Society LeadersPlus IMPACT HUB

PARENTAL LEAVE FOR CHIEF EXECUTIVES IN THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT SECTOR

Recommendations for Chairs and CEOS

"We must do more to support people in top jobs to combine leadership roles with raising young children. That is why the conversation around CEO parental leave is so critical, especially with a growing number of CEOs starting families."

Verena Hefti – CEO & Founder, Leaders Plus

Introduction

In October 2017, the social enterprise Leaders Plus and the executive search firm Society brought together a group of 12 charity and social enterprise CEOs who have experience of taking parental leave. We asked them to share what worked and hadn't worked when they went on parental leave and we collaborated with them to develop the recommendations contained in this document. We also consulted an additional 22 charity CEOs about their experience of parental leave through an online questionnaire, and we have since conducted further interviews with a number of other charity leaders.

Parental leave is a source of anxiety for many CEOs and their boards. All organisations rely on an element of leadership continuity, but small to medium sized charities are often particularly dependent on the knowledge, networks and expertise of their Chief Executives. As such, many charity CEOs are unsure whether they can continue a leadership career once they have a baby.

We believe that top jobs must always be accessible for leaders with children.

The UK's charity workforce is 65% female[1], but women are still woefully underrepresented in leadership roles, with only 27 of the 100 largest charities currently being led by a woman[2]. Career interruptions due to taking on parental responsibilities contribute significantly to women dropping out of the leadership pipeline[3].

But this isn't just an issue for women. Many male Chief Executives feel discouraged from making flexible working requests and report being penalised for considering shared parental leave.[4] This has a significant impact on the number of men who are able to combine active caregiving roles with senior leadership positions, even though there is evidence that many men are as motivated to pursue flexible working as women[5].

In our pre-event survey, 49% of CEOs said that good leadership continuity in their charities was very much on their mind when making personal decisions on whether to have a baby or take parental leave. CEOs reported that key areas they were thinking about included finding effective interim support, creating smooth transition arrangements and establishing meaningful support from board and team as well as balancing their own family priorities with concerns about their organisation.

[1] NCVO UK Civil Society Almanac 2017, https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac17/workforce-4/
[2] Civil Society Magazine 2017, https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/gender-balance-of-top-charity-ceos-lagging-behind-wider-sector.html
[3] PwC 2008: The Leaking Pipeline. Where are our female leaders? (http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/women-at-pwc/assets/leaking_pipeline.pdf)
[4] Bain and Company via Guardian 3 February 2016. (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/03/flexible-working-helps-women-succeed-but-makes-men-unhappy-study-finds)
[5] Timewise report "Flexible Working – A Talent Imperative". https://timewise.co.uk/what-we-do/research/talent-imperative/

"By catalysing this discussion, we aim to advance the creation of practical and lasting networks, mentoring schemes and action learning sets. These mechanisms will enable CEOs and Boards to navigate parental leave smoothly, with vital support and advice."

Tanya Stevens – Principal Consultant, Society

About Us

This report is edited by Society and Leaders Plus. We thank all CEOs and Chairs who contributed to this work for their generous support and commitment to this issue. We are grateful to Impact Hub Westminster for their support in hosting the event.

Society

Society is a global executive search firm focused on solving senior recruitment challenges for responsible businesses and purpose-driven organisations.
www.society-search.com

Leaders Plus

Leaders Plus is a social enterprise supporting talented leaders with young children to continue to stay on the leadership pipeline.
www.leadersplus.org.uk

Like all Leaders Plus events, our recent roundtable at Impact Hub Westminster was 'baby-friendly', allowing CEOs and Chairs to bring along their young children. The participants also heard from a panel including Elizabeth Oldfield (CEO Theos), Polly Mackenzie (CEO Money and Mental Health Policy Institute) and Kawika Solidum (CEO BeyondMe).

"Open, honest conversations and communication with your Chair, board and staff team are critical to making parental leave for CEOs a success, along with plenty of forward planning."

Susannah Hardyman – Chief Executive, Action Tutoring

Recommendations for CEOs

Good planning for CEO parental leave is vital for the wellbeing of CEOs and their organisations. But we shouldn't look at parental leave just as organisational risk. It can actually be an organisational opportunity. When handled well, CEOs report that they have returned from parental leave with renewed energy and perspective, and have found that they are able to become far more strategic due to their senior teams having taken a clear step up.

We make the following recommendations for CEOs:

1 **Avoid the temptation of putting yourself last**
Remember to consider your personal priorities. Before you have initial conversations with your Chair or your team, think about what you want for yourself and your family.

2 **Know your policies and your rights**
Check your organisation's parental leave policy. If policies aren't up to date or in line with best practice, consider making them fit for purpose before your new family addition arrives. If in doubt, the Working Families legal helpline can offer advice: 0300 012 0312.

