Time is of the essence... exploring the lived experience of parents within Deloitte Ireland
A participatory-photography project conducted by Dr. Maria Quinlan
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Foreword

At Deloitte, we aspire to offer the most inclusive workplace in Ireland for our people. We know from the research that real diversity, people with different backgrounds, perspectives, beliefs and ways of thinking and working together, leads to better decisions and solutions. In order to make an impact that matters for our clients, our people and in society, we need to enable this diversity of thought. The only way we can achieve this is if our people feel they can bring their whole selves to work. Clearly, that means being able to bring and show their “other” selves at work by acknowledging the fact that they are mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts or grandparents.

What does inclusion mean for parents who are balancing careers at Deloitte with the demands of raising children? It can be difficult to get under the skin of what would really make a difference to people, in terms of feeling a sense of balance and belonging, while still progressing their careers. The aim of this project therefore was to give our parents a voice, to try an innovative approach and to see what we could learn and do differently in our business.

We began this project knowing that it is a challenge for parents to balance the competing demands of home and work life. Through this project, we wanted to open a conversation about how we could bring that to life. When at work, parenting can sometimes feel like an invisible facet life. In order to support our people to find the right balance, we needed to bring some of the common challenges to life to help us an organisation to really support our people in achieving in all key spheres of their lives. Photovoice was the ideal medium to do this.

The parents represented here have been so open, sharing their very personal challenges and also their aspirations for themselves and also for their children. What really stood out for me personally were the stories people shared about themselves and the impact that Deloitte can have not only on our own people but also on their families and therefore on society. I was also heartened to see how much positivity shone through in terms of the flexibility people feel they have and the support they receive during the most challenging times.

I wish to thank each of them for their participation and for contributing to our learning and progression. Thank you also to Dr. Maria Quinlan for steering us so expertly through this project. To everyone at Deloitte, I encourage you to read these stories from our colleagues and think about what conversations you can have with each other to ensure everyone can bring their whole self to work and achieve a sense of balance for themselves, their families and their teams.

Brendan Jennings
CEO, Deloitte Ireland
The aim of this project was to explore the lived experience of parents working within Deloitte – to understand their thoughts and feelings regarding the challenges of combining parenting with working within a professional services firm. Their experiences were captured via a method of participatory photography known as photovoice. Photovoice is a research methodology and an advocacy tool which uses photographs, coupled with facilitated group dialogue and photo-captioning, to give voice to people’s lived-experience of a particular issue.1

This photovoice project was conducted with a group of eleven Deloitte Ireland parents: six women and five men. Participants volunteered to a call-out by the Deloitte Ireland Respect and Inclusion Council, and between them they are parents to twenty five children. They selected over sixty photographs to share within this catalogue.

Throughout this catalogue of photographs, we have added our own words sparingly to guide the reader and to gather the photographs into loose overall themes. In the main however, we have attempted to leave the talking to the people who have taken the photographs and who have shared their stories with us.

Putting the employee voice at the centre
Qualitative methods such as photovoice allow for a more in-depth, nuanced exploration of a topic. Because the issues of work and family balance, respect and inclusion are a multi-layered, complex phenomenon, it is a method ideally suited to facilitating participants to explore and represent their thoughts and feelings in this area. Using photographs to give voice to people who often feel unheard and unseen is a person-centred and co-created methodology that can be both a powerful and positive experience for the participants while also being an impactful way of providing deep insight into an issue for the wider organisation and indeed society.

While most use of photovoice has been at the societal level, there is a growing movement towards using it as a tool at an organisational level to investigate phenomena such as culture, climate and engagement.2 Creating space for employees to share their stories, fears, concerns and hopes is key to achieving inclusive workplaces.


Methodology
The project was conducted over three weekly two-hour workshops – Chart 1 outlines the high-level steps involved in this photovoice project.

In the first week the group was introduced to the aims and objectives of the overall project and to the photovoice methodology. Each member of the group was given a digital camera and instruction on how to use it – no prior photographic experience was required for participation.

Based on the overall aims and objectives of the project, the group discussed and brainstormed the themes that they felt they would like to explore via photographs over the three-week project timeframe. The group decided on the following list of broad themes to use to loosely guide their photo-taking over the period of the project:
Current experiences and challenges:
- The challenges of juggling work life with your role as a parent
- The impact of children on personal identity and ambition
- What does Deloitte do well in terms of supporting your role as parent?

Potential solutions
- What does Deloitte need to do better?
- What would an 'ideal' work day look like?

In the second workshop, the participants chose a selection of the photographs from those that they had taken during the previous week to share and discuss with the group. The selected images were projected onto a large screen and each participant described their photographs and the meaning behind them to the group. A group dialogue on the emerging metaphors and themes was facilitated.

For the final workshop, participants again shared a selection of their photographs with the group. They also selected the photographs that they wished to include in the final project catalogue and exhibition.

All three workshops were audio-recorded. After the final workshop each participant was sent a transcription of their narrative description of each of their photos. Each participant reviewed and edited their final selection of photographs and the accompanying narrative that they wished to include with them.
Findings

1. The work and family time-crunch
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1. The work and family time-crunch

One of the key themes which emerges from the photographs and associated group discussion with parents in this study is the issue of time. Time for work and time for active participation in family life becomes a delicate balancing act which can be thrown off-kilter in a myriad of ways due to the inherent unpredictability and inflexibility of parenting, combined with a high-pressure, highly-demanding work environment.

“*I feel like my life is dictated by the clock and calendar – at every time, every day, I know where I need to be. I’m always planning ahead... meetings have to run on time because they’re typically back to back and I have to leave on time in the evening, so I can get to after-school on time.*” (Sinead)

This tension of being against the clock all the time can also lead to a sense of loss amongst the parents. Some of them note the loss to their own sense of personal identity or time for themselves. Others feel a sense of loss around time or events that they miss out on with their children. Related to this is a strong desire amongst parents to savour the positive moments and to ensure they prioritise getting the balance right while their children are still small and making that investment in their family.

“*My life feels like it’s on fast-forward... this moment is just trying to pull back a bit of that time.*” (Tamara)
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Figure 1.

