

Research summary

Attitudes of coachees, line-managers and HR leaders toward maternity coaching.

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Attitudes of coachees, line-managers and HR leaders toward maternity coaching:
Summary Report

Introduction

The aim of this research was to identify the attitudes of three key stakeholders of maternity coaching provision; coachees, their line managers and HR leaders.

This report has been prepared prior to completion of the consolidated analysis. The data and analysis in this report is highly representative of the anticipated consolidated results.

This research was undertaken independently in part completion of a professional doctorate.

Method

Data was collected via an online questionnaire consisting of 5 'yes/no' questions; 17 closed questions; and 2 open questions.

Responses to the 'yes/no' questions that relate to demographic information are outlined below in table 1.

Closed questions are presented as descriptive data, with statistical analysis provided where significant correlations exist. I have provided consolidated data for comparison purposes.

Open questions have been analysed with findings grouped into key themes.

Participants & Respondents

In total, there were 114 respondents in this study. This report has been prepared following data analysed from 76 respondents.

Number respondents	76
Response rate	69.72%
Percentage who have managed 2 or more returners	15.91%
Percentage who have received maternity coaching over past 2 years.	77.27%
Percentage who have attended a workshop/received coaching related to managing direct report going through the maternity transition	4.65%
Percentage who are HR leader	20.93%

Table 1.

Limitations:

Data relating to line manager attitudes was limited as they were not surveyed within this population other than those line managers who had received maternity coaching.

Women on maternity leave were difficult to reach and therefore response rates were relatively low among this participant group.

Key findings:

Charts describing responses to all 16 closed questions are provided on pages 8-13.

Summarised below are those findings where responses indicate a high degree of alignment – i.e. over 80% of respondents agree/strongly agree OR disagree/strongly disagree with the statement.

Overview:

- An overwhelmingly positive attitude toward maternity coaching is present across the three stakeholder groups, in particular in the following three areas:
 - maternity coaching smooths the transition back to work (86% positive attitude)
 - organisational culture as supportive of maternity coaching (88% positive attitude)
 - Managers should also be coached in managing women returners (93% positive attitude)
- The very high response rate (69.72%) is likely to be reflective of a high level of interest toward maternity coaching provision; in addition to being attributable to a high degree of engagement from ECC and the participant employer organization(s).
- Data from the closed questions was statistically analysed (using SPSS) with a view to identifying correlations that were of significance. Results from this analysis indicated that there were no statistically significant correlations between the participant companies. Further, there were very few statistically significant correlations across the stakeholder groups (i.e. Managers, Coachees & HR), indicating a high level of convergence between the participants across the study.
- Approximately 60% of respondents completed the open questions. Responses were extremely positive in terms of the personal impact of maternity coaching, particularly around considering options; building confidence; clarifying career goals and communication with managers.
- In response to how maternity coaching effectiveness could be measured, there was a strong theme around seeking feedback from women returners, managers, and to a lesser extent – clients, at various intervals post return. Areas for measuring included;

satisfaction, degree that work was challenging, career progression, happiness, and stress levels.

Retention

Q.14. “Maternity coaching smooths a mother’s transition back to work.”

29.55% strongly agreed, 56.45% agreed with a remaining 9.36% uncertain and 4.55% disagreed. No respondents strongly disagreed.

Several respondents commented on the impact maternity coaching had on their experience of returning to work:

“I benefitted greatly from it and felt it made my return to work smoother and happier and really contributed to the position I am now in 2 years after my return from a second period of maternity leave. This benefitted me but also my employer who has made a significant investment in me over the years.”

“I can honestly say that if it had not been for the maternity coaching I received I would have given up my job- the transition back to work would have just been too difficult to manage without coaching.”

Correspondingly, there was a very high level of “uncertain” responses to the statement below (Q7), though a high proportion were in agreement (65.9%);

Q.7. “Maternity coaching plays an important role in the retention of female talent.”

27.27% uncertain, 20.45% strongly agreed and 45.45% agreed with a remaining 4.55% disagreed and 2.27% strongly disagreed.

Statistical analysis indicates that managers of women returners are more in agreement with this statement than HR leaders and coachees.

There were several comments relating to measuring retention and factors that influence retention over the longer-term in response to the open question “*What criteria would you use to measure the effectiveness of maternity coaching?*”:

“The number of women who not only return to work following a period of maternity leave but also stay on.”

“Time with the firm after receiving the coaching, number of promotions, employee engagement results, client feedback”

“Happiness and satisfaction of women who do return to work.”

Additionally, responses related to the longer-term nature of the maternity transition, and the impact on retention:

“How many women return to work and remain for at least 2 years.”

“Retention of women up to 3 years post return. Career progression over same time period.”

A significant number of respondents – 68.88% - believe that retention can be improved further by offering maternity coaching for an extended period of up to two years post return:

Q.8. “To improve retention of working mothers, maternity coaching should be offered for up to two years following return.”

11.36% strongly agreed, 59.09% agreed with a remaining 14.02% uncertain, 11.36% disagreed and 4.17% strongly disagreed.

Impact of maternity coaching on career

The questionnaire included two questions relating to the impact of maternity coaching upon women returner’s careers. The responses to these questions were varied.

Q.4. “Maternity coaching has a positive impact on the career development of working mothers.”

22.73% strongly agreed, 59.09% agreed with a remaining 11.36% uncertain and 6.82% disagreed. No respondents strongly disagreed.

Statistical analysis of the consolidated data indicates that Managers of returners and HR leaders are more likely to agree with this statement than coachees.

Exploring options, new perspectives and career planning were among the responses to the question *“How does maternity coaching impact you and/or your organisation?”*:

“Improved ability to focus on and articulate career goals for return.”

“It provided me with a sounding board to explore my options, to gain a new perspective on how my career could develop after returning.”

