

Parental leave in the UK – an investigation from a company perspective

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This dissertation thesis researches the current parental leave policies offered in the UK from a company perspective. A business case argument for offering parental leave policies above and beyond the statutory minimum was also constructed. As a result, this thesis has attempted to fill a gap in current literature surrounding this topic by offering an updated view of parental policies in the UK from a company perspective. A qualitative research design was adopted using in-depth semi-structured interviewing as a means for data collection. Findings highlighted three common themes, financial affordability, talent management and gender diversity. Interviewees expressed strong views in favour of the new shared parental leave policy recently introduced. However, the importance for paid leave above and beyond the statutory minimum was also stressed. It was, however, recognised that the ability of firms to offer such policies is dependent on firm size and industry sectors. A general consensus also developed where interviewees felt generous parental leave policies provides a vehicle for effective talent attraction and talent retention. Finally, it was felt that gender diversity and gender equality would be enhanced, thus benefitting business. Overall, it was found that the implementation of said policies is profitable for business according to the sample.

1. Introduction

“It seems that we are in a period of significant transition, but the ground has not fully shifted” (Harrington et al., 2014, p.2)

1.1 Background and Context

1.1.1 Dynamic Changes of the Labour Market

Over recent decades, social changes, feminism and a changing labour market have led to a significant influx of women into our workforce in the UK (and globally) (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2013). This has resulted in profound effects on gender roles both at home and in the workplace as well as questioning the status of males as the main ‘breadwinners’. Analysis by the Institute of Public Policy Research (2013) found that over 2.2 million working mums are now breadwinners, which demonstrates an 83% increase since 1996/7. Furthermore, “in couple families, 31% of working mums are now the breadwinner” (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2013, p.2). Data from the British Social Attitudes survey show that the proportion of women who thought ‘a man’s’ job is to earn money and a woman’s job is to look after the home’ decreased from 46% in 1986 to 15% in 2006 (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2013). These figures therefore demonstrate a significant shift in the structure and attitude of the UK labour force today. With that, policy on maternity leave and rights for women in the workforce has been altered over recent years. Nevertheless, paternity leave has remained largely unchanged (Gov.uk, 2016b). However, the introduction of Shared Parental Leave (SPL) in April 2015 in the UK is beginning to start a trend for change.

1.1.2 Current UK Statutory Context

This section describes the current statutory legislation for parental leave in the UK today. The recent introduction of Shared Parental leave (SPL) shall also be discussed.

UK maternity leave was not legislated until the Employment Protection Act 1975 (Long, 2012). This entitled women to take up to 29 weeks leave per pregnancy combined with a guarantee of returning to work for their original employer (Long, 2012). Provisions for paternity leave, however, were only introduced in 2003 (Long, 2012). This entitled new fathers a right to take up to two weeks statutory paid leave. Since then, parental leave legislation has been amended and improved to the current system. As a result, in the UK today statutory maternity leave states that employees can take up to 52 weeks maternity leave (Gov.uk, 2016a). During this time, employees can receive pay for up to 39 weeks with the first 6 weeks being at 90% of their average weekly earnings (Gov.uk, 2016a). The remaining 33 weeks of leave is capped at £139.58 per week (Gov.uk, 2016a).

Current statutory paternity-leave states that employees can take one or two weeks leave per pregnancy and receive a maximum of £139.58 per week statutory pay (Gov.uk, 2016b). With the exception of employees who have worked less than 26 weeks for their employer and therefore are not eligible to receive the statutory paid leave, this policy applies to the majority of male employees. Extensive rights for fathers such as Additional Paternity Leave (APL) was introduced in 2010 that entitled fathers to take up to 26 weeks additional leave (Long, 2012). However, this is dependent on the mother who must have returned to work. Nonetheless, it can be argued that this transition in parental rights “reflects the transformation of societal attitudes towards men and women’s roles both at home and in the workplace” (Long, 2012, p.54).

Despite recent parental legislation changes, it is still argued that discrimination still exists within the workforce (Long, 2012; Striking-women.org, 2013). However, on 5th April 2015, the UK government introduced the new Shared Parental Leave (SPL) that enables parents to split up parental leave as they wish depending on their “preferences and circumstances” (acas, 2015, p.3). Legislation therefore, states that parents are allowed to share up to 50 weeks at the statutory £139.58 per week (Gov.uk, 2016c). With regard to the discretionary split, up to three separate blocks of leave can be established; allowing partners to refrain from taking the leave all at once (Gov.uk, 2016c). Overall, SPL has enhanced the timespan of leave for new fathers from a maximum of 2 weeks to 50 weeks paid leave. Nonetheless, it remains optional for their employers to pay above and beyond the statutory minimum (Gov.uk, 2016c).

1.2 Significance of the research

The significance of this research project is to fill the current gap in the literature on whether there is a business case for more generous parental leave policies beyond the statutory requirement in the UK. In addition, this project aims to provide an updated business case argument since the introduction of SPL in 2015 by linking theory and current literature to the views given by a small sample of employers and employees.

1.3 Aims and objectives

1.3.1 Aims

- To explore whether there is a business case to offering more generous parental leave policies in the UK.

1.3.2 Objectives

- Collect primary research data to fill in the gap of current literature surrounding parental leave in the UK.

- Conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews with a sample of employees from one employer to explore the business case argument for more generous paternity/parental leave policies in the UK.

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation will be structured into five sections. Section 1 provides the reader with the relevant background surrounding the research question by giving an overview of how perceptions in the workforce are changing. The current legal status of parental leave in the UK will then be discussed. The latter sections clearly outline the aims and objectives of the research project emphasizing the significance of the intended research. Section 2 provides a literature review that delves into current literature relevant to the research area. There will be three sections: Employee demand, Talent Management and Gender Diversity. Section 3 outlines the methodology used to complete the research study and discusses the reasons in favour of the in-depth semi structured interview technique used whilst noting the limits of such methods. A discussion will follow regarding the use of thematic analysis to interpret the primary data collected as well as ethical considerations. Section 4 will present the findings from the analysis of the primary data that was collected through interviewing. A discussion will be incorporated throughout and will contrast and compare findings from the current literature. Conclusively, Section 5 will collate all discussions established in the former sections to conclude the research dissertation and present a summary of findings. A brief paragraph will follow that will acknowledge limitations of the project before providing suggestions for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Section Overview

This section consists of a critical review of academic literature surrounding the debate on whether there is a business case for providing more generous paid parental leave policies in the UK today. Due to the scarcity of literature regarding the paternal aspect of parental leave, literature focused on the maternity aspect and parental leave in general will be discussed. Some relevant newspaper articles will be incorporated throughout to supplement the sparse academic literature in this research area.

