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Advancing women in business.

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WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY IS STILL A WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT ISSUE

During the last ten years, we have seen employers expand their views of flexible work programs to serve people of all ages, men and women, those who are parents, and those who are not—rather than serving only women with young children. In fact, the common terminology has changed from “work and family” to “work/life.” This change has been a positive step toward creating more inclusive work environments. Catalyst believes change has occurred for two reasons. First, addressing the concerns of men as well as women was an important strategy for moving these programs and policies forward. Second, the growing number of dual-career couples in which men take on greater family responsibilities, and the rising issues around elder care have increased the need to expand the traditional thinking about work/life issues. As a result, flexible work policies are now more common and more inclusive.

However, this expanded view has not changed the reality. Women shoulder a majority of household and child care responsibilities. Therefore, women are more likely than men to need and use reduced hour arrangements, which, in turn, affects their career outcomes. In Catalyst's quest to advance women in business, this Viewpoints illustrates why workplace flexibility is still a women's advancement issue.

Over the past five years, Catalyst has studied women and men in different industries and demographic groups. Groups reflected in this Viewpoints include:

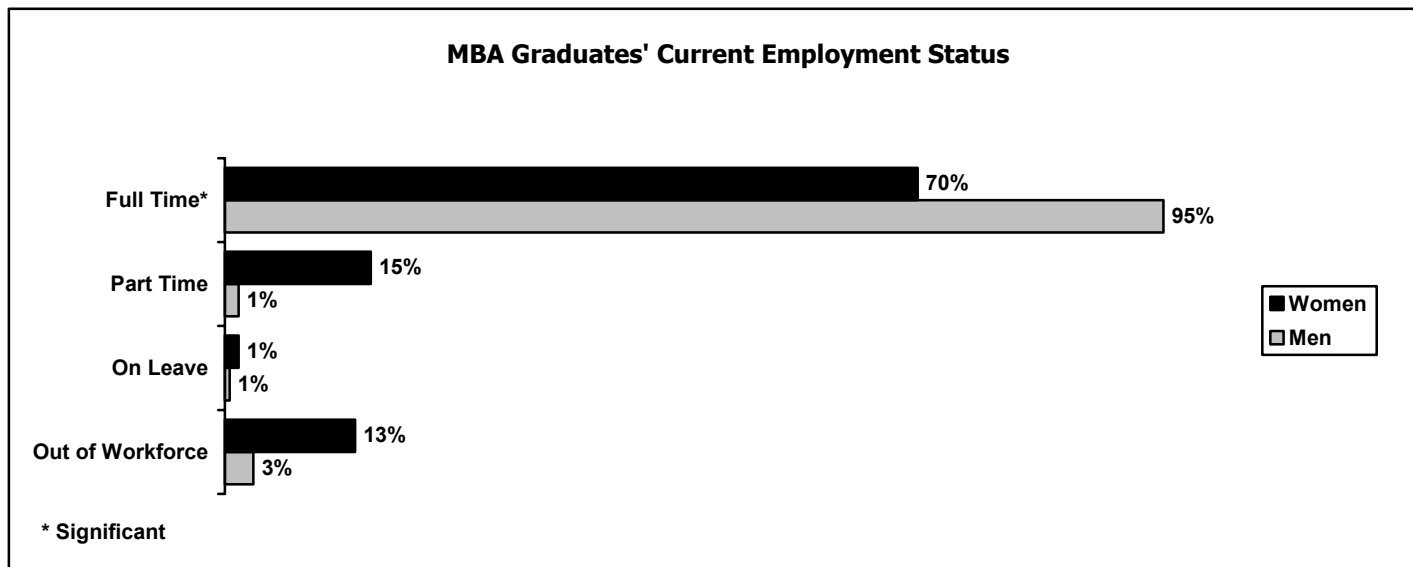
- MBA Graduates
- Law Graduates
- Financial Services Employees
- Generation X*
- Dual-Earning Couples
- FWA Users

* Those born between 1964 and 1975

Women and Men Live Different Lives. In the business and professional arena, Catalyst's studies find markedly different personal circumstances between women and men.