This is the clock in my kitchen. I suppose it’s not the clock in this case, it’s the specific time that I want to draw out: 8.10. My wife works too and leaves early to be in work for 7.00 so she can then leave at 4.30ish to pick up the kids. I therefore drop the kids to crèche in the morning which opens at 08.00. Morning time in the house with me and the three kids is just carnage, there’s no other way of describing it. Trying to get the kids dressed and look in someway presentable is a daily challenge. The eldest is a little older now, so she is a little bit more self-sufficient and can make a good attempt at getting herself dressed, but even with that, by the time you have the third one dressed the first one is nearly undressed again. And then the eldest might want a plait in her hair, I wouldn’t have a clue how to even go about trying to do it so it’s never straightforward. Somehow we do manage it though and I get them all in the car and dropped off safely at crèche just after 8.00.

8.10 is therefore the first chance I get to breathe out, exhale and start to think about my workday ahead. And then fast forward 12 hours - 8pm is bedtime in our house. So the nights I’m not football training I always try to get home in time so I can put them to bed. I try to make it a priority - and to be honest it’s not that hard for me to be home by that time most days. The bedtime routine starts about 7.30 every evening and all going to plan the lights are turned off by 8.05. This is post the ordeal of getting them into their pyjamas, the nightly fight over who picks the story and all that good stuff. And again about 8.10 all the Lego is back in the box the clothes are in the washing basket (in theory anyway, half the time nothing ever goes back into the box and the clothes stay on the floor) but again 8.10pm is the time where you get to sit on the couch, maybe flick on the telly or open your laptop and see what emails are after coming in and generally just relax.

So I suppose the point of that picture is 8.10 in the morning and 8.10 in the evening mark a good time when I can finally relax for different reasons. I have a pretty demanding job which can be fairly stressful at times but a lot of the time (not all the time) the most stressful part of my day is outside of work. So that is what 8.10 signifies.
I picked a clock as one of my pictures because I feel like my life is dictated by the clock and calendar - at every time, every day, I know where I need to be. I’m always planning ahead... meetings have to run on time because they’re typically all back to back and I have to leave on time in the evening, so I can get to after-school on time and get home and do whatever they have to do in the evening and then... it just keeps going and going. It was a 8.45 last night when in theory they were in bed but I could hear them laughing upstairs! And that used to be earlier but as they’ve gotten older it’s later... my space in the evening has gotten smaller and smaller, it was a quarter to nine so I said I’d take the photos for this project now... and that’s kind of my day, I’m always trying to squeeze things in... like what’s the couple of extra things I need to do, I’ve done work, I’ve done everything I need to do with the kids, spent time with them and then there’s a whole load of things to do... arrange lifts for who’s bringing who to birthday parties and what match are they going to, what project or sports equipment is needed the next week... so there’s always other things in the evening after they’re gone to bed, I usually have another 20 minutes or half an hour of that, so by the time I get to sit down it’s late... I take a deep breath at whatever time that might be, an hour or so later... so just for me ever since I’ve had kids whatever day it is, it’s the clock dictates everything for me.

I’m always trying to squeeze things in.
This photograph was me behind the bus as it was just taking off... but thankfully I had just gotten off it. I wasn’t running for it which is normally what I’m doing. So this photograph was kind of to represent that since becoming a parent, I’ve had to, for the first time in my life, make sure I leave work at a specific time, to be at the crèche and leave the house at a specific time to be at work so that I can leave early and be at the crèche because my husband does the drop off. This is kind of my life now - it’s always run through a timetable... I have to be somewhere all the time and I suppose that was probably my biggest challenge of becoming a parent, never mind with work but even becoming a parent, was that all of a sudden I had to be somewhere all the time and I wasn’t just chilled and I could do whatever I want. This is the time-table aspect of having a child.
The parents within the study highlight the unpredictable nature of their children’s needs, especially when their children are very young. For example children being sick, needing extra care during the night, needing to be taken out of crèche and so forth can’t be scheduled.

“That’s something you have to adjust to when you become a parent… you can plan all you want but if something comes up you may have to drop everything and pick them up from crèche, or whatever the emergency of the day requires.” (Shane)

This unpredictability is mirrored for many of the parents within their working environment, with unexpected client needs and last-minute requests, tenders etc. needing to be accommodated often at short-notice. This can create a challenging time-pressure crunch, with both roles vying for attention.

Allied to unpredictability, parenting duties have an inherent inflexibility for many of the parents within the study. Caring for children requires significant effort and routine which parents must attend to before their working day begins and again once their working day is over. There are crèche drop-offs and pick-ups to be done, breakfast, bedtimes, bath-times, homework, lunches and dinner to be made.

“…endless washing, dirty dishes, making lunches, administering Calpol, constant tidying up… that encapsulates the madness that is everyday life with four kids.” (Donncha)

“Morning time in the house with me and the three kids is just carnage, there’s no other way of describing it.” (Shane)

“…morning time is just chaos, absolute chaos… I’ve got to be in a meeting in 20 minutes, [the kids] have got to get to school and then all of a sudden I have to abandon everything.” (Sinead)

Children obviously require a significant amount of care and attention from their parents - this is the so-called ‘second-shift’ of work that parents are required to fulfil. Children also have a need for routine and many of the parents within the study, particularly those who parent alone, or whose spouse also works outside of the home, have a certain level of inflexibility when it comes to starting work early, staying late, or travelling overnight. Again,

1a. Reconciling unpredictable and inflexible demands from family and work

this inflexibility can be at odds with the Deloitte culture which, while offering flexibility in many ways, also requires significant flexibility from employees, particularly when they are client-facing.

Weekends and evenings are a time when many employees in highly-pressured and competitive professional services firms catch-up on extra pieces of work which may need to be fulfilled. For the parents within this study, evenings and particularly weekends, are a time when family-life also needs to take precedence. This adds further stress to the time available to them to fulfil their work role fully. Many highlight the stress and guilt associated with feeling like they cannot perform either role – as parent, or as employee – to the best of their ability.