2.2 Employee Demand

Section 1 highlights the social demographic changes that are occurring in the workforce today. Burgess (2007, cited in Rigoni, 2013, p.4) indicates that since 1970, fathers in the UK tend to spend eight times more time with their children. As a result, recent research has started to show increased employee demand for generous paternity leave policies from their employers. Harrington *et al.* (2014) conducted a comprehensive in-depth qualitative research study looking into current attitudes by fathers

regarding parental leave. Out of the 1,029 fathers interviewed, 89% believed it was vital for employers to provide paid paternity or parental leave (Harrington *et al.*, 2014). (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009, as cited in, BBC News, 2010) complements these findings by noting: out of 45% of fathers that did not take paternity leave, 88% stated they would have liked to. Alternatively, (Opinion Matters, 2012, as cited in, Williams, 2013) found that 70% still felt social stigma involving paternity leave and 27% still did not utilise the two weeks of statutory pay that the UK allows. This indicates mixed opinions throughout recent literature. However, whilst Harrington *et al.* (2014) presents a strong argument of new demand by employees who want more generous pay, UK fathers can benefit from statutory two week paid paternity leave while the US only grants fathers up to twelve weeks unpaid leave. As a result, the current literature certainly suggests that changing societal attitudes with regard to parental leave is translating into employee demand for more family-friendly policies.

2.3 Talent Management

Several academics and firms are of the belief that offering generous family-friendly policies can enhance talent management. Harrington *et al.* (2014) stress that, if firms recognise the importance of family-friendly policies, they “will reap their rewards in terms of loyalty, productivity and long-term retention” (Harrington *et al.*, 2014, p.27). However, the cost of offering enhanced paid parental to employees has been argued to reduce profitability (Harrington, 2014). Therefore, this puts into question one of the most fundamental economic assumptions that firms naturally profit-maximise (Scitovszky, 1943). Research by Appelbaum and Milkman (2011); however, found that the introduction of paid maternity-leave in California had no noticeable effect on firm profitability. The Department for Business Innovation & Skills (2014) who recognised the importance of paid maternity leave in terms of staff retention had a contrary view to offering more generous paternity leave. It was seen that small-medium employers expressed discontent with allowing fathers to take more generous paternity leave (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2014). That said, this particular study looked at firms in more male dominated sectors of the economy such as manufacturing. This, questions the representativeness of employer’s views across the UK in this study.

Besides the cost saving debate of offering more family-friendly policies, current literature also indicates the benefit of talent attraction and talent retention (National Partnership for Women & Families, 2015). Early research looking into the business case for paid maternity leave highlights this (Kotey and Sheridan, 2001; Barrett and Mayson, 2007). Aryee *et al.* (1998, as cited in, Barrett and Mayson, 2008, p.279) also indicates that family friendly support positively impacted “retention-relevant outcomes”. Bevan (2001 and Bevan *et al.*, 1999) conducted a study of 11 SMEs (small to medium size enterprises) and found that employees tended to stay longer with firms who offer family-friendly policies. Thus, providing reliability to theoretical research by Akerlof (1982) who highlighted

the gift exchange between employers and employees. It was shown that if firms were to offer more generous paternity leave policies in the UK, employees would repay firms in loyalty and productivity. Thus, echoing the research of Hirschman (1970).

As noted in Section 1, societal attitudes are changing. With that the importance of attracting and retaining talent seems to be a main priority for business. Research by the Public Management Institute (2013) indicated that organizations that perform well, compared to those who perform less well are more than twice as likely to have talent management programmes structured within their business operations. Thus, suggesting a correlation between good talent management programmes and bottom line business performance. However, causation issues are apparent here.

2.4 Gender Diversity

Several company reports regard the effect of gender diversity on bottom line financial performance as profound. With that, growing research highlights the potential business case for offering more generous parental leave policies due to the enhancement of gender diversity in the workplace. McKinsey&Company (2014) found that sampled companies in the top quartile in terms of gender diversity levels were 15% more likely to experience increased bottom line performance above the national industry median (McKinsey&Company, 2014). That said, although these figures highlight correlation, causation might not prevail. Nonetheless, the findings do provide hypotheses into what the main driving factors could be (McKinsey&Company, 2014). A collaborative study between Virgin Money and the UK treasury reports a reduction in 'groupthink' as diversity related driver for better performance (Virgin Money, 2016). Janis (1972) highlights the detrimental effect that groupthink has on effective decision-making. However, the link between generous paternity pay policies and the translated benefit to business through increased gender diversity remains ambiguous. Nevertheless, as IPPR (2013) highlights, the proportion of female breadwinners suggests that if said policies were implemented, incentives for women to remain in the workforce are enhanced. Nelson (2015) who revives the theoretical notion of husbandry provides additional support. Numerical evidence indicates, "79% of women said that support for women returning to work is essential" (Virgin Money, 2015, p.66). This statistic alone, albeit significant, does not provide a business case argument. However, increased employee satisfaction has been shown to enhance profitability of businesses (Harter *et al.*, 2002; Barber *et al.*, 1992). It is argued therefore that increased gender equality in the workplace is beneficial to business. Nelson (2012) highlights that the financial crisis of 2008 may have been prevented if gender proportion at the management level were more equal. This coincides with findings suggesting women are more risk averse and therefore, prudent than men (Jianakoplos & Bernasek, 1998; Ferray, 2009; Wittenberg-Cox, 2009, as cited in, Nelson, 2012).

2.5 Summary

Throughout current literature there is a general consensus which links generous parental leave policies and benefits to business. However, the assessment of the extent to which the implementation of said policies on bottom line business performance remains difficult. Many believe, however, implementing more family friendly policies will translate into better talent attraction and talent retention resorting from changes in employee demand, loyalty and productivity. More recent studies have begun to highlight the importance of having a more gender diverse workforce. That said; by offering a more gender equal parental leave policy, logistical and discriminatory effects that come with favouring the maternal aspect of parental leave are arguably reduced. Nonetheless, the recent introduction of SPL and the benefits to business it will have, remains largely unexplored.

3. Methodology

This section aims to explain and evaluate the methodology chosen to conduct the research for this dissertation. Theoretical comparisons will be made in order to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using in-depth semi-structured interviews. The use of thematic analysis will then be discussed in addition with ethical considerations that have been made throughout this study.

3.1 Qualitative Approach

This research project adopts a qualitative approach. This type of research design allows the researcher to obtain more rich, in-depth data of the social processes involved (Griffin, 2004). As (Willig, 2013) argues, a qualitative approach is based upon the idea of meaning and how participants perceive their experience from certain events (Willig, 2013). By collecting opinions from different perspectives using a qualitative approach therefore, assists the researcher in answering the research question more effectively than a more numerical, systematized quantitative approach.

