



family friendly 
working scotland



Employee Workshops

Increasing well-being and
engagement for new dads

Introduction

“ It seemed to meet the needs I didn't know I had, and I find that a very powerful experience. I thought I had everything I needed, but I didn't as it transpired as this filled the need that I couldn't. ”

In 2015, **Fathers Network Scotland** commissioned a research project in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh section of Clinical Psychology to develop and deliver a pilot series of evidence-based workshops to support first time fathers in the workplace. The workshops were developed to enhance fathers' wellbeing and therefore that of their families by focusing on:

1. Relationship with child

2. Relationship with partner

3. Relationship with work

This report describes the workshop materials that were developed and delivered and outlines key findings from our evaluations. Further qualitative data was gathered independently by an International Human Resource Management M.Sc. student at the University of Edinburgh Business School to explore what potential effect these workshops might have on engagement at work and this has led to recommendations for future workshops.



Background

Becoming a father for the first time can be a wonderful experience and also one that presents a new set of challenges. One such challenge is ensuring first time fathers have a healthy work-life balance, one that enables them to develop a strong relationship with their child and protect their relationship with their partner, whilst engaging effectively at work.

A study sponsored by Working Families in 2012 found that work engagement and relationship quality were positively correlated, indicating that strength in relationships at home is associated with strength in relationships and engagement at work. Research looking at the transition into parenthood also shows us that relationships between partners can deteriorate during this period and that child development, and lack of it, is related to this. Finally, there is a wealth of literature showing the positive associations between uptake of family-friendly working arrangements and positive outcomes for child and partner relationships during the transition into parenthood; however, it is often mothers and not fathers who take up these arrangements.

Taking this literature into consideration, our project team developed a series of workshops to be delivered during work hours for first time fathers to reflect, consider new challenges, and access knowledge and skills to strengthen their relationships in each of the three areas.

Workshop Programme

A series of three 3-hour evidence-based workshops was developed to be delivered at monthly intervals in the workplace. Each workshop incorporated the educational elements of the three domains, with accompanying practical and reflective exercises for individual and group work. A supplementary workbook was designed to provide a more comprehensive resource and for participants to record their personal reflections throughout the programme. Table 1 provides an overview of the content and exercises of each session.

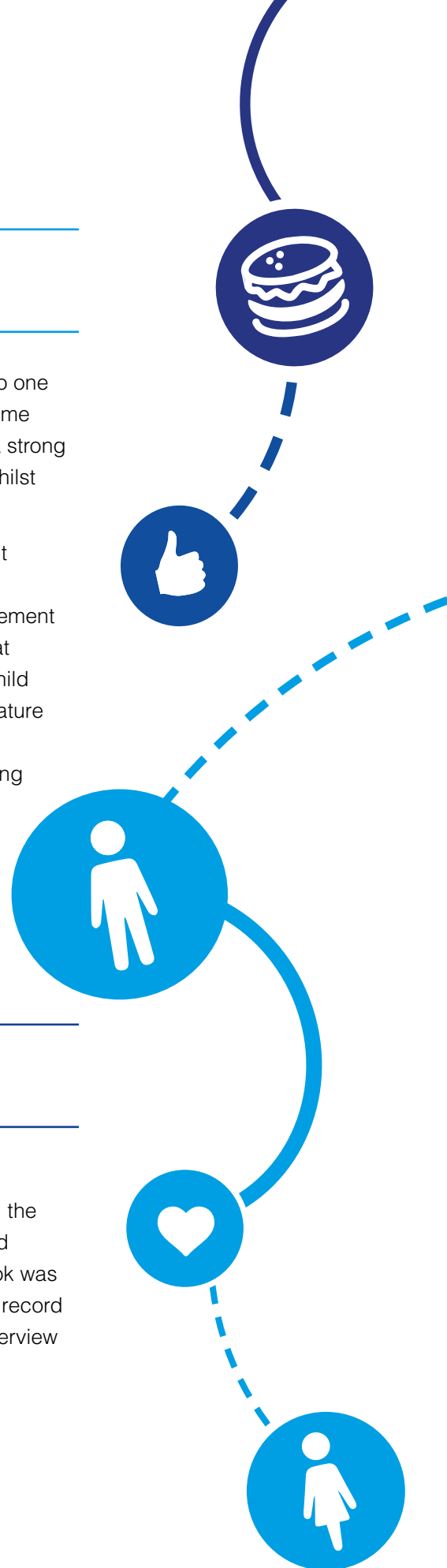


Table 1. Workshop Programme: Content and Exercises.

