

Beyond Parental Leave: Supporting the Marathon of Working Parenthood



Welcome

Paid parental leave is often thought of as the hallmark of organizational support for parent employees. However, parental leave serves a very specific parent demographic: parents of newborns. From our work at Werklabs and The Mom Project, we know that attempting to balance work and home life for parents does not end when children are no longer newborns or toddlers. The needs of parents change as children age, and so it is critical that organizations apply a holistic lens to support caregiver employees in the workplace. This should include all forms of parenting; caregivers of children of all varieties, including step-parents, guardians, and foster parents.

It is with this background in mind that Werklabs set out to better understand the evolving workplace needs of parents as their children grow up. To do this, Werklabs partnered with Vivvi, a child care and early childhood learning provider that partners with organizations to create an early childhood experience that aligns with the exceptional quality families deserve. Together, we are determined to shift how organizations think about supporting parent employees from one of a sprint mentality - primarily focusing on parental leave - to a marathon mentality, where there's understanding and investment in all phases of parent employee needs.

Sincerely,
Pam Cohen, PhD
Chief Research & Analytics Officer
Werklabs & The Mom Project



Introduction

In this report, Werklabs explores the many ways in which the needs of working parents evolve as children grow, and examines whether - and in which ways - organizations are supporting these needs. This includes a predictive model that identifies key drivers of working parent satisfaction and connects these factors to three critical business outcomes: employee retention, recommendation, and productivity.

The report aims to 1) improve our understanding of the evolving needs of parents in the workplace and 2) provide a guide for organizations to support and retain working parents beyond parental leave, across the entire lifecycle of parenting.

The bottom line? When organizations cultivate supportive cultures, working parents are more satisfied, and as a result they are more loyal to their employers, more likely to recommend their organizations to talented colleagues, and more productive in both the short and long term.



“When I moved across departments...I saw [employees] work from home that day because they had an appointment. ‘Wow, you can do that? Imagine that.’”

Supporting the Marathon

Parenthood does not begin and end with parental leave, and neither should workplace support for parent employees. An understanding of parent needs as they evolve is critical to support and retain parents through all stages of parenthood.

After parental leave is over, parents deal with the pressure of finding and affording child care, picking up and dropping off school-aged children, and supporting extra-curriculars. It is a challenge simply finding enough hours in the day to spend valuable time with their children, take care of themselves, and cultivate their careers.

It is no wonder that parents often describe feeling like they have to choose between work and family. But this simply does not have to be the case. Employers can support working parents through flexibility, supportive colleagues and managers, and important benefits. Where these factors are present, working parent satisfaction is higher; and where working parent satisfaction is higher, employees are more productive, more loyal to their employers, and more likely to recommend their employers as great places to work.



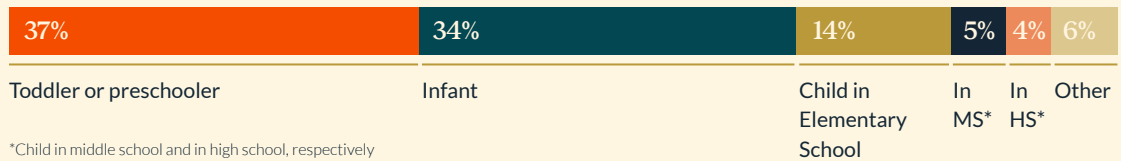
Many of the parents we surveyed are not getting what they need from their employers. 38% say their organization's benefits are **not comprehensive to meet the needs of parents at all stages of parenthood.**



Career Pauses

The extent to which working parents feel supported by their employers has long term implications for parents' careers. While a high-quality parental leave policy can help keep parents of infants in the workforce, parents of children of all ages take career pauses, and they do so for different reasons as their children age. In fact, among surveyed parents, there were more parents who took career pauses to tend to the needs of their toddlers and preschoolers than there were parents who took pauses to take care of their infants.





Parents who took a career pause to tend to the needs of:



By understanding why parents choose to leave the workforce at different stages of their children's lives, employers can offer benefits to alleviate the evolving pressures of working parenthood.



Parents take career pauses for different reasons at different stages of their children's lives. For example, while the cost of child care is the second most important reason parents of kids under 5 take career breaks, a lack of flexibility at work is a more important factor for parents of older children. **Top three reasons for taking a career pause for parents** are:

 Ages 0-5	 Ages 5-8	 Ages 8-17	 Ages 17+
1. Amount of time with children	1. Amount of time with children	1. Amount of time with children	1. Amount of time with children
2. Cost of child care	2. Flexibility in hours	2. Flexibility in hours	2. Flexibility in hours
3. Flexibility in hours	3. Cost of child care	3. Mental health concerns	3. Work culture

Career pauses have real implications for parents in terms of career and earning potential. Compared to parents who had not taken a career pause, parents who had taken a career pause were 24% more likely to say their compensation had been negatively impacted by parenthood, and 30% more likely to say their eligibility for a promotion had been negatively impacted by parenthood.