3.2 Research Method

The means by which the researcher obtained qualitative data for this research project was by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews. These were mainly conducted over the telephone. However, one interview took the form of a face-to-face interview off-campus. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and audio recordings were taken. Overall there were a total of five interviewees, all employees of [Firm X] who had experience of parental leave. Subsequent to each interview the researcher used the audio recordings to create transcriptions prior to conducting thematic analysis. The researcher then used interview transcripts to analyse what common themes arose from responses given by the interviewees and how it compared with the current literature as discussed in Section 2.

3.2.1 Semi-structured interview

The means to which data was collected for this research study was the use of a semi-structured interview technique. As (Willig, 2013) states, a semi-structured interview approach to collecting qualitative data tends to be the most popular method because a variety of analysis techniques can be used to draw conclusions. Therefore, by using an intensive interview technique such as this with a small number of interviewees, a detailed exploration of perspectives surrounding parental leave in the UK can be established. In terms of this research study, a semi-structured interview technique is considered most appropriate as it allows the participants to talk about aspects of their leave such as parenthood and their work/life balance (Willig, 2013). As the researcher has scope to deviate away from pre-prepared questions, the data collected may provide unexpected rich data that would not have been obtained through a structured interview technique. This technique also provides a basis of comparability between participants due to a range of structured questions still being present. As a result, the semi-structured interview method is considered to be the most relevant for this research project. Therefore, the researcher is able to collect data in order to collate and scrutinize the business case argument for more generous parental pay policies in the UK today.

3.2.2 Limitations to semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews, as a means of collecting qualitative data also possess limitations. Boyce and Neale (2006) argue that in-depth semi structured interviews are time-intensive, prone to bias and therefore not generalisable (Boyce & Neale, 2006). It is argued that a participant could be biased depending on whether he/she has a stake in a particular programme (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In order to keep this bias at a minimum, interviewees included employees who had no role in the implementation of parental leave policies. Another argument is that semi-structured interviewing can be ambiguous in nature (Willig, 2013). Due to the mixture between formal interviewing and open-ended informal questioning, it is argued that the researcher may become “salient” (Willig, 2013, p.30). That said, the researcher has attempted to refrain from “abusing the informal ambience” (Willig, 2013 p.30) to prevent skewness of data.

The bias argument in addition to the small selection of interviewees also suggests that this type of data collection is not generalizable to the wider population. However, DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) argue that having a small sample provides certain richness to data collection that other qualitative research methods do not provide. Furthermore, as long as similar themes begin to arise from interviewee responses, a small sample size is sufficient (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

Boyce and Neale’s (2006) referral to the fact that semi-structured interviewing is time intensive by nature poses another limitation. They argue that extra care must be taken in order to conduct, transcribe and then analyse the interviews (Boyce & Neale, 2006). However, this technique is vital in order to extract rich, unquantifiable data with regard to building and critically reflecting on a potential business case argument for more generous paternity pay policies in the UK.

3.2.3 Sample selection

Small sample selection as discussed in section 3.3.1 establishes certain advantages. Although possessing limitations, Patton (2002) highlights that purposeful sampling of whatever size identifies rich information when having limited resources (Patton, 2002). That said, identifying individuals who have relevant knowledge and experience with regard to the research topic is necessary for purposeful sampling (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011, cited in Palinkas *et al.*, 2013, p.534). Therefore, the researcher has interviewed employees who have experienced differing parental leave policies within the same firm. The success of collecting that sample was very much convenience dependent in that the researcher could only collect information from interviewees who were accessible and available (Palinkas *et al.*, 2013). Table 1 below illustrates the backgrounds of each interviewee that took part in the interview process.

Table 1: Interviewee Backgrounds

Interviewee #	Interviewee Background	Experience of Parental leave
Interviewee 1	Head of Employment Law, Employee Relations & People services	Adopted SPL- Split year 50/50 with partner
Interviewee 2	Senior IT Analyst	Took leave prior to SPL introduction- 2 weeks paternity leave
Interviewee 3	Computer Operator	Adopted SPL- Split year 50/50 with partner
Interviewee 4	Mainframe Transactions analyst	Planning to use SPL in near future- 3 months
Interviewee 5	IT Consultant	Took leave prior to SPL introduction- 52 weeks

3.2.4 Open-ended questioning

During the interview process, the researcher used open-ended questions in order to collect information-rich data on the interviewee’s thoughts and experiences. This is supported by Turner (2010) who argues that interviewees can provide as much detail as possible whilst allowing the

researcher to follow up with additional probing questions to extract more information (Turner, 2010). The questions themselves were written up in advance of each interview (Appendix A) and any additional questions asked occurred during the dialogue between the researcher and interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Prior to each interview, the researcher gave a brief introduction to the interviewee explaining the nature of the inquiry. For example, certain questions adopted the Likert scale followed by a simple open-ended question such as “Please give reasons as to why you believe this”. This allowed the researcher partly to compare each interviewee’s response as well as to inform the interviewee how they should structure their response.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Thematic analysis

For the purpose of this research project, Thematic analysis provided the best way to analyse the collected data. As Braun and Clarke (2006) explain, thematic analysis “is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.6). This type of analysis is also relatively simple to complete and does not require high levels of technical knowledge that other methods such as Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis demand. For example, once the researcher has transcribed the interviews, a thorough examination of the text is established. The researcher then codes the data by extracting then collating various common themes that arise and relate to the research topic in question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Along with the argument that thematic analysis is flexible by nature, it is also useful to produce “qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.37). As a result, it can be said that by conducting thematic analysis for this research project, a comprehensive analysis can be used to discover whether there is a business case to offering more generous parental pay policies in the UK today.

3.3.2 Limitations of thematic analysis

Thematic analysis does possess limitations. It is argued that upon the completion of coding, various responses by the interviewees could be interpreted differently than intended by the participant due to the data being taken out of its original context (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although this does not necessarily mean that the method itself is disadvantageous, it does highlight the susceptibility of skewed interpretation of interviewee responses.

3.4 Ethical issues and Considerations

It is important to take note of the potential ethical issues that may arise over the course of the research project. As DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) argue, it is vital to inform all interviewees about the nature of the research study prior to conducting an interview. The researcher therefore constructed an information sheet and an informed consent form which interviewees were given prior to being

interviewed (Appendix C and D). Due to the unexpected direction that semi-structured interviews may take, it is important to fully inform the participants what they are going to experience and what risks they need to be aware of. As this research study talks about personal experiences such as parental leave and work/life balance, interviewees may feel uncomfortable hence, reemphasising the importance of the information sheet and consent form. It must be noted that the researcher kept all interviewees and the firm that employed them anonymous to prevent any danger of interviewee responses causing problems at a later date (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The researcher will also destroy all audio recordings upon completion of the study. Overall, the steps taken by the researcher aforementioned aim to consider the potential ethical issues that may occur over the course of this research project.

