

Maternity Cover for Executives: A Boost to Your Core Functions

The days are long gone when maternity leave was mainly taken by younger women in the early stages of their careers. In 2015 over half (53%) of all babies in England and Wales were born to mothers aged 30 and over. And with women increasingly outpacing men in their careers, and gender diversity a target for many organizations, it's just as likely to be senior managers and directors who need time off to start families.

It's easy to see why some CEOs get anxious about losing some of their brightest talent for as much as a year, but the best companies see the rise in senior level maternity leave as an opportunity, not a threat. And, perhaps against expectations, it can even be a boost to women's careers.

Being a 'head of' in the financial sector can be uncomfortable in the current climate. Change is all around you. To compete, you have to stay one step ahead of regulatory requirements and the market. Just keeping pace with change is hard enough. Many function heads have too much on their plate, and are sometimes too close to their day job to see how the function might need to adapt.

Appointing an interim maternity placement with a different experience or skill set from the incumbent can give a shot in the arm to critical functions such as Risk, Product, Sales, and Strategy. An independent consultant with a relevant, but different, background to the manager on maternity leave can provide external market intelligence while keeping the operation ticking over until the incumbent's return.

Returning to a Smoothly Running Function

There will be managers who feel threatened by a potentially more senior manager standing in for them. But using cover as an opportunity to temporarily adapt the role is not a threat to the incumbent's job and can often enhance it. Women returning from maternity can be handed the keys to a smoothly running function with many of the underlying issues they never had time to resolve fixed.

For example, one head of Product went on maternity leave having just hired a new team and was worried about how her absence might affect their training and integration. Instead of simply looking for like-for-like maternity cover, we found an independent consultant with many years' experience and success in building effective Product and Sales teams. When the incumbent returned she immediately saw the improvement in her team's capability and productivity. It meant she could focus on her key targets while easing gradually back into the role, benefitting her and her new family.

Similarly, people often return from maternity leave to find that the independent consultant has applied his or her external experience to resolve issues that were making the function less effective, but which had previously gone undiagnosed. It's very much in the consultant's interest to do this - he or she is not looking to build a long-term career with your company, but to make an impact for the defined maternity period and then move on.

So everyone benefits. The company has a more efficient function, and the manager returns to find the foundations for future success have been established - and reaps the rewards!



Key Points:

- Heads of business can be too close to their day job to see how the function might need to adapt.
- A placement with a relevant, but different, background provides external market intelligence and keeps the operation ticking over.

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