- Across these studies, two-thirds or more of women respondents are married or living with a partner. However, in each of these studies, there is a considerable gap between the marital status of women and men. For example, 69 percent of women MBA graduates and 80 percent of men MBA graduates are married/living with a partner. The only exceptions are the Gen-X respondents, of which the percentage married/living with a partner is virtually identical for men and women.
- When looking at dual-earner couples, fewer of the women respondents are married and more than twice as many women as men have a full-time working partner. This is even true of Gen X. Therefore, men are more likely to have full-time support at home.
- Approximately one-half or more of the women respondents have children, compared to two-thirds or more of their men counterparts. This is also true of Gen-X respondents.

Women are More Likely to Reduce Work Hours Than Men. While both women and men report work/life conflict, the vast majority of users of flexibility, particularly reduced work arrangements, are women. This is true across Catalyst studies, and is, in part, due to the increase in work hours in that what were once deemed full-time hours are now considered part-time schedules. Virtually all of the men MBA and law graduates and slightly less than three-quarters of the women are working full time. Fifteen percent of the women law graduates and 17 percent of the women MBA graduates are currently working part time, compared to virtually none of the men.



This trend continues for the new generation of leaders. Fifteen percent of Gen-X women with children use reduced work schedules, compared to 1 percent of their men counterparts.

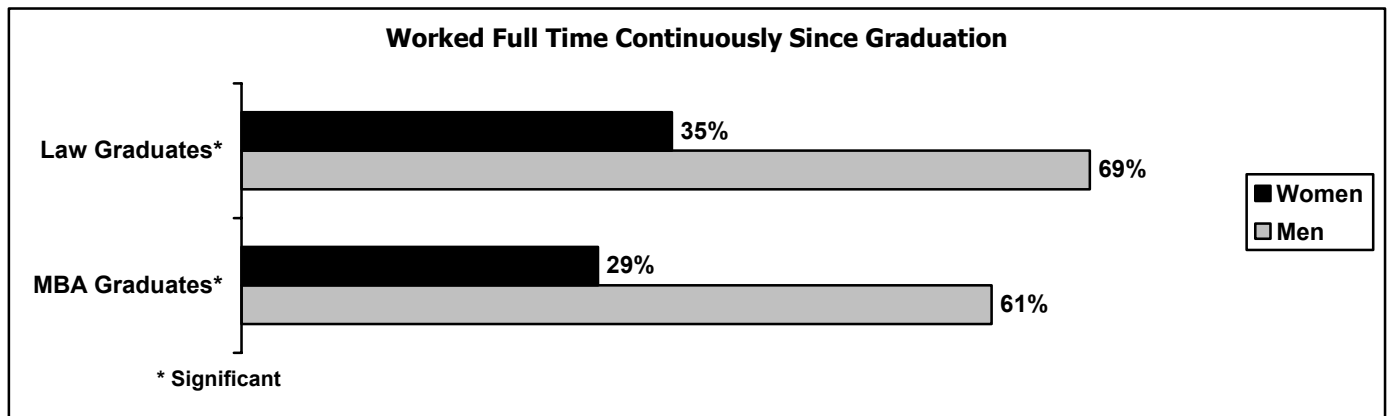
Another explanation is that women continue to shoulder the majority of household and child care responsibilities, referred to as the "Second Shift."¹ Because the married women with children are more likely than men to have a full-time working spouse, they are less likely to have someone handling the household and child care responsibilities.

In a Catalyst study of women who first began part-time arrangements in 1989, 23 of the 24 respondents are married, in dual-earner relationships, and have children. Those who have continued their reduced schedules explain that their husbands' schedules provide little flexibility and that the child care demands fall to them. The following quote illustrates one woman's frustration: *"I cannot count on my husband for anything. If he says, 'I can come home and be there for the kids,' he can't. And that's just the way he is. He's a good father and he rarely works on weekends. But during the week, even when he's here, he's not here."*

¹ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The second shift : working parents and the revolution at home* (New York : Avon Books, 1990).