3.5 Summary

This section has discussed the researcher's reasoning behind the use of in-depth semi-structured interviewing as a means for data collection whilst taking note of certain limitations. The use of thematic analysis has also been explained and how it is relevant to this particular research topic. Again, limitations were noted. Finally, a number of ethical issues were discussed along with ethical considerations that the researcher took when conducting this research project to prevent effects on others.

4. Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

This section will discuss the findings that became apparent from the five interviews that were thematically analysed. Comparisons with current literature aforementioned in Section 2 will be incorporated in order to establish whether the researcher's findings support the findings of previous studies. It will be seen that three common themes arose, financial affordability of employers and employees, talent management and gender diversity.

4.2 Financial Affordability

During the interview process one major theme of financial affordability became apparent. There was no doubt that all interviewees' felt that the new shared parental leave policy introduced by the government was an important new policy as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Interviewee's perceptions of the new Shared Parental Leave policy (SPL) introduced by the UK Government in 2015

The new Shared Parental Leave (SPL) policy is an important new policy					
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
3	2	0	0	0	0

However, when prompted to elaborate, the interviewees highlighted the importance of financial affordability. Interviewee 1 stressed the need for firms to offer paid leave above the statutory minimum:

“So, I think the social policy initiatives in this area are to be welcomed. The government are the only ones that can drive that. But actually, all of these rights are meaningless unless employers make it financially possible for employees to utilise those rights. So those rights available, yes, they are a good thing but offering the statutory minimum, no one is going to take it”.

Interviewee 2 who experienced only two weeks paid paternity leave before the SPL policy supported this consensus:

“I don't know what it would be like for other people. But from my personal perspective we couldn't afford to take that leave on the statutory minimum. It would almost feel to me that they are offering this type of policy to abide to the law but would know fine well that nobody would actually take it. It would be pricing people out of their financial means. You would have to be in a very good financial position to take a large drop in income”.

Interviewee 4 disagreed highlighting that he/she would still take the leave:

“To be honest, we would be no worse off. So, we would probably still do it. But obviously being paid is a great benefit”.

That said, both interviewee 3 and interviewee 5 respectively stressed that receiving the statutory minimum would prove to be insufficient:

“I definitively think that we would have required more if we were only able to get the statutory minimum”.

“No. I wouldn't have been able to do it. I would have only taken four weeks off to be honest”.

From this, it is clear that family friendly policies such as the SPL recently introduced is only attractive if firms were prepared to pay above the statutory minimum. Interviewee 1 highlights that not all UK firms should look to offer more generous parental leave policies arguing that employers themselves may struggle to afford extensive paid leave:

“I think, I am more nuanced in it in that I think it’s easier for companies like (Firm X) to make those commitments. It’s much harder if you’re an owner-managed business, if you’re a start-up where, you know, you are struggling to pay wages as it is. So if you’re asking me whether I think the government should commit to ensuring everybody gets full pay, then I am not sure I do think that. Because I think you will cripple enterprise at the other end of the spectrum”.

It’s clear therefore that interviewee’s perceptions of generous paternity leave policies allude to the financial affordability of both the employer and employees. If firms do not offer above and beyond the statutory minimum, employees are less likely to take them. Alternatively, if firms implement generous family friendly policies, affordability may be detrimental to their financial performance.

When interviewee 1 was asked whether other UK firms should offer New Fathers more generous paternity leave policies it was answered simply:

“Yes, if they can afford them”.

Interviewee 4, an employee, when asked to expand on whether more generous parental leave policies are profitable for business or not had sympathy towards businesses:

“I’d probably sit on the fence with that one because obviously they are paying someone a wage but they are not there [...]. So, I’d probably say it would still cost businesses. Also, in areas where they become short staffed, they are going to bring in temporary cover, therefore incurring further costs. So, I wouldn’t say it’s an easy thing for businesses to do”.

This response highlights that although employees themselves advocate for more generous parental leave policies by UK firms, there is an understanding that not all firms are able to afford them. This finding coincides with the Department for Business Innovation & Skills (2014) report that highlighted small-medium sized employers expressed a potential financial struggle if they were to implement more generous paternity leave policies.

Nevertheless Table 2 below highlights a strong perception by all interviewees that more generous paternity leave policies would be profitable for business.

Table 3: Interviewee’s perceptions regarding the profitability of businesses if they were to implement more generous paternity leave policies to new Fathers

Offering more generous paternity leave policies to new Fathers is profitable for business					
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don’t Know
0	4	1	0	0	0

This section has highlighted that all interviewees rated financial affordability for both employers and employees as of high importance when looking at the business case for more generous paternity leave policies in the UK. These responses support the study by Harrington et al. (2014) who found 89% respondents indicated that paid paternity leave was important. However, sympathy of employees to employers regarding the financial difficulty of offering these types of policies in the UK has also been highlighted.

4.3 Talent Management

The theme surrounding talent management including both talent attraction and talent retention became evident during the interview process. From Table 2 above, it was noted that the general consensus was that all interviewees viewed more generous paternity leave policies in the UK as a profitable activity for business. That said, various responses from interviewees subsequently alluded to the effectiveness and importance of talent management.

Interviewee 1 alluded to the importance of attracting the best talent by implementing family-friendly policies:

“I think there is the, what will become the war for talent, where particularly when you look at the numbers of people who are leaving university with good degrees and STEM subjects. Everybody is fighting over them and there are far more attractive businesses you can work for in this day and age. So you have to be able to attract people and actually, I don't think it's always about money, it's about the culture that you create”.

Interviewee 1 subsequently elaborated on this point by reinforcing the fact that societal attitudes are changing in the UK:

“There is a lot of research saying that Millennials want very different things from their careers and from the firms they work for. They're far more interested in flexibility and have very different attitudes towards caring responsibilities. And I think firms need to be able to address that in order to attract the right people through the doors”.

Thus, echoing the findings of Harrington et al. (2014) who found a stronger feeling by the Millennial generation regarding family friendly policies.

Table 4 below illustrates the finding that most interviewees feel that if they were to leave their current firm, generously paid parental leave policies are of significant importance.

Table 4: Interviewee’s perceptions regarding the importance of paid parental leave policies if they were to change firms

If you were to look elsewhere for work, how important would it be for your employer to offer paid paternity leave					
Very Important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Not important at all	Don’t Know
2	2	0	0	1	0

Interviewee 5 elaborated that it was dependent on the individual wanting more children:

“[...] Once you’re over having children then I guess you would change that opinion. But yes, at the moment I would rate really highly”.

Interviewees 3 and 4 were in agreement respectively:

“[...] I am intending to have another child in the next couple of years. Therefore, it would be something I would definitely look for in another company if I were to leave”.

“I’d say important to be honest because especially if you’re young and looking to start a family it would be one of the major pull factors to get you to choose that firm to work for”.