Session 1

Area	Content	Exercises
Relationship with Child	Infant development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine motor skills • Sensory skills • Speech and language • Developmental milestones. 	Place developmental milestones in chronological order.
Relationship with Partner	Why couple relationships matter? Benefits of leave to: fathers, children, mothers and employer. What's good fathering?	Identify three key issues you think you will face.
Relationship with Work	Presentation from HR on shared parental leave and paternity leave.	What are your thoughts on how you will be a working father? What issues do you foresee?

Session 2

Area	Content	Exercises
Relationship with Child	Attachment theory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why me and now? • Forming secure attachment • Quantity vs quality 	Is father-child attachment important and why?
Relationship with Partner	The competencies to consider. Active listening.	Practicing the skill of Active Listening around topics of fathering.
Relationship with Work	The benefits of fathers' leave Company policies on flexible working.	Beliefs about being a working father. Questions for HR.

Session 3

Area	Content	Exercises
Relationship with Child	High quality fathering. Theory: How to be a sensitive father. Fostering development.	What do you think makes for good fathering?
Relationship with Partner	Layers of listening.	Active Listening skills practice.
Relationship with Work	What is a work-life balance? HR session on compassionate/carers leave.	Wheel of Life. Actions to take forward



Participating Fathers

Two large Scottish public sector organisations joined the pilot programme. Employees who had taken paternity leave were invited to the workshops by their Human Resources (HR) department. Inclusion criteria stipulated that at the time of the first workshop (March 2016) their child must be aged 0-24 months. Employees were asked to commit to all three workshops over a 3-month period and to complete the pre and post-intervention questionnaire. Once the workshops had started participants were also asked if they would be willing to participate in interviews evaluating the workshops and the potential impact workshops might have on their engagement at work.

“ I think hearing it from the horse’s mouth. It’s nicer and easier to take in when someone sits and explains it to you and answers your questions. ”

Delivery of Workshops

Two experienced workshop facilitators were contracted by Fathers Network Scotland to deliver one set of workshops each. Requirements for their selection included: experience of facilitating personal development workshops, personal experience of fatherhood, and awareness of “father” and “male” issues both at home and in the workplace. The facilitators advised on the development of practical and reflective exercises for the workshops.

Workshops were closed sessions with only 1 facilitator, participants, and members of the research team being present. The only exception to this were scheduled sections for HR discussion. Transparency with regards to expected outcomes, as well as issues of respect and confidentiality within the workshop group, were discussed with participants prior to commencement of workshops.



Evaluation Techniques

Quantitative Approach

The following self-report measures of mental wellbeing, relationship satisfaction, and work engagement were used to assess the impact of the intervention on each of these variables.

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale – 21 (DASS-21)

The DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) measures the negative emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress (7-items per subscale).

The Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI)

The 4 item CSI (Funk & Rogge, 2007) measures satisfaction in a relationship.

Quality of Marriage Index (QMI)

The 6-item QMI (Norton, 1983) measures marital satisfaction.

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

The 9-item UWES (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) measures overall work engagement, also providing scores for subscales of work vigour, work dedication, and work absorption.

Qualitative Approach: Phase One

Within 10 days of the completion of the workshops, recorded telephone interviews were conducted with the participants to explore:

1. **Fathers' motivations for participation**
2. **Reactions to the workshops**
3. **Recommendations for how to improve workshops**
4. **Impact of the workshops.**

The interviews were semi-structured, with an interview schedule comprising of eight questions.