3 **Be kind to your Chair and your Board**
It is likely that they have not had a CEO going on parental leave before and therefore they might be afraid of getting it wrong.

4 **Talk early and often**
Share as much as you can as early as possible with your Chair and your team, but be clear that your thinking might change or evolve. Be explicit about your commitment to the organisation.

5 **Be in control of communication while you are away**
Think about what level of involvement you want and what issues (if any) you are keen to be contacted about. Be clear about these parameters with your Board and your team. Schedule regular catch-ups in the last two months before you return to work.

6 **Plan for the unexpected**
Your pregnancy or your partner's pregnancy may not progress as expected. As babies can come early, begin preparing your handover notes several months in advance of your due date. Make sure you hand over not only work streams but also relationships.

7 **Set the parameters for your interim replacement**
Don't leave this task to someone else. Be clear about what role you want your interim to play and ensure a handover for your return is part of their job description. Do you want them to maintain the status quo and then leave? Do you ideally want them to join you in a job share afterwards? Do you want to take this as an opportunity to empower someone from your team who may retain certain additional responsibilities after you return?

"My daughter was born before the introduction of Shared Parental Leave, but this new legislation gives us a fantastic opportunity. If male Chief Executives can lead by personal example, then we can transform the UK's social norms, so that Dads routinely assume more responsibility for caregiving in year one."

Simon Lucas – Managing Director, Society

8 **Consider how to use your 'Keep In Touch' days**
Some CEOs have used these to join fundraising meetings, external training or annual planning sessions. You may even want to ask your Board whether you can use your KIT days for CPD.

9 **Think about your ideal work pattern on return at the earliest opportunity**
Consider your options early. You may be interested in opportunities such as job shares or flexible working. You don't have to work part-time to be a good parent and you don't have to work full-time to be a good leader.

10 **Don't isolate yourself**
Going on parental leave as a CEO can be an isolating experience, talk to others or join action learning sets. A number of CEOs who contributed to this paper offered to have a mentoring conversation with other CEOs and Leaders Plus is offering support such as workshops for leaders before, during and after parental leave, coaching and peer support.

Avoiding Other Pitfalls

- Don't assume there is a right way of doing things. You need to find what works for you.
- During parental leave, don't jump in and start doing the job for your interim, as that will be frustrating for both of you.
- Help to drive this discussion with your peers, and show that parental leave support should be gender neutral.

"The best Chairs managed me in a way where I was completely trusted to get on with the job and held accountable for the outcomes, rather than what hours I sat at my desk. The payoff for doing that as a Chair is huge, as the CEO will go above and beyond for the organisation."

Poppy Jarman – Chief Executive, Mental Health First Aid England

Recommendations for Chairs

When your CEO informs you that they want to take parental leave, it can be a daunting prospect. But this is an increasingly common situation. There are now many excellent examples of CEOs who have been well supported before, during and after parental leave, and of charities that have flourished through an enlightened and progressive approach to managing their parental leave arrangements.

We make the following recommendations for Chairs:

1 **Prepare before your CEO announces a new addition to their family**
Ensure that your policies on parental leave support and flexible working are up to date. Being known as a family-friendly employer can enable organisations with limited budgets to attract top talent.

2 **Congratulate your CEO and make it clear that you want to be supportive**
This is a time when your CEO may be feeling vulnerable, so your support will make all the difference. If your CEO is an expecting father, make it clear that you are happy to discuss shared parental leave. Don't wait for them to raise the possibility.

3 **Invest in your CEO, check your organisations' policies and legal responsibilities**
CEOs report that having a supportive Chair is hugely incentivising. Consider investing in your CEO through coaching, action learning sets, training or networking with other CEOs in similar situations. Contact Leaders Plus or Society for details.

4 **Listen to your CEO**
Boards often make well-meaning assumptions. It's not uncommon for Trustees to decide that they mustn't bother the CEO whilst they're on leave, or that the CEO will definitely want to take a full year, or that the CEO will probably plan to go part-time when they return. Avoid leaping to these conclusions.

5 **Talk early and often**
Your CEO's thinking may evolve throughout their leave, so keep communicating. Ask what his/her latest thinking is about the length of the parental leave, but be aware that this may change. Find out how or whether she/he wants to use 'Keep In Touch' days. Also think about how you will manage if the CEO has to go on leave early due to medical reasons. And ask the CEO whether she/he would like a regular catch up during their parental leave and how/if they would like to be kept informed of key developments. It may be helpful to agree a list of things that your CEO wants to be consulted on (if any) whilst they're away.

6 **Joint interim planning with your CEO**
Shape the interim role together with your CEO and encourage your CEO to be actively involved in the recruitment and selection process. Ensure the interim role has it in their job description to provide a thorough handover to the CEO upon returning from parental leave.

