

# Women in Engineering

Creating Effective Workplaces for Now and in the Future – Flexible Workplace Strategies





Congratulations to the Women in Engineering National Committee for engaging with industry in the development of a toolkit for creating effective workplaces – now and into the future.

Creating flexible workplaces which embrace diversity allows our organisations to compete strongly in the 21st century. There is increasing evidence that organisations with a diverse leadership team outperform more traditional ones.

Implementing the work-life balance strategies outlined in this toolkit is essential for successful organisations now and into the future. I believe that flexible working should be embraced as a key innovation within organisations, rather than simply being a response to the needs of a subset of employees.

My own flexible work arrangement of a 9-day fortnight is terrific. I feel I am delivering for Parsons Brinckerhoff and for our clients but, I get a wonderful lift in well-being by having a frequent three-day weekend. I envision a workplace in the future which has greater diversity at all leadership levels, enabled by fully implemented flexible working with obvious benefits to organisational performance.

In parallel, I envisage home environments in which all members are able to contribute equally to the nurture of their children, the care of elderly loved ones, the contribution to their communities and the pursuit of endeavours outside of work.

Adopting such a workplace culture delivers clear organisational benefits.

David Cruickshanks-Boyd

Engineers Australia National President 2015.  
Parsons Brinckerhoff's Regional Director, South  
Australia and National Director, Sustainability





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## Introduction

In 2012, Engineers Australia's Women in Engineering National Committee (WIENC) led a workshop with a number of successful organisations with the aim of developing a blueprint on successful in-house professional women's programs.

Due to increased interest from organisations wanting to achieve greater diversity, and in particular attract and retain more women in the engineering industry, WIENC facilitated another round table discussion with industry partners, this time focusing on flexible workplace strategies to create more effective workplaces.

Work-life balance, or balancing family life, is not limited to women. Current and future trends indicate that work-life balance is also a goal for men, single people and the majority of any workforce.

This brochure outlines:

- Various case studies demonstrating successful work-life balance;
  - Strategies for creating effective workplaces by implementing work-life balance opportunities; and
  - A check list for organisations and individuals for before, during and after changes in working arrangements.
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## Industry Endorsements on the Benefits of Flexible Workplace Arrangements



### Guy Templeton

Asia-Pacific President and Chief Operating Officer of  
Parsons Brinckerhoff

Our global knowledge economy, advances in technology and new workplace models have allowed us to engage in more flexible work patterns than ever before. A flexible workplace that embraces diversity makes absolute business sense as a means of attracting and retaining talent and improving productivity levels when such initiatives strike

the appropriate balance between business imperatives and employee circumstances.

Workplace flexibility is a key issue for personnel, regardless of gender, generational or socioeconomic status, while for business it is an important strategic tool. Parsons Brinckerhoff recognises that men and women in our organisation need flexibility to effectively prioritise their work and personal lives to redefine career goals, success and how to achieve it. This awareness and commitment to the need for flexibility has moved beyond an HR imperative and now has full senior management support, with our organisational outcomes now being monitored, assessed and measured against agreed business metrics and KPIs.

Some of the most important steps we have introduced to remove or mitigate against barriers to flexibility are to support a performance-based culture (with less focus on face time and more on efficiency, productivity and work accomplished); empower teams to develop flexible work schedules that meet combined business and personal goals; provide training to optimise working in non-traditional environments; and communicate how valued employees, who happen to work flexibly, meet and exceed both business and client expectations.

Our corporate values of excellence, integrity and respect underpin our business; workplace flexibility and diversity help us to live those values and contribute to our corporate viability as engaged and committed employees positively influencing client satisfaction levels leading to an improved bottom line.



# Industry Endorsements on the Benefits of Flexible Workplace Arrangements



**Dr Michael Shirley**

**Group Vice President,  
ANZ Infrastructure and  
Environment, Jacobs, and  
Consult Australia Champion  
of Change**

Jacobs considers flexibility to be a valuable commodity

that supports a diverse and inclusive workplace.