Qualitative Approach: Phase Two

Six weeks later, unstructured face-to-face interviews were conducted to specifically explore how work engagement could be affected by the workshops. Questions were driven by topics that could reveal relationships between features of the workshops that influence work engagement. This was to provide a better understanding of how and why the workshops were having an impact.

“ Recognising the value of what you're doing even though you might be tired, it's precious and the only time you have. I now make sure I'm living in the moment. ”



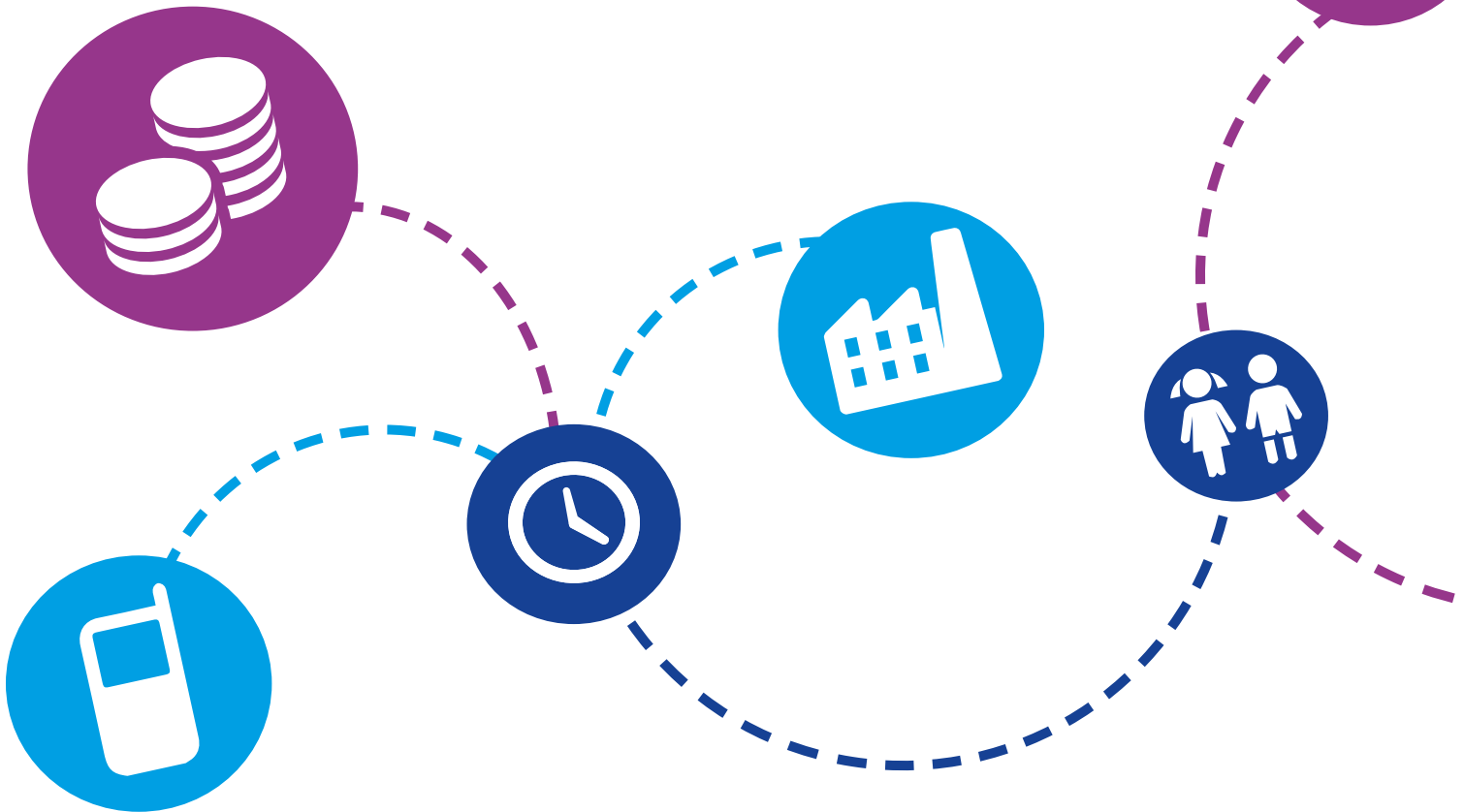
Key Findings

Quantitative

Of the initial sample of 27 participants who completed the pre-workshop survey, 15 also completed the post-workshop questionnaire. These 15 fathers ranged in age from 30-45 years, with their children ranging in age from 0-21 months old. Eighty-per-cent of the sample were married to the mother of their child with the other 20% being in a committed relationship with them. All participants lived with their child and their partner.

Pre- and post-workshop scores of each were highly correlated. Differences in group means pre and post-workshop pointed towards small increases in work vigour, work dedication, overall work engagement, quality of marriage, and depression. Conversely, small decreases in mean couple satisfaction and work-absorption were observed. Neither anxiety or stress changed over time. Depression was found to correlate significantly with measures of stress, relationship quality, and work engagement.

This pilot study has shown the measures are reliable and would be useful to track over a longer period of time.





Qualitative Findings Phase One

Eighteen fathers participated in telephone interviews. These lasted 15-20 minutes. Thematic analysis of the data revealed the following findings:

Reason for Attending Workshops

Fathers wanted to meet colleagues who were in a similar situation, regarding being new fathers. They had a desire to engage in self-development that might help their families and use HR policies. Participants also highlighted the uniqueness of the type of workshop, the rarity of male-focused support and perceived gender equality promotion. They also felt that the workshops appeared to have a more holistic approach to fatherhood than antenatal support programmes they had attended.

Reasons for Continued Attendance

The formation of strong bonds and camaraderie with other fathers, as well as having a curriculum and a progression of focal topics (i.e. child, partner, workplace), influenced continued attendance.