Methodology & Demographics

To begin, Werklabs conducted a series of 20-30 minute interviews with moms of children from various ages and backgrounds. The findings from these interviews formed the basis for the creation of the *Lifecycle of Parent Employee Needs* survey, which was fielded to the The Mom Project and Vivvi communities in October 2022 and attracted more than 5,500 respondents. From there, Werklabs performed an analysis to evaluate a measurement model and assess which survey items best “fit together” to define predictors of working parent satisfaction. We also assessed how working parent satisfaction in turn impacts key outcomes such as productivity, loyalty, and employees’ likelihood of recommending their employers.

Of 5,583 respondents, most are between the ages of 25 to 44 (80%) and over half are White (59%)*;

88%

Identify as a mom.

94%

Have 1-3 children, with the majority between ages 1 to 11 (67%).

81%

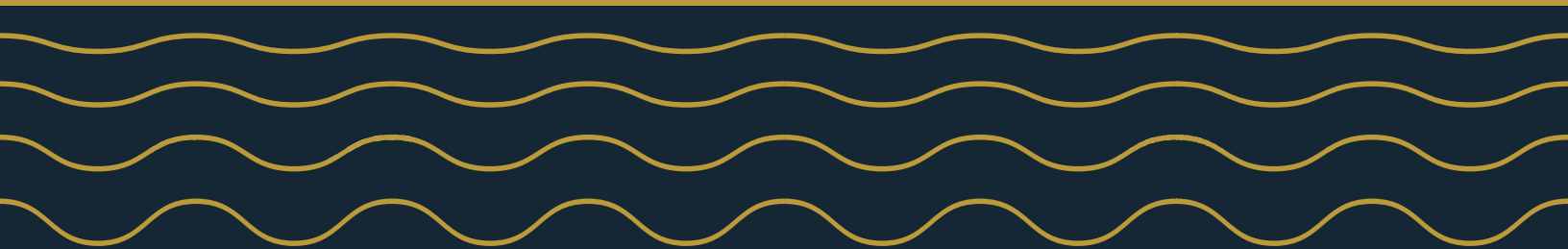
Are currently employed, with 56% working full-time.

*15% African American/Black, 13% Hispanic/Latino, 10% Asian, and 3% Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native/Indigenous



Drivers of Working Parent Satisfaction

Four drivers in order of impact



1

Team & Leader Support

● ● ● ● ● ● HIGH IMPACT

A culture that is supportive of parenting needs is absolutely essential to working parent satisfaction. Parents strongly value working with managers, colleagues, and team members who understand that parenting needs do not have to detract from high quality work or team cohesion. Parents are looking for organizations with a culture of respect for employees' personal lives, that trust employees' commitment to their work, and normalize not having to make up every single hour that is missed.

The ability to self-advocate is also extremely important. Parents need to feel like they can speak up and ask for the flexibility and support they need at work, without feeling pressure to pretend they don't have personal lives. Along similar lines, employers should take care to seek out and understand parents' flexibility needs and work capacity from their perspective rather than making assumptions. Some moms describe experiences with managers assuming that they would not be able to take on certain projects, or that they were not available for promotions due to motherhood, rather than ascertaining their bandwidth and career goals.

"Companies should not just support women [but also] set a culture for all employees that encourages work-life balance."

-Interviewed participant



2

Compensation & Advancement

● ● ● ● ○ ○ MODERATE-HIGH IMPACT

It is imperative that parents see a path for career development, feel they are compensated fairly, and experience fair performance reviews. Parents - especially moms - often report feeling that their employers see them as less committed to their work because they also have parental responsibilities. This can result in being passed over for promotions, raises, and opportunities. In many cases, moms simply choose not to pursue advancement opportunities because they mean giving up flexibility and time with family. In other cases, moms describe having to advocate for themselves above and beyond their non-parent co-workers in order to advance their careers.

On the other hand, parents who feel their career advancement has not been negatively impacted by parenthood often express strong feelings of gratitude and loyalty to their organizations.

"I've had to hold myself back due to not being able to work evening or overtime hours, which is seen as less dedicated."

-Interviewed participant



Overall, 51% of parents surveyed said their **compensation** had been negatively impacted by parenthood (51% of moms, 45% of dads), and 50% said their **career advancement** had been negatively impacted by parenthood (51% of moms, 43% of dads).



