

# A Study of Part-time Professional Work: Case Study Analysis of the Practice in the United Kingdom and the United States

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## Introduction

I researched **part-time professional work** in the UK and US because I wanted to understand **why part-time working is more prevalent in the UK**, than in the US. The goal of this project is to help Americans **understand the British approach to, and perceptions of**, professional part-time working.

### Why

- This way of working is important to certain populations (i.e. women with dependent children in dual-career households)
- The female labor participation rate in the US is not keeping up with the rest of the industrialized world

### Context

- Qualified women are leaving the workforce in the US because of a lack of flexibility
- Perceptions of part-time workers need to shift for three reasons: they are unjust (ethically); can be discriminatory; and, are bad for business
- Cultural norms play into this: “flexibility stigma” and “ideal worker norm”

## Methods

This capstone project uses a case study approach to explore how workers experience flexibility

### Why a Case Study?

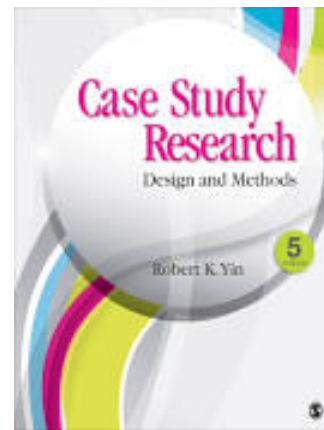
- It can help inform an issue or concern
- It involves multiple sources of information (I used interviews, literature review and policies at the institution studied)

### Participants and Design

- Case study of a prominent British higher education institution
- Exploratory interviews with four employees; additional interview with a man at a separate institution
- Used snowball sampling technique

### Procedure

- Semi-structured interview format
- Sample interview questions: *Why did you seek part-time work?; Is it important to you that you continue working? If so, why?; Why do you think part-time working does (or does not) work in your organization?; What words come to mind for you with the idea of part-time work?*



## Results



### Research

*“The Work Life Balance policy has a stated purpose of: [name of institution] acknowledges that its staff are most productive when they have achieved a work-life balance that enables them to meet their responsibilities outside work. This policy provides a framework within which departments can consider how best to enable staff to achieve an effective balance between work and life outside the workplace.”* – policy at the institution studied

### Analysis

**How part-time workers are often perceived:** *“uncommitted,” “not available when you need them, so less inclined to rely on them,” “Mom”*

**How part-time workers see flexibility:** *“being treated like a grown-up,” “agility, respect,” “an enormous privilege,” “so often more committed, rather than less”*

### Crucial to making this way of working successful:

- The ability to choose to work part-time**
- Eliminate negative perceptions of flexibility**
- Support of the organization’s leadership**
- Focus on output**
- Ability for the worker to control their own time**

### Challenges to this way of working:

- **Team cohesion** – “sociologists have pointed out that physical proximity enables the development of trusting relationships among participants” (Scott and Davis 2016, 297)
- **Slow down in activity** because of scheduling issues
- **Perceived as something only for mothers, or parents**

## Conclusions

# Werk

*“Our society understands women when they're in a 100% care-taking role, our society understands women when they're in a 100% working role, but they have not yet figured out how to understand women who want to tackle both of those with equal passion...flexibility is the way to achieve that.”* – Werk co-founders Anna Auerbach and Annie Dean in “Women Killing It!” podcast from October 17, 2016

### What is Werk?

- **An American company**, led by two women, focused on increasing flexible working opportunities
- Jobs marketplace with approximately 900 high-paying, senior-level roles – all with some type of flexibility
- **Types of flexibility offered:** remote working; DeskPlus™; TravelLite™; TimeShift™; MicroAgility™; and, part-time (described by Werk as, “an advancement-track job on a reduced-hours schedule”)

### Lessons Learned

- **From the UK:** recognition from the UK government that flexible working is the future; perceptions matter, but laws do as well; “right to request” legislation for all Brits
- **Three areas where we can gain tangible insights for the path forward:** 1. the United Kingdom’s 2005 Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) report; 2. the efforts to increase diversity in the United States workforce; and, 3. best practices in change management

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## Further Information

This is a topic I am deeply passionate about; if you would like to speak more please contact me at:

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