



October 12-16 2020

Thanks for downloading the edited extracts from my book #Upcycle Your Job: the smart way to balance family life and career.

In the mid-1990s I began campaigning for working practices that were flexible and 'family friendly'. At that time there was little or no legislation in the UK to support working mothers. Working in a high pressure environment that often required long hours I realised how important it was to offer more support to women if they were to progress in the corporate world.

Twenty five years later work-life balance remains the key focus of my training, coaching and consulting work. In the intervening period I've amassed an enormous amount of expertise on the topic: both practical from my work with employers and employees; and academic from my membership of the British Psychological Society's working group on Work Life Balance. I'm passionate about providing evidence based information and sharing what I've learnt on my journey.

From my own experience I know that finding the right balance is of huge interest to working mothers; and that the quest can sometimes feel like the search for the Holy Grail. Which is why last year I decided to put what I've learnt into a practical book that will guide any reader to improve her work-life balance. A book offered me the potential to reach a much wider audience. Does it sound too grandiose of me to think that for the price of a budget evening out a career could be transformed or a life made more fulfilling?

Thanks to my wonderful publisher, Alison Jones at Practical Inspiration Publishing my book has sold more copies than I expected. But the number is small and I'm keen to have more people read and benefit from it. For this year's UK National Work Life Week I've put together these edited extracts in the hope they will inspire you to want to read further – to buy the book in other words.

The book is available from [Amazon](#), [Practical Inspiration Publishing](#) and [Shulph](#) as well as other local and independent booksellers. If you do buy and read it I'd love to have your feedback (and I'd really appreciate a review on Amazon as it helps to sell more books!) Message me through [my website](#) or [twitter](#).

Anna Meller

October 2020

#Upcycle Your Job:

The smart way to balance family life & career

By Anna Meller

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine a younger version of you. An ambitious recent graduate now working in the perfect first job at the start of her professional journey. You're excited, hopeful, committed to your career. You've just bought your first 'power suit' which cost an arm and a leg but was well worth it. It's a fabulous designer creation that makes you feel great when you wear it to those important meetings and interviews.

Fast forward ten years and the suit is still in your wardrobe, still looking great. You've taken good care of it, but you've not really thought about it recently as you've been undergoing some big life changes. Now you're ready to put it on again – and when you do it no longer seems to fit. Somehow it seems to restrict your movement and doesn't quite reflect who you are any more. You still like it and remember how great it used to make you feel. So what do you do? You have two choices – discard it or upcycle it.

Now imagine we're not talking about a suit, but about the corporate career you've been developing for the past ten years. Since you became a mother it – like the suit – no longer seems to fit. What are you going to do?

Every year thousands of women discard a corporate career that no longer seems to fit their lifestyle. It's a decision that could cost them up to £300,000 over their working lives; but it doesn't have to be like this. In an era where we upcycle other parts of our lives, why not upcycle your corporate career?

When I search for an online definition of upcycling I learn that it means to improve something we would otherwise discard in such a way that we create something of higher quality or value than the original.

There's been an exponential rise in the popularity of upcycling in recent years. When we upcycle we take an item of clothing or furniture we may have once loved – or where we see the potential for creating something we will love. Where we were once tempted to discard our belongings as they got older, now we're consciously choosing to transform them into something better.

When we upcycle we'll often draw on skills passed down to us by our mothers and grandmothers. Then we'll add a modern twist – perhaps an eco-conscious paint or an up to date restyle of a jacket. And voila! We're left with an item that reflects our new lifestyle. One that we can love all over again.

For some time I've been thinking about applying those same principles to our jobs and our careers. There's a lot about the corporate world that needs upcycling: cultures based on mid 20th century norms; working practices out of line with 21st century social expectations; models of career progression grounded in outdated stereotypes. We'll be considering all of these in detail in part one.

As a consequence, when we transition to parenthood too many of us discard the careers we've been working so hard to build. Sometimes we're seduced into thinking that something new will suit us better. We believe becoming a mumpreneur is our best choice.

