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Report on the checklist for maintaining contact with individuals taking family breaks

Document

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Objective

To compile a checklist that will help to maintain contacts with the individuals taking family breaks and for employees returning to regular working conditions afterwards. Binding procedures will be recommended to guarantee a successful career continuation with continuous institutional support.

Audience

Leaders among partners and other linked institutions, human resource departments, employees.

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Checklist for maintaining contact with employees taking career breaks to guarantee the continuation of successful careers of employees

Introduction

A career break is a leave period from work because of a certain reason, e.g. parental leave, sick leave, military service, etc. To support careers on a continuous level despite career breaks it is important to maintain contact with employees while they are on leave and support them when they are returning to work. This checklist is compiled to provide employers with practical and essential information to support the continuation of successful careers of employees taking career breaks.

The checklist is based on the experiences of 55 employees of the partner institutions of the Horizon 2020 project Baltic Gender who all have had a recent career break. The employee's experiences were collected through an online survey, "Sharing career break related experiences" in November 2018. The questions of the online survey are presented in an appendix. They might give inspiration to other institutions that plan to evaluate and/or improve their current structures and procedures.

Answers to the survey clearly indicated room for improvement in career break related issues in the partner institutions. Expectations of employees and employers have to be determined in advance in order to avoid misunderstandings. It depends on whether an employee continues to work part-time or not and on the legal background of the country. Normally the employees have no duties during a break and employers cannot expect their employees to fulfill work-related tasks. Nevertheless, there might be the mutual interest to stay in contact. There are employers who do not have officially work part-time during the career break, but expressed their interest in keeping contact and continue working on (re)writing manuscripts, preparing conference presentations, etc. If this is in line with the employee's personal wish, full access to the infrastructure and communication is necessary. It is the employer's responsibility to provide appropriate structures and flexible arrangements in consultation with the employee. Finding individual, feasible solutions that fit to the needs will allow a smoother re-entry to work. A situation in which the employee feels obliged to work during her/his career break should be avoided.

The goal of the compiled checklist is to provide support for employers to make the career break and return as smooth as possible and to give the employees continuous support for their career advancement. Nevertheless, the situations differ from institution to institution because of legislations, established structures and practiced cultures. Therefore this checklist is a guide and has to be adopted to the institute-specific needs.

The checklist includes three parts, one part to be used before the career break, the second part concerning the period of the career break and the third when the employee returns back to work.



Checklist

I Before the career break

1. Conduct a meeting with the employee who plans to take a career break.

- Agree with the employee on the time and participants (e.g., human resource specialist, equal opportunity officer etc.) of the meeting.
- Be supportive and encouraging.

Things to discuss:

- Expected start and duration of the career break.
- Make sure the employee is aware of the leave policy of your institution and her/his legal rights.
- Inform about the work contract - will it be extended by the time of the career break? If not, explain why and what other possibilities are there after the break?
- Is there a need to adjust the work and/or the workplace conditions before the career break? Is part-time work an option?
- Unfinished work: discuss all items (including field and lab works) that need to be finalized during the career break. Decide on when they need to be finished and who shall finish them.
- Ask whether the employer wants to be in contact with the institution during the break or not.
- Possibility and need for a substitute (stand-in). When should the substitute start (to allow enough time to transfer the knowledge)?
- Discuss tasks after career break/future plans.
- Inform about institutions work time models.
- Discuss the employee's preferred methods and form to keep in touch with workplace during the break and what information does the employee like to receive during the break.
- Discuss the possibilities to perform small and temporary tasks (short-term recruitment) and possibilities to work from home during the career break if the employee is interested in it.
- Inform about the legal obligations and rights to use work facilities (library, laboratories) and participate in field works (marine expeditions) during the break.
- If agreed upon assign a mentor/coach/contact person during the break (see point 2).
- Discuss if the employee's contact details (e-mail, phone) should stay active on the webpage.



