a) Deloitte’s Return-to-Work Programme

In 2015 Deloitte undertook an industry-first return-to-work programme, designed to provide opportunities to senior women who have been out of the workplace for 3-5+ years to reconnect with the world of work and relaunch their careers, whilst balancing their family commitments through our agile working approach.

The pilot programme objectives were to offer women at senior manager level a paid 12-week ‘internship’ with the view to securing a permanent or contract role at the end of the programme.

We were clear that we needed to adopt a carefully tailored approach to recruitment which recognised the potential barriers to return, including a loss in confidence and the very real practicalities of childcare. We wanted all those who expressed interest to benefit regardless of whether they ultimately joined the programme. Those who came along to our Insight Day had the opportunity to network with one another, question people in the firm, and participate in workshops to construct first class CVs as well as refresh their interview skills. We asked participants for feedback on the recruitment process to inform our planning and design of future programmes. Their feedback has been extremely positive, including:

“I think I speak on behalf of all of us when I say it’s been a great start to the programme, and we feel so privileged to be a part of it. I do hope that if I were to continue on here after, I can be a champion of this programme in some shape or form, for this truly is such a unique way in engaging with the women out there.”

The women who joined the programme were alumni of Deloitte or one of the other comparable professional services firms and were given tailored support and coaching to help them transition back to work. Participants were matched to client-facing roles across all of our four service lines.

We recognised the importance of agile as well as part-time working, so participants joined on a four-days-a-week basis, with the October half term week off as paid leave. The participants worked with their business areas and clients to identify ways of working which were effective for the individual, the business and its clients. One of the participants said:

“My managing partner is a real believer in the agile working practices that have been put into place at the firm, meaning people are judged on output and not presenteeism, which is great and works well for me as I can juggle my career and childcare commitments.”
During the 12 weeks the women participated in a number of tailored sessions to equip them with relevant business and technical skills and help them adjust to re-entering the workplace. These included a session on current economic affairs, group coaching with our Working Parents Transitions Programme provider and talking to current female senior managers at the firm to hear about how they navigated returning to work after an extended break. They also got the opportunity to discuss relevant issues and talk about the programme during meetings with the firm’s CEO and Chairman, as well as other senior leaders. Participants were actively supported by a mentor and buddy as well as the programme manager so any obstacles could be overcome quickly.

We set ourselves a target of at least 80% of the participants transitioning to ongoing roles with the firm and have achieved this. Following the success of the pilot programme, we will be extending the scheme in 2016, with a view to 20 women taking part.

B) Agile working – Time Out

Deloitte’s award winning Time Out initiative, which allows employees to take an extra four-week block of leave each year, has proven to be a popular addition to our agile working practices; put simply, it helps our people to achieve a better balance between their career and other commitments, such as family. Our people love it, with feedback that even if they don’t intend to take a Time Out immediately, it’s great to know they have the choice.

Time Out was introduced in summer 2014 in recognition that our people are balancing family and other personal commitments alongside demanding careers. It allows any employee with over a year’s service to request a four-week block of extra leave, unsalaried but with continuing benefits allowances, to be taken at a mutually acceptable time, returning to work re-energised. Employees can request a Time Out each year.

Over 300 people, from all parts of the business and at all levels from administrator to partner, have requested a Time Out since 1 June 2014. We monitor Time Out requests each month and have been delighted that the overwhelming majority of people have been able to take their preferred dates, with just a handful being asked to identify alternative dates to better match business resource needs.

Although we don’t require people to provide a reason when submitting an application (to ensure we don’t judge the merit of one request against another) we have seen people using their Time Out for a variety of reasons, from catching up with family members, to taking care of their
children - particularly during the school holidays - to spending time with friends, to travelling or pursuing other hobbies, or simply to catch up with life.

Time Out is also supporting the firm’s women in leadership ambitions, with 55% of the requests coming from female employees, the majority of whom are operating at the level of manager or above - a critical female talent retention point for the firm in order to meet our ambitions.

The Time Out offering is part of the firm’s wider agile working programme – WorkAgility. Based on the principles of trust and respect, open and honest communication, and judging people on output, WorkAgility provides our people with greater choice over when, where and how to work by offering a blend of formal, flexible working arrangements and informal day-to-day practices. It was introduced to support our people better manage their work-life demands, and in recognition of our need to attract and retain talented people. For those that needed to understand the business case, we quantified it through setting out the multi-million pound cost to the firm of replacing people who leave.

The detailed proposals were discussed in depth with the most senior leadership of the firm (our Executive and our Board), and their full support obtained to implement WorkAgility – including Time Out - across all business areas. We then took the plans out to all partners via meetings, email, and the monthly partner briefing. We provided a toolkit setting out the component parts of our programme, including the business case, to ensure all our partners had the information they would need to lead and embed agile working within their teams.

The firm has made significant efforts to raise awareness of our agile working programme (including the rationale for it). This has been led by the Executive group through a range of engaging communication activities including a firmwide CEO Town Hall. We received encouraging feedback from people that attended, examples of which include

“I attended the Town Hall and thought Time Out was a stunning idea. Likely to make people stick around. Well done!” and “The programme for 4 weeks unpaid leave is very positive. Whether people choose to use it or not, having the option to do so reinforces that Deloitte values work-life balance.”

Following the firmwide launch, the cascade was then led locally by leaders of each business area.

Six months post-launch, we ran a participative campaign, ‘#AgileMe’, to identify role models, including those who have taken a Time Out, to
champion the benefits of agile working and address any potential stigma associated with working flexibly.

All of this activity has helped to make agile working our most improved item in the last people engagement survey, up by 12% points, as well as being commented on as a differentiator when talking to people about joining our firm.

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