

WORK LIFE



“Paternity leave
can boost
productivity”

SARAIM BATARAJAN, India

Professional dads

Nach der Geburt eines Kindes wollen auch manche Männer eine berufliche Auszeit nehmen. Väter aus drei verschiedenen Ländern berichten von ihren Erfahrungen. Und zwei Expertinnen wissen, wie Unternehmen familienfreundlicher werden können

Von MELITA CAMERON-WOOD

MEDIUM

Fathers want to **bond** with their children and be there for their partners after childbirth. **Paternity leave** should offer the chance to do that, but traditional views of gender roles and a lack of established support from employers and governments can cause many men to **think twice** about **taking time off**. *Business Spotlight* speaks to three dads about their experiences of being on paternity leave — what they've learned and what they think could be better.

Sairam Natarajan, co-founder of Tllid, a start-up that provides childcare for working parents, and director of ethics at Mazars UK, an international accounting firm — Coimbatore, India

After the birth of my son, I took a **sabbatical** of two months and worked part-time for the following few months. I was lucky. Many new fathers in India are unable to take parental leave. Only central government employees are **entitled** to 15 days of paternity leave, and there's no formal policy for private-sector employees. Some companies in India, especially multinationals, offer 15 working days of paternity leave. A few organizations offer three or more months of paid paternity leave, but that's rare.

I hope India's government takes steps to improve **legislation**. In the meantime, **HR departments** can introduce more generous paternity leave policies, for both biological and adoptive fathers, and offer more flexible working arrangements. Paternity leave can **boost** productivity, improve **morale**, attract candidates and **retain** top talent, so there are clear benefits for employers.

Johan Bävman, freelance filmmaker, photographer and the creator of "Swedish Dads", a photo project about fathers who took six months or more of paternity leave — Malmö, Sweden

In Sweden, for one child, financial support is paid for a total of 480 days. For 390 of those, the payments are based on your income and parents receive what are called "sickness benefit level days". The **compensation** for the other 90 days is 180 **krona** (about 15 euros) per day. If you are a single parent, then you are entitled to all 480 days. When it comes to couples, then each parent is **assigned** 240 days each, which are non-transferable if one parent decides not to take them.

Many companies pay employees the remaining 20 per cent of their salary during their paid leave. You also get two weeks of paid leave after the birth. Although many see the Swedish system as progressive, the 90 days are not **compulsory**, and many men don't take them — according to government data, fathers in Sweden take about 30 per cent of all paid parental leave.

My wife and I are both freelancers, but self-employed people are entitled to the same benefits as employed people in Sweden — the money you receive is simply 80 per cent of what your expected income would have been. After the initial two weeks with my first-born son, my wife took nine months of **maternity leave**. Then, I took over and did nine months of paternity leave, most of which was paid, based on my income. I chose to save some of the paternity leave for later — it can be used until your child **turns** eight.

Knowing that we can rely on each other to take care of the children makes it easier when one of us needs to travel for work, for example. You need to be able to be on your own with your child. Many of the men that I interviewed for "Swedish Dads" told me it was important for them to spend time with their child without the support of their partner, because parenting involves learning from your mistakes. Those in **C-suite** positions often found paternity leave hard, as they felt out of their comfort

bond with sb.

- eine Bindung zu jmdm. aufbauen

paternity leave

- Vaterschaftsurlaub

think twice about sth.

- sich etw. gründlich überlegen

take time off

- sich freinehmen; hier: sich freistellen lassen

co-founder

- Mitgründer(in)

accounting firm

- Wirtschaftsprüfungsfirma

sabbatical

- Freistellung, dienstfreie Zeit

entitled: be ~ to sth.

- Anspruch auf etw. haben

legislation

- Gesetzgebung

HR department

- Personalabteilung

boost sth. • etw. steigern

morale [mə'ra:l]

- Stimmung

retain sb.

- jmdn. (im Unternehmen) halten

sickness benefit

- Krankengeld

compensation

- hier: Ausgleichszahlung

krona • Krone

- assign sth. to sb.** • jmdm. etw. zuteilen, gewähren

compulsory

- obligatorisch

maternity leave

- Mutterschaftsurlaub

turn • hier: werden

C-suite ['si: su:t]

- Vorstand(sebene)



Johan Bävman, Sweden

zones. Many manual workers, on the other hand, said they felt that they had to fight for their right to take paternity leave.

After my parental leave, I changed the type of clients I was looking for — it helped me to change my pattern. Many of the participants in “Swedish Dads”, which has now been exhibited in 65 countries, changed their jobs after going on paternity leave. Those nine months off work give you time to consider the legacy you want to leave behind.

Steffen Rolfes, aerospace engineer — Munich, Germany

For the first year of my daughter’s life, my partner and I went part-time and we split our parental leave between us equally. Female co-workers were supportive, but I received more pushback from male colleagues. They’d tell me: “I thought you wanted to climb the career ladder.” Some even suggested that my partner’s maternal instincts would make my presence unnecessary.