Value of Workshops

Establishing a support network of fathers was often cited as a valuable aspect of the workshops. The safe, honest, confidential, and empathetic environment was viewed as helpful to the discussion and learning environment. Informing them of the impact of fatherhood on children and work endowed the fathers with confidence in their new role. Discussion of theories, particularly attachment theory, and learning of skills (e.g. Active Listening) were viewed as helpful. Participants also felt they benefited from the reflective elements. Having physical copies of a work book was helpful to fathers to share at home.

Timing and Length of Workshops

Generally, workshops were perceived as well planned and appropriately timed (9.30am-12.30pm with a networking lunch). Participants felt the timings enabled them to commit to focussing on the content, not be distracted by meetings, and to maintain their attention and interest. The spacing of workshops across a 3-month period was appreciated. The fathers explained that while the time commitment was initially off-putting, it turned out to be ideal in practice.

Action following Workshops

Participants often discussed workshop learnings with their partners. Active listening had been employed in many cases. One father had decided to reduce his working week to spend more time with his child. Research presented at the workshop helped encourage another father to take leave immediately. Meetings had been planned by some participants with colleagues and subordinates (where applicable) with regards to highlighting their entitlements.

While change did not always feel immediate, fathers expressed feeling more confident about their role as a father and more reassured/less stressed about taking leave. Awareness of work-life balance policies particularly helped with this confidence. For those who hadn't changed anything, they were often reassured about utilising policies and so felt their prior reluctance to do so had decreased.

“ You need senior leaders who understand that fathers have different responsibilities and who can break stereotypical views on what fathers are and do. ”

Qualitative: Findings Phase Two

Twelve fathers participated in face-to-face interviews, lasting 40-55 minutes. Analysis revealed the following findings:

Depending on how the fathers interpreted the workshops, work engagement could be influenced in three paths where participants can accumulate and utilise resources:

At Home

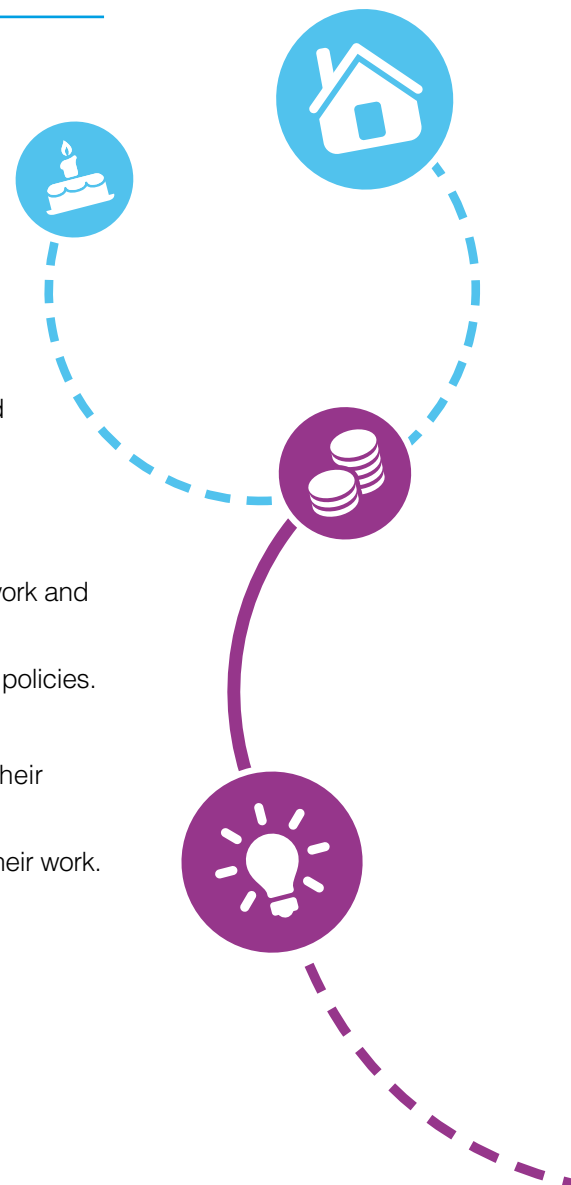
- Increased knowledge of their potential impact on their children and their partner relationships. For example, some fathers were less anxious and more confident at home as a result of their new knowledge and this helped their emotional equilibrium at work.
- Their work could have greater meaning now they have a family to support.

Work-Life Balance

- Fathers could use the workshops to improve their competencies to manage work and family such as prioritising their own well-being as well as that of their partners.
- Having greater knowledge of and therefore confidence to access work-family policies.

At Work

- The appreciation that fathers felt toward their organisation for addressing their needs in work time (increased employee loyalty).
- Using skills developed in the workshop, such as active listening to carry out their work.
- Increased autonomy to manage job demands.





Other national and societal moderators also affect the workshops' efficacy

- Whether the fathers perceive their employer to be 'father-friendly'.
- How policies are currently used by senior leaders.
- The cost of childcare.
- Individual predispositions such as domestic factors.
- Whether their partners were on leave or at work.
- How the father psychologically separates work and home.
- How important monetary reward was against the impact of work on the family.
- How important work is to the individual (are they family or work focused)

Some conversations suggested that fathers believed that by focusing more on family that this was to the exclusion and detriment of work.

Figure 1 shows the pathways from workshop to work engagement (mediator) and factors that can influence the change in engagement (moderators).