“I gained confidence in believing that I could manage my career and continue to develop in my role working on a part-time basis.”

Q.11. “Maternity coaching has no impact on the career progression of women returners.”

31.82% uncertain, 47.73% disagreed and 6.82% strongly disagreed, with 9.09% agreed and 4.55% strongly agreed.

Correspondingly, in response to the open question, “What criteria would you use to measure the effectiveness of maternity coaching”, several comments related to measuring career progression:

“Comparison of career progression of those who have had the coaching vs. those who have not..”

“...how career progression would take place etc”

“The progression and retention of female talent following receiving such coaching. In fact, I think that in my organization a lot of importance is still placed on working the long hours and being 100% committed, and if you are not you tend to be side-lined and progress much slower (or stall completely). I have seen others seek to work flexibly and it just doesn't really work as you end up with less and lower quality work.”

Organisational impact

Respondents indicated a strong belief that organisational culture is supportive of maternity coaching:

Q.9. “Maternity coaching is unsupported by my organisation’s culture.”

18% strongly disagreed, 69.82% disagreed with a remaining 9.09% uncertain and 3.09% agreed. No respondents strongly agreed.

Responses to the open questions were not entirely aligned to the responses to question 9:

“It was very positive for me personally and I know another colleague who found it beneficial in thinking about priorities etc. But it did feel like a tick-box exercise from the perspective of the firm.”

97% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that maternity coaching should be part of a wider organisational’ strategy to develop female leaders;

Q. 13. “Maternity coaching needs to be part of a wider strategy to develop female leaders.”

39.36% strongly agreed, 58.09% agreed with remaining 2.55% uncertain. No respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

There was a rather ambiguous response to the statement:

Q.16. “Maternity coaching only works when supported by a culture of flexible working.”

20.93% strongly agreed, 34.56% agreed with 6.65% uncertain and a full 33.21% disagreed and 4.65% strongly disagreed.

This ambiguity may have arisen as a consequence of the strongly worded statement, specifically, **“only works”**.

Line managers

Q.3. “To maximize the effectiveness of maternity coaching, line-managers should also be coached in managing women returners”:

64.54 % strongly agreed, 28.64% agreed with remaining 6.82% uncertain. No respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Correspondingly, there is a high level of ‘uncertainty’ in response to two further questions relating to the role of managers, Q5 & Q10

Q. 5 “I believe most managers are supportive of maternity coaching”

While the vast majority agreed with this statement – 11.36% strongly agreed, 54.55% agreed – a significantly high number of respondents were ‘**uncertain**’ at **27.27%**.

Q.10 “Maternity coaching helps improve communication between line-managers and coachees.”

34.36% uncertain ,with 40.09% agreed and 11.36% strongly agreed with 11.91% disagreed and 2.27% strongly disagreed.

Statistical analysis indicates that managers of women returners are more in agreement with this statement than HR leaders and coachees.

Responses to the open question “*How does maternity coaching impact you and/or your organisation?*” supports the high level of agreement that managers should also be coached, while also providing insight into some of the uncertainty around just how widespread the level of management support is:

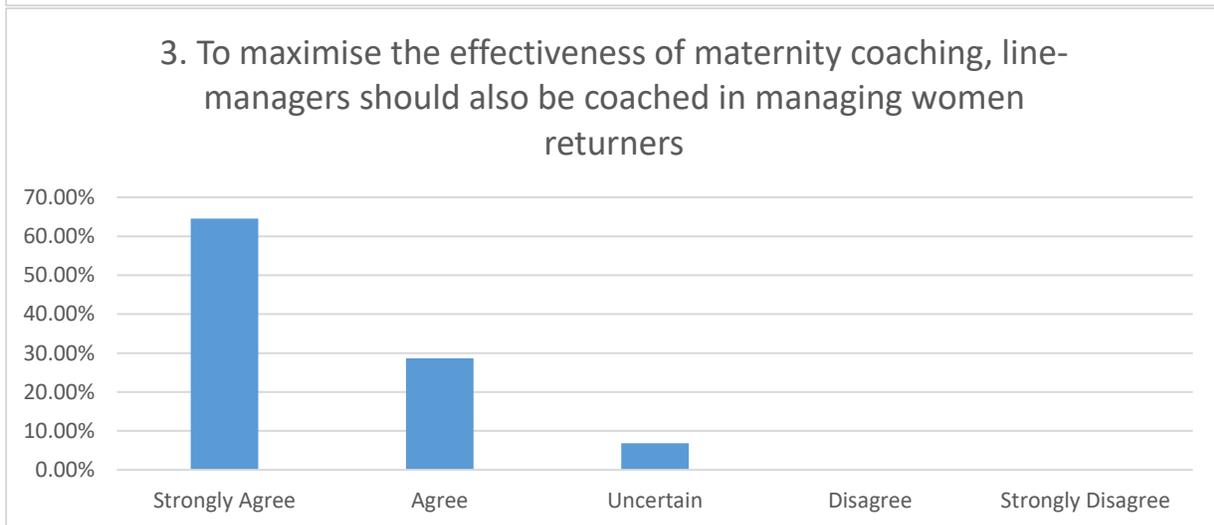
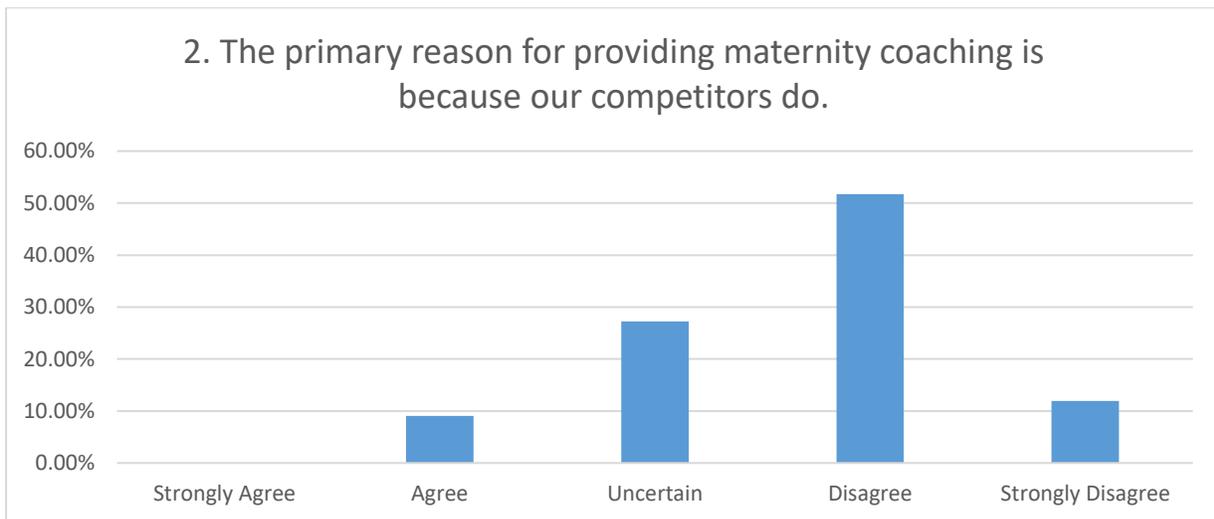
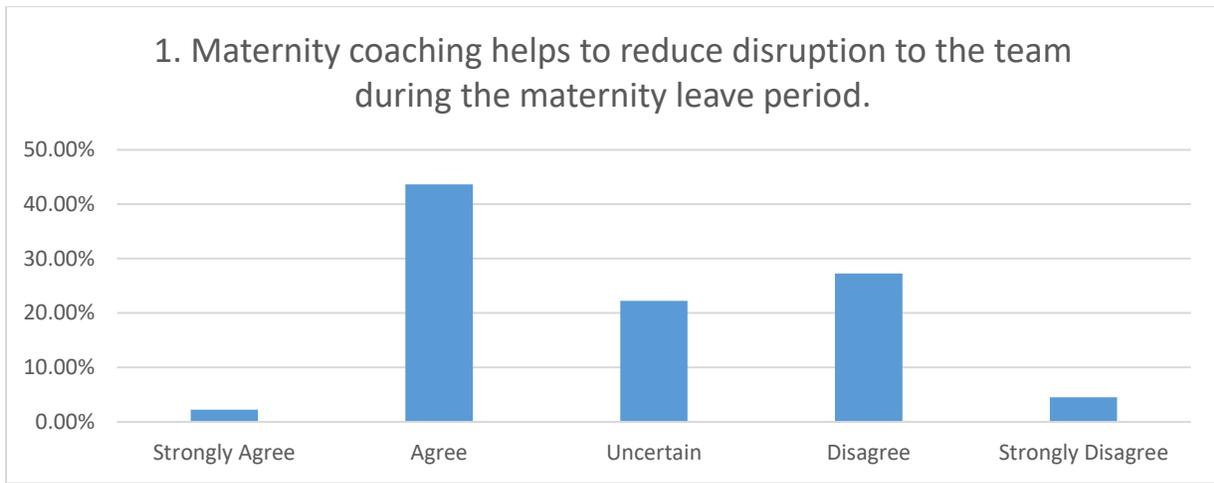
“...the attitudes of managers need to be changed for women to be successful and be able to shape their careers after returning from mat leave.”

“It has had a huge impact on me but I think a greater emphasis on having the manager involved would help women manage flexible working more effectively.”

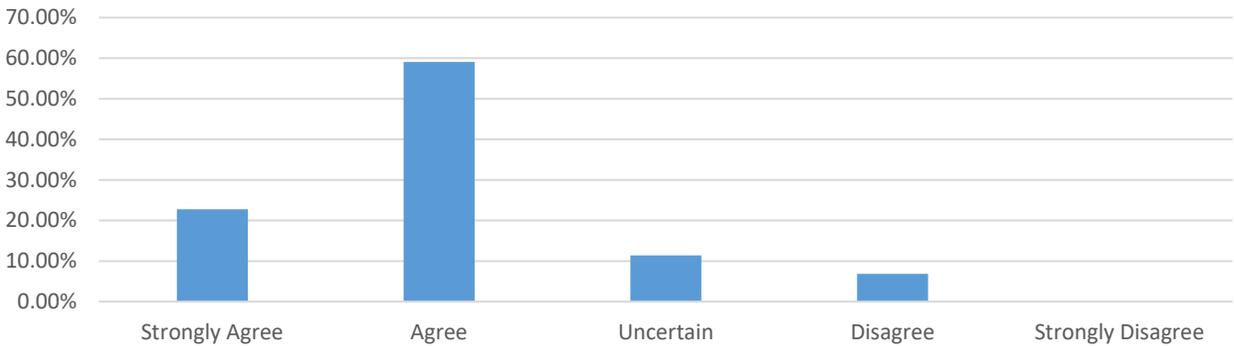
“I have been lucky enough to work for someone who has been supportive of my return and that is invaluable.”

“It does create a feeling that mothers returning to work are supported in that transition (although query whether that flows through to management?)”

