

# Expecting more than a baby:

## Closing the employee experience gap for working parents in China

The dual pressures of professional and family life are demotivating Chinese working parents. They feel the future is uncertain due to a shift in the government's family planning laws, and many worry about how society will cope.

**Here's what employers can do to retain talent.**

# Introduction

In China, the dual responsibilities of career and family put untold pressure on working people. And while mums and dads enjoy support from their organisations around parental leave, many don't take it because of financial pressures associated with caring for young children and elderly relatives. Also, since the government relaxed its one-child policy, there is growing concern among respondents about how society will cope with the increase in population.

67%

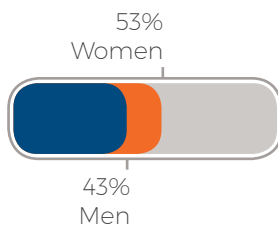
of respondents agree that work pressures often negatively impact their ability to be the parent they would like to be.

Therefore, organisations looking to retain talent and support working parents in China shouldn't solely look to expand on their already good track record for offering generous parental leave policies. They should also consider supporting working parents by offering genuinely flexible or agile working cultures, as well as onsite childcare facilities in the workplace and further coaching support.

Currently, parents feel guilty that they are failing to be the parents they want to be and overwhelmingly want more flexibility in how they work.

## WE SURVEYED 1,000 WORKING PARENTS IN CHINA AND THIS IS WHAT WE LEARNT:

PARENTS WHO FELT CAREER PROGRESSION HAD SLOWED DOWN AFTER HAVING A CHILD



Among employees age 25-34, over half believe their own children will have it just as hard when they themselves become working parents

- Two thirds of respondents were keen to go back to work after having a child
- **Almost 8 in 10 respondents agree that people they know in China are going to struggle to care for both children and elderly relatives at the same time**
- **Almost 7 in 10 respondents think that China is going to struggle to cope with the anticipated rise in 2-children families and a rapidly ageing population when most adults are working full time without government support**
- 69% of respondents agree that their organisation has practices and policies in place to support parental leave, with 56% agreeing that their company offers extended parental leave
- Just under half felt their career progression had slowed down after having a child (53% of mums and 43% of dads), and 43% of respondents felt less committed to their jobs than they used to be after having children (46% of mums and 39% of dads)
- 57% of respondents (57% of mums and 56% of dads) took less parental leave than they would have liked
- There is clearly still a stigma attached to fathers taking extended periods of parental leave. Of those who had an opinion on the issue, almost half of respondents (49% of mums and 44% of dads) believed that extended leave is detrimental to a man's career
- Among employees age 25-34, over half believe their own children will have it just as hard when they themselves become working parents
- **Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that they were more likely to stay with their organisation if they offered flexible working (82%), onsite childcare (79%) and working-parent coaching (74%).**

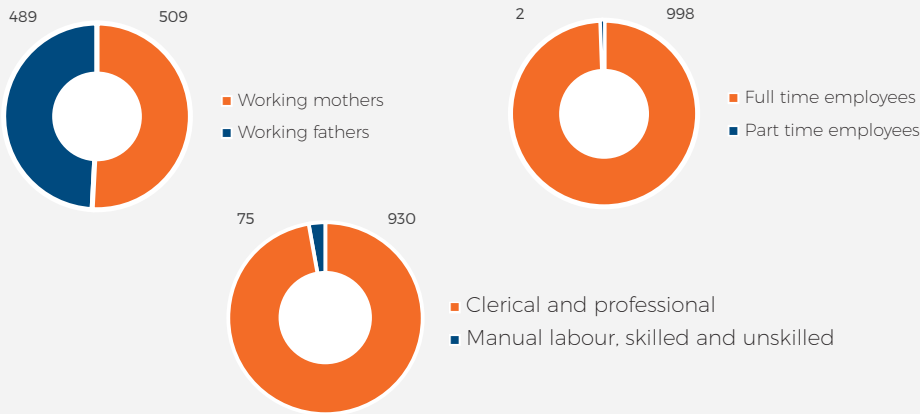
## ORGANISATIONS CAN AND MUST SHRINK THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE GAP

The following paper outlines our findings in more detail. We delve into the pressures facing working parents, as well as their views on parental leave and how well their workplace supports them. We also provide suggestions on how organisations can reduce stigma and shift workplace culture around parental leave for both men and women, as well as flexible working policies and practices. The latter is necessary if organisations want to have a real impact that reaches beyond corporate policy and into sincere, on-the-ground change for the people they employ.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Talking Talent commissioned in-depth, independent global research from Censuswide. Researchers surveyed 8,089 working parents in the UK, the US, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Singapore, China, India and Australia. Respondents included a representative sample of professionals across a range of ages, industry sectors and regions. This report focuses on the respondents based in China.