Interviewee 2 disagreed:

“For me, personally, right now, it would not matter to me at all. The reason I say this is because we are not intending to have any more children so it would be kind of irrelevant to me now”.

The interviewee, however, highlights the role of these type of policies in talent attraction:

“I suppose it shows me that the company looked after and valued their staff a bit more than other places”.

Interviewee 3 expanded on this response by linking generous parental leave policies to talent retention and loyalty:

“In the longevity of keeping hold of the staff then, I would definitively say it would be profitable for business. I say that because it is a massive incentive for staff to remain loyal with the firm”.

The referral to loyalty by interviewee 3 was supported by most. Significantly, Interviewee 2 who had taken leave prior to the introduction of SPL indicated that loyalty would have been enhanced subject to more generous parental leave policies:

“Yes, I think if I was offered what is currently offered now then I would have been more loyal towards the company. I think it's a pretty decent thing to do”.

Interviewee 3 who experienced SPL and was offered above the statutory minimum strongly agreed:

“Oh yes, it has increased massively. I think that what they've done is above and behind what is legally required really”.

Interviewee 4 highlighted the importance of paid leave by firms above the statutory leave as being the enhancing factor to increased loyalty:

“I've been here thirteen years now and I feel that seeing as [Firm X] is prepared to pay you above and behind the statutory minimum where as other firms do not, it makes me feel more loyal just through this policy”.

Interviewee responses here support the work of Akerlof (1982) who highlighted the gift exchange between employers and employees. Hence, showing that if firms were to offer more generous parental leave policies in the UK, employees would repay firms in loyalty and productivity.

Interviewee 1:

“If they have a good deal with their current employer and they trust in the culture, they trust in the policies, they trust in the people who are managing them”.

Regarding productivity effects of more generous parental policies, all but one interviewee said their productivity levels are positively affected subject to experience more generous leave:

Interviewee 3:

“ [...] I feel that I put a bit more work in due to the bigger respect I have for the company”.

Interviewee 4:

“I think that when I come back, although it'll be tough, I definitely feel I'll be more productive”.

Interviewee 2 disagreed however:

“ [...] No I don't think it would have changed. To be honest when you have a young child, your productivity is dependent solely on how much sleep you get. So regardless whether I was off for three months with my daughter or had two weeks and then came back, I don't think my productivity would change much”.

Interviewee 1 gave an insight into the employer's perspective:

“Effectively I think it's about how you want to be seen. It's about your employer reputation and how you want to attract talent and retain talent. [...] Therefore, as long as you can make it affordable, you've got to look at retention rates. You look at your employee engagement survey in terms of what people were saying to us regarding work/life balance. There is quite a lot of data which says if you can shift your employee engagement figures by 1 or 2 points then that does correlate with your bottom line”.

Nonetheless, Interviewee 1 did highlight the difficulty in seeing definitive profitability effects by implementing more generous policies:

“I think yes that will ultimately translate into your bottom line, but it's very hard to show that directly”.

4.4 Gender Diversity

The role of gender diversity and gender equality and its potential effect on business arose as a major theme subsequent to thematic analysis. Among all interviewees the general consensus was the recognition of changing societal attitudes to the role of women in the workforce.

Interviewee 1:

“[...] It stops child caring being a gender issue and it stops it being assumed as a female's role. And so, by giving dads or partners the opportunity to take that paid time off, you give others more choices.”

Interviewee 5 who represents the female employee perspective when asked whether UK firms should implement more generous paternity leave policies said:

“Yes, I think they should be given the option. I think because of everything nowadays where there is demand for equal opportunities for women such as same rate of pay as men and want this entire sort of thing. So, when it comes to parental leave, there should be no reason why it shouldn't be the same.

Interviewee 2 giving a male employee perspective, agreed:

"[...] It's a hard time for everyone so being able to help your partner in a modern world is the way it should be. It's very old fashioned in my opinion to think that women should stay in the kitchen at home [...]"

Interviewee 3 indicated the benefit of allowing new Mothers to return to work sooner:

"I really think it brings families closer together. It gives families a better opportunity to have a work/life balance. It can only benefit them really as it gives them an opportunity to get back to work"

Interviewee 2 highlighted this benefit further:

"[...] I also think that by letting my wife come back to work for a bit and sharing some of the burden with me would have meant she wouldn't have been so out of touch with work as well. Because she's had a full year off and since coming back she's found it really difficult this time to suddenly switch back into work mode overnight. [...] You go from a full being a full-time mother for what feels like a very long time to suddenly the Monday where there is no phased return or anything like that. So, it's a bit of a culture shock for her and the kids and for me as well to be honest."

Responses are shown to advocate a more balanced parental leave policy in order to allow women to return to work sooner thus, reducing difficulties faced when returning to work. It was also seen that interviewees felt strongly about fathers taking more time to bond with their new child:

Interviewee 4:

"Well without being too negative towards the female side of things, I don't think new dads are being given enough time to spend with their new child"

Interviewee 5:

"I think that it's nice for the fathers to bond and take some of the responsibilities whilst their child is very young"

Interviewee 3:

"I truly believe that I have an added connection with my son because of it."

That said, interviewee 1 who represented an employer perspective stood out as the main advocate for gender equality in the work place and the benefits to business it may have:

"[...] I think these initiatives are important for promoting gender balance [...]. It's not about promoting women at the expense of men or having single sex teams. What we are arguing for is balanced teams"

However, it was noted that it is hard to see a direct effect on profitability:

“I think the issue with all of the diversity agendas and diversity initiatives is that it’s really difficult to show the direct impact on the bottom line. You can show correlation but you probably can’t show causation.”

This supports the findings by Bevan (2001) – benefits to the firm are somewhat unquantifiable. Nonetheless, interviewee 1 presented two business case arguments for generous parental leave policies:

“[...] Companies with good diversity do have better returns on income”.

Thus, supporting the findings of the McKinsey&Company (2014) report.

“I think the second issue is risk management and avoiding the dangers of group think. [...] If you just put the same sorts of people and ask them a question in a room, they’ll come up with one answer. Whereas if you have people with different backgrounds, different thoughts, you get better solutions to problems”.

Interviewee 1 emphasised this point further:

“There is some research which shows that women are more risk averse than men, which is a good thing in financial services considering what happened in 2008 [...] and whether it was partially caused by a product of alpha males at the top”.

This shows reference to findings by Jianakoplos and Bernasek (1998), Ferray (2009) and Wittenburg-Cox (2009).

While it was noted in Section 4.2 that talent retention posed as one major business case argument for implementing more generous parental leave policies, one interviewee successively combined the theme with gender equality:

“So what you have is that at graduate level, you have almost 50/50 gender split. Then, year-on-year, you see a shift towards more male orientated workforce as you go up the job ladder. Now, you can’t tell me that, losing that amount of talent in any business is good for business. It just isn’t. And I think you’ve got to find ways of keeping that knowledge, that know-how and working differently”.

