

THE DESIGN BRIEF

Fathers want to play an **active role at home**, and increasingly want their working lives to reflect it. But **offering leave is only the beginning and how managers turn policy into individual support** shapes the transition that follows. Here's a practical checklist to make changes in your workplace today.



Before Leave

- Schedule a pre-leave planning meeting. Cover leave dates, priorities, workload, handover and return timing.
- Create a written coverage plan. List what will pause, what will continue, who owns each responsibility and who handles urgent issues.
- Agree a communication plan in writing that includes the frequency, channel and type of information communicated.
- Give managers a standard pre-leave conversation guide so the basics don't depend on who the manager is.

During Leave

- Follow the communication agreement.
- Nominate one person to manage coverage questions so work does not quietly flow back to the employee on leave.
- Protect access to leave. Leaders should take their own parental leave and visibly use flexibility rather than only endorsing it in policy.
- Give managers an HR contact for all leave & return transition questions.
- Prepare a return-to-work brief before the employee returns, compiling key team, project and organizational updates, decisions and changes so they can get up to speed without working through months of emails.

After Return

- Hold a return-to-work meeting in the first week. Review the brief together, clarify priorities and agree what needs attention now, later, or not at all.
- Use a 4 to 6 week adaptation period. Adjust workload, hours, travel and WFH as possible; do not expect full capacity on day one.
- Match workload to working time. If someone returns at 60%, 80% or reduced days, reduce the work accordingly, and keep in mind a gradual return.
- Schedule a check-in 3 to 4 weeks later. Revisit workload, WFH and hours alongside childcare realities, and discuss whether parenthood has changed their priorities, career goals or how they want to work..

Keep it Working

- Don't make career decisions based on leave. Keep employees in conversations about projects, development and progression; ask before assuming their ambitions or availability have changed.
- Give every manager the same core transition tools: a timeline, pre-leave conversation guide, coverage-plan template, communication agreement and return checklist.
- Review the transition at 3 months. Ask the employee what worked, what didn't and what would have helped, and feed that back into the process.
- Track leave uptake by gender. If fathers are entitled to leave but aren't taking it, investigate what is getting in the way.

Want the research behind the recommendations?

Read *Designing a New Way to Work and Parent*