3

Organizational Benefits

● ● ● ● ○ ○ MODERATE-HIGH IMPACT

Strong organizational benefits go beyond the provision of competitive healthcare and PTO. Organizational benefits that drive high working parent satisfaction are comprehensive to meet parent needs at all stages of parenting, easy to access, and relevant.



Surveyed working parents shared their current access to benefits. Percent of surveyed parents who say they have access to:

Early Parenthood	Mid & Later-Stage Parenthood	All Stages of Parenthood
Paid parental leave - 41%	Tuition assistance - 21%	PTO - 65%
Pumping Accommodations - 28%	Mental health services for dependents - 21%	Medical insurance coverage - 66%
PTO for Miscarriage or Adoption Loss - 16%	Paid caregiver leave - 9%	
Family Planning - 15%	College planning services - 6%	
Breast Milk Shipping - 5%	Tutoring assistance - 4%	

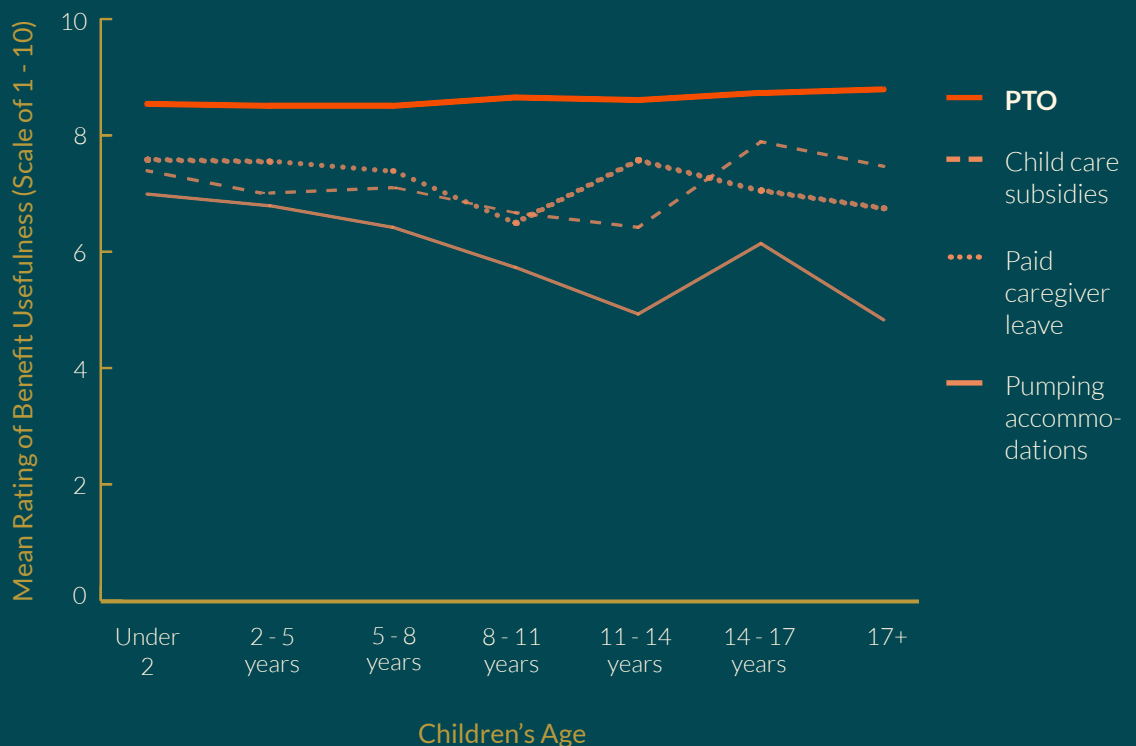