Among other interviewees, the issue of gender discrimination was raised. For example, interviewee 4 expressed:

“It’s a very interesting debate. [...] I was out having a few drinks with a friend. [...] He said to me that you can’t go on record and say this but from a personal point of view, everything that he pays comes out of his own pocket. Therefore, he mentioned that he

wouldn't employ a receptionist who is aged between 25-35 because I know, she is likely to leave and have children. This is because he would have to find cover. He admitted that you can't really say that in this day and age but this type of discrimination is still happening throughout business".

That said, interviewee 1 mentioned that if more generous parental leave policies were introduced by UK firms, gender discrimination will be reduced:

"You don't get managers looking at women of a certain age in their teams and thinking they're going to be the ones that are going to take a year off because I don't think you can make the assumption anymore".

5. Conclusion

This concluding section will present a summary of findings as discussed in Section 4. Acknowledgements to the limitations of this dissertation will follow before discussing the scope for further research in this topic area.

5.1 Summary of Findings

Over the course of this dissertation a presentable business case argument has emerged with regard to parental leave policies in the UK. Since the introduction of SPL, there has been a significant enhancement in terms of length of leave a new Father may take. However, the issue of financial affordability arose as one of the common themes surrounding this debate. It was found that all interviewees expressed the view that the introduction of SPL in the UK was an important new policy. That said, both employer and employee perspectives expressed the need for UK firms to offer paid leave above and beyond the statutory minimum. These findings thus highlight the employee demand for more financially viable parental policies and coincide with the transition of societal attitudes in the UK today. One interviewee warned, however, that small, owner-managed enterprises may struggle financially if they were to implement more generous parental leave policies. Nonetheless, all interviewees expressed a strong view in favour of firms offering paid parental leave above the statutory minimum.

The theme of talent management and the importance of it were highlighted by most. 4 out of 5 interviewees highly ranked the importance of paid parental leave policies if they were to seek employment elsewhere. It was also found that most interviewees positively correlated more generous parental leave policies by firms with increased loyalty and productivity. The employer perspective was found to recognise this by stressing the importance of these policies with talent attraction and talent retention. Conversely, it was noted that the bottom-line effects of implementing more generous

parental leave policies still remains ambiguous. However, all but one interviewee expressed that generous parental policies would be profitable for business.

Finally, the topic of gender diversity and gender equality became evident via the interview process. Two interviewees in particular expressed the potential reduction in gender discrimination in the workforce due to the implementation of SPL and more generous parental leave policies in the UK. Interviewees highlighted that fewer firms now automatically assume that the female cohort of the workforce will take the entitled parental leave. As a result, many interviewees welcomed the more equitable opportunities women are likely to have. Many also highlighted that women are likely to benefit from being able to return to work sooner. Coinciding with this finding, one interviewee emphasised several business benefits to having a more gender equal workforce. This included reduced groupthink issues and the retention of female talent. With that, the importance of career progression of women was emphasised by the employer. Nonetheless, all interviewees expressed that allowing new Fathers to take more leave would enhance morale upon returning to work.

Overall, findings from this dissertation highlight a strong business case for more generous parental leave policies by UK firms. Changes in societal attitudes, especially in the Millennial generation, indicate an increasing demand for new Fathers to take more leave to spend with their newborns. With that, an employer insight indicated that the implementation of more generous parental leave policies beyond the statutory minimum is a vehicle for talent attraction and talent retention. Although financial affordability of the firm being able to offer generous parental leave policies was questioned, all interviewees stressed the long-term business benefits they may create. Finally, it was found that all interviewees desired gender diversity and gender equality in the workforce.

5.2 Limitations of research

Taking into consideration the significance of this research, there are limitations that need to be acknowledged. The sample size used for data collection was small and confined to one specific firm. Although comprehensive perspectives were established from within one firm, there lies a reliability issue. As this topic area covers UK business in general, different sized firms from a range of sectors may have given different findings. As a result, the sample used for this dissertation may not present reliable findings for generalising to the population. In addition, the proportion of employee perspectives outweighed that of an employer perspective, therefore, increasing the susceptibility of interviewee bias.

5.3 Scope for further research

In order to obtain a more comprehensive view of more generous parental leave policies and the effects on business, a larger sample of firms would be suggested. With that, a more reliable basis for generalisation could be established.

This dissertation has attempted to fill the gap in literature surrounding a potential business case for more generous parental leave policies in the UK. It has also given an updated insight into the effects of recent introduction of SPL from a company perspective. With that, this dissertation provides scope for further research into the effects of more generous parental leave policies on both the labour force and businesses in the UK.

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Appendix:

Appendix A: Interview questions

Introductory questions

- 1) Tell me what you do here at [Firm X]?
- 2) Have you experienced taking parental leave yourself? If so, what was the policy in place at the time?

Main questions

This section will involve a range of questions where some will ask you to answer in a strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, don't know type of fashion. I will then allow you to expand on each answer you give if you wish.

- 3) As of 5th April 2015, the UK government's revised new-shared parental leave scheme was introduced. Do you think this is an important new policy?

- A – I strongly agree
- B – I agree
- C – I neither agree nor disagree
- D – I disagree
- E – I strongly disagree
- F – I don't know

Why?

- 4) Do you believe this policy is generous enough? Please answer in as much detail as possible.
- 5) Do you think offering more generous parental leave policies are profitable for business?

- A – I strongly agree
- B – I agree
- C – I neither agree nor disagree
- D – I disagree
- E – I strongly disagree
- F – I don't know

Why?

- 6) What evidence is there to suggest this new policy is viable to implement in business terms?
- 7) Do you believe that New Father's should be offered more generous paternity leave policies by other UK firms?

- A – I strongly agree
- B – I agree
- C – I neither agree nor disagree

- D – I disagree
- E – I strongly disagree
- F – I don't know

Why?

- 8) Do you think that the implementation of more generous paternity pay policies will have an effect on mothers?

- A – I strongly agree
- B – I agree
- C – I neither agree nor disagree
- D – I disagree
- E – I strongly disagree
- F – I don't know

Why? And what kind of effect?

- 9) Has your experience of parental leave whilst as [Firm X] altered your loyalty to the company at all?

- 10) Have you felt that your time off has affected your productivity since returning?

- 11) If you were to look elsewhere for work, how important would it be for your employer to offer paid parental leave?

- A – Very Important
- B – Important
- C – Neither Important nor Unimportant
- D – Unimportant
- E – Very Unimportant

- 12) What identifiable costs is [Firm X] going to incur by implementing this new policy? Are other UK firms financially able to implement these new revolutionary policies?

- 13) Do you think the UK economy will be affected in any way if this type of policy becomes the norm in UK business?

- 14) Is there anything you would like to add/discuss before finishing?