And sometimes we simply feel we have no choice. Intransigent corporate cultures refuse to adjust to the new shape our lives have taken. We cut our cloth according to our circumstances. So we take a step back onto the "mommy track" or decide to take a break until our offspring are ready for school.

These are costly decisions; and in many cases our earnings potential will never recover.

What if I told you there was a better way?

Women started breaching the corporate world in large numbers during the 1960s and 70s as the economic boom fuelled demand for labour. They encountered workplaces set up for 'ideal workers' – organisations that ignored women's dual roles as both caregivers and employees. For over half a century we've been waiting for employers to shift culture and mind-set. And the lack of women in the top layers of the pyramid confirms that progress has been slow – we're still waiting.

Just as our mothers and grandmothers took things into their own hands, so it's time for new generations of women to do the same. As an organisational psychologist and work-life balance expert I know it's possible to restructure your working arrangement in ways that will both make you more productive and support your work-life balance.

The idea is to empower you – as an ambitious professional woman – to develop a personal route map that supports you in navigating both your work-life balance needs and your workplace culture. I want to open your eyes to new possibilities and inspire in you the confidence that you can be a Balanced Leader.

Why this book?

Recent years have seen a steady stream of books by high profile role models sharing their corporate journey. Women are hungry for new role models so that should be a good thing, right? While these books are inspirational the challenge lies in applying their wisdom to our own – often very different – life circumstances.

For the past twenty five years I've been consulting on work-life balance matters in the corporate world. I've supported both private and public sector clients to improve work-life balance policies and practices. I've trained and coached women to make those small adjustments that make such a big impact when it comes to finding a balance that works for them. I've conducted ground breaking research into the work-life balance challenges faced by professional women. And as I've learnt more about the research evidence I've shared this with a wide range of audiences.

Based on all this, I've developed a practical six step process – PROPEL – that will enable you to create a working and living arrangement that meets your specific work-life balance needs while supporting you to remain on the corporate career ladder: so you get to lean in on your terms. The first two steps will help you pinpoint your own work-life balance Preferences and how you can combine the Roles of parent and employee in ways that support balance rather than creating conflict.

Steps three and four offer practical advice on how to upcycle your job for better balance. You'll consider the Options open to you – given the nature of your employer's corporate culture; and the Possibilities for restructuring your work. Step five provides an opportunity to evaluate your Essential skills. And finally, in step six I offer a new model of balanced Leadership.

Think of it as three projects that will show you how to upcycle your work-life balance, your working practices and your leadership skills.

As with any upcycling project we'll strip out what's no longer working; reshape our pared down structure; and assess our current skills and resources. This will result in the clarity of focus we need create a life that makes us smile.

What to expect from this book

The book is laid out in three parts. In the first I've provided a summary of the complex issues that get in the way of women's corporate career progression and what we can do to change the situation. I hope you'll find this background useful, but if you're itching to upcycle your own work-life balance you can jump straight into part two (leaving part one for bedtime reading at a later date).

Part two provides you with the opportunity to work through the PROPEL process, understand each step and apply it to your own life. The result is a more balanced life and a new way of thinking about balanced leadership.

Part three introduces two powerful techniques from the school of Positive Psychology that you will find useful in navigating a more balanced future. Again, you don't need to read part three to gain the benefits of the PROPEL model. However, if you're unfamiliar with the techniques discussed (Appreciative Inquiry and Solutions Focus) you will benefit from understanding the new – and very different – approaches to change taken by them.

I've tried to keep the theory to a minimum. But I'm assuming that as a smart and ambitious professional woman you want to know why I'm suggesting a particular approach. And as a proponent of evidence based practice I want to demonstrate why the approach works.

So, before you discard your corporate career join me in the pages of this book. I want to inspire you to upcycle it instead - so you can be your best self and offer your best contribution to the world. You'll discover how much potential you have to upcycle your life. And the positive impact that will make on your wellbeing and your finances will delight you.

How the struggle for work-life balance compromises women's careers

This first extract considers how the struggle to maintain a work-life balance gets in the way of women's career progression.