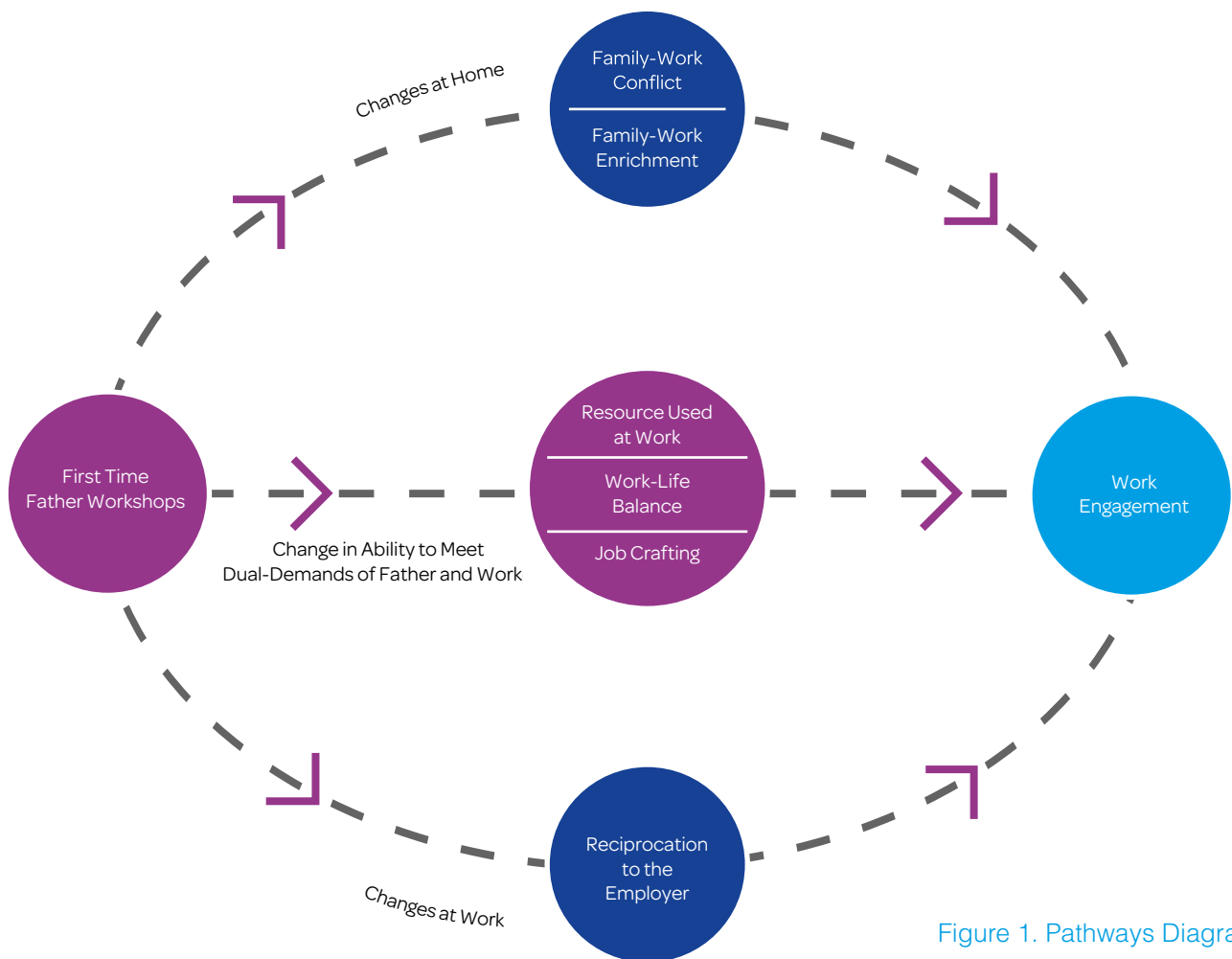
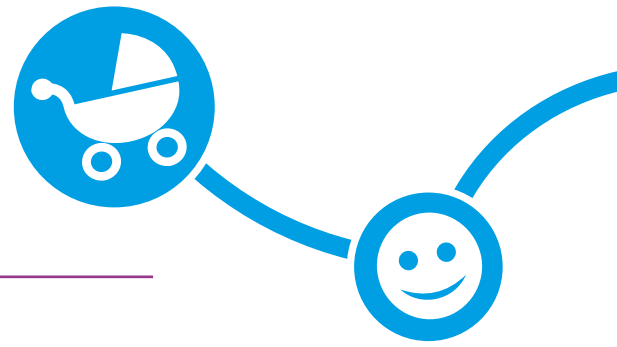


Figure 1. Pathways Diagram.