Appendix B: Interviewee Transcript example

Interviewee 1 Transcript:

1) Tell me what you do here at [Firm X]?
<i>"So, I have the world's longest job title. I am head of employment law, employee relations and people services. However, I am about to become the director of public affairs. So that is where I am going next".</i>
2) Have you experienced taking parental leave yourself? If so, what was the policy in place at the time?
<i>"Well I shared the year with my husband using the new shared parental leave scheme. And we split it exactly 50/50. My part of the leave involved three months full pay, three months half pay in line with [Firm x]'s parental leave policy".</i>
3) As of 5th April 2015, the UK government's revised new-shared parental leave scheme was introduced. Do you think this is an important new policy?
<i>"Yes, I agree, but my answer is a bit more nuanced than that. Am I allowed to say why? So, I think the social policy initiatives in this area are to be welcomed. The government are the only ones that can drive that. But actually, all of these rights are meaningless unless employers make it financially possible for employees to utilise those rights. So those rights available, yes, they are a good thing but offering the statutory minimum, no one is going to take it".</i>
4) Do you believe this policy is generous enough? Please answer in as much detail as possible.
<i>"Yes again, I think, I am more nuanced in it in that I think it's easier for companies like (Firm X) to make those commitments. It's much harder if you're an owner-managed business, if you're a start-up where, you know, you are struggling to pay wages as it is. So, if you're asking me whether I think the government should commit to ensuring everybody gets full pay, then I am not sure I do think that. Because I think you will cripple enterprise at the other end of the spectrum".</i>
5) Do you think offering more generous parental leave policies are profitable for business?
<i>"I think the issue with all of the diversity agendas and diversity initiatives is that it's really difficult to show the direct impact on the bottom line. You can show correlation but you probably can't show causation. That's what I think. That said, I think these initiatives are important for promoting gender balance. It's not about promoting women at the expense of men or having single sex teams. What we are arguing for is balanced teams. And I think that is important for a number of reasons. I think there is definitely an economics case in that it's at the high level and you can look at the McKinsey</i>

report, which will show you that companies with good diversity do have better returns on income. Right so you can show that. However, it is quite difficult to show that at a business case level, but what I do think is, you have got to be able to relate to your customers. And you look at the amount of money that is controlled by women in this economy. Then why would you just create a business that only has men at the top? I think the second issue is risk management and avoiding the dangers of groupthink. I think if you just put the same sorts of people and ask them a question in a room, they'll come up with one answer. Whereas if you put people with different backgrounds, different thoughts, you will get better solutions to problems. There is some research that shows that women are more risk averse than men. It is a good thing in financial services considering what happened in 2008. Was it partially caused by a product of alpha males at the top? And then I think there is the, what will become the war for talent where particularly when you look at the numbers of people who are leaving university with good degrees and stem subjects. Everybody is fighting over them. There are far more attractive businesses you can work for in this day and age. So, you have to be able to attract people, and, actually I don't think it's always about money, it's about the culture that you create. Finally, millennials is the last point I want to make. There is a lot of research saying that millennials want very different things from their careers and from the firms they work for. They're far more interested in flexibility and have very different attitudes towards caring responsibilities. And I think firms need to be able to address that in order to attract the right people through the doors. So, I think it becomes more important in terms of talent management, knowing your customers, risk management. So, I think, yes, that will ultimately translate into your bottom line, but it is very hard to show that directly. And I think the issue for me around paid shared parental leave and why that's important is, that, it stops child caring being a gender issue and it stops it being assumed as a female's role. And so, by giving dads or partners the opportunities to take that paid time off you give others more choices. You don't get managers looking at women of a certain age in their teams and thinking they're going to be the ones that are going to take a year off. I don't think you can make that assumption anymore. What you will see is, particularly in places like [Firm X], is that we will be able to change the dynamic of our top tiers because of it".

6) What evidence is there to suggest this new policy is viable to implement in business terms?

"So, we benchmarked across peer groups, we looked at what other firms were doing. We obviously have the legal obligation that we have to do, so, the question is, how much of it do you want to fund? And as you're casting around trying to put together a recommendation to the executive committee, what you're thinking about is what would it be. Is it going to be a month, two months? Now what we could see looking at it is the take up of paternity leave. To rewind a bit, I think our policy was something like one week fully paid, one week on the statutory minimum. And, what we could see is, what dads were doing was that they'd take the first week off and then they'd take a week holiday.

So, the second week was never really utilised. So, you can see that as an issue. So, we look at affordability and we looked at cost. But the issue is that you never really know how many people are going to become pregnant in any one year. But what we can do is look at averages. And, actually, it was a principal decision taking by our executive committee to say, when you're looking at how much paid leave you're going to give, it's very hard to justify anything other than why wouldn't you do the same for fathers as you would do for Mothers. Because anything else is arbitrary and isn't grounded in any kind of logical argument. Therefore, as long as you can make it affordable, you have got to look at retention rates, your employee engagement survey in terms of what people were saying to us regarding work/life balance. There is quite a lot of data that says if you can shift your employee engagement figures by 1 or 2 points then that does correlate with your bottom line, in terms of discretionary effort and the rest of it. So that is what we looked at. But in terms of the decision we made, it was on a point of principal actually, because you couldn't justify anything differently".

7) Do you believe that New Father's should be offered more generous paternity leave policies by other UK firms?

"Yes, where you can afford them".

8) Do you think that the implementation of more generous paternity pay policies will have an effect on mothers?

"I actually think this is all ground-breaking. It's one of the things that I think, can, and will make the biggest difference. Because the main reasons why dads didn't do it because invariably, they are the breadwinners. But there are the social attitudes to part of it as well, which needs to be overcome. And you can only do that by starting that trend and thought that things can be different. But I do think that it is massively important".

9) Has your experience of parental leave whilst as [Firm X] altered your loyalty to the company at all?

"Yes, I believe so, yes!"

10) Have you felt that your time off has affected your productivity since returning?

"I believe so. Yes".

11) If you were to look elsewhere for work, how important would it be for your employer to offer paid parental leave?

"Very important. Although I am not considering leaving".

12) What identifiable costs is [Firm X] going to incur by implementing this new policy? Are other UK firms financially able to implement these new revolutionary policies?

"Well is the back-fill for the period that the partner is off work. But that's not to say that in all instances we will bring in temporary resource. We cover it within the team. So, actually, it becomes no net difference to us. It depends what the role is and where you sit".

13) Do you think the UK economy will be affected in any way if this type of policy becomes the norm in UK business?

