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By Karen Mattison [Thursday, 04 December 2014](#)

It's time for firms to wake up to the part-time brain drain

Ignoring the growing demand for more flexible senior roles is costing employers dearly in lost talent and experience, says Karen Mattison.



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All round the UK, employers large and small are losing talented people exactly at the point when they would traditionally step up to senior levels, because they need more flexible hours and can't get them.

We're not just talking about women here. With ever-lengthening working lives, having kids is no longer the only key life stage that demands a different approach. Increasingly, people need to change their schedule to accommodate treatment for an illness or care for elderly parents, too.

Plus – whisper it – many want flexibility, just because. An estimated 8.7 million full time workers in the UK – accounting for around two in every five – actually want to work part time or from home more often. And the gender split is roughly 50:50.

Hankering to go part time doesn't signal a loss of drive or ambition – in fact often quite the opposite. But there is a rising tide of demand for more flexible senior positions, yet no vacancies to speak of. Just 3% of all £20,000+ jobs that are advertised openly on the market currently offer part time hours. The inevitable result is that we continue to see talented and experienced people in their 30s and 40s walk away from their careers in droves. It's bad for them and arguably worse for their employers who are losing huge swathes of what would otherwise be the coming generation of corporate leaders.

But there is another way. A few companies are trailblazing flexible working at the top level. Businesses that understand that success doesn't depend on the amount of time spent behind a desk or in meetings, but on what is achieved.

Hence the 'Power Part Time List', now in its third year. [2015's list is a roll call](#) of 50 men and women who work in seriously senior jobs, achieving incredible things – all on less than 5 full days a week. All of whom kick that 'not ambitious' myth into the dust.

They include Pascale Demont, the COO of \$60.7bn (£38.7bn) AXA Investment Managers (4 days/week), and Eileen Mannion, the senior marketing director at Google who was responsible for launching Gmail in EMEA (4 days/week). And Gordon Newlands, a senior partner at EY who, at 50, renegotiated his working structure specifically to create more space for 'downtime' and family – without losing any of his responsibility (works 60% across the year).

Each year I build the list to show people an alternative working world – one that focuses on what is possible. One that inspires and uplifts. But while it's important to celebrate these stories, it's also important to talk about the 'next step' too.

That's why I'm calling upon all employers, recruiters and leaders to think much more imaginatively when it comes to recruiting for that next big job. 'Could this role be worked flexibly?' should be the question built into every job design process right from the start.

The alternative is 10 more years of scratched heads, with senior women struggling to advance or getting sidelined into nice little clerical jobs rather than adding the kind of value that they are capable of. And 10 more years of men feeling that asking for flexibility is career suicide – although they have the right to – because of the bad impression it creates with bosses.

So let's make 2015 the year of change. And let's make Britain a leader in the debate around it. No more 'let's be like the Nordics' or 'let's learn from the Netherlands' – let's be the example for modern, up to the minute working practice.

Karen Mattison is founder of [Timewise](#)