The Shifting Importance of Benefits

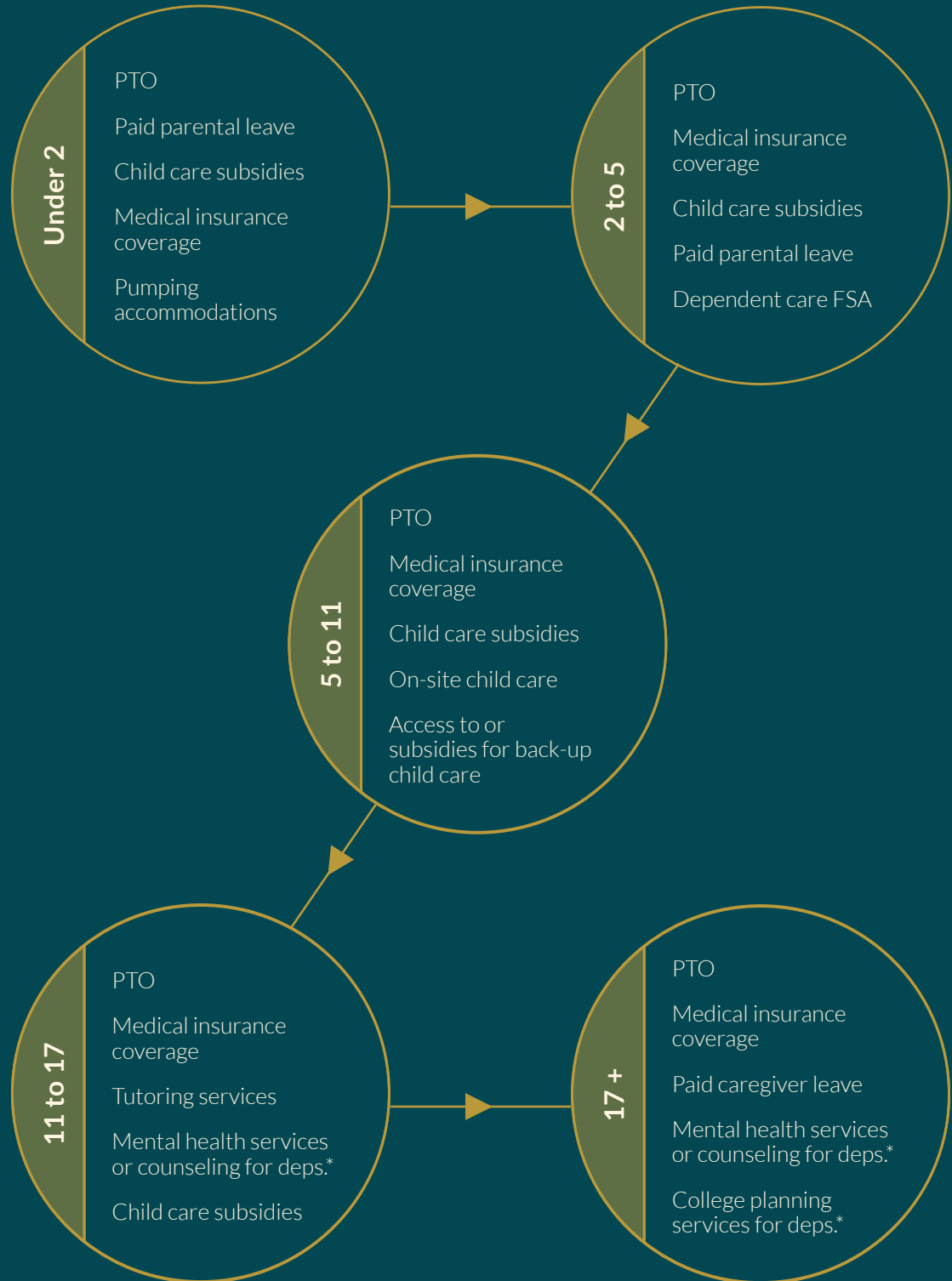
The usefulness of some benefits is universal to parents of all ages. For instance, parents of children of all ages rank PTO and medical insurance as highly useful, with **PTO consistently rated as the most useful benefit across all parents**. The **usefulness of other benefits shifts as children age**.

Tutoring and college planning services are rated most useful for parents of children between the ages of 14-17. Mental health services for dependents also increase in importance as children grow. Parental leave, pumping accommodations, and breast milk shipping are more useful to parents of children under 2.



Top 5 most useful benefits by age category

In the order of importance, the below benefits have been rated as the top 5 most useful benefits for parents with kids:



* Dependents



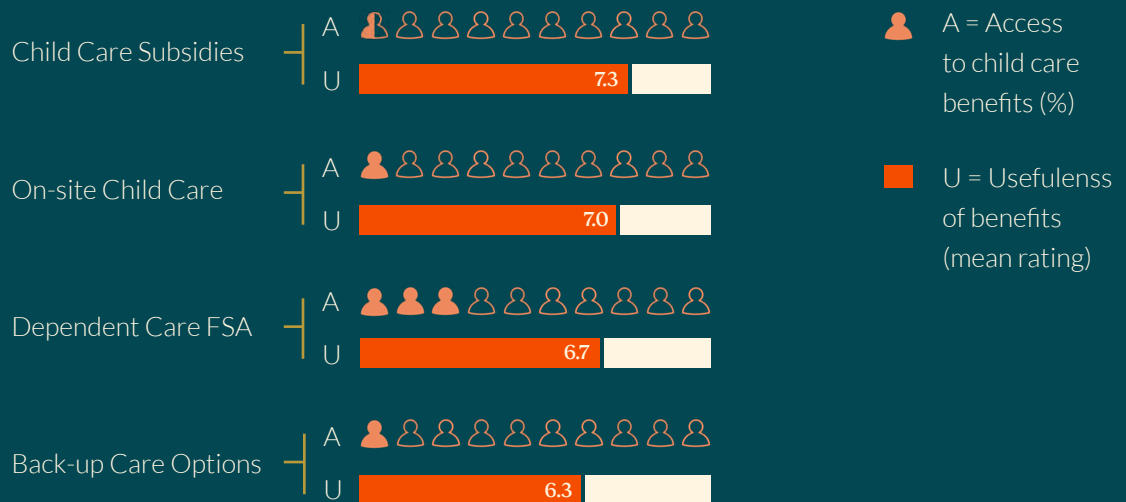


Child Care Benefits

Accessing affordable, dependable child care is one of the top challenges faced by American parents in the paid workforce. The vast majority of surveyed working parents do not have access to any kind of child care benefit through their employers.

Parents consistently rate child care subsidies among the most useful child care-related benefits, particularly parents of younger and school-aged children, yet less than 10% of surveyed parents have access to child care subsidies. The most common child care benefit offered to working parents is a dependent care FSA. Although most parents say that this is a useful benefit, it is not rated as useful as child care subsidies or on-site child care, and parents often report difficulties with accessing FSA accounts, with many saying their contribution limits are too low.

Access to and Usefulness of Child Care Benefits



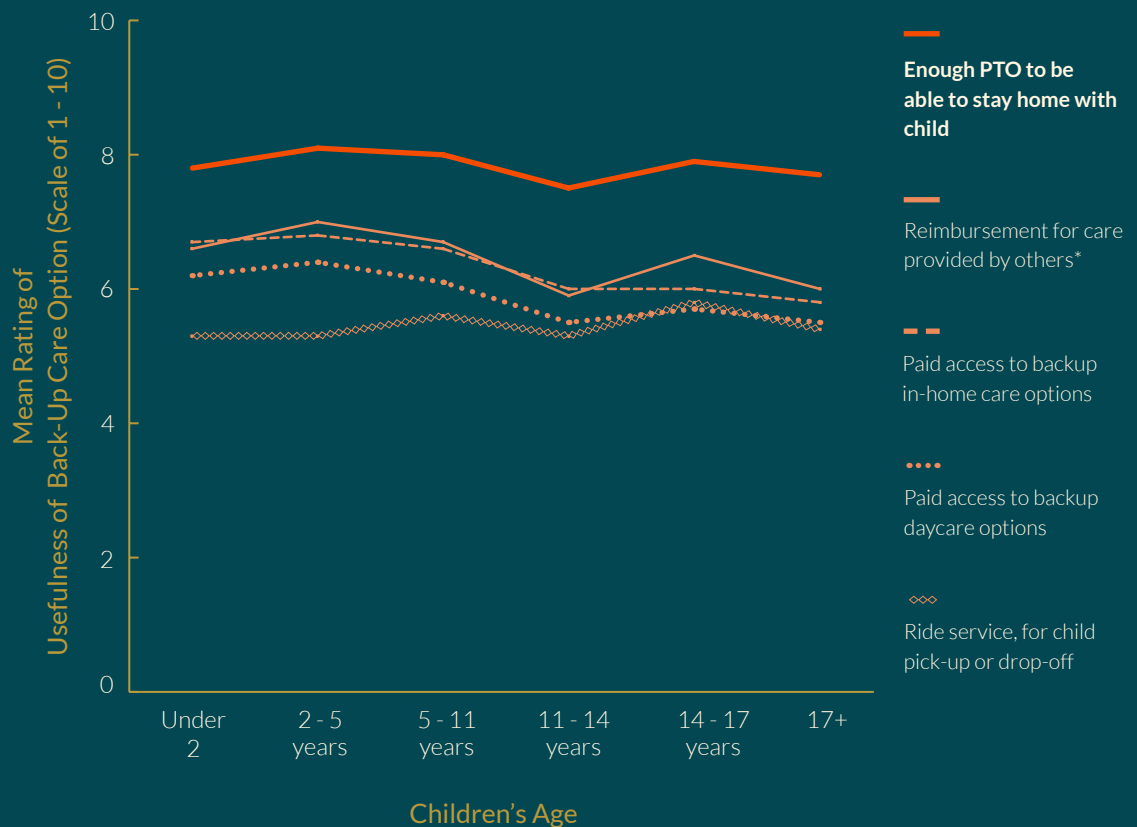
"Subsidizing daycare would be the biggest game changer."