"Well, I think it links back to the women's issue. So, you can see in most firms, what they have is, what we call, as the pyramid. So, what you have is that at graduate level, you have almost a 50/50 male/female split. Then, year-on-year you see a shift towards a more male orientated workforce as you go up the job ladder. Now, you can't tell me that, losing that amount of talent (women) in any business is good for business. It just isn't. And, I think you've got to find ways of keeping that knowledge. I also think, as I have said before, is that we would struggle to get the best people in at this end. It is interesting that the firms that are more forward thinking on this sort of stuff tend to be public sector. And you see a lot more women at the top of those organisations. And even the regulators. That is because they haven't got the salaries to be able to throw at this. So, they have to think more creatively about the opportunities they can offer. And, I think that's why you see more of that sort of stuff in Silicon Valley where they are more forward thinking. And, that's because there is a war for talent. And, actually, I think that you could offer women 20/30 thousand pounds more and they won't move if they have a good deal with their current employer, they trust in the culture, they trust in the policies and they trust in the people who are managing them".

14) Is there anything you would like to add/discuss before finishing?

"I think, technology will change this debate enormously. You look at many of the big employers at the moment and they are moving towards a lot more flexibility in terms of the way people work. So, that's the culture of presenteeism. I think that will diminish over time, which is part of the reason why people don't take maternity or shared parental leave as they think it will harm them by not being seen. But you can break that. I think that is important. But genuinely I do think that this is all good for business".

Appendix C: Interview Information Sheet

Research question for this project

Parental leave in the UK- an investigation from a company perspective

Invitation to participate

You have been invited to take part in a dissertation research project. Before making a decision on whether to take part or not, it is important for you to understand the motivations of the research and what your involvement will be. Please read the provided information below carefully and if you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me.

What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of this dissertation research project is to develop an understanding whether there is a business case to provide more generous parental leave policies in the UK.

Why have you been chosen?

You have been chosen to participate in this research project because you currently work at the firm that is at the forefront of changing paid parental leave policies as well as having significant expertise in the proposed research topic.

Do you have to take part?

It must be emphasised that it is to your discretion on whether to participate in this research project or not. If you decide to take part, you will be provided with a consent form to sign. Alternatively, if you wish not to take part in the research project you have the right to withdraw at any point without having to provide a reason behind your decision.

What do you have to do?

You will participate in an in-depth, semi-structured interview in person. The interview should last no more than one hour. You will be asked to answer variety of evaluative and open-ended questions. If possible, provide as much detail as you feel necessary to each question asked.

Will your participation in this project be kept confidential? What will happen to the results of the dissertation research project?

All the data collected in this dissertation research project will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity will be kept anonymous unless you permit otherwise. Although it is improbable that this dissertation project will be published, if it were to be, you will be duly informed of where you can access the results of this research project and when.

What are the possible benefits of participating?

Although there are no primary benefits to the participant as such, the information you provide could give a rich insight into the potential business case for UK firms to offer more generous parental leave policies. As a result, you could, on some level, aid support to parents throughout the UK if firms in the UK implemented more generous parental leave policies.

What are the possible disadvantages of participating?

There is a chance that this study may lead to the discussion of sensitive material with regard to your views on parental leave in general and the implications for business. As a result, this may lead you to feel uncomfortable. If you do, you can withdraw at any time.

Will you be recorded? If so, how will the recorded media be used?

There will be an audio recording of the interview. These audio recordings however will only be used for analysis for the dissertation research project. There will be no further use of the recordings for any additional reason without having your written consent. In addition, no external parties other than the researcher will have access to the audio recordings. Once the analysis has been completed, all recordings shall be deleted unless you request otherwise.

Contact for further information

If you have any additional questions regarding this dissertation research project, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor Dr Stefan Kesting.

My e-mail address is: bn12j5c@leeds.ac.uk

Dr Stefan Kesting: s.kesting@leeds.ac.uk

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I would like to sincerely thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and it is yours to keep. If you are willing to participate, you will be given a consent form prior to the interview being conducted.

Thank you once again,

Kind regards,

[Student Name emitted for anonymity purposes]

Appendix D: Declaration of Consent

I (print name) give consent to participate in data collection as part of [student name emitted] undergraduate dissertation research at the University of Leeds. The research is focused on developing an understanding of whether there is a business case to provide more generous parental leave policies in the UK.

I understand the information provided will be:

- used sensitively and confidentially,
- anonymised such that respondents cannot be identified from the final report,
- stored in a secure location:
 - o digital data will be stored initially on a password protected USB, and then transferred to secure folder on the university network,
 - o hard-copy data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet on University premises and
- destroyed after the research is complete.

Participant:

Signed

Dated

Researcher:

Signed

Dated

Research Supervisor:

Dr Stefan Kesting

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Appendix E: Thematic Analysis Example

Below illustrates the response to question 5 from interviewee 1. The themes that became evident have been highlighted as follows:

- Talent Management

- Gender Diversity

"I think the issue with all of the diversity agendas and diversity initiatives is that it's really difficult to show the direct impact on the bottom line. You can show correlation but you probably can't show causation. That's what I think. That said, I think these initiatives are important for promoting gender balance. It's not about promoting women at the expense of men or having single sex teams. What we are arguing for is balanced teams. And I think that is important for a number of reasons. I think there is definitely an economics case in that it's at the high level and you can look at the McKinsey report, which will show you that companies with good diversity do have better returns on income. Right so you can show that. However it is quite difficult to show that at a business case level, but what I do think is, you have got to be able to relate to your customers. And you look at the amount of money that is controlled by women in this economy. Then why would you just create a business that only has men at the top? I think the second issue is risk management and avoiding the dangers of groupthink. I think if you just put the same sorts of people and ask them a question in a room, they'll come up with one answer. Whereas if you put people with different backgrounds, different thoughts, you will get better solutions to problems. There is some research that shows that women are more risk averse than men. It is a good thing in financial services considering what happened in 2008. Was it partially caused by a product of alpha males at the top? And then I think there is the, what will become the war for talent where particularly when you look at the numbers of people who are leaving university with good degrees and stem subjects. Everybody is fighting over them. There are far more attractive businesses you can work for in this day and age. So, you have to be able to attract people, and, actually I don't think it's always about money, it's about the culture that you create. Finally, millennials is the last point I want to make. There is a lot of research saying that millennials want very different things from their careers and from the firms they work for. They're far more interested in flexibility and have very different attitudes towards caring responsibilities. And I think firms need to be able to address that in order to attract the right people through the doors. So I think it becomes more important in terms of talent management, knowing your customers, risk management. So I think, yes, that will ultimately translate into your bottom line, but it's very hard to show that directly. And I think the issue for me around paid shared parental leave and why that's important is, that, it stops child caring being a gender issue and it stops it being assumed as a female's role. And so, by giving dads or partners the opportunities to take that paid time off you give others more choices. You don't get managers looking at women of a certain age in their teams and thinking they're going to be the ones that are going to take a year off. I don't think you can make that assumption anymore. What you will see is, particularly in places like [Firm X], is that we will be able to change the dynamic of our top tiers because of it".