



WORKING DADS EMPLOYER AWARDS

Leadership and Culture Case Study

Why has BMJ chosen to support working dads?

At BMJ, we believe true equality depends on our ability to create a workplace where people are supported to be their authentic selves. We want to surpass expectations and biases that make it difficult for men to pursue career fulfilment without compromising their ability to be involved fathers. Traditionally, masculinity was defined by stereotypes: strength, stiff-upper-lip and dominance. Men were expected to exhibit a sense of invulnerability. That portrayed invulnerability suppresses valuable skills, such as open communication, relationships built on trust, emotional intelligence, empathy, vulnerability, respect for others and mental health. That's why an inclusive culture is good for employees but is also critical for us as an organisation.

How does BMJ support working dads?

Embracing flexible working.

BMJ is remote-first and encourages people to work from the location most suitable to the work they do. We trust our people to make that determination. We offer core hours, so people can start their workday early and finish early or start late and finish late. We also offer 4½ day weeks and 9-day-fortnights: people can work a bit longer on some days and take half a day off per week or a full day off per fortnight, without touching their annual leave provision.

“At the core is the trust and autonomy our people enjoy, to design a work schedule that fits business requirements and their family needs”

Margherita Zorretto – Head of Employee Experience

Manager training

We have focused on managers because they are critical in people's work experiences. We prioritise giving them the tools they need to be inclusive and supportive. For example, through our inclusive management training, managers work through case studies highlighting common challenges of working parents.

Policies and support

BMJ offers 3 weeks of Paternity Leave at full pay, an additional 12 weeks Shared Parental Leave at full pay, a further 14 weeks at half pay and the final 15 weeks of Statutory Shared Parental Pay. We have a Parents' and Guardians' Network which offers peer support and opportunities for our colleagues to raise common issues as parents. Our network is chaired by a mum and a dad. We have partnered with Care By Lottie, a concierge service that supports families to find the right care for their loved ones and helps them navigate the relationship with care providers.

Facilitate brave conversations that challenge gender roles

We want to build a shared and supportive workspace where people have a voice so we create suitable opportunities to discuss important topics. We want to challenge the traditional gendered expectations of working fathers. We deliver workshops with experts on topics as varied as parenting neurodiverse children, parenting teens, modern masculinity and fatherhood, and positive LGBT+ parenting. As part of one of these sessions, our CEO spoke very candidly about confronting and challenging internalised stereotypical gender roles, including the importance of embracing and being open about vulnerabilities. By doing so, he gave implicit permission to all men to share their challenges at work and to ask for the support they need.

The logo for the British Medical Journal (BMJ), consisting of the letters 'BMJ' in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

BMJ (British Medical Journal) is a global healthcare knowledge provider with a vision for a healthier world. We share knowledge and expertise to improve healthcare outcomes. We are renowned for publishing the British Medical Journal. In addition, we publish over 65 medical and science journals.

Our approach is data driven. We look at indicators such as progression, leavers rates and employee engagement scores, to monitor whether parents of young children have as positive an experience at work as the rest of our employees. We also collect qualitative data, e.g. we undertook a consultation through surveys and focus groups that culminated in a review of our policies and support offered to parents.

How have you developed the leadership and culture in BMJ to better support working dads?

We work on culture in a variety of ways. From monitoring indicators in our data, to our training, our events

“At BMJ our goal is to create a culture that breaks through and does away with rigid stereotypes and gender roles. Toxic male culture is alive and well in our society, and our workplace is not an isolated island. To deal with that, we create spaces for meaningful conversations.”

Chris Jones – Chief Executive Officer

and network activities. The parents' network has an Executive sponsor, and our CEO is an outspoken and active sponsor of our EDI program. The EDI team has created learning interventions for line managers and looks for opportunities for the exec team to 'walk the talk'. From supporting and role-modelling flexible work and positive work/life balance, to talking about their own challenges as parents and carers.

What has been the impact of this work?

Our flexible work policy is well used by dads to spend quality time with their kids, and we have seen a reduction in absence. We also know that parents have used support, e.g. our concierge senior care service, and feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Feedback also tells us this has a positive impact on people's empowerment to ask for what they need at work.

What challenges have you faced developing this agenda?

One of the challenges we have had is engagement. While there are many engaged fathers, and one of the network chairs is a dad, it is also true that our parents' network is disproportionately attended by mums. Yet, dads have unique challenges we don't want

"When my daughter was born, I wanted to be part of her life right from the start. It was important for me to gain skills and confidence as her carer. I was able to take ten weeks off at full pay to care for her through shared parental leave. Now that she is a bit older, our flexible work policy and the supportive culture in my team allow me to respond to childcare emergencies where other arrangements fall through at the last minute. It makes me feel able to be there for my daughter when she needs me, not just a mysterious figure who's always working!"

Dr Will Stahl-Timmins, PhD –
Data Graphics Designer

to overlook. We have tackled the issue in a number of ways. Having a dad chairing the network is one way. Ongoing communications and engagement initiatives is another. The most successful approach has been offering events.

How do you communicate about your support for working dads?

Internally, we communicate through policies, events, our all-staff town halls and various communication channels. Another important source of communication is line managers. We work to ensure they are aware of the common challenges working dads experience.

We make them aware of what is expected of them as line managers. We also create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. We ensure line managers know where to go for support. Finally, our parents' network is a great source of information.

How have your Senior Management Team supported these initiatives?

At BMJ our SMT wants to empower and support working mums and dads and ensure true equality for all. We pass on the information we get through our parents' network and other consultations, to the SMT. We monitor a great deal of data, comparing our carer group to colleagues who are not carers to ensure both groups are equally able to thrive and succeed. SMT is regularly briefed on this information. Each Exec member monitors an EDI dashboard specific to their department, so they have a more granular oversight of the equality indicator in their areas. It is data like our gender pay gap, which motivates senior leaders to double up efforts. Our leadership is also active in role modelling flexibility, trust, and support for autonomy in how and when people choose to work their hours. They are approachable (e.g., ad hoc meetings, or more openly on blog posts, during all staff meetings and events) and open about their own challenges.

What have you learnt through this process and what are your next steps?

One key lesson is the importance of engagement, upwards and downwards. Upwards involves

What's your advice to other organisations interested in doing more to support working dads?

Our advice is to talk to working dads. Find out what their challenges are. Set up a network if you don't have one already. Work with engaged dads to support network activities and other events. Have many informal conversations to find out the areas people want to discuss or learn about. Arrange for opportunities to talk and explore common challenges. Help line managers to be inclusive and supportive of working parents. Review your policies and challenge decision-makers to offer generous leave provisions to parents and working dads in particular. Get the buy-in of the senior management team.

engaging with leadership, to ensure they lead by example, and put their weight behind shaping an inclusive culture. BMJ has an approachable and progressive leadership group. The challenge is supporting them to identify appropriate opportunities to promote an open and supportive culture. Downwards it involves creating engagement opportunities, through quantitative and qualitative data, informal conversations, and structured interventions, to ensure our working dads have a voice and what they say influence our HR program. The challenge here is to ensure the least engaged working dads share their experiences as well.

While we are proud of some of our recent work, there still is much to be done. Next, we will review the policies and support we offer parents, and dads in particular, with the view to expanding it. This will include a toolkit and nudges for managers on how to support new parents, through their leave and their return to work. It will also include resources for the parents, including a peer buddy program. Our goal is to expand the network's reach and engagement. We are also planning a bring-your-child-to-the-office day.

Information accurate as of 2023.

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