-Interviewed participant



“I use up all of my annual sick leave by August [due to] frequent illnesses and requiring my child to stay home.”

78% of surveyed parents say they have needed backup care because of unexpected changes to child care plans. When it comes to backup care options, for parents of all ages, **having enough PTO to be able to stay home with their children** is consistently rated as the most useful backup care option. Back-up care options such as reimbursement for care provided by family members or friends and paid access to backup daycare and in-home care options are rated as more useful by parents of younger children. While access to a ride service is rated as the least useful option overall, it is considered more useful among parents of older children.



4

Flexibility

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ MODERATE IMPACT

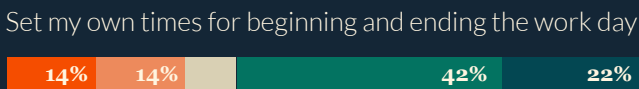
Although the reasons why parents need flexibility evolve as children grow, the importance of flexibility to working parents is universal. Parents of infants may need to step away from work to pump, or leave work to accommodate daycare pickup times or a babysitter's class schedule. Parents of older children are juggling playdates, school drop-offs and pickups, extracurricular activities, parent-teacher conferences, and appointments. When parents have the flexibility to complete their work around those responsibilities - to truly integrate life and work - they are not only able to perform at the highest levels, but their organizational satisfaction increases immensely.

Women feel supported when they can trust colleagues not to schedule over blocked-off hours; when organizations adopt a core hours philosophy so that drop-offs and pick-ups are less likely to interfere with meetings; and when they can easily have conversations with managers about shifting needs. In contrast, providing flexibility without genuinely giving women permission to be away, can feel punitive and create its own additional stress.



The extent to which working parents say that they can:

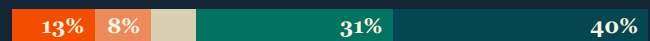
Not at All Disagree Neutral Agree Extremely



Periodically step away from work throughout the day



Work remotely





Varying Flexibility Across Roles

Many parents have roles that demand in-person work for specific hours. For those working in industries like healthcare, education, or construction, remote work and flexible hours are often simply not options. But that does not mean employers can't support these parents in other ways.

Working parents who are unable to work remotely rate several benefits as **more** useful to them compared to those who can work remotely. These include:

- Pumping accommodations
- Breastmilk shipping services
- Onsite childcare
- Tutoring services for dependents
- Parent Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

Parent Employee Resource Groups

Parents at all stages, from infant to adult children, see parent Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) as similarly useful resources. ERGs can help parents by providing organizational support, offering a vital sense of community and serving as a valuable resource to raise overall awareness of working parents' needs. Yet only 15% of surveyed working parents have access to a parent ERG at their organizations.

ERGs provide colleagues - often from different parts of an organization - with the opportunity to learn from each other, sharing solutions and helpful approaches to balancing parenting and work needs. ERGs offer camaraderie and support through Slack channels, blog posts, or organized discussions led by professional speakers. In addition, established ERGs make it easier for employees to understand and use organization benefits by highlighting those company resources most essential to the ERG members, such as parental leave policies.



Outcomes

Recommendation, Retention, and Productivity

Through predictive modeling, Werklabs developed a Working Parent Satisfaction Index. This includes participants' ratings of (1) their overall satisfaction with their experience as a working parent, (2) how their experience as a working parent compares to expectations, and (3) how their experience as a working parent compares to their ideal. Participants are also asked to indicate (1) their likelihood of recommending their current employer as a great and a family-friendly place to work, (2) their likelihood of remaining at their employer in 1 and 3 years' time, and (3) their productivity expectations.

Thus, Werklabs is able to link the drivers identified in this report to working parent satisfaction and then to define their overall impact on key business outcomes of recommendation, loyalty, and productivity.

Why is this important? Werklabs' predictive modeling demonstrates that employers who invest in key aspects of working parent satisfaction will see higher productivity levels, and enjoy employees who stay longer and are more likely to recommend their organizations to talented colleagues. A win for working parents is a win for business.



Conclusion

Working parents want to be there for their kids and be the best moms and dads they can be, without letting go of their careers or feeling guilty about the choices they make. To that end, a true family-friendly workplace recognizes that each family's needs are unique, and supports those needs accordingly. Benefits that shift as parenting needs change, flexibility that adapts to changing schedules, ERGs that build community and open lines of communication, and a culture of respect and empathy at all levels of an organization, are the keys to supporting parents along the full marathon route.