“...I'm halfway through reading a story at bedtime and then realise I actually haven't paid attention to a word I've read out, because my mind is still at work.” (Torunn)

“...when I'm at work I'm always thinking of my son and when I'm at home with him I'm always thinking that I should be at work... I'm not giving work or family 100% but they're always on my mind.” (Aishling)

“Kids aren't selective on the nights they choose to disrupt your sleep... Coping with the lack of sleep while still maintaining acceptable work standards is a constant challenge.” (Shane)
This was at the end of a particularly bad day at work, a Monday... one of those days where everything went wrong, a million emails, problems and clients looking for me. I had no time to get to everything at work and when I finally made it home my child was very emotional. His homework hadn't gone well and I'm sure he was picking up on my negative vibes as well. So, I said let's go... we're getting our hurls and our sliotars, and we're going down to the hurling wall and we're going to hit sliotars really hard against the wall. We did that for 45 minutes straight and I felt amazing. I felt back, part of something, real again as opposed to living in a work bubble. The physical activity grounded me, the benefits for your mental health and your state of mind, and your ability to work, to parent, have a proper night's sleep are enormous.

This is my kitchen table, which is covered in washing, clean washing actually even though some of it is on the floor. That is actually clean washing! So I'm not joking you this could stay like this for weeks... this is actually not a bad version of my kitchen table... it's reasonably tidy compared to most other weeks. This could stay like this for weeks and I will not bring those clothes upstairs because that is not high up enough on my list of priorities... they can just stay there. And the table is actually strategically positioned behind a pillar in the middle of the kitchen. So if I'm sitting in the right place I can actually not see it.
This is a screen grab I took from my phone. In the background is my eldest on her first day of school but I think the point of this photo is really to get across the impact of the dreaded missed call from crèche. At this stage we're well aware that a missed call from crèche is never a good thing - they're generally not ringing to say everything is grand and wish you a great day... something is up. I like to know what I'm doing every week and plan out my week and my days - generally I'm pretty good at being organised. Next thing a missed call from the crèche comes in and that can put an abrupt end to any plans you possibly had for your day or potentially your week. The first emotion you get is clearly worry, hoping everything is alright and nine times out of ten it is - one of the kids has a temperature and you allow the crèche to give them Calpol or whatever it is. But sometimes that's not what it is and you have to go collect them and that just upends everything you have planned. That's something you have to adjust to when you become a parent that you clearly wouldn't have had before you have kids - you can plan all you want but if something comes up you may have to drop everything and pick them up from crèche, or whatever the emergency of the day requires.

So this is the reality then... endless washing, dirty dishes, making lunches, administering Calpol, constant tidying up. That kind of encapsulates the madness that is everyday life with four kids.
So this is the morning time, and morning is just chaos, absolute chaos, so that’s all the schoolbags there and my laptop bag and in the middle of all that is a teddy bear and that’s a worry-maker. They have them on their bags to put their worries into. It’s cute actually… and there were worries in there this week and I was given out to for not having checked, in theory I’m not meant to be checking as the monster is meant to be eating the worries! My six year old wrote in it “I’m worried you’ll forget me… forget to collect me”, which has never happened. But it’s a big thing at the moment, it’s her big fear at the moment, there’s nothing I can say to change it, it’s never happened, it’s never even come close to happening, but she’s convinced I’m going to forget her… your heart sinks you’re thinking why does she think that? Then you’re kind of psychoanalysing, thinking what does this mean, is it because I’m working and I’m not always there and anyway you could drive yourself demented, so I just try and listen.

But that little fella hanging out of the bag just kind of sums up the fact that in the morning when I’m getting them ready and getting the bags ready and everything is going to plan and then all of a sudden she says “did you not check my worry maker?” Then you read the thing and you’re thinking oh my god it’s absolute chaos I’ve got to be in a meeting in 20 minutes, you’ve got to get to school and then all of a sudden I have to abandon everything and we have to have a little chat and say we’ll come back and talk later.

In the morning anything can happen in our house – a bottle is lost, or a pencil is missing, or one of the kids was meant to bring something into school today and this is the first I’ve heard of it. And even on the days where everything goes right it still feels chaotic to be honest… because we’re all trying to get out the door at the same time. I always feel when they get to school and I’m on the Luas, my day is a success actually, I’m thinking that’s actually my success, I’m going to be on time for work and everyone’s where they’re meant to be, this is actually a score for me.
Prior to kids coming along when you went to sleep at night time, there's a good chance the next time you'd wake up is when the alarm clock went off. It's seldom nowadays your night's sleep isn't interrupted by coughing or crying. Linked to that, something you have to adapt to pretty quickly as a parent is that your time is no longer your own... and neither is your bed. At least once a week in the middle of the night you might hear small footsteps coming across the landing as one of the kids heads towards your room. The nights you hear them coming you can head them off at the door and coax them back to their own room.

Other nights you might not hear the footsteps and wake up with two much smaller people in the bed than you went to sleep with as your wife made a run for the spare room at some stage during the night. Sometimes, especially when they're very small, bringing them into bed is a conscious decision. The easiest thing to do when they won't settle and you have to be up for work in a few hours, is just put them in the bed beside you as they then typically go back to sleep. Other times, when they're a little bigger and more mobile, they somehow manage to squeeze in unbeknownst to you until you awake a couple of hours later with a small foot in your ear and at that stage there's no moving them. So you just settle in for a night of disrupted sleep.

The point of this really is that the kids aren't selective on the nights they choose to disrupt your sleep. It could be on a weekend but also just as likely to be the night before you have a big presentation or back to back meetings for the day. The knock on effect of this is that sometimes through lack of sleep you're not firing on all cylinders at work and your colleagues or your clients have no idea why and can just chalk it down to poor performance. Coping with the lack of sleep while still maintaining acceptable working standards is a constant challenge.
It's just a completely different reality once you have kids. They always come first.