"An organisation's most important asset will always be its people. Trustees who support chief executives through the challenges and opportunities of considering and taking parental leave are helping the people most able to manage and care for the organisation's greatest asset to navigate one of the most important aspects of their lives."

Kawika Solidum - Chief Executive, BeyondMe

7 **Plan**
Treat your CEO going on parental leave as an organisational project with opportunities, risks and a communication plan involving all the stakeholders including senior leadership, trustees, funders and staff. Develop this jointly with your CEO.

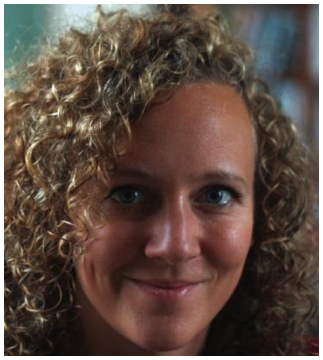
8 **Work with funders**
Some CEOs reported that funders threatened to stop promised funding when they learnt of a CEOs pregnancy. Challenge your funders if this conversation arises. Work with your CEO in order to communicate proactively to your funders about your interim plan.

9 **Be open**
Consider a wide range of interim solutions and permanent return to work options informed by the CEO's and the organisation's needs. Review best practice examples on CEO job shares, flexible working, gradual return after parental leave, or part-time CEO roles. Make it explicit that you are open to a flexible working conversation, as many CEOs report feeling nervous about broaching that discussion. However, don't assume that your CEO wants to work part-time, as many CEOs will choose to return to work full time after parental leave.

10 **Focus on how this can be an opportunity**
Consider how an interim CEO may be an opportunity to acquire new and timely skills for your organisation. Discuss these ideas with your CEO.

Avoiding Other Pitfalls

- Don't be scared to ask questions because you are afraid of doing it wrong.
- Don't call the person covering the role a 'replacement'. They are an 'interim', as this should just be an interim arrangement.
- Try to adopt an outcome-based management approach upon your CEO's return, where they are judged on performance metrics rather than attendance time.



"It is so important for organisations to be open to flexible working for CEOs returning from parental leave. There are lots of options for making it work and it IS possible to support people to be better leaders and better parents at the same time."

Jessica Barratt – Chief Executive, Franklin Scholars

What's Needed Next

The recommendations made in this report must be supported by the creation of lasting, documented and well publicised support structures. These may come in the form of case studies, action learning sets and mentoring schemes.

These three areas were identified as essential to this agenda:

1 **Role models**
We need to celebrate individuals in senior leadership roles who are looking after young children and find ways to showcase different examples of how people have made it work.

2 **Peer networks and bespoke support for CEOs**
We need active support networks for leaders with young children and bespoke support interventions to help more of them to stay in their leadership roles, with a positive impact on gender equality.

3 **National culture change**
We need to push for a national culture change how organisations support people in leadership roles who are looking after young children, regardless of their gender.

If you would like to work in partnership with us to address these recommendations, please do get in touch.

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Society

LeadersPlus

The Leaders Plus Parental Leave Options Grid

When recruiting parental leave cover, consider the strength of the team, the size and culture of the organisation, and the CEO's own aspirations.

Model	Part-time interim with job share prospect	A member of the current senior team	Recruit external interim via a recruitment organisation
Recruitment	You can advertise your interim role as open to flexible working, or as a part-time role, while delegating further responsibilities to the CEO's existing reports. This may ultimately lead to a job share if that is what the CEO wants.	Run a transparent internal-only recruitment process. Consider whether you have an experienced team, and consider whether the individual would be happy to go back to the original role.	You may want to make the job description for the interim slightly different from the permanent CEO. Consider partnering with a recruiter who has experience of parental leave roles as the requirements are often different from a traditional interim role.
How to make it work	State in the advert that a future job share may be considered. This will help you to attract the right candidates. When returning from parental leave, the permanent CEO has the option of discussing a potential job share, but will be under no obligation.	This may work for CEOs who want their own role to evolve (e.g. to become more strategic) and who are happy to hand over some responsibilities to other team member upon their return. To avoid team disruption, the interim CEO should have an open conversation with the team on how their role is changing.	Consider whether you want the interim person to maintain status quo or deliver change, and recruit for the skillset accordingly. You may also want to ask the recruitment firm to offer the post as a secondment to increase the pool of applicants.
Risks	If an individual is recruited who is unable to manage their workload and delegate tasks to the wider team, there is a risk that core deliverables are not achieved.	Several examples have been observed where the internal interim sought to replace the permanent CEO, leading to conflict. Run a transparent recruitment process with clear parameters established, to avoid needless friction.	There can be a continuity issue. To avoid this, allow for a significant overlap between the CEOs before and after parental leave to facilitate a good handover.

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