While still limited, access to benefits that are more relevant to early parenthood is much more widespread than access to benefits that are more relevant to mid- and later-stage parenthood. In other words, organizations are more likely to support the sprint than to consider the full marathon of parenting. This means there is ample opportunity for employers to invest in their bottom line by expanding the ways they support parent employees over time.

The findings in this report place a particular emphasis on the importance of culture. Offering flexibility and a strong benefits package are immensely important, but they really only matter insofar as employees are actually able to use them as needed. Parents repeatedly emphasize that PTO is paramount, but very often say that they do not actually feel free to use their PTO as needed. Investing in a culture that is supportive of parenting and flexibility needs entails low monetary costs but large, long-term payoffs.

Want to learn more?

Visit us at [Werklabs.com](https://www.werklabs.com).

Have questions? Email:

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Predictive Model

Werklabs' *Lifecycle of Parent Employee Needs* survey formed the basis of a predictive model that identifies the factors that most impact respondents' feelings of satisfaction as working parents. Through measurement and predictive analytics, the model defines the current and expected effect of a change in any of these characteristics on critical performance outcomes.

This enables Werklabs to measure how these factors impact bottom line performance as they change, allowing employers to understand where to invest resources to generate the biggest returns on essential performance outcomes. In future applications, this approach can be adapted and customized by organizations to create models segmented by industry, function, and role.

Scores

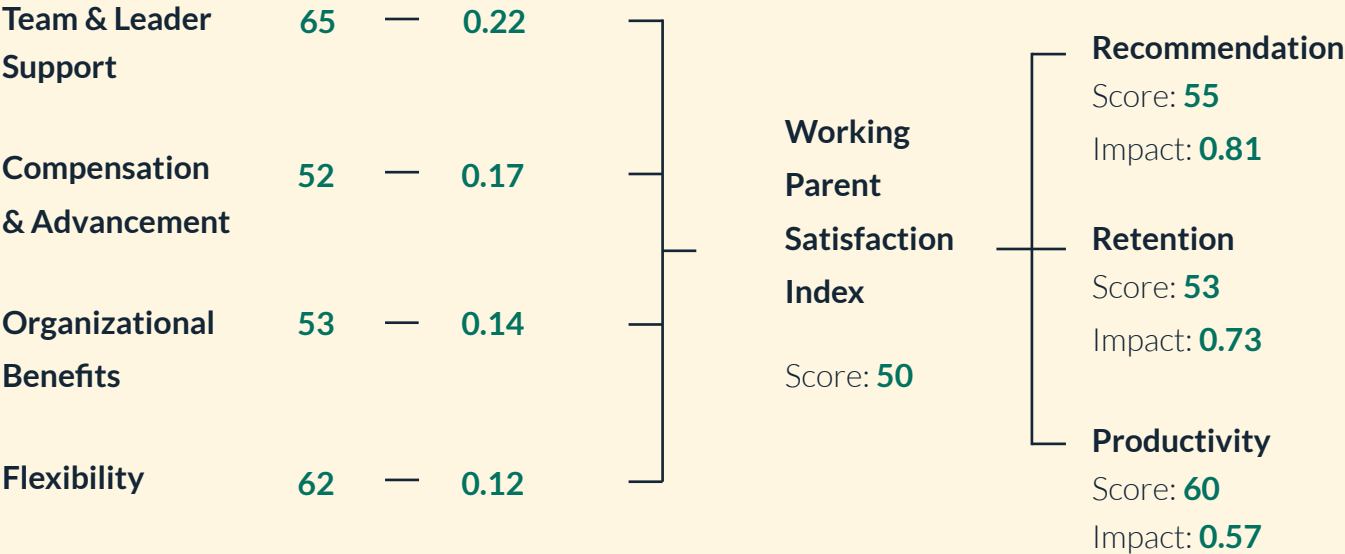
Current experiences on a 100-point scale