#### CHINA RESPONDENTS INCLUDED:



Reduce stigma and shift workplace culture.

Researchers surveyed 8,089 working parents in the UK, the US, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Singapore, China, India and Australia

This report focuses on the respondents based in China.

# 1. The new deal for new dads: Parental responsibility vs career progression

Making it more attractive for fathers to take parental leave is key to mothers being able to progress in their careers. **However, 44% of men believed that a father would hurt his career by taking extended parental leave.**

Working parents were generally dissatisfied with the amount of parental leave they took.

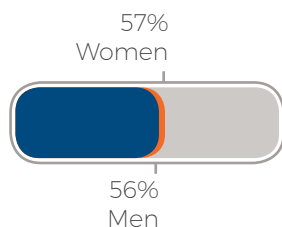
## FATHERHOOD PENALTY

**This belief in a 'fatherhood penalty' is dangerous to organisations because it sets up a vicious cycle.**

From a male perspective, it places valuing equal parental responsibility in direct opposition to valuing career progress. This exposes the underlying attitudes that women have had to contend with for years. But gender equality shouldn't mean that being a working parent has to be as hard for men as it has been in the past for women.

Since we know that sharing responsibilities is key to shaping a better future for all working parents – as well as being a golden key to retaining and progressing more women – **organisations need to encourage both men and women to view parental leave in a more positive light.**

GENERALLY DISSATISFIED WITH AMOUNT OF AVAILABLE PARENTAL LEAVE TAKEN



Those who fail to address this perceived fatherhood penalty may experience new retention and engagement hurdles, as men look for workplaces where all working parents are supported. What's more, organisations will continue to struggle with a lack of female leadership in the C-suite if workplace norms around parental leave continue to reinforce the message that women are the primary caretakers and that men should place work first.

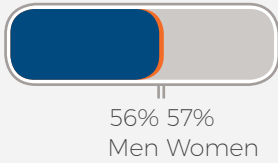


## PRESSURE TO RETURN EARLY

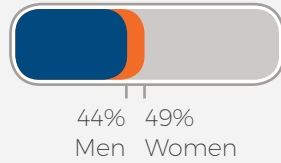
57% of women and 56% of men reported that they had taken less parental leave than they would have liked.

## LEAVE EXPERIENCE BY GENDER

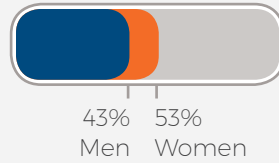
TOOK A SHORTER LEAVE THAN THEY WOULD HAVE LIKED



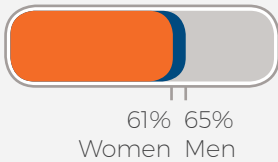
THINK FATHERS HURT THEIR CAREERS BY TAKING EXTENDED PARENTAL LEAVE



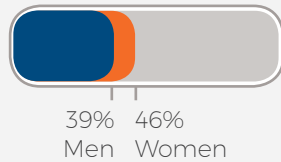
THINK THEIR CAREER HAS SLOWED DOWN



WOULD HAVE TAKEN LONGER LEAVE IF IT HAD BEEN OFFERED TO THEM



FEEL LESS COMMITTED OR AMBITIOUS



## STRUGGLES ALL AROUND

Professional working parenthood may not be a 50:50 split, but **our research shows a staggering overlap between the challenges facing working mothers and fathers**. Just over two thirds of all working parents agreed that work pressures affect their ability to be the parent they'd like to be, with 67% of both men and women agreeing with this statement.

**In terms of the challenges experienced by working parents, men and women in China are generally on parity with one another.** This was the case, for instance, in terms of experiencing sleep deprivation (men and women, both 38%), not spending enough quality time with children (men 36%, women 35%) and keeping up performance at work (men and women both 25%). Slightly more women (34%) reported not having enough downtime for themselves, compared with men (29%).

## WORKING PARENT GUILT

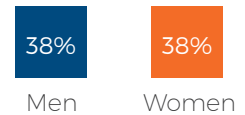
When it comes to 'working parent guilt', slightly more women (62%) than men (58%) feel pangs about not spending enough time with their children. This is the case, despite survey results which show women aren't spending all that much more time with their children than men are. According to our study, men report spending an average of nearly 30 minutes less with their children during a working day than women do, with women reporting an average of just over two and a half hours per day.