By providing detailed guidelines and policies for managers and employees, Jacobs has been able to ingrain flexible work arrangements as part of the culture in many areas of the business.

Adjusting work schedules to suit individual needs and desires, without compromising colleagues and clients, has meant that both men and women can achieve a greater work-life balance. Typically, the types of flexible work arrangements offered cater for both time (i.e. flexi-hours) and location flexibility (i.e. working from home).

Our focus is on outcomes, not on how many, or which, hours people spend at their desks.

This attitude engenders a greater sense of loyalty and an increased focus on results.

Establishing a culture and processes which enable flexible working has resulted in Jacobs being able to retain some of our best people, and achieve ongoing business success.



**Lara Poloni**

**Chief Executive, Australia and New Zealand, AECOM**

AECOM's success is built on its people. Our flexible work practices program – Be There – recognises the diversity of our team members, both in terms of their roles and responsibilities at work, as well as their lives away from work.

A culture of empowerment focusing on outcomes has developed at

AECOM as we've moved to encourage flexible work practices across our Australian business. We recognise that success is not measured through the number of hours spent at a desk, but through business outcomes – results. It's an approach that underpins our aim to be the best place to work, as measured through the engagement levels of our people, the satisfaction of our clients, and the ultimate success of our business.

While we all have different aspirations, commitments and passions, I believe we share common ground in trying to balance work and life commitments. Be There encompasses a range of options, from alternative start and finish times and the ability to work anywhere, to paid parental leave, part-time work, and the option to purchase additional leave.

Be There recognises that flexibility matters to our people.

It matters if our team members with young children can leave the office early to pick their kids up from school. It matters if those caring for ageing parents can stay at home to support them at short notice. And it matters if our team members with sporting, musical or community interests or responsibilities can commit to those activities, regardless of when they may occur.

The benefits for AECOM are many. Team members who are confident they are doing the right thing by their family are more engaged at work, and happier at home. Further, we know that by offering such options for our people, we position ourselves as the kind of employer that attracts the industry's top talent.

Whatever our team members' interests or commitments, AECOM's Be There flexible work practices program recognises the importance of providing options for them to realise their professional and personal goals.

# Work-Life Balance Case Studies

## Melanie Purcell

Contracts & Procurement Manager,  
Jacobs



### How did you initiate your flexible workplace arrangement?

Prior to starting parental leave I discussed with my manager that I would like to return to work part-time.

### What is your flexible working arrangement?

I have two kids – Joshua (4 years) and Isaac (19 months). I work an average of four days a week, but it can be three or five depending on work commitments.

The flexibility I have works both ways. I'm fortunate to be able to perform some of my work from home if necessary and I'm also prepared to shuffle personal activities around so that project deadlines can be achieved. I communicate regularly with my managers, who are understanding about both work and family commitments.

### How is it going?

Managing work and family is a constant juggling act, but most of the time I feel as though I have a reasonable balance. My husband, Shaun, is incredibly supportive and very hands-on. He has one day off each week to look after the kids. We also have some assistance with cooking and cleaning through the week.

The main challenges are when the kids get sick or when something at work has to be done in unforeseen or unreasonable time frames. That's when survival mode kicks in.

### Any tips?

- Communicate whether you are available for work on your days 'off'.
- Don't be afraid to say 'no' or ask someone to wait a day or two until you're back in the office again.
- Use your 'out of office' auto-response so that you don't feel obliged to get back to people straight away.
- Surround yourself with positive, supportive people who don't judge you harshly for the choices that you make when either work takes over or work has to wait.
- Don't be too hard on yourself. Learn to accept that you can't do everything you want to do, to the standard that you'd like to do it, all of the time.
- Delegate if you can and ask for help from colleagues, family or friends.
- Make time for you. You can't look after your kids properly if you don't look after yourself.