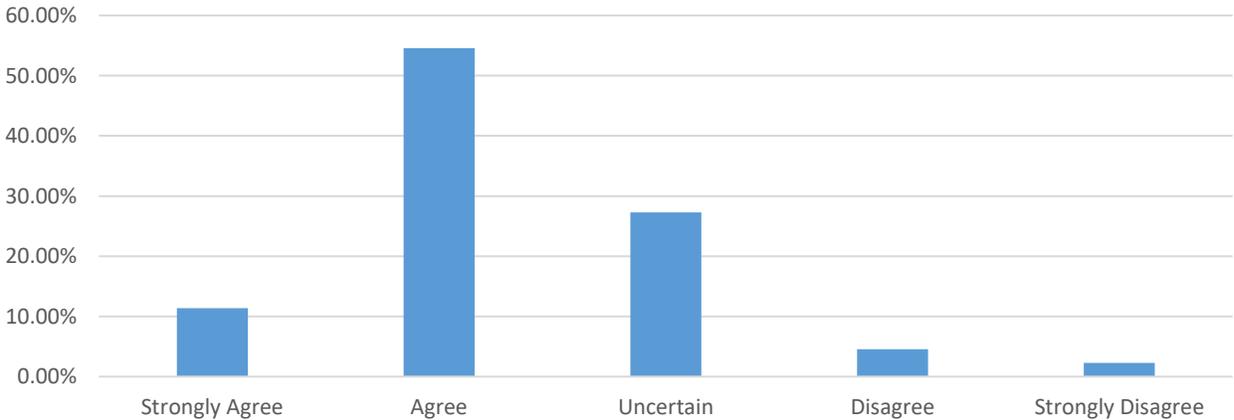
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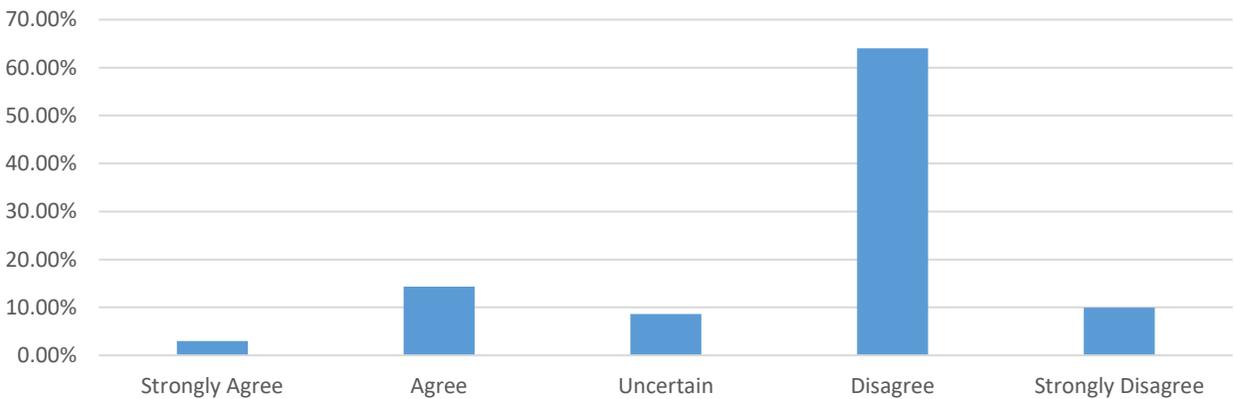
4. Maternity coaching has a positive impact on the career development of working mothers.



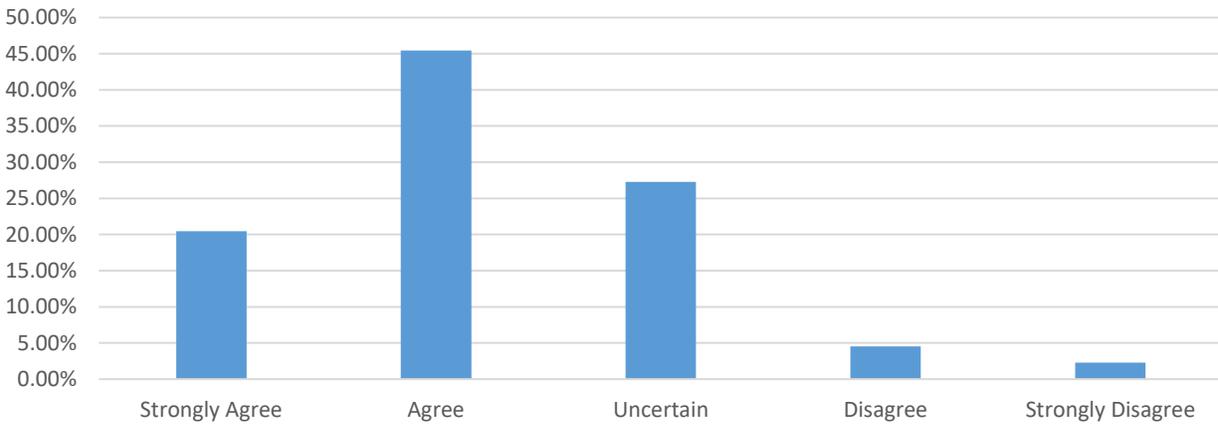
5. I believe most managers are supportive of maternity coaching.



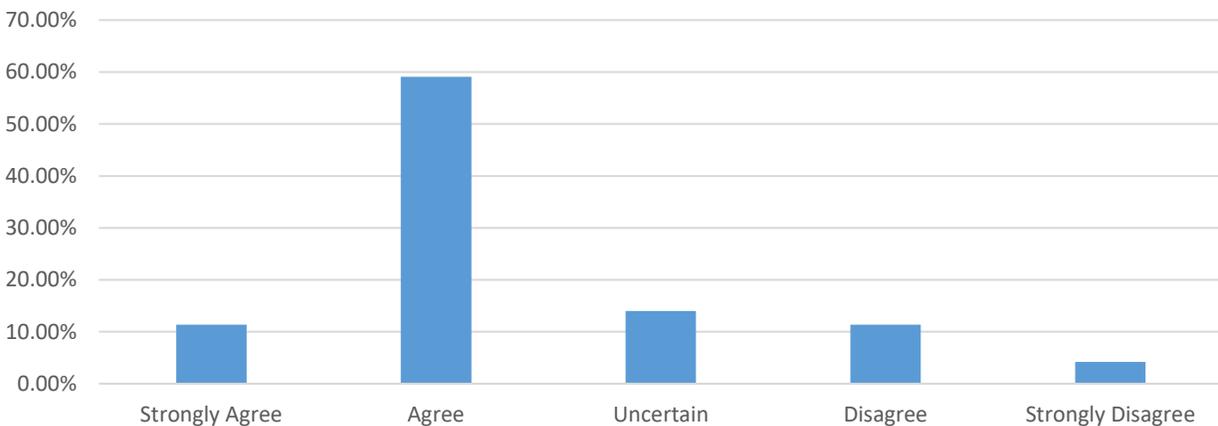
6. Maternity coaching only benefits the employee receiving the coaching.