The Need for Reduced Hours Creates Different Career Paths for Men and Women. As a result, the women and men in Catalyst’s studies have strikingly different career trajectories.

- More than two-thirds of men law graduates have worked full time continuously since graduation, compared to more than one-third of their women counterparts. Forty-two percent of the women have taken a leave of absence at some point in their careers and another 34 percent have worked part time.
- Throughout the course of their careers, only 29 percent of women MBA graduates have worked full time since graduation. And of the women who have continuously worked full time, they are less likely to be married and have children than women who have taken leaves or worked part time.



The studies reinforce that taking a snapshot in time doesn’t capture the whole picture.

- While 15 percent of women MBA graduates are currently working part time, 26 percent report past use of part-time work and another 21 percent plan to work part time at some point in their careers.
- In a study of employees using flexible work arrangements, 35 percent of women project that they will work part time at some point in their careers.
- This gap doesn’t appear to be narrowing, with Gen-X women more likely than men to believe they will work part time in their current organizations during the next five years (19 percent versus 2 percent, respectively.)

The women in our ten-year study of part-time pioneers described flexibility as an essential tool to create an integrated and meaningful life. Personal and business needs evolve, and women’s work arrangements reflect these changes. As one woman describes, *“I think the flexible arrangement has been wonderful for me because as my family has evolved, I’ve evolved, and the company has been willing to evolve with me.”* These women accept the trade-offs in trying to balance careers, family, and community involvement and are satisfied with the choices they have made overall. They credit flexibility with allowing them to slow down yet remain in the professional world for a period of time when family demands are high.

The Use of Reduced Hours Affects the Career Outcomes of Women. After accounting for leaves, gaps in employment, and part-time work, men and women MBA graduates who have worked full time continuously have similar promotion rates. Flexible work options, especially those involving reduced time at work, continue to be discussed as atypical, as exceptions, and as accommodations. Catalyst’s study of women who began working part time a decade ago reinforces the stereotypes and misconceptions about those who don’t use a traditional full-time schedule. As one woman notes, *“Simply because you work a flexible schedule, even though you are extremely committed, some people may view you as less committed or less professional.”*

Many of the factors creating long work hours—fast turnaround, quickly adjusting work hours, immediate accessibility to clients—are considered essential for advancement. Managers and professionals who limit their hours may in turn limit their advancement. For example, in Catalyst's study on women in law, only 34 percent of men and 25 percent of women report they can use flexible work arrangements without career penalties. In our study of employees using flexible work arrangements, one part-time professional asserts, "*If you're onsite and working full time, you're more likely to be afforded the better opportunities and more visibility.*"

Conclusion

While Catalyst research does find that men experience work/life conflict and need flexibility, women continue to be the primary users of formal reduced work arrangements, which often carry career penalties. For many mothers of young children, the long hours and rigidity of full-time work schedules make the career trade-offs of reduced work arrangements difficult but necessary. The career and pay consequences of using reduced work schedules are often too high for many men despite their preference for more flexibility. Women and men need flexible work environments where they can vary their day-to-day schedules and reduce their work responsibilities for a time without leaving the workforce entirely and forfeiting career advancement opportunities. Companies that foster these flexible work environments will reap the benefits of a diverse leadership pool and retaining committed, productive, and experienced talent.

Catalyst Resources

- *Flexible Work Arrangements III: A Ten-Year Retrospective of Part-Time Options for Managers and Professionals* (2000)
- *Making Change: Building a Flexible Workplace* (2002)
- *A New Approach to Flexibility: Managing the Work/Time Equation* (1997)
- *The Next Generation: Today's Professionals, Tomorrow's Leaders* (2001)
- *Two Careers, One Marriage: Making it Work in the Workplace* (1998)
- *Women and the MBA: Gateway to Opportunity* (with the Center for the Education of Women at the University of Michigan and the University of Michigan Business School) (2000)
- *Women in Financial Services: Word on the Street* (2001)
- *Women in Law: Making the Case* (2001)