*"Enabling flexibility on major projects through varied roles, skill sets and working hours, results in a diverse and productive workforce."*

**Anthony Radici**  
Project Manger, Jacobs



## Work-life Balance Case Studies

### Darren Fidler

Transport Management Leader, Christchurch  
Office Leader, NZ Graduate Co-ordinator, Jacobs



### How did you initiate your flexible workplace arrangement?

I approached my managers early (I was able to do this a year in advance of when I actually changed to four days) and instigated discussions with the rest of my team as to how we could keep functioning well with me being out of the office on a Friday.

### What is your flexible working arrangement?

I work four days a week.

### How is it going?

Rather than trying to achieve a work-life balance, I think work is just how I choose to spend some of my life.

I changed to a four-day week when my eldest daughter, Maggie, turned four (over a year ago), choosing to spend more time with her before she went to school and all my imparted wisdom was eroded by a useful formal education.

When Maggie started school last month, I maintained a four-day week so that I could spend the extra day with my younger two daughters, Isla and Cassie (a new arrival this year!), before they head off to school as well.

### Any tips?

Notifying my managers early and keeping my colleagues and clients informed of my plans has meant there were no issues in my move to a 32-hour week.

At home, we've done a bit of balancing the budget to go with the reduced salary. Over a year into my four-day working week, I'm sure it was the right decision.

# Work-Life Balance Case Studies



## Cherry Fulmer

Section Leader Bridge & Maritime (Acting), Jacobs

### How did you initiate your flexible workplace agreement?

I'm currently working 40 hours per week, with the flexibility to work one day per week from home, and flexibility surrounding start and finish times when in the office to accommodate child care pick-ups etc.

### How is it going?

I recently accepted the challenge of acting in the position of Section Leader for the Bridge and Maritime team. In this capacity I have made the decision to return to work full-time. Prior to accepting this opportunity I worked a 32-hour week as a senior structural engineer, with similar work-from-home flexibility.

I have three young children aged 4 years, 2 years, and 6 months. During the week, the care for my children falls largely to my husband and to daycare/kindergarten providers.

Returning to work after having children has been one of the hardest decisions in my career. In particular the first three months after returning to work after my son was born was extremely challenging. During this time I felt a lot of guilt about leaving my children and

not being the type of mother I had envisaged myself to be. As I became more engrossed in project work, I recognised, however, that my passion for my job was a critical element to my personal satisfaction and happiness.

Recognising the significant part that my work played in my own fulfilment was a real turning point and allowed me to 'let go' of the ideal I had in my head of the type of mother I was going to be. This change in mind-set allowed me to stop seeing work as a negative (i.e. time away from the kids), but rather as a positive, and helped me to be the best mother and role model I can be for my children. I now really value and make the most of the time I do have with the kids.

The second big challenge to returning to work and having my husband step up as the primary caregiver has been around accepting how he manages the house and prioritises his time with the kids. I have had to accept that he will not always do the household tasks in the way, in the order, or with the same priority as I would. However, I know that my children are getting the best of both parents, and I doubt they will ever recall that the groceries sat on the floor for an extra couple of hours!

### Any Tips?

Since I returned to work, no week has been the same as the one before. The family

calendar is essential, and the coordination required around drop-offs, pick-ups and extra-curricular activities is what I term "organised chaos". The flexibility I am offered at Jacobs is essential to managing this every week. For this flexibility to be a success, there is a responsibility to have open dialogue with my colleagues, team members, manager, and those I am working with on projects. Keeping my work calendar up to date and having regular conversations with those around me is critically important, as is the ability to delegate when things are too much.

Transitioning back into the workplace after having children is difficult and in my experience isn't something that women take lightly. Adjusting back to the routine of a workplace can be a challenge, and this is often on top of sleep deprivation and the emotions of being away from your young children. I believe that these emotions and the transition back to work are underestimated, and that many parents struggle through it with minimal work-based support. Organisations invest in support to new leaders taking on new roles, or to staff during a time of organisational change; however, I believe we can do better in terms of providing mentorship, guidance and transitional support to parents who are committed to return to the workplace.