There’s a lack of role models for hands-on fathers, and many men fear underperformance, so they prefer to leave the role to their female partners. Traditional gender roles don’t help, or the social stigma associated with sending an infant to daycare for the whole week. There aren’t enough spots for babies and toddlers at

pattern ▶ Struktur
exhibit sth.
 ▶ etw. ausstellen, zeigen
legacy ▶ Erbe; hier: (elterliche) Prägung
aerospace engineer
 ▶ Luftfahrtingenieur(in)

pushback (US)
 ▶ Widerstand
maternal
 ▶ mütterlich
hands-on ▶ zupackend; hier: sich aktiv beteiligend
infant ▶ Kleinkind

daycare ▶ Tagesbetreuung; auch: Kinderkrippe
spot ▶ hier: Platz
toddler ▶ Kleinkind
crèche [kreʃ] ▶ Krippe
exhaustion [ɪgˈzɔːstʃən]
 ▶ Erschöpfung

set in
 ▶ sich einstellen
precious [ˈpreʃəs]
 ▶ wertvoll
accelerate sth.
 ▶ etw. beschleunigen, voranbringen

career growth
 ▶ berufliche Entwicklung
in the short term
 ▶ auf kurze Sicht
give a talk
 ▶ einen Vortrag halten

caregiving
 ▶ Pflege; hier: Betreuung
attitude
 ▶ Einstellung

POLICIES FOR NEW DADS IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES

UK: two weeks’ paid paternity leave, taken on consecutive days. Employees receive £151.97 or 90 per cent of their weekly income — depending on which is lower

USA: 12 weeks’ unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act

Japan: Four weeks’ flexible paternity leave before and after the birth, paid at 80 per cent of the employee’s salary, plus 12 months of childcare leave (first six months paid at two thirds and the rest at half of salary), which can be used until the child turns three

Brazil: Five working days of paid leave at the time of birth

Germany: Up to three years, during which time parental allowance is available — a minimum of €300 and a maximum of €1,800, depending on salary

Spain: A total of 16 weeks’ paid paternity leave. The first six weeks must be taken straight after the birth, while the rest must be taken before the child turns one.

paternity leave
 ▶ Vaterschaftsurlaub
act ▶ hier: Gesetz

turn ▶ hier: werden
parental allowance
 ▶ Elterngeld

crèches. If society were more accepting, it’d be easier for parents to organize a parental leave model that’s right for them.

Working part-time with a new-born involves a lot of planning and communication. Exhaustion sets in at times, but experiencing precious moments, like my daughter’s first word, make it all worth it. While parental leave hasn’t accelerated my career growth in the short term, it hasn’t slowed it down. I gave a talk about my experience at work to inspire other men to change their views on caregiving and parental leave. Times are changing. So should attitudes towards parenting.

“Times are changing and so should attitudes towards parenting”

STEFFEN ROLFES, Germany



Steffen Rolfes, Germany

UK and US parental leave changemakers

Business Spotlight spoke to two experts who help companies and parents navigate parental leave.

AMY BEACOM is founder and CEO of the Center for Parental Leave Leadership, a consultancy and coaching service, based in Oregon, in the US, which supports companies, working parents and international organizations.

DR NATALIE PARSONS is co-founder of the tech company Parent Promise, in Manchester, England, which specializes in reinventing workplace support for new and expecting parents.

What are the big problems with parental leave in the US?

Beacom: The US is the only developed nation without mandated paid parental leave. This means a quarter of mothers go back to work within two weeks of giving birth, and dads rarely get to take leave at all. That’s traumatic for families and dangerous for businesses. The Family and Medical Leave Act provides just 12 weeks of unpaid job-protected leave, which many families can’t afford to take. We also have a growing patchwork of state laws that employers with an increasingly remote workforce must follow. It’s an untenable situation that isn’t working for anyone.

What improvements do the UK’s statutory leave policies need?

Parsons: There shouldn’t be a distinction between maternity and paternity pay. Regardless of how somebody becomes a parent, they should be allowed the same amount of leave. More government funding is needed, so that statutory parental pay at least covers the real living wage.

How can employers be as family-friendly as possible?

P: Speak to their people! Get feedback. Hold workshops to understand parents’ challenges and how they feel about the support they’re given. Everything should be driven by the working parents, who need to be fully involved.

B: Policy is a great start, but it’s how policy is put into practice that matters. Offer manager/parent-aligned training and make it a required part of the off-boarding process. If it’s only as an option, it may be forgotten or only be done by mothers. The systemic issues, such as managers’ lack of understanding or dads’ unawareness of their role, won’t be identified or challenged, and companies will continue to suffer.

How does a good parental leave policy help companies?

B: A strong parental leave policy (at least 12 weeks, gender-neutral and at 100 per cent pay) creates clarity and a level playing field. It’ll attract top talent, increase retention and promote gender diversity.

founder ▶ Gründer(in)

CEO (chief executive officer)
▶ Geschäftsführer(in)

expecting ▶ hier: werdend

mandated ▶ hier: gesetzlich vorgeschrieben

remote
▶ auswärts arbeitend, mobil

untenable [ʌn'tenəbəl]
▶ unhaltbar

statutory ['stætʃətəri]
▶ gesetzlich

aligned [ə'laɪnd]
▶ ausgerichtet, abgestimmt

issue ['ɪʃuː]
▶ Frage, Thema

clarity ▶ Klarheit

retention ▶ hier: Bindung