Every year thousands of women discard careers that no longer seem to fit their lifestyle. It's a decision that will cost them up to £300,000 over their working lives. They lose out, their employers lose out and society loses out as their voices go unheard in the corporate world. The Chartered Management Institute has called them the 'missing middle' – the women who never make it to senior manager.

What would prompt so many women to compromise a promising and hard won career in this way?

Quite simply it's because they cannot see a way to combine caring responsibilities and a senior career. Or to put it another way, as long as employers remain inflexible mothers will continue to fix things in the only ways they feel are open to them: by downshifting jobs, compromising careers and being seduced into the world of the mumpreneur.

A wealth of evidence confirms that achieving a semblance of work-life balance is a top priority for women with caring responsibilities. Many are prepared to trade both income and career aspirations in their efforts to find it. For example, a survey of London (UK) mothers earlier this year found half of those returning to work had changed jobs for family commitments. Six in ten respondents were willing to put flexibility ahead of a job that used their academic or professional experience.

Last year Boston Consulting Group reported 60% of both genders holding themselves back from promotion because of the perceived challenges of balancing increased job responsibilities with home ones. The report concluded that making flexible working more widely available would help overcome this.

While there's mounting evidence to confirm the importance of flexible working in supporting women's career progression, the reality remains bleak. Research conducted by Timewise in 2016 revealed that demand for flexible jobs (47% across all salary levels) far outstripped supply at a mere 6.2% of all quality vacancies.

Among women the most popular strategy for achieving flexibility is to opt for part-time hours. A quarter of the employed workforce works reduced hours and the vast majority are female. The pay and progression penalties they experience in doing so were documented in a report released by the Institute for Fiscal Studies earlier this year.

Many organisations are schizophrenic about work-life balance. On the one hand they acknowledge its importance for wellbeing; on the other they continue to operate with cultures that penalise those who openly seek it. Ask to work flexibly and you're likely to be judged as less committed to your career. In addition you may be passed over for those challenging assignments that would develop that career – on the assumption that you want an easier life. Corporate cultures continue to uphold the myth that senior jobs must be worked full-time, require long hours and generally need to be office based.

In 2013 Maria Miller – then Minister for Women – summarised the challenge for most women as one of operating in “*workplace cultures designed by men for men.*”

The current workplace was established on the notion of an ‘ideal worker’ whose single minded focus was on his job, who was available for long hours and could travel at the drop of a hat. He had no outside interests or responsibilities, rarely got sick and prioritised work above all else. Most organisations still equate ambition with this absolute commitment to work – which plays against the structure of women’s lives and their careers. These ‘man-made’ corporate cultures are riddled with embedded and outdated practices that get in the way of women’s progress.

Given this context is it any surprise that women with caring responsibilities self-select into jobs where they know they can work part-time or at least without the constant pressure of long hours? Or perhaps make the choice to leave the corporate world altogether.

For example, Doctor Meriah Foley at the University of New South Wales discovered Australian mothers being pushed reluctantly into self-employment as a result of childcare challenges and inflexible employers. It’s easy for women to be lulled into thinking ‘mumpreneur’ is the better career choice.

Upholding many of the barriers faced by women is an assumption of choice. While it’s true the majority of women are not forced to have children their choice is made within a broader social context that continues to emphasize a mother’s prime responsibility for child and elder care.

Over the course of my working life I’ve come across women who ‘chose’ to work part-time in order to manage work-life challenges. Women who ‘chose’ to remain working full time but move to ‘mommy track’ jobs where they felt they would be under less pressure; but also knew they would be less likely to be promoted. Women who ‘chose’ to negotiate a flexible working arrangement granted as a concession by their employer; and where they found themselves floundering to make it work in an inflexible corporate culture. I’ve also met women who ‘chose’ to take a career break; and women who ‘chose’ to refocus their career during maternity leave – often by starting their own business.

What’s lacking from this list of choices is any genuine choice offered by a shift in employer practices.

How to #Upcycle jobs: learning from our mothers

In the second extract I look at how women can help themselves by following in their mothers' footsteps.

The dictionary defines upcycling as reusing a discarded object or material in such a way as to create a product of higher quality or value than the original. In the last few years we've seen a resurgence of interest in many of the craft based activities that underpin upcycling. Commentators suggest it's being driven by our desire to switch off from the ever present technology that's coming to dominate our lives.

When we upcycle we take an item of clothing or furniture we may have once loved – or where we see the potential for creating something we will love. Where we were once tempted to discard our belongings as they aged, now we're consciously choosing to transform them into something better.

When we start an upcycling project we'll often draw on skills passed down to us by our mothers and grandmothers. Then we'll add a modern twist – perhaps an eco-conscious paint or an up to date restyle of a jacket. And voila! We're left with an item that reflects our new lifestyle. One that we can love all over again.

For some time I've been thinking about applying those same principles to our jobs and our careers. There's a lot about the corporate world that needs upcycling: cultures based on mid-20th century norms; working practices out of line with 21st century social expectations; models of career progression grounded in outdated stereotypes. As a consequence, when we transition to parenthood too many of us discard the careers we've been working so hard to build.

In yesterday's blog I talked about the illusion of choice that pulls us away from the corporate world. For previous generations of women wanting financial freedom their only choice was to enter that same corporate world. Struggling to combine work with caring responsibilities they found themselves bumping up against 'man made' working practices at every turn. The good news is they were able to make inroads; chipping away at these practices to bring about changes such as term-time working and job-share which enabled them to progress into managerial roles.

Given the raft of legislation that now supports carers in the workplace, it's easy to forget these women had no protection. Their hard-won concessions were the result of their own efforts as they lobbied employers for change. The Families and Work Institute (NY) acknowledged this in its five stage process charting the 'evolving business case for work-life initiatives'. This journey starts (at stage 1) with a focus on child care issues – typically raised at grass roots level by working mothers themselves; often through internal networks.

It's only at stage 2, when the focus broadens to supporting work-life balance for everyone, that HR typically steps in to develop appropriate policies. In the UK (and the European Union) much of the impetus for family friendly policies has – in reality – been driven by employment legislation protecting pregnant women and new parents.

Women joining the corporate world in the second half of the last century had few #upcycling tools at their disposal but they quickly learnt to draw on their ingenuity and persistence to navigate 'man made' cultures. In contrast those of us currently working in the corporate world are better placed to get upcycling. We have more tools at our disposal – in the form of thirty years' accumulated research and practical experience. We don't need to wait for employers to adjust policies or practices.

Foundational tools for #Upcycling your job

In the third extract I share some of the foundational 'tools' we can use to make our own adjustments and upcycle our jobs for better balance.

To upcycle the job we have into the balanced job we want (and keep our feet on the career ladder at the same time) we need some foundational tools. These are the things that will enable us to achieve a work-life balance that suits us and to craft a job that makes best use of our skills – for our benefit and that of our employer.

Contrary to any impression gained from internet blogs, work-life balance is not a fuzzy concept best tackled by sharpening time management skills and becoming better organised. Social scientists have been studying the subject for the past forty years and some of the key concepts emerging from their research will prove invaluable in helping you get control of your balance.

When it comes to managing the interface between work and the rest of our lives we have personal preferences. Some of us want to keep the two separate (Separators) while others prefer to integrate (i.e. they are Integrators). Separators prefer to segment work and personal life – psychologically and physically. When at work their focus is on work; and when at home they focus on the home. They prefer not to work at home or over the weekend - but should they need to they will carve out a specific time and space to do so. As we've already seen separation was the workplace norm and the traditional 'masculine' way of working. In some corporate environments – for example: some professional services firms - this is still the case. Developments in mobile technology, however, have made separation increasingly more difficult for workers of both sexes.