# Work-Life Balance Case Studies

## Renukha Nadarajah

Traffic and Transport Engineer, Jacobs



### How did you initiate your flexible workplace arrangement?

As part of returning from my maternity leave, I discussed my intent to have a flexible work arrangement with my immediate manager.

The details were discussed and approved by myself and my manager before I re-commenced work

### What is your flexible working arrangement?

Currently working 24 hours over 4 days (with flexible start and finish times).

### How is it going?

I like to think that on a given week, a very big portion of my time is spent between two keys things that I enjoy most – spending time with my lovely son and working on challenging /interesting projects at work.

There have been days, I wish I had more time to do more but thus far I have managed to juggle the majority of my time between my son, my family and my work.

I don't think I would have been able to do so without the support of my husband, my parents and my colleagues. I think the greatest challenge so far has been managing my time, especially when my son hasn't grasped the concept of "Mummy has a meeting in 30 minutes, will you please go to sleep?".

So much so, I am consistently updating my calendar with definite at-work time-slots to ensure that I would be in the office to attend meetings and catch-ups (which has seemed to work).

### Any tips?

- Flexibility and communication are the key ingredients in making my part-time work arrangement succeed.

There have been times when I had to work extra hours on a given week to meet project deadlines.

I am very lucky to have the flexibility to work in the evenings when my son goes to bed. And I am consistently communicating with my colleagues and clients about my/their work expectations for any given project – that way all parties are on the same page.

- Another important factor is having my husband's support – because it is always handy to have Plan B, C and D (Daddy time!) when all else fails!
- More than anything else, I think the biggest mind-set challenge that I had to adjust to was that on some days, you just can't win!

On days like those, it is always good to take a step back and congratulate yourself for surviving and hope that the next day will be better!

*For more flexible workplace case studies please visit the following link  
<http://www.engineersaustralia.org.au/women-engineering/resources-o#pubs>*

# Effective Workplace Strategies

Strategies to create more flexible, more effective workplaces need to encompass culture, processes, policies and enablers to achieve successful outcomes.





## Effective Change Timeline

When instigating changes in your organisation towards a more flexible workplace, it is important to engage with employees before, during and after the changes, to ensure they are meeting employer and employee expectations. This will enable greater success in the long term.

### Before Change

#### Communication with employee

- Expectations of employee and employer and preferred methods (email, phone etc.) and how often
- How is engagement with the business going to be maintained?
- What information is to be communicated (social, business updates etc.)?

#### Communication with clients

- What and when should you tell your clients?
- Send an email/phone call
- How will you manage on-going communication with your client?
- How do your clients feel about it and how will the change be managed in terms of the transition?

#### Legal requirements for both parties

- Timelines/dates
- Position after change
- Contract and/or internal paperwork

#### Any IT issues

- Remote access
- Work mobile/laptop

### During Change

#### Communication with employee

- How are you feeling/progressing?
- What are your plans/thoughts for returning (role etc.)?
- What professional development opportunities are available?
- What bids can you be included in?
- What services will be available on return (hot desk etc.)?

#### Communication with clients

- Any updates of major clients/projects?
- When should you contact clients about change?

#### Legal requirements for both parties

- Are the original dates still viable?
- Inclusion in pay review/performance process

#### Any IT issues

- Is everything working for you?

### After Change

#### Communication with employee

- How are you feeling/progressing?
- Lessons learned?
- Would you be a buddy for someone else?
- Re-acquaint yourself with processes and tools
- Speak up if something isn't working
- Advocate/be role model for others – share successes and challenges

#### Communication with clients

- Have you contacted your clients to let them know you are back/have new role?

#### Any IT issues

- Appropriate “Out of Office” messages so people are aware of your working hours

#### Monitor True Hours Worked

- If exceeding agreed hours, discuss resourcing tactics to share excess workload



Industry Partners:

