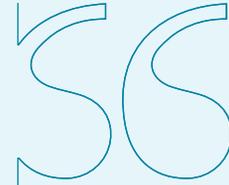


‘Give to Gain’:

How flexible and hybrid working policies support career progression, improve productivity and empower women to thrive





In the spirit of ‘Give to Gain’ – the theme of International Women’s Day 2026 – new research from International Workplace Group (IWG) highlights how flexible and hybrid ways of working are empowering women, and the businesses they work for, to thrive.

“Far from a shallow, transactional exchange, the ‘give’ and ‘gain’ associated with hybrid working policies is about reciprocity and real support; the forging of relationships that offer advantages for all. The freedom and autonomy hybrid working affords are translating into multiple benefits for women – from improved work-life balance and increased opportunities for meaningful collaboration, to clearer pathways for career progression.

“At the same time, progressive companies that offer more flexible ways to work are benefiting from deeper, more productive relationships with female employees that inspire long-term loyalty. Time and again, studies have shown that firms with gender-balanced teams and boardrooms boast greater profitability. Enshrining policies that support women in the workplace is not only the right thing to do on a human level – it’s a win-win that also makes complete commercial sense.”



Fatima Koning
Group Chief Commercial Officer
International Workplace Group Plc

The race for female talent



27% The increase in the number of women hired by companies offering flexibility

Since the start of this decade, workplace flexibility has played an increasingly important role in attracting the brightest and best to any business. The latest research from IWG – a study of more than 2000 female workers, commissioned to support this year's International Women's Day theme, underlines its significance. 77% of the women surveyed said they would be unlikely to take a job that did not offer hybrid working, while only 7% said hybrid working had no impact on whether they would accept a prospective job offer.

When Zurich UK took the decision to advertise all available roles on a part-time, job share or flexible basis five years ago, it was the first company in Britain to do so – and it showed that broadening access to hybrid and flexible working can open the door to a tidal wave of female talent. Since 2019, the number of employees hired on a part-time basis has almost quadrupled – and in 2023, 87.5% of part-time hires were women. Meanwhile, digital services consultancy Nash Squared reports that companies that require employees to attend a central office for only one or two days per week have been found to hire 27% more women than those insisting on a five-day in-office work week.

"These are striking statistics, but they make perfect sense," says Fatima Koning, Group Chief Commercial Officer at IWG. "While the data shows men are also benefiting from part-time

opportunities, on average, more women than men seek part-time work. By making it possible for people to join on this basis, companies can take a vital step forward in equalising opportunity. When they introduce changes like these, leaders ensure talented women who are juggling careers with co-parenting or caring responsibilities aren't automatically shut out because they can't commit to a Monday-Friday schedule."

Spotify's 'Work From Anywhere' (WFA) model, first introduced in 2021, further underlines how powerfully the promise of flexibility can boost recruitment. It reduced the time taken to find and onboard a new hire by six days, while company data also shows around 50% of subsequent hires came from outside their US hubs in New York City and Los Angeles. "Supporting access to a broader talent pool always makes sense," Koning says, "because it yields benefits across the board in terms of diversity, equality and inclusion."

77% of women would be unlikely to take a job that did not offer hybrid working

A seat at the table

The 'Give to Gain' approach is already yielding significant benefits for forward-thinking firms. At Zurich UK, for example, the number of female hires at senior level has more than doubled since 2019, while part-time internal promotions increased 167% between 2022 and 2024. "These numbers are heartening," Koning explains, "because for all the progress made in recent years, we're still far from achieving gender parity in the workplace. Implementing hybrid and flexible ways of

working can accelerate progress, and the data shows the immense impact this can have. The statistics speak not only of bringing more women on board, but of supporting their career progression."