2. Offer (psychological) counselling.

Introduce the counselling possibilities of your institution such as ombudsperson, mentoring, coaching, etc. A career break was often associated with different kinds of insecurities in our online survey and it would be helpful to provide employees support to discuss any career related issues.

3. Hire a substitute (stand-in), if appropriate.

II During the career break

1. Keep in contact with the employee during the career break as agreed in the meeting.

If the employee would like to stay in contact, make a written agreement on the kind of information to share and possibilities to participate. You can for instance share minutes of team meetings; share information about new and revised policies and procedures; provide information about relevant conferences, seminars, training and development opportunities; share major social events invitations; offer possibility to be a co-author and participate in field works or perform some other temporary task, if appropriate.

The written agreement should be binding for the employer.

2. Allow the employee to keep a computer and a mobile phone.

Keeping the business notebook and/or cell phone is useful to make the arrangement work as smooth as possible. This allows also, to perform small and temporal tasks, if wished by the employee.

3. Allow your employee to maintain her/his email account active.

4. Preserve the employee's email address visible on your institutional webpage.

5. Preserve of employee's benefits (sports club card, etc.), if appropriate.

6. Inform your employee about re-entry grants and application deadlines if such possibilities exist in the institution and in case the employees contract runs out during the career break.



III After the career break

1. Return to work meeting.

- Agree with the employee on the time and participants (e.g. human resource specialist, equal opportunity officer etc.) of the interview.
- Be supportive and encouraging.

Things to discuss:

- Is there a need to adjust the work, work time and/or the workplace conditions?
- A development plan with appropriate measures for the coming year (or career?).
- Possibilities and needs for a mentor or coach after the break.
- Introduce new or revised arrangements of work, including administrative or organizational changes.
- Inform about new team members or employee departures.
- Possibilities to continue the work if the contract was not extended by the time of the career break, e.g. inform the employee about internal and external funding possibilities.

2. Meet regularly with the employee after the career break to discuss how the return is progressing and to ensure that support is set up, if reasonable.

3. Be supportive of part-time work (if appropriate) and ensure that the workload is in accordance with the work time.

4. Allow to work partially or fully from home, if appropriate.

5. Adjust the workplace (taking into account the physical needs of the returning employee), ensure parent-child office and baby care facilities for nursing and diaper change, if appropriate.

6. Provide, arrange or support the childcare, if appropriate.

7. Offer (psychological) counseling, if appropriate.



Appendix.

The questions of the online survey "Sharing career break related experiences":

Section A: I. General**A1. What is your gender?**Female Male Other **A2. In which position are you employed at your institution?**

First Stage Researcher (R1) - individuals doing research under supervision in research institutes or universities. It includes doctoral candidates. Recognised Researcher (R2) - PhD holders or equivalent who are not yet fully independent. Established Researcher (R3) - Researchers who have developed a level of independence. Leading Researcher (R4) - Researchers leading their research area or field.

Source: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/europe/career-development/training-researchers/research-profiles-descriptors>

Leading researcher (R4), e.g. Full Professor, Research Professor Established Researcher (R3), e.g. Assistant/Associate Professor, Senior Researcher Recognised Researcher (R2), e.g. PhD holders First Stage Researcher (R1), e.g. doctoral candidates Technical position Administrative position Other

Other

A3. Please choose the type of your break(s) and insert the approximate duration of your break(s) on the comment field (in months).Parental leave Elder care leave Sabbatical leave Sick-leave Compulsory military service 

Other



Other

Section B: II. Before the break

B1. Were you interviewed before your leave (the exit interview)?

An exit interview is a survey conducted with an individual who is separating from an organization or relationship. Most commonly, this occurs between an employee and an organization, a student and an educational institution, or a member and an association. An organization can use the information gained from an exit interview to assess what should be improved, changed, or remain intact. More so, an organization can use the results from exit interviews to reduce employee, student, or member turnover and increase productivity and engagement, thus reducing the high costs associated with turnover. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exit_interview/

Yes No

B2. Please specify your previous answer, e.g. When the interview took place? Who was conducting the interview? What was discussed? Did you find it useful? Was there anything that you were not satisfied? etc.