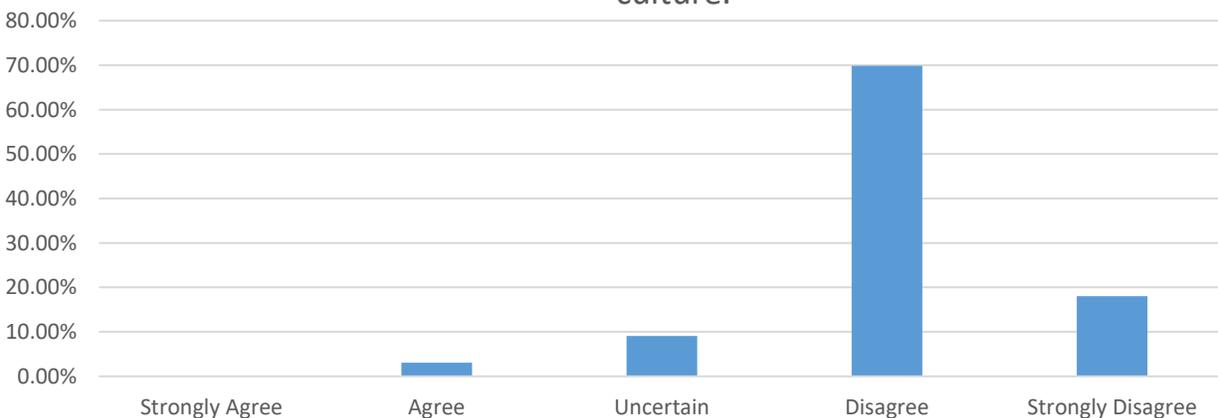
7. Maternity coaching plays an important role in the retention of female talent.



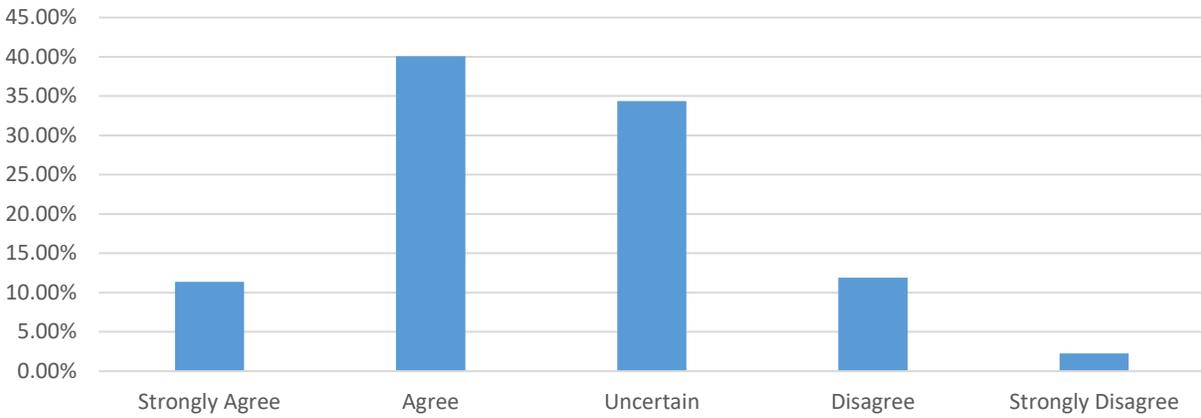
8. To improve the retention of working mothers, maternity coaching should be offered for up to two years following return.



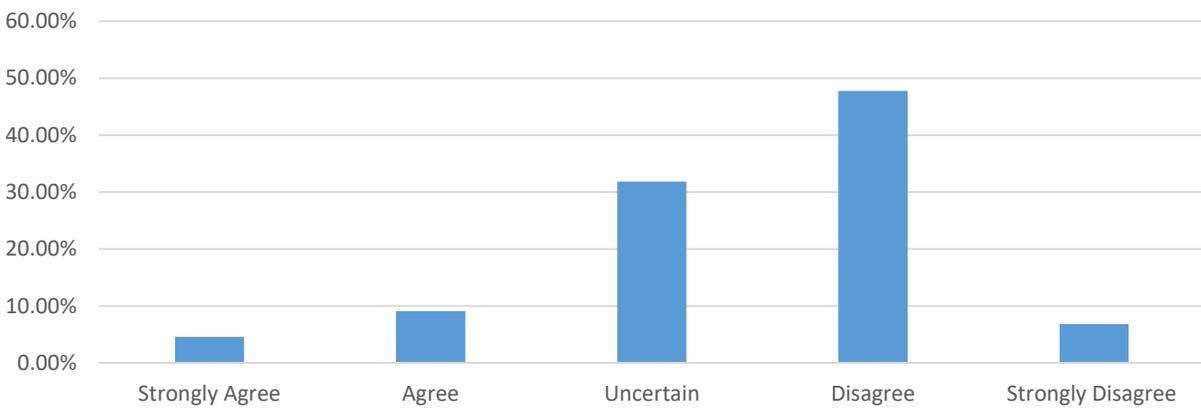
9. Maternity coaching is unsupported by my organisation's culture.