Bear in mind that guilt is likely to become more of an issue as future generations of parents are compelled to work full time in order to support larger families, including more children and elderly relatives. Employers should be considering ways to pre-empt the pressure felt by parents by offering smarter ways of working that lets them spend time with family and contribute to the organisation.

NOT HAVING ENOUGH DOWNTIME FOR MYSELF



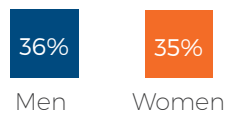
LACK OF SLEEP CAUSED BY LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN



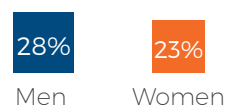
FINDING TIME TO EXERCISE



SPENDING ENOUGH QUALITY TIME WITH MY CHILDREN



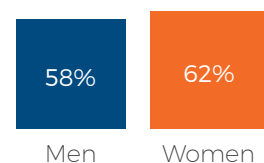
SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH HOMEWORK/EXAMS/ SCHOOL PREPARATION



MANAGING CHILDCARE WHEN MY CHILDREN ARE (OR THE USUAL CAREGIVER IS) ILL



WORKING PARENT GUILT



## AVOIDING RE-RUNS

We often talk of the penalties brought by motherhood, but it's about time we start talking about – and organisations start addressing – the fatherhood penalty, too.

Organisations must recognise that **promoting parental leave (for fathers as well as mothers) means greater employee engagement from both genders.** Paternity leave, which is leave taken by new dads, takes some of the pressure off working mums and, on a macro level, promotes gender equality.

To some extent, we used to see the 'motherhood penalty' as a grim but inevitable fact, a version of you-can't-have-it-all syndrome. **But attitudes are shifting, and parenting roles are changing.** It's time to take the lead and learn from mothers' experiences by ensuring that positive shifts in workplace practices can benefit men too. Otherwise, we'll end up rerunning the same negative experiences which previously stopped working mums from progressing – and for working dads, too.

But attitudes are shifting, and parenting roles are changing.

## EXPLORING THE FATHERHOOD PENALTY

The results of our survey provide an interesting contrast to a much-cited 2014 study: **The Fatherhood Bonus and the Motherhood Penalty: Parenthood and the Gender Gap in Pay.** The research, conducted by University of Massachusetts professor Michelle Budig, found that, on average, men's earnings increased more than 6% when they had children, while women's earnings decreased by 4% for each child.

Our survey suggests that fathers feel penalised for taking leave and they believe their careers have slowed down after having children. So, how do we account for the conflict with Budig's research?

The results of our survey provide an interesting contrast to a much-cited 2014 study 'The Fatherhood Bonus and the Motherhood Penalty: Parenthood and the Gender Gap in Pay.'

It could be that our respondents' perception of a fatherhood penalty is different from what actually appears in their monthly salary. Or, it could be that the stigma attached to paternity leave is short-lived for fathers (i.e. penalties don't extend into their careers over the long term). Alternatively, we may find that workplace practices are changing rapidly. As paid bonding time for fathers becomes more common, dads who take advantage of that benefit – and who are more involved dads overall – may experience negative career and wage impacts that extend well into their careers.



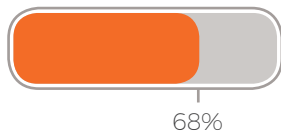
## 2. Closing the experience gap

Words show what an organisation wants to be. Actions and follow-throughs show what it is.

31%

said that their employer still had no policies at all for supporting parental leave (2018).

HAVE POLICIES IN PLACE



HAVE EXPERIENCED A GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND ACTION



63%

of participants agreed that their line manager or HR department was very effective in the parental transition.

How sure are you that your organisation's working parent policies and desired behaviours are actually being implemented?

For many organisations in China, a culture of transparency already exists around what parents can expect from their organisation in terms of parental leave. For example, just over two thirds of respondents agree that they find it really easy to understand their company's policy on parental leave. Furthermore, over 6 in 10 agree that their company has a very inclusive culture.

This is all very good news, but there are still key areas where working parents are calling out for more support. In terms of inspiring greater loyalty, **82% of people we spoke to said they'd be more likely to stay with their organisation if it offered flexible working. Nearly 80% said onsite child care would make them more likely to stay, and nearly three quarters reported that onsite coaching would be a key factor in whether they remained with their organisation.**

How your organisation talks about parental leave – how openly it communicates – sends a not-so-subtle message about your commitment to gender equality. To send a clear, positive message, employers need to be transparent and proactive in promoting their policies on parental leave.