66% of the women who participated in IWG's study said flexible work has had a positive impact on their career, rising sharply for Millennials (79%) and Gen Z (76%). 66% of respondents also said flexible working



More equal companies with more diverse leadership teams make better decisions. Ultimately, they're more productive and more profitable." Fatima Koning

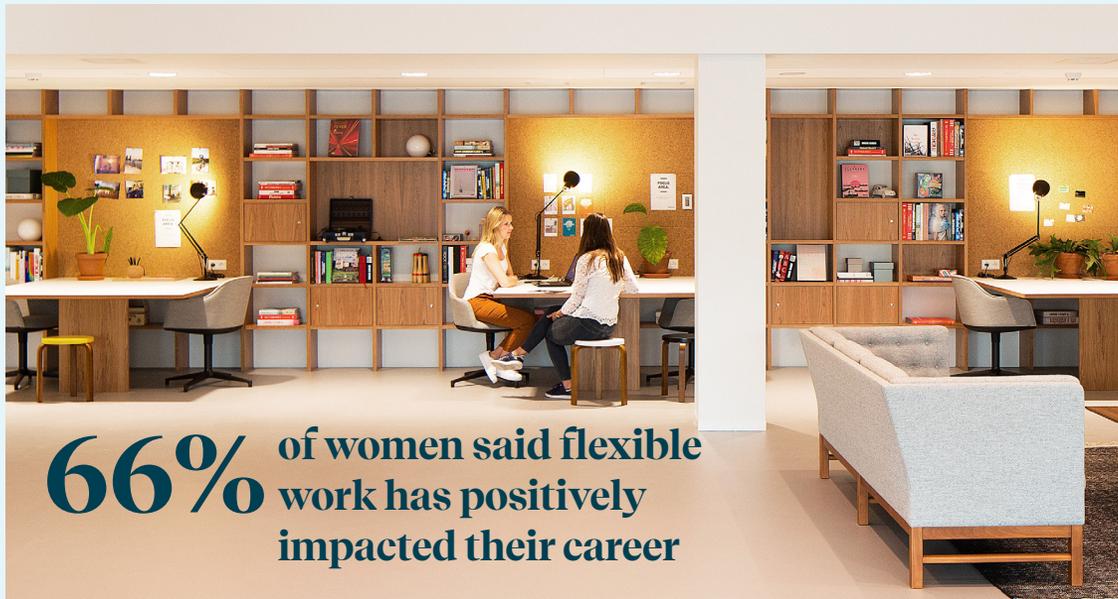
was 'essential' for their career progression. According to the Financial Times, the gender pay gap among tech firms has already narrowed thanks to a 'growing acceptance' of the need for more flexibility among firms. Meanwhile, the number of women in leadership roles at Spotify grew from 25% to 42% between 2019 and 2021.

"This matters," argues Koning, "because more equal companies with more diverse leadership teams make better decisions. Ultimately, they're more productive and more profitable; a study from McKinsey showed that companies with representation of women exceeding 30% are likely to financially outperform those with 30% or fewer. Diversity, equality and inclusion are not buzzwords – they're consequential concepts for firms that are serious about their bottom lines."

It's also important, Koning notes, for younger women to see those from the generation above in positions of influence and responsibility. "While it sounds like a cliché," she says, "you can't be what you can't see. It's powerful for

women just starting out in their careers to see female line managers and team leaders working flexibly but effectively."

In IWG's survey, 64% of women said better collaboration had been a key benefit of flexible and hybrid working, 62% cited the advantage of being able to learn from leadership and 66% said they valued the opportunities it brings for sharing knowledge with others. The option to work from a local flexible workspace can support inter-generational mentoring, as well as meaningful collaboration between women who work flexibly, according to Koning. "Working from home can be stressful and isolating, while commuting to a company's head office tends to be tiring and time consuming. The 'middle ground' – being empowered to work from a local, professional space where you can discuss issues and generate ideas – can be extremely fruitful, helping to forge those all-important relationships among women at different stages of their careers."



66% of women said flexible work has positively impacted their career

Inspiring long-term loyalty



Firms that have committed to giving their people greater flexibility are already seeing significant gains when it comes to retention rates. Professor Nicholas Bloom, an economist based at Stanford University and one of the world's foremost researchers on flexible working, studied the effect of increased hybrid work on more than 1,600 people at Trip.com, a major online travel agency. His team found that employees who worked remotely for two days per week were just as productive, and just as likely to be promoted, as their fully office-based peers.

When it came to employee turnover, researchers discovered something even more encouraging. Quit rates fell by a third among the employees who shifted from five to three days' 'in office'

work per week – and the effect was even more pronounced among female employees, who were 54% less likely to resign when offered the opportunity to work more flexibly. Elsewhere, almost three-quarters (73%) of the working women IWG surveyed said they were more likely to remain working for a company that allowed them to save time commuting by working locally.

“Studies like these show how crucial working policies can be, in terms of inspiring long-term loyalty among employees,” explains Koning. “As any business leader knows, higher retention rates mean less disruption to productivity – not to mention cost savings.” Trip.com estimates that the reduced attrition associated with the Stanford study saved the company millions

of dollars. Meanwhile, Spotify's ongoing commitment to flexible working practices has seen its quit rate drop by 50% since 2021, according to Fortune.

“These stats speak for themselves,” Mark Dixon, Founder and CEO of IWG adds. “Rather than demanding that people undertake arduous, unnecessary commutes every day, more and more firms are realising that a ‘return-to-several-offices’ approach makes more sense. Firms that prioritise people and performance, understanding that this is driven by good management and leadership, not physical location, will reap the rewards.”

Flexibility: four key benefits

COLLABORATION

64% of women surveyed by IWG say they feel flexible and hybrid working empowers them to work more closely and productively with others

CONFIDENCE

64% say that greater workplace flexibility has helped them build the confidence they need to speak up and contribute ideas

NETWORKING

62% say they have found more opportunities to learn from women in leadership positions when able to work in a hybrid way

MOTIVATION

66% say hybrid working has positively impacted their career trajectory, with this number rising to 79% among Millennials and 76% among Gen Z

Positive for productivity

The Stanford study is merely one of many that shows companies' productivity isn't hampered by hybrid and flexible working practices. In fact, it can be improved. Research by IWG and global engineering consultancy Arup shows that businesses empowering employees to use local workspaces and offices as part of their hybrid approach could boost productivity by 12% over the next five years.

In its latest report on hybrid working, tech firm Owl Labs claims that nearly seven-in-ten managers (69%) say it has actually improved their teams' performance. IWG's own study found the same, with 69% of businesses that offered flexible working reporting improved productivity among their workforces. Meanwhile, according to a study by Massey University, New Zealand, the majority of people who work in hybrid environments have even been found to be "more productive and innovative".

"If you've ever dealt with a long, daily commute, none of this will surprise you," Koning says. "In IWG's latest study, almost seven-in-ten women

said that commuting reduced the amount of time they had for a personal life and negatively affected their wellbeing. 64% of the women we recently surveyed said that inflexible work and unnecessary commuting make it difficult to balance work with other commitments, while 67% said it left them less time to spend with family. Hybrid workers are happier, healthier and more productive than their office-based peers," she explains, "in part because of the huge reduction in time spent travelling. These saved hours can be invested usefully – perhaps in self-care, but sometimes on work-related tasks, too. Whatever people do with that time, the facility to choose is key: autonomy reduces stress, allowing individuals to think clearly and prioritise more efficiently."

As if to underscore the importance of choice, IWG/Arup researchers found employees rated their productivity as 'excellent' when based at local flexible workspaces – 67% higher than when solely working from home. According to Koning, this finding is particularly pertinent for women. "When you shoulder a disproportionate

69% of managers say hybrid working has improved their teams' performance



amount of domestic responsibility, as many women still do, flexibility is non-negotiable," Koning says. "However, the ability to draw a line between 'home' and 'work' can make a huge difference to your concentration and creativity. Being able to switch out of one mode and into another is helpful from a productivity perspective – but it also supports healthy boundaries and mental wellbeing."

Supporting women's work around the world

Across the globe, IWG locations are home to enterprises led and founded by talented women. IWG also actively promotes women in business through internal initiatives and a dedicated Women's Network, which provides a platform for connection, collaboration and support.



Natalya Lopareva – Co-founder and CEO – Algorized, Switzerland

Algorized is a tech firm that specialises in advanced people-sensing and positioning software. It has recently secured \$13m in funding to develop models that will function as “the nervous system for physical AI”, bridging the gap between people and machines in places where they work side by side. The firm’s mission is to advance human-machine interaction technology, with a focus on safety and efficiency. It builds AI models that enable machines to accurately distinguish people from objects – essential for the prevention of accidents in environments where humans and robots are integrated.