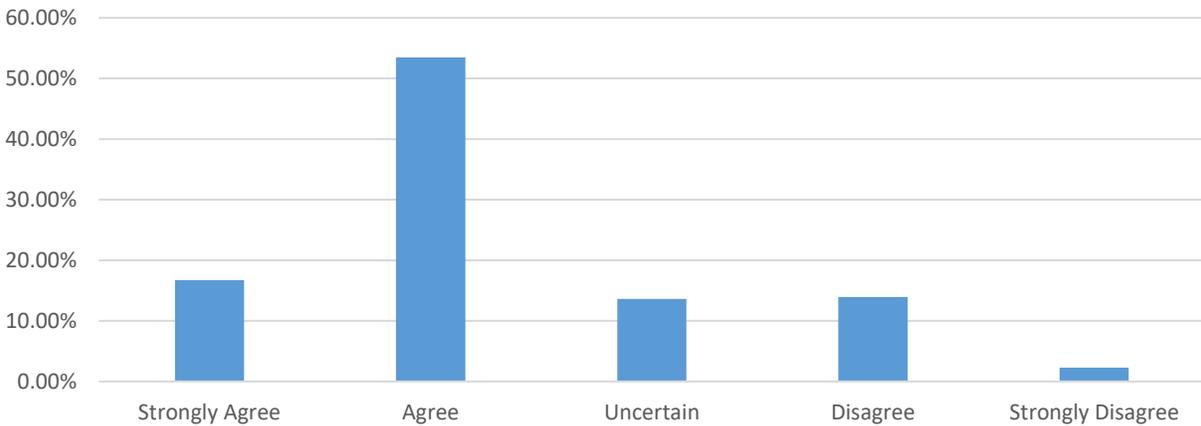
10. Maternity coaching helps improve communication between line-managers and coachees.



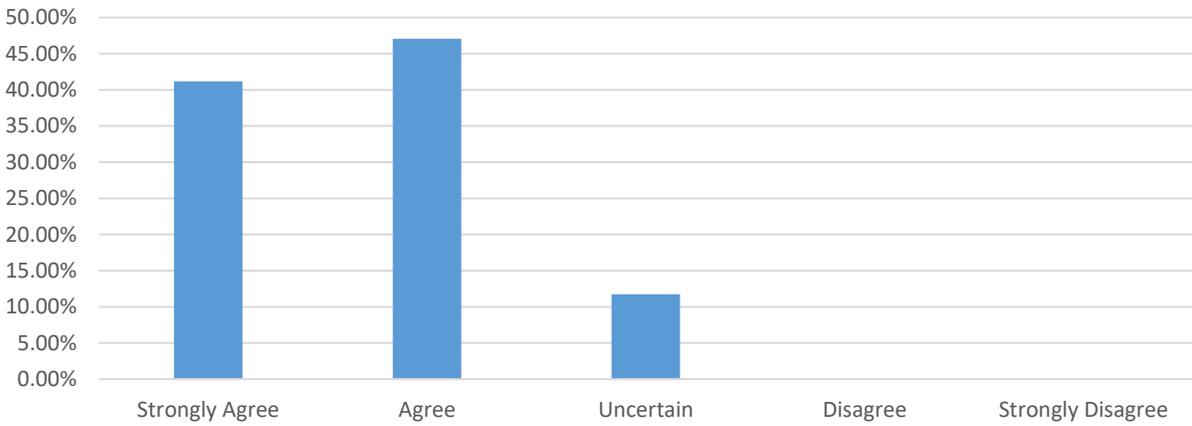
11. Maternity coaching has no impact on the career progression of women returners.



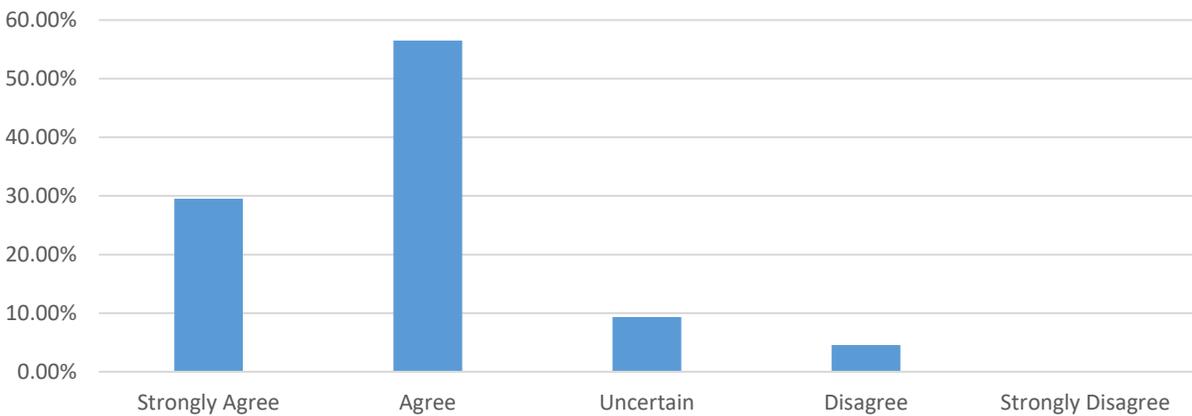
12. Maternity coaching provision is critical to be seen as a progressive organisation.



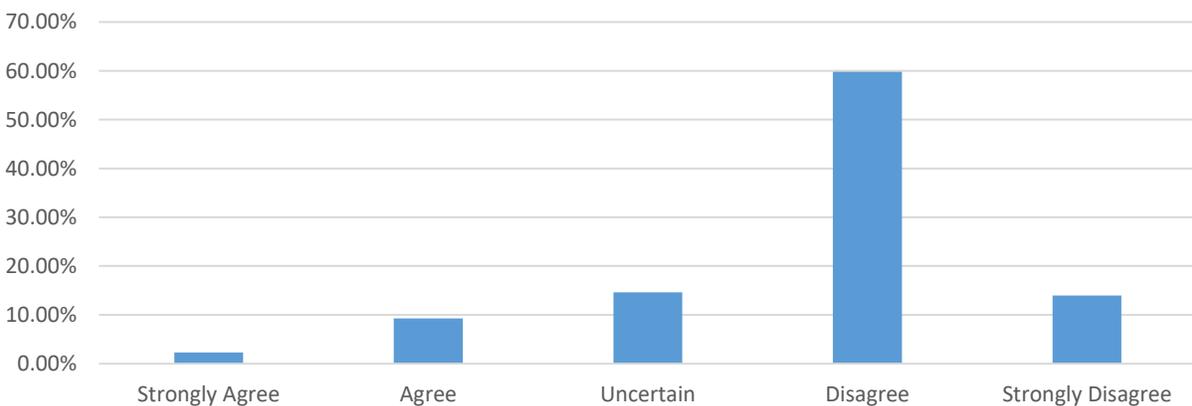
13. Maternity coaching needs to be part of a wider strategy to develop female leaders



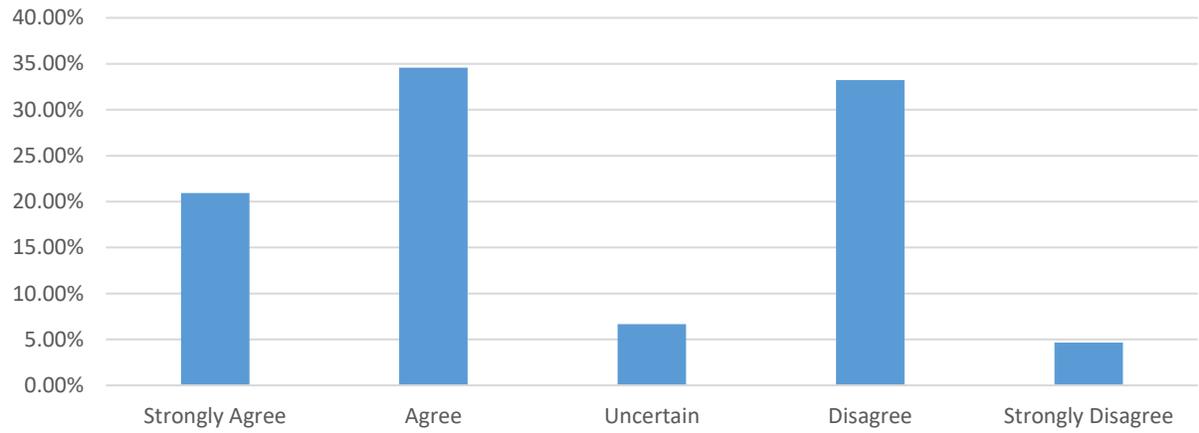
14. Maternity coaching smooths a mother's transition back to work.



15. Maternity coaching reinforces the perception that employing women is costly.



16. Maternity coaching only works when supported by a culture of flexible working.



Responses to open questions

Responses to the two open questions were analysed using thematic analysis. In brief this method entails reading through responses several times, looking for emerging themes and then grouping themes to identify meta themes. Extracts are representative examples of responses to the open questions.

Q. 17 What criteria would you use to measure the effectiveness of maternity coaching?

Meta Theme	Theme	Extracts
Psychological Measures	Confidence; Self-esteem; comfort level; self-worth; happiness; wellbeing; relaxed (during mat-leave)	“Measure happiness & satisfaction after returning to work – not just when women first return, but perhaps 6 months or a year later.”
Job Satisfaction	Challenging work;	“Are they getting the same level of challenging work as before going on leave?”
Re-integration	Time to settle post return; engagement;	“How team is able to adjust and reintegrate when on leave and return.”
Performance	Line manager performance; returner performance; client feedback.	“It helps managers communicate better around the maternity process which overall helps those availing themselves of mat leave and the business.”
Retention	Career progression	“The number of women within an organization who not only return to work following a period of maternity leave but also stay on to progress their careers.”
Role of Manager/HR	Impact of manager attitude	“...the attitudes of managers need to be changed for women to be successful and be able to shape their careers after returning from mat leave.” “It was all very ad-hoc and dependent on the individual to take the initiative to have what could be perceived as difficult conversations. HR should be involved in the transition back to work for women if they truly want to retain talent.”
Difficult to measure	Highly personal;	“I’m not sure how you could measure this – I know for me a lot of the benefit was around personal issues like increased confidence – how would you measure that?”
Longer-term		“...not just when women first return, but perhaps 6 months or a year later.” “Retention of women up to 3 years post return. Career progression over same time period.”

Table 2.

Q.18. How does maternity coaching impact you and/or your organization?