This is Fionn, my 2 and half year old trying out his photography skills while I try to cheer on Luke (9) at his GAA match. Saturday morning is divide and conquer - I take my oldest son who's the nine year old to his game and I take one of the twins (two twins on the side-line just wouldn't work). I really enjoy going to the matches and kicking a ball around with Luke and Fionn at the end. My wife takes the two girls to dancing lessons. Saturday is busy, taking the older two between activities and you could have a birthday party thrown into the mix. Sunday is definitely our relaxing day with no planned activities. It's a huge change from BK (Before Kids) when all your time was your own, it's just a completely different reality once you have kids. They always come first.
This picture is very typical, it struck me that a lot of the things I was taking pictures of in this context are quite banal I suppose. I mean they’re fairly universal experiences to some extent... All of my kids do lots of sports which is great, but particularly in this instance, this is Lily playing camogie, which she only started taking an interest in four or five months ago. Up until that she steadfastly refused to get involved in any sports, which wasn’t great, but we’re delighted now that she’s very invested in football and camogie, mostly driven by her friends and so on, but still fantastic.

Anyway in this picture we were playing Na Fianna who have this ground right by the airport and you can actually see the plane landing in the background.

It doesn’t come through quite as dramatic as it was in real life but these things were literally roaring down every five minutes and the pitch is there, there’s trees, there’s roads, and then there’s the runway. So anyway it was actually quite an unusual setting for this kind of thing and it was just something that captured. A) this is the typical Sunday, so yes I’m in taxi driver mode, which is a little bit easier at the moment because my son Joe can’t play football because he has a broken arm - normally we would be trying to manage things logistically, how are we going to be here and how is he where he needs to be as well, that’s always the trade off, and B) the fact that there was something quite unusual going on in the background I tried to capture that.
Parents are torn, they are pulled in many directions at once, often feeling like they are doing neither job to the level that they would like to be doing it. Several highlight the simple day to day activities that they miss out on with their children – such as taking them to school or putting them to bed. The loss of these precious moments is felt keenly by many parents within the sample.

“I spent a lot of time this week taking pictures of abandoned school bags, clothes on beds... because your experience of family is often the stuff they leave behind, especially if you’re late. I try to get home every night by 7.15, but if I don’t, all I see are the remains of the day, you see the stuff left around, but that’s the only trace sometimes if everyone is in bed.” (Ian)

“During the week I don’t eat one single meal with my child.” (Sinead)

“...your kids are only young once and you don’t get that time back. I don’t want to look back in ten years’ time and think I never brought my kids to school.” (Shane)
During the week I don’t eat one single meal with my child. He has lunch at school and the childminder gives him his dinner every evening. So we’ve developed a bit of a ritual over the last few years to make pizza together on a Saturday lunchtime. It’s just a small moment but it’s something we can do together. After all the craziness of the week it’s our opportunity for a little pause on a Saturday afternoon.

Breakfast for dinner. The children are fed dinner in crèche. My husband often works late. There seems no need to make dinner for just me when I get home, So we often eat cereal.
Part of my role is I’m up first in the morning and I’m the ‘waker’ in the house. So this photograph is me about to go into the den. My son Joe is actually quite good, Joe sleeps like a log and when you wake him up he literally jumps out of bed and just gets going. I’m sure it won’t last, but while it does it’s great. The girls though are totally different, well actually at the moment they’re both quite good, but I’ve had some absolutely ferocious experiences with Lily, and yeah the whole range of possible ways to protest have been explored at different times. Anyway I feel quite mean going in in the morning because they hate it, they absolutely hate it, and rightly so. I don’t really like being the waker but I have to because I have to get them up and get them going. Because they’re older now and they can dress themselves, it’s less stressful but you have to actually make sure that they start the process. Then I can get out and get into work at a reasonable time which allows me to get home at a reasonable time. So it’s on the clock and you’re very conscious that, well it’s 6.58 now I have to leave at 7.03 so let’s get going. I try not to be a mean waker and like I said they are all mostly complying at the moment so you don’t have to find yourself getting exasperated, but occasionally it happens and you run out the door and you feel bad for maybe them starting the day in a bad way because they got yelled at just to get going, so I try to avoid that.
I suppose this image is fairly familiar... I spent a lot of time this week taking pictures of abandoned school bags, clothes on beds, because your experience of the family is often the stuff that they leave behind, especially if you're late. I try to get home every night by 7.00 or 7:15 but if you don’t, all you see are the remains of the day kind of thing, you see stuff that’s left around. But that’s the only trace sometimes, if everyone’s in bed. Occasionally if it’s needed I’ll be there in the morning but I’m almost never there in the morning now... which is great because washing those things and having arguments about you know “no you have to bring fruit” and “no that’s not a fruit”, that kind of negotiation... So that’s just the stuff that’s around the house which is most often where I get to see what people are up to or where they’re at.

I travelled quite a bit in the first part of the year - I was away week-on week-off for probably about three or four months... not for the whole week but probably from about Monday to Thursday and you definitely notice the absence and there's a bit of a gap grows when you're away.

My wife had worked the whole time since we had our first child up to the last year. She was a journalist, she worked on a news desk and it’s very difficult to succeed in that on a three day week type arrangement. Then practically speaking she ended up structuring her three day week to be Saturday, Sunday, and Wednesday. So she was at home for much of the week and then her parents would look after the kids on Wednesday so it was great in terms of child care, but it meant then that she never saw me during the week and I never saw her at the weekend and we were kind of mono-parenting, 7 days a week one or the other of us. It was just a bit tough and we were getting into a discussion going... there are different ways of measuring value obviously and she really valued staying in the workplace, and she kind of misses it now, but in terms of financial benefit for all the hassle it caused, was it really worth it?... probably not... but anyway that’s kind of an ongoing challenge to weigh all of that up.
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Figure 16.

Here are my two daughters and we are teaching them how to ride a bike. It’s so important to invest this time. I am afraid because my life feels like it’s on fast-forward... this moment is just trying to pull back a bit of that time.

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Figure 17.

This was just down time with my older kids on Saturday evening watching E.T. because they tend to get a bit neglected at the moment, we try to fit in quality time when the twins are in bed just to do something with the older ones.