### MANAGERS ARE DOING WELL, BUT CAN DO BETTER

Not only that, but the commitment to supporting working parents needs to be visible and consistent in every area of the organisation. **Overall, 63% of our participants agreed that their line manager or HR department was very effective in helping with their transition to working parenthood, but that still leaves 37% who were less than very effective.**

From our on-the-ground experience coaching managers, we know that it's extraordinarily rare to find a manager who would own up to believing they've been unsupportive themselves. **It's clear that some managers need to improve in this aspect of their job, and they need support to do that.**

From the consistent and significant positive impact we see in our management interventions, we know that the change has to start from the top of the organisation.

79%

of respondents reported wanting a flexible work arrangement

## FLEXIBLE WORKING.

Being open to flexible working practices is, as our research shows, another part of the picture. **About 79% of respondents reported wanting a flexible work arrangement at some time in their career**, with the split between men and women being very close (78% men, 80% women).

A popular myth suggests that women ask for flexible work more frequently than men, but in fact 89% of women and 88% of men have made a flexible working request. Similarly, the gender split over having a request turned down stands at just over 10% for men and 10% for women.

As for why flexible work requests are rejected, respondents said they were given a number of reasons, such as the nature of their role requiring physical presence, their organisation does not offer flexible working, extra costs to the business, negative impact on the team, past misuse of flexible working options, a lack of work to do in the proposed times, lack of trust or a general inability to reorganise the work accordingly.

While it is true that not every single role in every single organisation can accommodate flexible working, improving not just policies, but real-life practices and workplace culture, remains critical to parental engagement and retention.

Here again, it's likely that employees are experiencing a gap between company policy and actual reality. Our past experience shows that even when flexible policies exist, manager support can vary widely from team to team. Employees are often denied flex, not because their role couldn't accommodate it, but because their manager doesn't understand flexible working or doesn't want to adapt to newer, more agile ways of working.

In future, however, flex working may become a necessity for organisations. With the recent relaxation of the one-child policy, parents are going to struggle to provide sufficient care for children and aging relatives because both will be required to work full time. Companies can start to consider more part-time, remote and flexible options to address this issue before it arises.

## ALIGNING EXPERIENCE WITH MESSAGE

**As employers, it's crucial to find ways of bridging the gap between the policies you advertise and the employee experience you deliver.** Otherwise we're stuck in a vicious cycle that both erodes individual self-confidence and perpetuates organisational ignorance.

Following through on working parent support policies, like parental leave and flexible working is the only way to show that you have confidence in the importance – and good business sense – of promoting gender equality. But getting from policy to practice requires active manager support across the organisation.

When employees see their employers delivering what was promised, they will have more reason to feel confident and valued in their workplace, and with that comes the associated commercial benefits of a fully engaged workforce.



# 3. Younger working parents: New expectations meet rising dissatisfaction

On a macro level, many younger working parents in China are worried about how the country is going to cope with a rapidly aging population and an explosion in two-child families.

72% of respondents aged 25–34 agreed that work pressures often have a negative impact on their ability to be the parents they want to be.

## YOUNGER PARENTS

On a day to day basis, more than 6 in 10 respondents in China agree that they find it difficult or challenging to keep an interesting job role while being a parent.

This is a significant level of dissatisfaction, but we have found that for younger working parents in China, they face added pressures from family and work which have the potential to have a negative impact on them.

72% of respondents aged 25–34 agreed that work pressures often have a negative impact on their ability to be the parents they want to be. For example, 1 in 8 respondents in this age group found that being present at their child's first experiences or significant milestones was one of the greatest challenges they faced when they first returned to work after having a baby.

Worryingly, many younger working parents in China strongly agree that people they know are going to struggle to care for elderly relatives and children at the same time. This view is highest among women (29%) compared with men (22%).

The overarching pessimism among younger professionals is consistent with the dissatisfaction they express in their parental leave experience. Young professionals report getting greater levels of support at work than their predecessors.

**Yet, they are far more likely to report a significant gap between workplace messaging around new-parent support and actual experience.**

## MORE SUPPORT RECEIVED... AND DESIRED

While almost two thirds of younger professionals agreed that there was enough support for working parents within their organisation, 68% of this generation also said they would have valued some outside coaching in this area. As other studies have shown, younger professionals expect greater levels of coaching in the workplace.



Employers need to recognise that there might be a blind spot here among senior decision makers who are shaping policy and experience for younger employees.

### USING LESS AVAILABLE LEAVE

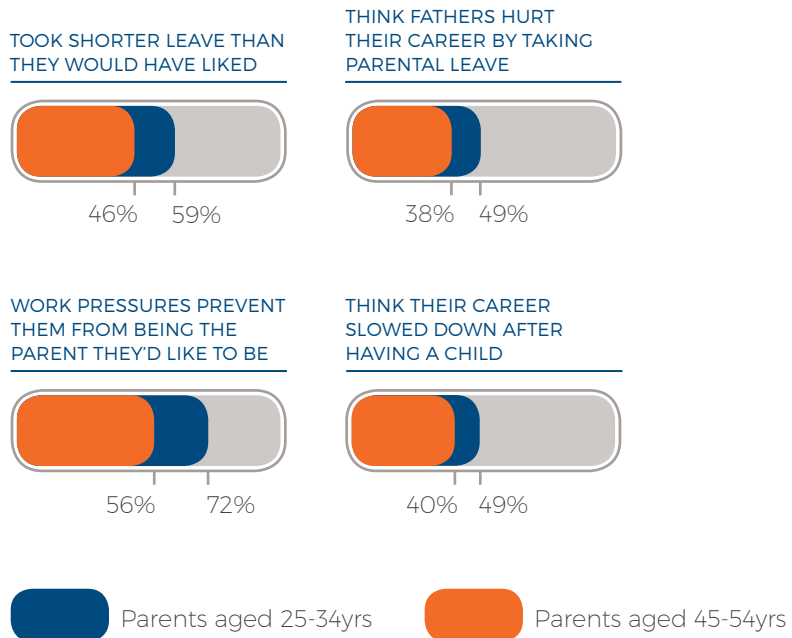
While neither generation took all the parental leave available to them, **younger parents report taking less of their available time and greater dissatisfaction with the amount of time they did take.**

This shift highlights a key challenge for organisations: policies themselves do not change employee experience.

Many employees will not take the paid leave made available to them unless organisational attitudes and habits shift. This includes greater manager support, encouraging more parents to take leave and lead the way, addressing workload issues and reducing parenthood penalties.

**Employers need to recognise that there might be a blind spot here among senior decision makers who are shaping policy and experience for younger employees.**

### LEAVE EXPERIENCE VARIES BY AGE



### TOP HURDLE CONSISTENT ACROSS GENERATIONS

Once we move beyond issues of parental leave, generational differences become less pronounced.

**The challenges of working parenthood are perennial, shared across age groups.**

The table below reflects the top five toughest challenges experienced on first returning to work after becoming parents, as ranked from first to fifth by working parents of different ages:

## CHALLENGES FACED BY NEW WORKING PARENTS

Rank	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs
1	Financial pressure	Financial pressure	Financial pressure
2	Maintaining emotions	Giving your family enough attention	Giving your family enough attention
3	Giving your family enough attention	Maintaining emotions	Feeling like you are being a good parent
4	Feeling like you are being a good parent	Feeling like you are being a good parent	Maintaining emotions
5	Spending quality time with your partner	Spending quality time with your partner	Spending quality time with your partner

Challenges faced by new working parents.

## CONCLUSIONS

Notably, **spending quality time with one's partner was a priority across every generation of working parents.** That's not surprising, as other research shows that marital satisfaction generally declines when partners become parents. Unfortunately, relationship strain has been associated with physical and mental health problems and an overall decrease in life satisfaction. Working parents would do well to bear this issue in mind and ensure it is a high priority.

Generationally, we can see that age groups rank financial pressure as a more significant challenge. Both the 35-44 and the 45-54 age groups ranked giving family enough attention more highly than their younger counterparts.

Younger working parents are facing the stressful prospect of having to provide for larger families, due to an aging and, simultaneously, rapidly expanding, population.

Younger working parents are facing the stressful prospect of having to provide for larger families

In other words, being a working parent will always be a balancing act. In terms of keeping these working parents engaged and satisfied, one of the biggest areas of risk – and opportunity – arrives early in their parenting experience. Millennials want to take the parental leave available to them, but they don't feel like they can. Organisations, then, need to do more than shift policies – they have to shift habits and culture.

Doing that means strengthening manager support, highlighting dads who take parental leave, and showcasing dads who take advantage of other new parents support, such as paternity leave coaching. Pay particular attention to how you're talking about parenting obligations. Be sure you're framing them as a family issue that impacts all parents. **To effect real change, go beyond messaging and give your managers and employees the coaching they need to buck cultural norms. Give parents support to step away and help transitioning back when leave is over.**

# 4. Parent vs professional: Working parents torn in two

More than two in three working parents say work pressures frequently diminish their ability to be the parent they want to be.

**46%**  
of working parents agreed that they have become less ambitious and committed to their jobs.

We all know that perfection doesn't exist, but working parents often feel torn between two ideals. For both men and women, the pressure to perform as a professional at work and a parent at home can have compounding effects, as each identity disrupts and complicates the other.

Many parents feel compelled to choose or compromise, with over two thirds of working parents agreeing that since they became a parent they were keen to go back to work. But returning to work is often accompanied by challenges. Almost 4 in 10 agreed that lack of sleep caused by looking after a child has become an issue, and over a fifth said that giving their family enough attention was one of the biggest challenges they faced.

## PARENTS TORN BETWEEN WORK AND HOME

WORK PRESSURES PREVENT ME FROM BEING THE PARENT I'D LIKE TO BE



67% 68%  
Women Men

I AM UNHAPPY WITH THE AMOUNT OF TIME I SPEND WITH MY CHILDREN



7%  
Men & Women

I OFTEN FEEL GUILTY I DON'T SPEND ENOUGH TIME WITH MY CHILDREN



58% 62%  
Men Women

I BECAME LESS AMBITIOUS OR COMMITTED TO WORK AFTER BECOMING A PARENT



39% 46%  
Men Women

MY CAREER SLOWED DOWN AFTER HAVING A CHILD



43% 51%  
Men Women

IT'S HARD TO KEEP AN INTERESTING OR CHALLENGING ROLE WHILE BEING A PARENT



59% 65%  
Men Women

**39%**  
of fathers say they became less ambitious.

**46%**  
of mothers said the same.

## COMMITMENT TO WORK

Traditionally, women have been criticised for losing their work motivation after having children.

But our research shows that a **substantial proportion of men, 39%, are also likely to say that they became less ambitious or committed to their work** after becoming fathers.

This could be because of shared stress-factors, like burnout and sleep deprivation, or it could be that men are simply more confident in expressing a shift in their priorities.

## SLOW AND UNSATISFYING

Again, when we talk about the responsibilities and challenges of being a working parent, the historic focus has been on working mothers. Yet when working parents were asked if their career progression slowed down compared with their childless colleagues, **43% of men (compared with 51% of women) reported this to be the case.**

Much has been written about the challenge working mothers have in finding career satisfaction – and yes, 65% of women say it's difficult to keep an interesting job while being a parent. But much less has been said about new fathers, despite the fact that an almost identical proportion of men (59%) find this a challenge too.

This decline in engagement is a clarion call to employers: maintaining a positive employee experience and providing support throughout the transition into working parenthood, to both mums and dads, is paramount.

## CONCLUSIONS

For parents, striving towards the dual impossibility of perfection creates both mental and physical fatigue. Without proper support, opposing demands between work and home are likely to amplify guilt, as parents feel like they're not doing well enough in either realm. Guilt is distracting, and parents who feel guilty will not be wholly effective employees.

Organisations have a role to play here, both in reassuring employees, and by making the role of the "working parent" seem like less of a binary choice..

Balance isn't just about where working parents spend their time, it's about whether they are made to feel that they should be spending it somewhere else or that they're exactly where they need to be.



# 51%

of mothers were significantly more likely than men to say that their career progression slowed down.

# 5. Career-catapult, not career-killer: Parenthood enhances professional performance

What challenges you, changes you.

## TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

If we focus too closely on the inherent challenges of being a working parent, we may become distracted from the transferable skills that parents naturally develop.

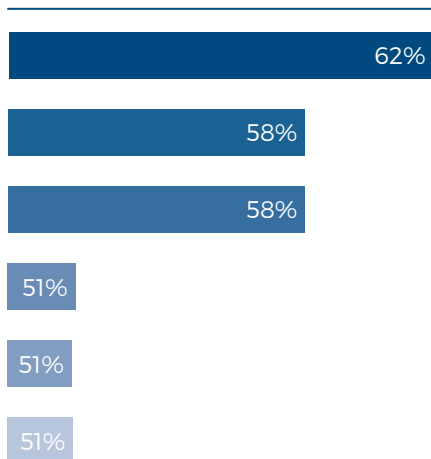
Most parents have a vague sense that all their multitasking, planning and prioritising – not to mention the constant negotiation with children, family and others – must surely have some positive upshot at work.

Our survey shows that people absolutely feel more skilled and capable as a result of having kids.

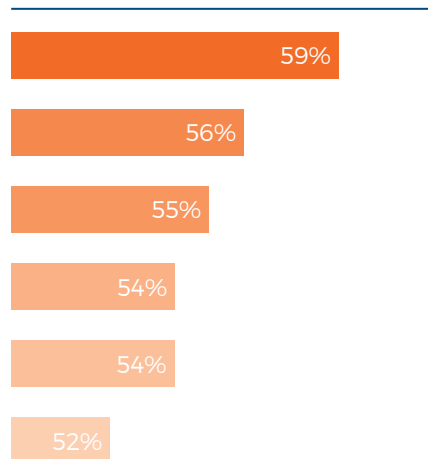
After having a child, men reported that their abilities improved in a number of areas such as networking (62%), managing personal wellbeing (58%), self-confidence (58%), resilience (51%), time management (51%) and career planning (51%). Women reported a similar phenomenon: managing personal wellbeing (59%), confidence (56%), networking (55%), resilience (54%), organisational skills (54%) and time management (52%).