Recommendations

The workshop intervention for first time fathers was well received by the fathers in this pilot programme and had overall positive feedback. It offered a unique opportunity for first time fathers to prepare and develop knowledge and skills and to create an informal network at work. Some recommendations for workshops are highlighted below:

Workshop Content

- Inclusion of further practical examples and tips of best-practice parenting strategies.
- More discussion of how to form a secure bond with child.
- Greater psycho-education elements discussing depression – risk and impact on home and work relationships – and how to cope.
- Further focus on reframing the control of boundaries to allow them to manage resources and prevent work-family conflict.
- Workshop facilitator to ‘frame’ the concepts of how work and family lives can complement – not detract – from one another and ways to integrate the dual-demands of fatherhood. Dispel the myth of a ‘zero-sum game’ or ‘balance’ of family V work.

Workshop Format

- Ensuring small-group workshops e.g. 10 fathers or less to foster openness and bonding.
- Delivered at earlier stages of child’s life i.e. within the first 12 months.
- Discussion on using policies/resources before baby arrives i.e. pre-fatherhood awareness.
- HR involvement to be well structured, open, and honest about the constraints and culture.
- Informal Q&A with HR could be supplemented with user-friendly intranet access to HR policies.

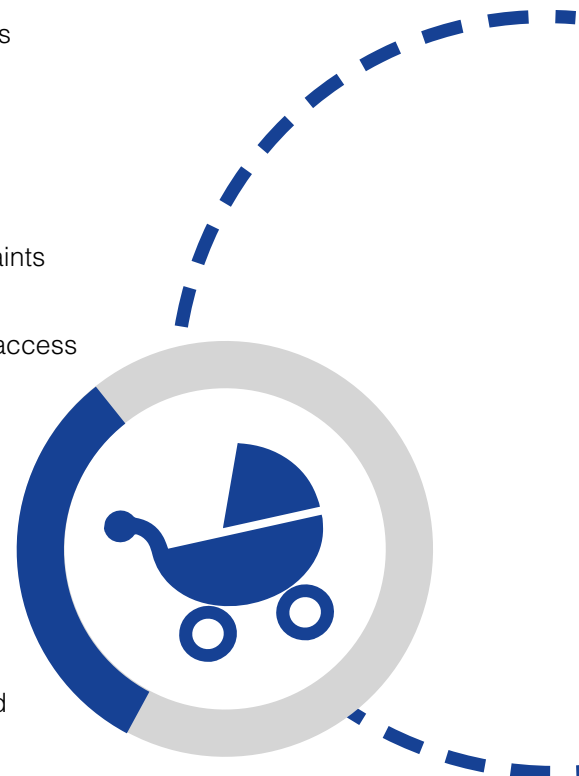
Workbook

- Workbooks should aim to incorporate more detail of practical exercises completed during sessions.

Attendance

- Should be fully endorsed by all line managers to ensure fathers feel able to attend all three workshops.
- Endorsement by senior leaders who ‘walk the talk’ would also help embed new behaviours sought by the fathers.

“ I had to get a lot more focussed if I was going to get through things in my new time whereas before if you were feeling a bit pressed you could just work an extra hour. I have to cut down the procrastination. So having that focus has maybe increased my engagement. ”





This research was undertaken by Fathers Network Scotland who commissioned Dr Nuno Ferreira of the School of Health in Social Science, to supervise our research assistant Dr Susannah Johnston, Section of Clinical Psychology, to develop the workshop content, the supplementary workbooks, and to measure quantitative outcomes for fathers.

Tim Puddy, our International HRM M.Sc. student, was supervised by Professor Wendy Lorreto at the University of Edinburgh Business School. Tim's interviewing enabled us to understand why the workshops influenced engagement and how we might better support working dads.

We are also grateful to our facilitators Brain Caie and Douglas Nicholson who took the academic content helped developed the interactive workshop.

Sam Pringle, Head of Research for Fathers Network Scotland, initiated the project and ensured that it was delivered a useful intervention for employers.

For further details of how your workplace can benefit from such workshops please contact

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Family Friendly Working Scotland is a Scottish Government funded partnership which supports and promotes the development of family friendly workplaces across Scotland.