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I am here with my children this time, but the gap between the boys represents the idea of “am I present?” or “am I present enough”, both physically and mentally? Coming home from work, managing to switch off psychologically can be really challenging. I can be halfway through reading a story at bedtime and then realise I actually haven’t paid attention to a word I’ve read out, because my mind is still at work. So how to make sure that I am really present is a big challenge. This summer my husband took a lot of parental leave, so they were spending a lot of time with him over the summer and I’m conscious that I need to carve back time where it’s not all “I just want to be with Daddy”, Daddy is the only one I’m interested in at the moment because they discuss Match Attax and sports together and stuff that I’m struggling to develop an interest in. So, it’s how to carve out that time and presence and do things like picking blackberries together or reading books, that is our thing together.
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The last part of my role during the day is bedtime - I get them dressed and read them a story. The picture above is the book which we pick the stories from every night. The hand belongs to the middle child- when it’s her turn to choose the story she inevitably picks the same story every time and we go through the ritual where she asks the same questions at the same point in the story and then she reacts like it’s the first time she’s heard it. It’s quality time and nice to spend with them and hopefully it’ll stand to them in years to come.

This is a picture of my eldest doing her homework – the homework for that day was identifying words beginning with the letters ‘s’ and ‘a’. I haven’t done her homework with her any evening since she started school - normally her mam does it because she gets home before me. As others in the group have said, their homework is not a big part of your day but it is a massive part of their day and to have you looking over their shoulder means a lot to them. It’s just another thing to be conscious of and to try and fit in to an already busy schedule once every so often. It’s a huge part of their day and they appreciate it, even though it’s fairly simple, it’s big to them, so it’s just appreciating that.
This up the top of Ticknock Hill which is at the start of the Dublin mountains. Every September for the last couple of years we’ve gone up there to pick blackberries, except for last year because the weather was really bad and by the time we got out all the blackberries were gone. Of course my son missed the experience last year so I had to make sure we got out this autumn. It’s a bit of a trek to the top and then you’re rewarded with a stunning view of the city. Life and parenting are a constant uphill trek but there are some moments when you feel you are at the top and can look back for a minute, catch your breath and admire the view. It’s important to enjoy those moments.

Portmarnock strand. It’s a photo of my husband, my two children and my nephew.

The water was freezing. I was thinking how important my family are to me and how time off work to spend with them means you come back with a fresh head.
Yesterday I stayed at home in the morning as we had a guy coming to look at our windows and I had to meet him at the house at 9.30. My eldest started school about four or five weeks ago so I took the chance to walk her to school. In doing so I copped that I hadn’t actually walked her to school since she started, apart from on her very first day. The bottom half of the picture, is just her holding my hand on the way as we walked over. She was chattering away about nothing in particular but they were big big stories to her. I’m asking her the odd question and she’s flat out talking as the stories start to get mixed up with none of them having a beginning or an end. Then as we got close to the school she let go of my hand and started walking a few steps ahead which is what’s in the top half of the picture.

Your kids are only young once and you don’t get that time back. The whole theme for all these pictures is that your kids are only young once and you don’t get that time back. I don’t want to look back in 10 years’ time and think I never brought my kids to school or whatever it was… this photo represents that it was nice to walk and bring her to school and just have that, which I haven’t had this year. I just hadn’t consciously thought of doing it as being at my desk for 9.00 was the priority, but it’s certainly something I’ll make an effort to do more often. I can generally make the time up in the evenings without too much hassle. There’s going to come a day in the not too distant future where she will no longer want to hold my hand or tell me every single detail of her day so it’s important I avail of the times that she does. So that’s what that picture is, just the two of us walking hand in hand and enjoying each other’s company.
With work and family life already vying for more time than is available each day, the ability to have time for oneself, for any kind of self-care, recharging, taking time-out, becomes almost impossible. Parents within the study highlight the impact of trying to balance work with family life on their identity, and their sense of self.

“...as parents, we always have to be somewhere, we always have to do something, we’re always late, we’re always running from work to home, from one activity to the next so that sense of freedom has disappeared somewhere along the line.” (Sinead)

“It’s a huge change from BK (Before Kids) when all your time was your own, it’s just a completely different reality once you have kids. They always come first.” (Donncha)

“Who am I? A mother, a wife, a daughter... a colleague? It can be too much some days.” (Tamara)

“...my own time to do my own thing, that just doesn't sort of exist... sometimes I just sort of lose my own identity... like who am I?” (Sinead)

“It doesn’t leave much room for you as a person - there’s work, there’s home and then you kind of get pulled between the two of them.” (Ian)

Parents also talk about how work and family can be quite separate or compartmentalised so they operate with different aspects of their selves in their home versus work lives.

1c. Parenting and the impact on personal identity and personal time
I suppose it kind of struck me through the week that a lot of my time as a parent is spent being somewhere else, or on your way to somewhere else. This is on the way to get the bus to the Dart in the morning. The other thing is how much of a divide there is between work and home, that’s why I took a picture of a fence or a barrier. Maybe it’s my personality but I tend to quite strongly compartmentalise - so unless something happens like there’s a crisis, I find myself very rarely thinking about home stuff when I’m at work unless I have a specific reason to. Then by contrast I do try to be present when I’m at home but there is a big divide between the two and sometimes things cross over, and sometimes it can be difficult to manage that divide, that barrier. It can be difficult for people to be on both sides of the barrier at the same time. It doesn’t leave much room for you as a person - there’s work, there’s home and then you kind of get pulled between the two of them.

It doesn’t leave much room for you as a person.

Who am I? A mother, a wife, a daughter, a daughter-in-law, a friend and a colleague? It can be too much some days.
Time is of the essence... exploring the lived experience of parents within Deloitte Ireland
A participatory-photography project conducted by Dr. Maria Quinlan

Figure 26.

This photograph is about the ropes – representing that you’re pulled in so many directions as a working parent, you’ve got work pulling on you, you’ve got your children pulling on you, you’ve got your relationship, you’ve got extended family that have support needs, trying to stay connected with friends and there’s just so much going on so you’ve got to be quite strong and resilient to deal with it all, so it’s that challenge.

Figure 27.

