

## How can maternity-return coaching complement structural organisational benefits? (Christine Vitzthum, 2017)

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EVIDENCE BASED COACHING AND MENTORITY, SPECIAL ISSUE NO. 11, JUNE 2017  
<http://ijebcm.brookes.ac.uk/documents/special11-paper-04.pdf>

### Aim of study

Evidence shows that helping women re-engage with their careers after maternity leave is key in sustaining the female talent-pipeline. This study conducted across 2 multinationals and 3 countries (UK, Germany and India) argues that maternity-return coaching can complement other maternity benefits to facilitate career re-engagement for women on an individual level. A new coaching tool was developed in the process that highlights common maternity –return themes.

### Research design – methodology

- An action research study developed with the aim ***of enacting positive change for returning mothers through the development, testing and refining of a maternity-return coaching programme*** (Vitzthum, 2017 p.44)
- The research involved interviewing **15 mothers in 2 international organisations, across 3 countries and various managerial levels**. Of these 12 participants completed a maternity-return coaching programme consisting of 2 hours of 1-2-1 coaching
- Thematic analysis was used to analyse interviews, identify themes and develop a maternity-return coaching tool

### Background / Key findings

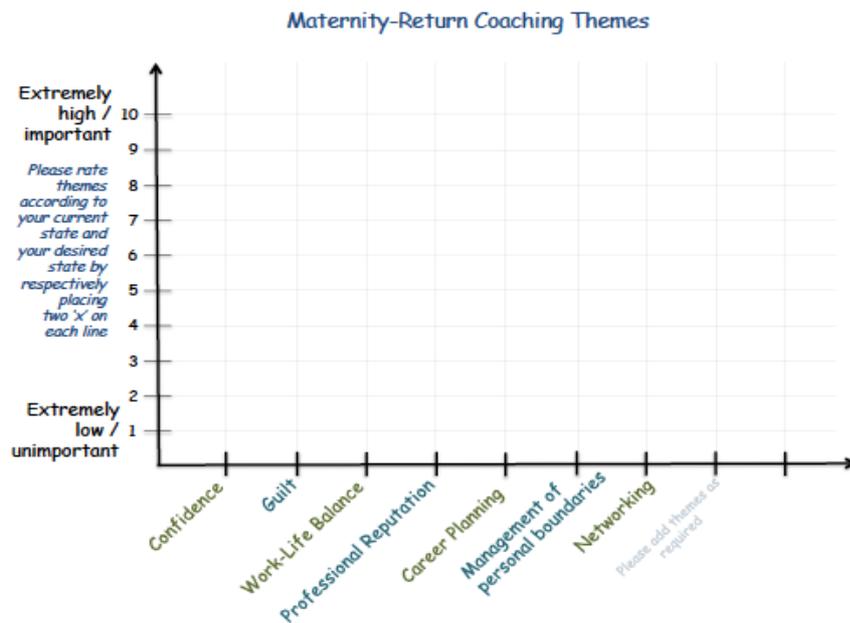
#### What is maternity-return coaching?

**Maternity- coaching** has been shown to offer a forum for expectant mothers to discuss and plan for their departure from work to go on maternity leave and their return to work. **Maternity-return coaching** on the other hand focuses on the return to work period, when new mothers have made the conscious decision to come back to work. The aim is to provide a safe place for them to voice any issues they have surrounding this significant transition, with a view to facilitate career re-engagement and make the experience as smooth as possible for them and their organisation.

Key maternity themes	
Organisational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A supportive culture with family friendly policies was an important deciding factor for women to return to work</li> <li>• <b><i>Role of managers in establishing and implementing these policies was shown as key to retaining returners</i></b></li> </ul>
Career planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scope for development and career progression was essential in the decision making process of mothers</li> <li>• Mothers appear ready to take responsibility for their career development if allowed</li> <li>• <b><i>Findings also show a mismatch between flexible working patterns and opportunity for progression – a need for visibility/ availability often makes these working arrangements unsustainable</i></b></li> </ul>
Guilt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irrespective of managerial level, majority of mothers reported feeling guilty for leaving their children in care</li> </ul>
Management of expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of expectations from both mothers and managers was a crucial aspect of the return-experience</li> </ul>
Perceived lack of confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Returners felt unable to discuss issues or raise concerns due to lack of confidence</i></b> – this type of isolation often led to career disengagement</li> </ul>

### Maternity- Return Coaching Tool<sup>1</sup>

- The below coaching tool was sent to participants prior to their first coaching session to trigger their thought process and help them define goals.
- Highlighting recurring maternity-return themes allowed participants to address suppressed issues, and set the coaching process in motion



### Why is maternity-return coaching beneficial for new mothers and their organisations?

- **Women feel supported and valued**, which translates to higher retention rates and better performance
- **Coaching complements other parent-friendly policies and facilitates re-engagement with career.** Evidence shows that individual support raises mothers' awareness to their needs and enables them to get clarity on how to best utilize benefits already provided by their employers
- **Increasing speed of reintegration for returning mothers.** Participants highlighted how a 1-2-1 approach helped them develop strategies and communicate them clearly to all stakeholders involved
- **Offering a sounding board outside of work** created a safe space for returning mothers to self-reflect and have honest conversations away from HR and their line manager

### Comments

- Maternity coaching is an under-researched area so this study offers useful insight into the advantages of developing these type of programmes as complementary to other parental friendly policies
- Further research is required to determine the validity of the coaching tool used in the study. Nevertheless all the maternity themes identified by the author seem consistent to evidence found in similar studies
- As mentioned by the author, further research is also needed to establish the optimal number of maternity coaching sessions.

<sup>1</sup> Vitzthum, 2017 p.48 (Figure 2)