Jana Marle Ziskova – Co-founder and CEO – Meiro, Singapore

Jana is a passionate champion for data innovation and diversity in tech. She co-founded Meiro, an AI-powered customer data platform built for enterprises that need full control over their customer data, and is in use across three continents. Jana also runs a global non-profit initiative, She Loves Data, which has reached and trained over 30,000 women through more than 300 free workshops and certification programmes in data, AI and digital skills.



Grace Mburu Njiraini – Founder and Executive Director – Flywheel Advisory, Kenya

Flywheel Advisory is a leading advisory firm that specialises in forensics, financial crime compliance, governance, compliance and risk management. Founder and Executive Director Grace Mburu Njiraini is a distinguished forensics and anti-financial crimes specialist, renowned for her expertise. She is also a passionate advocate for financial integrity, and her work continues to shape the future of anti-financial crime efforts both regionally and globally.



Dr Michele White – Founder – WBC Counseling, Michigan, USA

WBC Counseling was founded by Dr Michele White, a licensed psychologist, counselor and author with over 30 years' experience working with traumatic brain injury clients. The firm provides care for children, teens and adults navigating challenges such as anxiety, depression, trauma and life transitions, specialising in CBT and TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) therapy. Michele has travelled the USA as a presenter for PESI HealthCare and has been a sought after speaker for the Brain Injury Association of Michigan.



Evelyn Kelly – Founder and CEO – Orphan Drug Consulting, Ireland

Established in 2017, Orphan Drug Consulting supports emerging pharmaceutical and biotech companies globally. A common challenge pharmaceutical companies frequently face is the build out of their technical operations capabilities to support clinical trials, managed access programs and commercial launch, while ensuring their processes are compliant to meet stringent regulatory requirements. Orphan Drug Consulting supports companies to bridge this technical operations gap via its strong compliance, quality assurance and supply chain foundation and unique cross-functional approach. The firm has earned recognition for expertise in rare disease commercialisation, with Evelyn named a 2023 Enterprise Ireland HPSU Founder of the Year finalist and 2022 EY Entrepreneur of the Year finalist.



Linda Hoemar Abidin – Co-founder – Kelola, Indonesia

Kelola is an independent non-profit organisation founded in 1999 to strengthen Indonesia's arts ecosystem. Working across 34 provinces and Southeast Asia, Kelola has supported over 3,500 artists and cultural practitioners by expanding access to knowledge and networks while strengthening professional capacity. Through fostering innovation, collaborations and sustainable practice, Kelola is helping build a more inclusive cultural landscape where women artists and diverse voices thrive.



Mahdis Schubert and Tanja Sternbauer – Co-founders – the female factor, Austria

The female factor is a global community and consulting initiative working to close the gender gap in corporate leadership. It aims to get women their seat at the table by boosting confidence, competence and connections through mentoring, networking and leadership programmes. Founded by Mahdis Schubert and Tanja Sternbauer, the female factor is trusted by leaders from firms as diverse as Visa, Google and Hugo Boss to advise on DE&I.



IWG Women's Network – Global

IWG's Women's Network is a global, inclusive community built on three core values: empowerment, inclusive allyship and barrier-breaking. It's a space for everyone, bringing together a diverse mix of voices to connect, learn and grow. Members can access dedicated channels focused on topics including career growth and mentorship and mental health and wellbeing, alongside monthly webinars, events and virtual networking opportunities that connect colleagues across the globe.



Flexibility and the future

“IWG’s latest study shows that when businesses empower women with greater flexibility, they get stronger performance in return,” concludes Koning. “This is a powerful reflection of this year’s International Women’s Day theme, ‘Give to Gain’. Not only does more flexible working increase productivity and offer greater work-life balance, but it also strengthens collaboration, builds confidence and expands access to leadership networks, while helping women stay and progress in the workforce. Flexibility is no longer optional; it’s fundamental to harnessing and unlocking female talent in the workplace.”

This momentum is echoed by Dixon. “When employees are able to work closer to home in convenient and professional workspaces, they gain more than flexibility,” he says. “Hybrid working is opening doors to collaboration and career progression, while reducing the drag of long daily commutes. For female talent, flexible working is a catalyst for growth.”

We support more than eight million workers through our network of 5,000+ flexible workspaces in 130 countries. Find out more about what we do at [iwgplc.com](https://www.iwgplc.com).