This photograph for me represents the idea that I have four layers in my life. My former life, my work life, my family life and my friends. They are all separate but also connected. It’s about getting a balance.
This is a photograph that I called ‘gadgets’. This would not be untypical, I tried to get a picture of all the things in our house being charged at the same time but there was no chance of having them all in the same room… but you have got a fair representation here. You have a big TV remote, (TV causes more friction than any other single thing in their lives I think at the moment), Anna is on the Xbox, Lily has commandeered Anna’s iPad as a result. I think it’s a constant challenge for every parent, gadgets are a part of their lives, being online is a part of their lives, you can’t pretend otherwise, you can try and put rules around it. Sometimes to be honest you’re very glad of it. Electronic devices are fantastic parents in their own way, in terms of the ability to command attention and give you a little bit of free time.

Gadgets and who gets to go on what is a big parenting topic and trying to negotiate that and helping them to figure out what’s fair and what’s not fair. We had a big discussion this year about Anna getting a phone because a lot of her friends have had phones for a long time, she’s 11 now. I kind of hoped in my mind we could hold off until she is 12 but I suppose you find a lot of these decisions are made for you by other parents, because if every other kid has a phone you know what’s the point in saying no, all you’re doing is making them stand out. But figuring out how to try to control that and being very aware of all the risks there are but also being quite powerless about them is something that you worry about, but I try not to worry about it too much and be sensible and I suppose the main thing is, as people are they starting to understand what’s good what’s bad what’s right and what’s not, and how to behave because it’s as true online as it is offline. I suppose you can only hope that rather than put boundaries around them you hope to give them a sense of that… but it’s tough.
As a single parent you feel isolated at times.

I’m actually in this photo, it was taken by another parent. I’m on my own with my son in terms of parenting and over the years there have been tough times juggling work and parenting. At some point it struck me that there’s more out there, there are people out there that can help, there are people out there that like to do the same things as me, like go to hurling matches or surfing with a bunch of crazy 10 year olds. They are on the same rollercoaster and we’re all in it together! So I got involved in our local GAA club. My son and I have made great friends in this group of people and I see them now as my extended support system. I know if I picked up the phone to any one of those parents, if I needed them, I know they would be there for me. For me that’s hugely important.

As a single parent you feel isolated at times, you feel vulnerable, you feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders, you feel like you can’t talk to anyone about even small issues that are going on with work, or with your child. We had so much fun that day in Tramore and I’m so glad I’ve reached out to my community and got involved... just being part of something like that has changed my outlook, is great for my wellbeing and for my son’s as well!
This is in the hospital with my new born. My understanding of work is that work is a means to an end as opposed to an end in itself. So there were times until around five years ago that I was thinking that my life path was to get a good job and a wonderful career and everything else. But then when I started thinking about having kids and actually had kids I reviewed my priorities, so now I see that having a good career and being successful at work is for me a way to contribute to our lifestyle. But I always need to remember that it’s not a goal itself, it’s just a sub-goal or a broader goal which is to share those moments with family. So this is the reason why I want to have a good career in Deloitte - to be able to support them through their lives. I ended up having kids quite older than the average Irish man, so I will probably need to put in some extra effort instead of retiring... to support them when they want to embark on university or some complex career path and I want to be there for them. So that is my interpretation of career and my understanding of what career is all about.
I was just trying to see the comparison between homework and our work.

On the left is my work and on the right is my daughter’s. You know there’s just so many similarities… and you know her world is just as important as mine.

She is the future.

I have a nine-year-old son and on Sunday morning we travelled to Tramore with his hurling team. We got up at some ridiculous hour to drive down for an under-ten hurling blitz. We had surfing booked for the afternoon for 40 kids and a few brave adults! After the blitz we were walking down the hill to the surf school and I passed a sign for another surf school which was called ‘Freedom’. It struck me that we were on such a schedule that day, everything was planned out that even if I’d wanted to I didn’t have the freedom to do something different… because we were on such a tight routine. I think that’s kind of indicative of parenting… we always have to be somewhere, we always have to do something, we’re always late, we’re always running from work to home, from one activity to the next that sense of freedom has disappeared somewhere along the line. As a parent you just have to accept that it’s not coming back for a long long time. So it just struck me as I passed this sign, that’s not the way I’m going, I can’t take that right turn even if I wanted to. But you quickly move on and get in the moment and move forward with your journey!
What I was trying to show here was the different faces of me, sometimes I feel like I'm a split personality. So these are my work shoes and my 'me' shoes I suppose outside work, and in the middle of it all there's a doll... which is the other face of me so to speak, as a mum. I've tried to make the doll come out more colourful because that's what takes priority, ultimately. If I have to make a choice, it's the two girls, they are the ones that get priority... but that's really difficult. I have work and I am a mum but I'm probably not much else outside of that in reality... like my own time to do my own thing that just doesn't sort of exist, what is that? For me I just don't have any time to do anything outside probably work and looking after the girls and being there for them. So I was thinking about that just trying to juggle... like home life is great and work has its positives and work allows me to do all the things I get to do with my family and lots of those things are positives, but it is bloody hard sometimes. And I think sometimes I find I just sort of lose my own identity... like who am I? I go into work and it's quite formal in lots of ways, and people wouldn't necessarily know about my life outside work. I sometimes feel that it's quite separate but ultimately, I'm in the middle trying to balance it all... so it's a big juggle at times. Sometimes I don't know how it all works if I'm honest... somehow it all comes together. So I called this photograph "the many faces of me".
I was on a flight home from Turkey and I was randomly listening to music on the entertainment system on the plane and I heard this song by Nina Simone, “Work Song”. It made me think about how I have a Nina Simone piano book at home and I hadn’t actually heard the song properly before, so I thought I must dig that out. On the Saturday after we had our first photovoice workshop, it was still on the piano when I came in at about half eleven. I had taken my youngest guy to the GAA but one of the other parents had taken them off for a play date for the afternoon and my wife and my other son were off at his match somewhere, so I was actually home alone, for like an hour, and usually when I have time alone the thing I do is play piano. Following on from the discussion we’d had in this group, I started thinking about different things.