Impact

The expected effect of a 1-point change in score on the outcome

Outcomes

Working Parent Satisfaction Index and Performance Outcomes



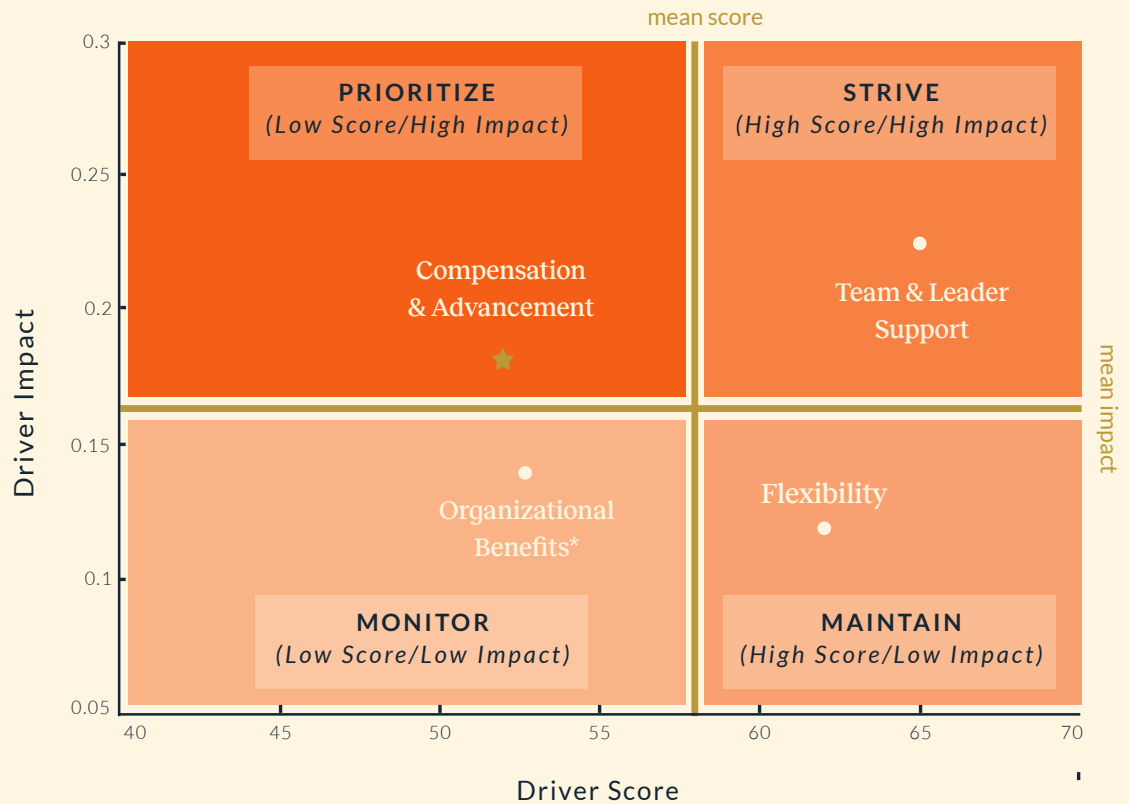
Scores Explained: Driver and outcome scores are calculated using a weighted average of the scores for each item's combined indicators. It is then scaled up to 100 for readability. Higher scores indicate a more positive current experience.

Impacts Explained: Through predictive analytics, the impact of (1) each driver on working parent satisfaction (2) of working parent satisfaction on key outcomes, is then defined. The impact defines the expected effect of a 1-point change in the score on the outcome.



Impact Matrix

The impact matrix provides a visual representation of the predictive model. The vertical axis plots the impact of each driver on organizational satisfaction, while the horizontal axis plots the driver's current score, with grid lines at the mean.



*It is important to bear in mind that lower impact scores do not mean drivers are not important or a worthwhile investment. They tend to be those that are status quo or at the expected level because they are expected by participants. In this case, they reflect the benefits respondents are currently receiving rather than a hypothetical full range of parenting-related benefits which they may not yet have been exposed to or imagined. Respondents may feel more satisfied than they otherwise would with the status quo because they have not yet had the opportunity to experience (or expect) those other possibilities and thus are not considering the absolute range of possible benefits.



Glossary:

Drivers, Index and Performance Outcomes Defined

Key Drivers

Team & Leader Support: the extent to which employees (1) say their team and managers are understanding of their unique needs as parents (2) feel comfortable advocating for the flexibility they need at work, and (3) say organizational leadership respects the needs of parents

Compensation & Advancement: the degree to which employees say they are compensated fairly, experience fair performance reviews, and have access to career development and advancement opportunities

Organizational Benefits: the extent to which employees say benefits at their organization are relevant to their current stage of parenting, easy to access, comprehensive to meet the needs of parents at all stages of parenting, and competitive compared to other organizations

Flexibility: (1) employees' ability to set their own schedules, step away from work as needed, work remotely, and be physically at home as much as possible, and (2) the extent to which employees say their current position meets their flexibility needs

Work Parent Satisfaction Index

(1) Overall satisfaction with experience as a working parent, (2) the extent to which experience as a working parent compares to expectations, and (3) how experience as a working parent compares to ideal

Organizational Performance Outcomes

Recommendation: the likelihood of employees recommending their employer as a great place to work

Retention: the likelihood of employees remaining at their current employer in one year and three years' time

Productivity: the likelihood of employees being more productive in the next quarter and next year