Integrators – on the other hand – prefer to blend work and personal life both physically and psychologically. Historically integration was the strategy adopted by working mothers keen to demonstrate to employers that home life would not have a negative impact on their commitment to work. And so the myth of women being good at multitasking was born. We now know this is not true; and that multitasking takes energy as we switch focus between tasks. The downside of integration is that it may cause you to struggle with setting boundaries between work and family.

Early research into work-family (latterly work-life) balance issues primarily focused on the conflict women experienced between their work and family roles. Conflict in this context is defined as *“a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect”*.

For women operating in the 'man made' corporate world it was the impact of family responsibilities on their job that created conflict. After all, caring doesn't stop when you walk through your employer's door. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to experience conflict when family life impacted on work - as they struggled to live up to the 'ideal worker' norm. Conflict is more likely to occur among Integrators.

The conflict you experience will also be determined by the pull of the roles you play. Do you define yourself more by your professional role or your parenting role? Which takes priority for you? Feeling conflicted may be something with which you are familiar. It's often labelled 'working mother guilt'. It has an emotional impact which both saps energy and can lead to anxiety and job dissatisfaction.

The good news is that there is a way to reduce this stress. In recent years researchers have sought to understand how our work and non-work roles can enrich each other - a concept known as 'enrichment'. Combining our work and parenting roles in positive ways leads to higher job satisfaction, higher family satisfaction and improved physical and mental health.

Taking time to consider how we prefer to manage our multiple roles will enable us to find the work-life balance that's best for us. We also have a foundation for upcycling our job so that it supports a more balanced life. In the book I offer a range of tools grounded in both academic research and my own experience with clients. In this edited extract I want to introduce one – job crafting.

Yale professor Amy Wrzesniewski - a key researcher in this area - defines job crafting as: *"what employees do to redesign their own jobs in ways that foster engagement at work, job satisfaction, resilience and thriving."* Her research has shown that people craft all the time – with or without their employer's permission.

Job crafting takes one of three forms: task crafting, relational crafting and cognitive crafting. The best results are likely when people combine all three. Job crafting tends to result in more satisfaction at work and greater commitment to your job. It can also increase your attachment to that job and to your employer if it changes the meaning and purpose of work for you.

While taking personal action will support better balance in our lives, it can feel like 'tinkering around the edges' when we're faced with an outmoded and inflexible corporate culture.

Power tools for #Upcycling corporate cultures

The fourth extract introduces some 'power tools' we can use to upcycle resistant corporate cultures.

Our workplaces were built on the notion of the 'ideal worker' with a single minded focus was on his job, available for long hours and able to travel at the drop of a hat. He had no outside interests or responsibilities, rarely got sick and prioritised work above all else. Most organisations still equate ambition with this absolute commitment to work; perpetuating "*workplace cultures designed by men for men*" as the MP Maria Millar so neatly put it. These man-made cultures are riddled with embedded and outdated practices that get in the way of women's progress.

This is not a book about culture change, but in order to upcycle working practices we will ultimately need to change the corporate culture. And there are two ways of doing that. The first is to instigate a radical culture change programme. The second is to do it gradually as we change the conversations within our workplaces. For most of us the latter is a better place to start; and when enough of us are having those new conversations cultures will shift.

Whatever we're upcycling, having the right power tools helps. When it comes to upcycling corporate cultures the Positive Psychology kit bag offers some great tools. Positive psychology is the exciting 'new kid on the block' that's been changing the way we think about human potential for the past two decades. Prior to the 21st century much of psychology was focussed on what was wrong with human beings and how to 'fix it'. Then the American Psychologist Martin Seligman declared it was time for psychologists to shift their attention to what was going well and how it might be made even better. His call led to an exponential growth in 'Positive Psychology' with an emphasis on issues such as personal strengths, psychological health and well-being, getting into 'flow' and how to create positive teams and institutions.

In the final part of this book I want to introduce two Positive Psychology techniques that I use regularly in my consulting and coaching work: Appreciative Inquiry and Solutions Focus. I'll provide a very brief summary of what each is about together with examples of how I've featured it in my work.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a collaborative approach to organisational design and change that is both positive and future focused. Organisations are seen as living human systems and the stories we tell ourselves within those organisations shape our world. Initially developed as a large group process AI has been extended to small groups and individual coaching.