That song is about someone working on a chain gang and that whole thing. So after the discussion we had in the group that week, I was thinking of you know I feel like I’m working every day. The last line on each verse is ‘but there’s still a long way to go’ or something like that, it’s never-ending. I had that in my head and I was thinking about that so I thought it was really relevant, but at the same time I was thinking about how my own life has changed quite a bit in terms of how, as my kids have got older... actually more free time does appear now and I’m coming out the other side of that in terms of how that happens a bit more frequently now. Because my eldest now is 11 and he’d be off with his friends and you mightn’t see him over the whole weekend. He’d be gone out places and you just get those little bits of time more and you sort of feel that you’re reclaiming some of that extra free time. But the other thing that I was thinking about as I was doing this was that I do find that work for me is sort of a sanctuary place to go to... particularly there are several months of the year when I’d be in the office on a Saturday or Sunday, but I also find that time really peaceful... you’re working, there’s no one else in the office. Work sometimes is that sanctuary place where you can get that head space. So that was what I was thinking about when I took that photo.
Findings

2. Flexibility – in principle but not always in practice
Findings
2. Flexibility – in principle but not always in practice

In many ways, the parents within the sample highlight the positive aspects of flexibility within Deloitte. For many, particularly those in more senior positions, they have a certain amount of autonomy and can manage their days in ways that suit them. If they need to work from home or collect a child unexpectedly from the crèche, most parents within the study are happy that they can do so, and feel supported by their managers and colleagues.

“I do have that flexibility... when I need to work from home I usually can. I didn’t have that in my last job and that’s one of the main reasons that I’m happy in Deloitte... honestly, that flexibility is key to the constant juggling.” (Sinead)

“It’s great that I have the flexibility with work that I can start at 9:30 (and drop my daughter to school). I really enjoy that I can incorporate one of my kid’s days into my day.” (Donncha)

“I have decided that I’m not going to work so many long hours... I want to be home early. If there is any urgency I can put in a couple more hours of work when the kids are in bed.” (Marco)

Where things get a little more complicated and constrained is in relation to the use of formal flexible working options. Many of those in this study highlight that while they may be entitled to use flexible working options in theory, the reality of their workload means that taking time out just creates more stress, as they either end up having to work while theoretically on a day-off, or they have to deal with a ‘tsunami’ of work waiting for them once they come back from leave, as no-one has been assigned to look after it in their absence.

“I take parental leave in the summer and when I come back a lot of the work will still be there waiting for me. It’s like a tsunami hitting me when I come back. So I have this great flexibility and I can take this unpaid time off but actually the work hasn’t gone away.” (Sinead)

For parents within the sample who have availed of formal flexible working options such as shorter working weeks or parental leave, it has often ended up being very stressful. Their workload pressure does not reflect their reduced hours and thus they end up working while on their scheduled time off,
adding to the guilt and pressure of not being able to fulfil either parent or employee role to a level where they feel satisfied. The ability to set and protect boundaries when you are meant to be off work is seen as particularly challenging within the high-pressure, high-performance culture within Deloitte.

“...I've had a lot of great support from managers... and I've loads of support at home but there just doesn’t seem to be any recognition that you do have other stuff going on outside of work, that you've committed to a part-time role, but we're still going to give you a five-day role and expect you to do it.” (Aishling)

“I was working a four day week at the time and I probably worked every one of my days off for about four or five weeks.” (Torunn)

There is also some confusion over what kinds of flexibility are facilitated within Deloitte, with a general sense that it can depend on your department, seniority-level and your partner’s open-ness to flexibility.

“...It shouldn’t be the case that you can only get to do that (work flexibly) because you’ve assumed a level of seniority... I see inconsistency as well... it shouldn’t be just the luck of the draw whether you can be flexible or for it to depend on somebody’s mood on a certain day.” (Ian)

The other side of flexibility is the flexibility that is required of employees – to be available outside of core working hours, to travel overnight, sometimes for extended periods, to take calls in the evenings and weekends. Again, while flexibility can go both ways, the overall level of work required of employees is seen as making the balance of home and work life particularly difficult to maintain.

Thus while there is flexibility in principle within Deloitte, parents within the study believe that accessing it in practice can be difficult.
This is my normal mechanism to get going at work on any given morning! Coffee and work are my priorities. Less so, during the week at least, is the state of disarray of my house... if you look in the background on the couch behind the chair, that's a pile of ironed clothes that have been in that same spot since I don't know when! On the coffee... it's the Frank and Honest one from Centra which I usually pick up after I drop my son to school. From a work point of view we talk about the flexibility we get at work, and I'm very lucky that I am supported in this within my team. Sometimes it's difficult to be frank about what your priorities are in the constant juggle between your home and work lives and to be honest with yourself about that in reality it’s difficult to give 100% to both on a constant basis. As parents we all know it’s not possible most of the time, however I do have the flexibility from a work perspective in that when I need to work at home I usually can. I didn’t have that at my previous job and that’s one of the main reasons that I’m happy in Deloitte... honestly, that flexibility is key to the constant juggling!
This is an example of the rewards of flexibility. The three guys at home are obsessed with ‘coffee time’ as they call it - having hot chocolates, and of course to make that I have to make myself a coffee. This happened to be a day that my wife was out, and I had to be home to be there when they got in from school. Which happens hardly ever to be fair, but it happened this time, and I just said to the guys in work that I’m not going to be around this afternoon. So in practice there were two/three hours that I was offline. I left at lunch time and was able to do work stuff from like 4.00 until 5.00, and then we’re into checking homework and dinner time and so on. So that’s an example, that worked well, and the reward was we got to have coffee time and hang out and annoy each other and do whatever. But it’s such a rarity that it warranted taking a picture about it, because normally days for me in terms of home are just blank zones. It is usually more that absence is your experience than anything else.
What I was trying to show in this photo is that the phone is great because it gives me flexibility not to be in the office all the time, but it also intrudes on home life. It’s the one thing that makes the split between home and work life really difficult. I find I try when I’m at home to be at home, to be listening to the girls, whatever they want to tell me, if they want to tell me about their day... but inevitably the phone will ring and interrupt, and they have said to me a few times “oh you’re not going on another phone call are you?” It’s always stuck in my mind, I really shouldn’t be doing this because it’s taking away the little bit of time that I have with them.