B3. Did you feel comfortable to take a career break?

Yes No

B4. Please explain the reasons of your previous answer (e.g. which made you feel uncomfortable?).



B5. Were there any unfinished manuscripts or projects before your break?

Yes

No

B6. Please specify your previous answer and describe the practice of unfinished manuscripts and/or projects e.g. when and by whom they were finished.

B7. Which institutional strategies and practices did you find useful before taking the career break?

Exit interview

Possibility to work part-time before leaving on parental leave

Adjusting the work and/or the workplace conditions to suit pregnant employee

Other

Other

B8. Is there any other formal or informal practice that you would like to recommend or share?

Please share the practices that can be implemented before the career break.

Section C: III. During the break

C1. Were you provided with the information about events and recent developments at your institution/department during your break?

Yes No

C2. Please specify your previous answer e.g. how often and how (by phone, by email etc) was it done?

C3. Did you have the right to take part in seminars, staff meetings, trainings etc. during your break?

Yes No

C4. Please specify your previous answer by describing the practice.

C5. Did you have the right to take part in field works, ship cruises or use the laboratory during your break?

Yes No

C6. Please specify your previous answer by describing the practice.



C7. Have you been offered a co-authorship while on career break?

Yes

No

C8. Please specify your previous answer by describing the practice.

C9. Did you have a substitute (stand-in) during your break?
Substitute- a person acting in place of another.

Yes

No

C10. Please specify your previous answer by describing the practice.

C11. Were your e-mail address active and your contacts available on the webpage of your institution during your break?

Yes

No

C12. Were you paired up with a mentor or coach with whom you met on a regular basis during your career break?

Yes

No

C13. Please specify your previous answer, e.g. Was there a formal framework for these meetings and supervisory involvement? Did you find it useful? Was there anything that you were not satisfied? etc.

C14. Which institutional strategies and practices did you find useful during taking the career break?

Stand-in

Mentor or coach

Keeping in touch with the organization

Preservation of employer's benefits (sports club card, etc.)

Performing small and temporary tasks (short-term recruitment)

Other

Other

C15. Is there any other formal or informal practice that you would like to recommend or share?

Please share the practices that can be implemented during the career break.

Section D: IV. After the break, returning to work

D1. Were you interviewed before your return (the return-to-work interview)?

Yes

No



D2. Please specify your previous answer, e.g. When it took place? Who was conducting the interview? What was discussed? Did you find it useful? Was there anything that you were not satisfied? What did you like the most? etc.

D3. Was your contract of employment extended by the time spent on the career break?

Yes No

D4. Did you have the possibility to get any financial support (e.g. from special programme or fund to people returning to work) after your career break?

Yes No

D5. Please specify your previous answer (e.g. the name of the programme, the conditions of the support etc.)

D6. How was your return to work supported?

Meetings with the supervisor/group leader A development plan with appropriate measures was made Support and supervision from colleagues Mentor/coach support Possibility of part-time work Possibility to work partially or fully from home Childcare provided, arranged or supported by the employer Psychological counseling Adjusted workplace (taking into account the physical needs of the returning employee) 

Other

Other

D7. Did you return to your previous job?

Yes

No

D8. Please specify your previous answer, e.g. Did you get advice before returning to work to find a position that matches your qualifications, interests and aptitudes? Was advanced training offered to qualify and prepare you returning to work for your new responsibilities?

D9. Does your institution support and encourage the part-time working to better combine career and personal commitments after the career break?

Yes

No

D10. Please describe how does your institution support and encourage the part-time working?

D11. Which institutional strategies and practices did you find useful after taking the career break?

Return to work interview

Contract of employment was extended by the time spent on leave

Financial support

Possibility to work part-time



Other



Other

D12. Is there any other formal or informal practice that you would like to recommend or share?

Please share the practices that can be implemented after the career break.

D13. Is there anything you would like to add with regard to your experiences in taking a career break(s)?