When we inquire into an aspect of organisational life our question itself has the power to change things; or at least to begin the change process. This is because questions direct our attention and generate information. The more we ask the more information we collect. For example, when we ask who in our organisation is working flexibly at senior levels we turn our attention to this aspect of organisational life. The more we ask the more examples we're likely to find; and the more potential we have for building on them.

For example, when I undertake a corporate consulting assignment my first step is to survey managers' experiences of flexible working. Essentially I'm asking the question: "*where do we already see it happening in this organisation?*" Shining a light on flexible working changes the conversation, identifies resources and opens up new possibilities.

Solutions Focus (SF) has its roots in the brief therapy work of Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg. In contrast with other coaching approaches in SF we keep our attention on identifying solutions rather than analysing problems; and on enabling the client to harness her inner wisdom do so.

Detailed understanding of the 'problem' is generally of little use in our search for the solution. When we get locked into analysing the problem we often get stuck in problem focused thinking. And as Einstein allegedly said: "*we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.*"

Since no 'problem' happens all the time, finding a solution lies in identifying the circumstances under which it is not happening. The idea is to discover what works and do more of it. We do this by asking "*when does success happen already?*" rather than "*when do things go wrong?*"

When we use these power tools to focus on the positive, on possibilities and on what we want to happen in the future we slowly shift our own thinking and that of people around us. And as someone once said to me: "change happens best when nobody notices".

As we upcycle our jobs and corporate cultures we open up new ways of looking at senior roles and how they can be worked.

#Upcycling Leadership – becoming a Balanced Leader

The final extract considers the concept of Balanced Leadership.

The 20th century narrative on leadership can be summarised in two tenets: To be a leader you must be a man; and you must be prepared to place your corporate leadership role above everything else in your life. Given these assertions it's not hard to see why women have struggled to see themselves as leaders.

The lack of women in senior roles is regularly explained by their lack of ambition. In my experience nothing could be further from the truth. Women do want successful careers. They want to be stretched, challenged and rewarded in exactly the same way as men do. But women don't want to do that at the expense of everything else in their lives. In my experience it's not lack of ambition but a concern about managing work-life balance that causes many women to hold themselves back.

In chapter 8 I introduce the concept of Balanced Leadership. It's one I've been thinking about over the past few years; and it's one I believe will resonate with women. My thinking has been influenced by the work of three leading academics: Beverly Alimo Metcalfe whose research is re-defining the characteristics of leadership; Stewart Friedman whose 'Total Leadership' model embraces the whole of life; and Herminia Ibarra whose research into how we grow into our 'working identity' will guide us on our journey. I hope their ideas encourage you to re-think your own about what it means to be a leader; and to open up new possibilities for your own leadership journey.

Beverly Alimo Metcalfe has been working to create a more inclusive definition of leadership. She's found that men and women define leadership differently. Men tend to see it as bestowing power on subordinates for the good of the organisation. Women on the other hand tend to emphasize relationships and empowerment.

Having conducted one of the largest and most inclusive studies ever into the nature of leadership Professor Alimo Metcalf and her colleagues developed a new model of Engaging Leadership. It focuses on serving others and supporting them to display leadership themselves. It encompasses team working, collaboration and connectedness; together with a desire to see the world through the eyes of others and to take on board their concerns, agenda, perspectives; and their ideas.

Engaging Leaders are not seen as ‘extraordinary’ or ‘heroic’ but as ordinary, open, humble, accessible and transparent human beings. It’s a style of leadership that encourages questioning and challenging of the status quo; that creates an environment in which ideas are heard and valued and in which innovation and entrepreneurialism are encouraged.

Professor Stewart (Stew) Friedman is founder of the Wharton (US) Work-Life Integration Project. Based on many years research and practice Stew has developed his Total Leadership model based on the three principles: be real, be whole and be innovative. ‘Total’ because it’s about the whole person and ‘Leadership’ because it’s about creating sustainable change that benefits both the individual and the people around her. The focus is on making changes that generate ‘four way wins’ – for work, family, community and private self.