## SELF REPORTED SKILLS INCREASE WITH WORKING PARENTHOOD

DADS: SKILL GAIN



MUMS: SKILL GAIN



- Networking
- Managing wellbeing
- Managing wellbeing
- Confidence
- Confidence
- Resilience
- Resilience
- Time management
- Organisation skills
- Time management



## EARLIER: CONFIDENCE TAKES A TEMPORARY HIT

While respondents did report that confidence increased as a result of being a working parent, they took a different view when asked about confidence immediately following a parental leave.

**This is a sensitive time when parents are getting back into the swing of things at work and dealing with new pressures and time constraints.**

Viewed in that aspect, 11% of new mothers reported a loss of confidence on returning to work, compared with 8% of men.

Here again we see that men report a similar challenge to women. This could be attributed to a perceived “fatherhood penalty” as men anticipate more negative judgement for taking time away from work.

Either way, these first months back at work represent a key time when parents need additional support and coaching to bolster their sense of confidence and capability to succeed as a working parent.

## LATER: AN ‘I’VE GOT THIS’ ATTITUDE

In every skill area surveyed, **parents were far more likely to report that their skills had increased rather than decreased** as a result of balancing career and family life.

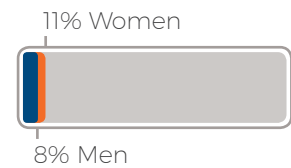
## CONCLUSIONS

We now have conclusive evidence that many working parents experience a significant positive shift in their self-reported capability and confidence after becoming parents.

Employers who ignore this are wasting firepower. With proactive management, this positive shift in self-perception will have a significant impact on the individuals involved and collectively enhance business performance.



### LOSS OF CONFIDENCE ON RETURNING TO WORK



# Summary

China's parents are confident, and they generally agree that working parenthood comes with all sorts of transferable workplace skills. Where they are less sure, however, is in how they're handling life at home, with concerns about how much time they spend with their children and their partners.

35% of parents shared concerns about how much time they spend with their children

**China has undergone profound changes over the last 30 years, both economically and socially. As is to be expected, these changes have filtered through to the country's working culture.** Today's working parents already struggle to care for elderly relatives, as well as their own children, due to the traditional structure of the family unit where children are expected to care for the old.

And now that the government has revoked the one-child policy, working parents are also growing more concerned about how future generations are going to cope with childcare when they all have to work full time.

**In short, they are feeling the pressure. And this has a direct impact on their performance at work.**

These parents feel they have a lot to contribute to the workplace and yet there's a persistent (even growing) dissatisfaction with the pressures faced at work and at home. Most parents are taking shorter parental leave than they want to and most say that work pressures prevent them from being the kind of parent they want to be.

**Significantly, working dads and millennials are more likely to express dissatisfaction than working mums and older parents.**

New working parents of today are expecting much more than a baby. They are expecting paid family bonding time and cultural support to actually use the time allotted to them. They are expecting to be involved mothers and fathers, and be engaged professionals with interesting, challenging work.

We can no longer focus our efforts on supporting women who want to "have it all".

**All parents want it all.**

Unfortunately, social stigmas around parental leave still exist, and dads are feeling it. We know that paternity leave plays a significant role in advancing women, particularly when working fathers take the same kind of leave that working mothers take. **Researchers suggest that fathers who take leave become more involved parents in the long-run, freeing up mothers to advance their own careers.**

Such long-term gains would have an even greater impact if we could overcome the immediate consequences of taking a parental leave – theoretically, judgements and penalties would be equalised if both parents took similar time off work.

For now, it's clear that workplace habits do not align with workplace policies. That means closing the gap has to be a cultural effort.

This report challenges all of us, at organisational, line management and individual working parent level, to take stock of what we are doing, how well it is truly working and whether we are going far enough.



# Conclusions and Recommendations



## 1. PRIORITISE PAID FAMILY LEAVE

In today's talent market, employees have unprecedented access to information about your culture and benefits.

Organisations that don't offer – or support – paid family leave put their employer brand at risk.