Meta theme	Theme	Extracts
Support	Feeling of personal support from coach. Support from manager. Feeling of being supported by organization. Questioning whether support extends to management/organization A 'feeling' of support. Broaden support network	"I have been lucky enough to work for someone who has been supportive of my return and that is invaluable." "It does create a feeling that mothers returning to work are supported in that transition (although query whether that flows through to management?)" "Provides a valuable support service for maternity returners. Needs to be used in conjunction with other support to ensure maximum benefit – e.g. HR, informal network of maternity returners within organisation, supportive line manager."
Options	Career options Work-life integration options Challenging pre-conceptions.	"It really made me feel like I had options and helped me to work that out." "Helped me think about options for flexible working." "It challenged my pre-conceived ideas I had about going back to work, particularly in a part-time role where I thought I'd have to write-off any social aspects of work and just get my head down and get the job done." "Not sure how it impacts the organization but for me it was really helpful in boosting my confidence and helping me gain clarity of career options."
Retention	Clarity over longer-term career Influence return choice	"Retention of talent." "Improved ability to focus on and articulate career goals for return." "I benefitted greatly from it and felt it made my return to work smoother and happier and really contributed to the position I am now in 2 years after my return from a second period of maternity leave. This benefitted me but also my employer who

		<p>has made a significant investment in me over the years.”</p> <p>“I can honestly say that if it had not been for the maternity coaching I received I would have given up my job- the transition back to work would have just been too difficult to manage without coaching. Maternity coaching really helped me structure my thoughts about everything ranging from childcare, what sort of parent I wanted to be and what my priorities were and helped me look beyond the day-to-day difficulties.....” ultimately, I wanted to continue working for my employer and gave me some great ideas for managing home and work life balance. It was really invaluable.”</p>
Confidence	<p>Retention Return Negotiating flexi-time Performance Ability to succeed with new role</p>	<p>“Significant impact on me in terms of my choice to return to work – I may not have returned without the support maternity coaching provided in terms of gaining confidence to ask for flexible working.”</p> <p>“After having coaching I was able to put together a proposal and business case for a longer maternity leave and a staged return to work. I don’t think that I would have had the confidence to do that without coaching.”</p> <p>“It builds confidence to return to work and takes away some of the common concerns.”</p>
Performance	<p>Of returning mother Team</p>	<p>“I received some positive advice that helped me improve my performance and my attitude towards work and my colleagues.”</p> <p>“Crucially, we talked a lot about being efficient when in the office and I am now much smarter about how I spend my time and challenge my need to attend every meeting/call to make sure it is really necessary.”</p>
Communication	<p>With line manager Taking control Increased professionalism Support for line manager</p>	<p>“...helps them to take more control of the conversations that are happening on return, they know the right questions to ask.”</p> <p>“...helps to re-build confidence as well as opening up a communication channel with</p>

		your line manager which is critical to this process.”
Ease transition	Reduce stress & anxiety Use of KIT day Prep for leave & return Team impact Managing expectations	<p>“Very useful for helping me hand over to team prior to leave and to think about how best to use my KIT days.”</p> <p>“I think it also helped me to prepare my team for my absence and reduced stress there.”</p> <p>“I got a lot from the coaching , in particular making the most of the KIT days, and reducing my worries around how I would re-engage with the team.”</p> <p>“I think it helps the returners have realistic expectations as to how flexible the employer will be able to be.”</p> <p>“Whilst cynical the first time I received it, I found it to be an extremely helpful forum to discuss concerns, queries, possible approaches and next steps so as to maximize my ability to achieve the transition from and to work as I intended and to improve the process for my team.”</p>
Questioning	Lip service Lack of awareness of impact beyond personal Extent of commitment within organisation	<p>“...I think sometimes it is just lip service.”</p> <p>“...feel like it is offered largely as lip service in order to appear diverse and progressive.”</p> <p>“Not sure how it impacts the organization but for me it was really helpful.....”</p>
External coach provision	Confidentiality Impartial Professional/Expert	<p>“...opportunity to discuss concerns in a confidential manner.”</p> <p>“Gives me the opportunity to discuss issues and concerns with an impartial 3rd party. “</p> <p>“I found it incredibly helpful to have someone outside the firm to discuss all my concerns. To have a professional who was able to give advice and really challenged some of my assumptions around what choices were there for me.”</p>

Table 3

Summary

The purpose of this research was to identify the attitudes of three key stakeholder groups toward maternity coaching with an intention of gaining understanding of what underlying forces exist that play to either support or undermine the provision of maternity coaching.

Overall there was a very strong level of positive attitude toward maternity coaching across the three stakeholder groups. There were very few statements where responses from across the stakeholder groups differed in a statistically significant way.

An overwhelmingly strong level of agreement related to:

- Maternity coaching smooths the transition back to work
- Organisational culture as supportive of maternity coaching
- Managers should also be coached in managing women returners

Responses to the open questions provide a very strong sense of where stakeholders place value on their experience and expectations of maternity coaching personally and within the context of the organisation; in particular comments relating to ease of transition, thinking long-term career goals; and confidence around communication with managers and team. There is some opportunity for further exploration where there are high levels of 'uncertain' responses e.g. statements related to levels of manager support and communication between managers and coachees.

Contact:

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Survey Questions

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with 16 statements on a five point scale; 'Strongly Agree' - 'Agree' - 'Uncertain' - 'Disagree' - 'Strongly Disagree'.

1. Maternity coaching helps to reduce disruption to the team during the maternity leave period.
2. The primary reason for providing maternity coaching is because our competitors do.
3. To maximise the effectiveness of maternity coaching, line-managers should also be coached in managing women returners.
4. Maternity coaching has a positive impact on the career development of working mothers.
5. I believe most managers are supportive of maternity coaching.
6. Maternity coaching only benefits the employee receiving the coaching.
7. Maternity coaching plays an important role in the retention of female talent.
8. To improve the retention of working mothers, maternity coaching should be offered for up to two years following return.
9. Maternity coaching is unsupported by my organisation's culture.
10. Maternity coaching helps improve communication between line-managers and coachees.
11. Maternity coaching has no impact on the career progression of women returners.
12. Maternity coaching provision is critical to be seen as a progressive organisation.
13. Maternity coaching needs to be part of a wider strategy to develop female leaders.
14. Maternity coaching smooths a mother's transition back to work.
15. Maternity coaching reinforces the perception that employing women is costly.
16. Maternity coaching only works when supported by a culture of flexible working.

Participants were then asked the following two open questions:

17. What criteria would you use to measure the effectiveness of maternity coaching?
18. How does maternity coaching impact you and/or your organization?