Herminia Ibarra has devoted her career to studying how people navigate career transition; and to identifying how they develop what she calls a ‘working identity’. She’s discovered we rarely arrive in a new job ‘fully formed’. More often than not we draw on our existing skills to grow into the person we will become.

It’s an idea likely to resonate with those of us who are parents. There’s a saying: “*when a child is born so is a mother*” but it’s rare for that mother to turn up fully formed, confident and capable. Every small act of parenting she makes will support her growth into her new role.

In her latest book: *Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader* Professor Ibarra has applied this same thinking to the way workplace leaders evolve. As we begin making small acts of leadership we feel our way into leadership thinking; and the environment around us reinforces our new identity. In order to think like a leader – therefore - we must begin to act like a leader.

The corporate world needs more women leaders. And those leaders must redefine how they “do leadership”. Not just for their own benefit but for that of everyone around them. Amidst the constant frenzy of 21st century life we need a way to get more present and more mindful - so we can make better decisions, head up more balanced organisations and lead more balanced lives. Embracing the notion of Balanced Leadership provides us with an unparalleled opportunity to upcycle the way we live and work.

What the reviewers said

“This book isn’t just about work-life balance, it’s also about the future of work environments and how we (as individuals) and organisations need to change to create environments that are more inclusive. It is coincidental I’m sure that this book is released at the same time as Invisible Women by Caroline Criado Perez, but there is a consistent message from both that the workplace has been designed by men for men (Meller refers to this as the notion of the ‘Ideal Worker’), and that we all need to challenge assumptions that exist about how people work and how jobs get done.

Meller has a wealth of organisational experience and her academic rigour also shines through. The book is aimed especially at women juggling family and work commitments, although I think it has relevance to a wider audience. She presents the challenge of how we all need to change the way we think about work and careers in order to create lives that are healthy, sustainable but also fulfilling.”

[Continue reading on the Psychologist website](#)

“I picked up this book full of hope and optimism for a new mindset on flexible working; lusting after tips on how as a single parent, I can juggle my two children, a household and still have a progressive career. I wasn’t disappointed. Anna Meller has written this book with compelling research, intellectual theories and practical tips to help you feel empowered to drive the change within organisations. She is realistic and prepares you for the resistance from your employer and carefully explains that we will need to be pioneers in steering what the new world could look like. Her reflection questions at the end of each chapter are thought provoking, helping you formulate your desired working pattern, and structure your approach towards your employer helping you take the necessary steps.”

[Continue reading on the HR DIRECTOR website](#)

About the Author

For the past twenty five years Anna Meller has specialised in work life balance issues and their impact on women's careers. Her consultancy work has supported a range of employers in the private, public and not for profit sectors to improve work-life balance provision for their staff. She has considerable experience of coaching senior managers to improve their work-life balance – adopting a pragmatic and evidence based approach. She continues to share her expertise with a wide range of audiences both as a speaker and regular blogger.

Anna works with ambitious professional women seeking to combine a satisfying corporate career with a balanced family life. Her focus is on empowering them towards better choices so they can make their fullest contribution at work and live a life in balance. To guide her coaching and training services Anna has developed an innovative model (PROPEL) which draws on Positive Psychology, her own published research and her consulting experience.

Anna has researched and written three ground breaking reports into work-life balance challenges in Professional and Financial Services and her previous book on how to get the best from part-time workers was published by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. She has worked as an accredited consultant to the government's Work-Life Balance Challenge Fund and since 2009 she has been an active member of the BPS Division of Occupational Psychology's working group on Work-Life Balance.

Anna served as a trustee for the charities New Ways to Work and PARENTS AT WORK which subsequently merged to form the UK charity Working Families. Prior to starting on her work-life balance journey she had a successful early career in HR - mostly in the Financial Services Sector. She has a Masters Degree in Organisational Behaviour and is a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

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