Beyond being a recruitment tool, **many organisations view paid family leave as a significant contributor to employee engagement.** Companies cite **correlations in retention and productivity.** Others frame paid family leave in terms of living out organisational values, making sure their own people policies are aligned with corporate ideals. And many understand that **paid family leave is a valuable tool to close the wage gap and get more women into the C-suite.**

Shifting policies and practices around parental leave is one concrete way your organisation can make a difference in terms of engagement and gender diversity in leadership. Determine whether you offer equal paid bonding time for all new parents and whether employees – particularly men – are using the time available.

Ensure that all employees, at every age and level of the organisation, **understand that a period of leave is the natural, ordinary step after welcoming a new child.** Prioritising paid leave for all employees helps foster a culture in which women have equal opportunities for advancement.

Send the message that it's okay for dads to take time away from work. Or better yet, send the message that it's not just okay to take leave, but that it's expected.

## 2. WAKE UP TO WORKING FATHERS

**Address all aspects of paternal inclusion,** from enhanced paternity and shared parental leave policies, to cultural norms about men taking career breaks, to coaching support as their responsibilities and stress



levels expand. Equip managers with the tools they need to give working fathers the confidence to take paternal leave, and this will be beneficial to individuals, their families, their performance and, ultimately, your business.

Take a long, hard look at your policies, recruitment and HR messaging and then assess whether the employee experience truly matches up..

### 3. PLUG YOUR WORKING PARENT POLICY-PRACTICE GAP



Lack of line management support for parental leave will continue to impede inclusion.

Take a long, hard look at your policies, recruitment and HR messaging and then assess whether the employee experience truly matches up. Support line managers and senior leadership in creating the

workplace culture that parents need – through targeted training or on-demand coaching support. For HR look at providing more generous parental leave policies given that Government leave policies are some of the lowest in the region.

### 4. INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FLEXIBLE AND PART-TIME WORKING

Organisations who want to retain talent need to be ready, making sure both policy and culture enable this.

Ultimately, balance is making sure working parents feel they are in the right place at the right time. Organisations can help by introducing policies that allow flexible working, not just for working parents but for all employees. Managers will depend on policies and procedures that are already in place at their organisation, and all new flexible working policies have to be tailored to suit each firm. However, the key to success is establishing clear communication about what is on offer, and ensuring that employees understand the boundaries and expectations that come with this benefit.



### 5. RESPOND TO MILLENNIAL PARENT PRIORITIES

Younger working parents are leaning hard into more equitable divisions of parenting roles and responsibilities. Organisations who want to retain talent need to be ready, making sure both policy and culture enable this. Through targeted coaching, you should help younger employees create healthy, sustainable work habits by providing exposure to role models, as well as practical support to manage both workload and their perception of leader and team expectations.

## 6. CAPITALISE ON PARENTS AS PROVEN PERFORMERS

Parenthood, for all its challenges, provides your employees with an invaluable boost in essential transferable skills. When you support working parents with flexible schedules, coaching and progressive management attitudes, you help avoid discrimination against working parents. Evaluate advancement and reward practices to determine whether you're undervaluing caregivers and employees who work a reduced schedule. Provide training around caregiver discrimination and coach parents on how to advocate for themselves in the workplace.



Parenthood, for all its challenges, provides your employees with an invaluable boost in essential transferable skills.

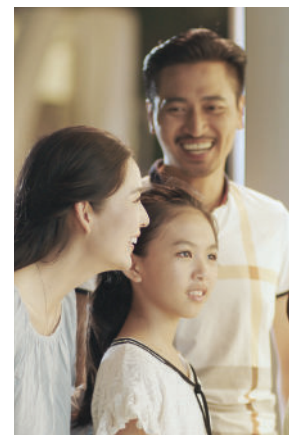
We welcome further conversation with you to understand your needs and share specific solutions.

Some organisations – perhaps even yours – feel they are already doing a lot to support this critical talent pinch point. Others have dipped a toe or two in the water, haven't yet got traction, and are wondering how on earth they can shift the dial. Many more have yet to make the business case for investment of time, leadership focus and funds into managing the parental transition. Whatever your organisation's position, we hope this report will prove a springboard to formulating the next steps.

Talking Talent's 14 years' experience leading global best practice support for the transition to working parenthood uniquely positions us to answer the principle question that comes out of this report – what, specifically, to do to address its conclusions? We welcome further conversation with you to understand your needs and share specific solutions.

Whatever your organisation's position, we hope this report will prove a springboard to formulating the next steps.

A working mother in China may be eligible for **98 days paid maternity leave** but this can vary by location. Eligible working fathers will generally receive **14 days paternity leave** but again can vary by location.





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