So I get that sense of dread sometimes in the evening when I see the phone ringing because I have to make the call of do I answer it or can I leave it until they go to bed and figure it out? But it intrudes on that time and kind of forces me back into that work mode, thinking something’s gone wrong for someone to be ringing me after normal hours... so it’s a challenge. We were making this Lego model and the phone kept ringing and I was trying to help as I know they really wanted me to and they’d been waiting to do it with me. Yet sometimes it’s the phone that allows me flexibility and I can do a call on the way home. It’s just that constant, constant battle to be focused in work and be focused at home but it’s impossible a lot of the time. My daughter made this Lego robot, she loves making Lego. But that one was kind of hard because the arms had this robotic thing in them... so I really needed to concentrate because it was actually quite difficult, and the phone kept ringing, and I just felt like, I’m getting stressed and I haven’t even answered the phone. I just keep thinking... my children are 8.00 and 6.00 and they are a lot more self-sufficient, but they still just want you there. They don’t want the phone ringing. They’ll say to me “are you going to answer that?” and if I say “oh I really need to take this”... I can see their faces fall. I’m just torn.
This is around the idea of flexibility, the good and bad points. This is me at 7.30am, when I start work and I normally have a FaceTime with my son because my husband gets up with him and brings him to crèche so that’s how I get to see him in the morning with his bed head and his pyjamas and his giving out that I’m not there. So yeah I suppose, this represents the flexibility I’m afforded by coming to work early so I’m able to leave early and collect him in the evenings, and also I’m really grateful that I don’t have to do the mornings [at home]. I’m really grateful. He’s upset but I’m delighted I don’t have to deal with the havoc of getting out to crèche, and I’m lucky because it’s only three days a week as well so I have the other two days when I do get to get up with him and he is very happy with it... and it means I can get into work early before anyone arrives. I get a good bit done at that time of day so there’s a real work life balance there in that respect.

I think it represents as well the fact that even when I’m at work I’m always thinking of him and when I’m at home with him I’m always thinking that I should be at work and even though I’m lucky enough that I’m in a position where I can only work three days a week, there’s still the balance of the financial aspect of that. It has a huge impact on our life and what we can do outside of work and what we can’t do more importantly, but also it’s all about that balance, I do get to spend that much time with him. This picture probably is working life for me, where I’m not giving either work or family 100% but they’re both always on my mind.
I hadn’t planned to take a picture of a chain but when I saw it, it reminded me and brought to mind a dark day in Deloitte, back in January where I was working a four day week at the time and I probably worked every one of my days off for about 4 or 5 weeks. My son had been sick, he had the flu at that time and he’d been at home while I’d been working at home, on my day off. I’d barely spoken to him all day, he was just lying on the sofa. I had been asked by a partner to send them a memo and, long story short, I got feedback that I needed to “learn the chain”. And that was the day where I wondered if I had joined the army, or is this the sort of culture that we work in where I feel like I’m giving and giving and I’m being told that I need to learn the chain? So it was a day I sort of decided maybe this isn’t somewhere where I’ll ever have a career, I need to refocus my priorities. Maybe this is just a job not a career, and to put stronger boundaries around how I worked, which is so much harder to do than you might think. You might think that’s something you will do and then a few days later I was on annual leave for a day with the family. We were on a train and they were playing games together while I was on the laptop writing a report for somebody else because they needed it and then you’re letting a different person down if you drop it... it’s just very hard, how do you set those boundaries?

It’s probably just a small thing that the partner didn’t even think about what they were saying, but it has such an impact when you feel you’re really stretched in terms of what you’re being asked to deliver relative to the capacity of your role and family constraints.
I was trying to think about things that would be practical, to actually help work life balance. This photo is meant to be my calendar. The red parts, they are outside of the core hours of I suppose 9.00-5.00. Core hours are the hours that everyone is typically around but outside those hours (in the red) my thinking is that meetings shouldn’t be scheduled without asking first. It’s come up quite a bit the last year… there were many standing meetings set up at 8.00 and 8.30. I can always make an exception if there’s a particular situation where I need to do an early meeting, but these standing meetings were regular weekly meetings… every Monday, every Friday, that kind of thing and they were causing quite a lot of difficulty for people but it wasn’t talked about. If you’re dropping kids to school, running to crèche or commuting or whatever, it was just causing me a lot of stress. If I could be asked first instead of assuming, that would just be a better way of working. So instead of slotting in a meeting at say 6.00 on my diary, just ask me can I actually do it. So that was what this photograph is about, probably more of ways of working instead of an official policy per se. It is difficult sometimes to say that I need to do other stuff in the morning, like I need to drop my children to school, it’s important to me, it’s important to them, and maybe it’s my own feeling about being uncomfortable doing it but I’ve got better at saying no definitely… I do think that might have something to do with my grade though because I set my own diary and do get a lot of flexibility, so I feel I can say no... but I just think it’s not really talked about.
Time is of the essence… exploring the lived experience of parents within Deloitte Ireland
A participatory-photography project conducted by Dr. Maria Quinlan

This was a bit of the chaos that happened at the weekend, this is how our little tiny apartment normally looks, with a scooter, and the Lego blocks. I only have one child, the other boy here is my nephew he came over for a sleepover at the weekend so it was bedlam. I suppose this was just about the fact that I am able to do this - this is kind of my positive picture in that I am able to, even though the financial end of things and the career end of things you know, I suppose I'm not developing them in any way. I'm not making them any better at the moment but it's just temporary for now so that we can just do this, just sit down and play and be together.

We've got four kids so there's not much down time... this was the youngest two going for a bath, they're twins, and they love their baths, absolutely love them... it's full on all the time as you can imagine... but bath time is one of the real fun times with the twins, which helps you through the hard work that goes with having kids, sleepless nights, tantrums, sickness. So it's not always smiles, but this is one of the real fun activities for me as a parent.
That's our fridge at home, and at the start of the week we put up one of these - the pink is when my wife is dropping and collecting our kids and the blue is when I am. We don't have a scheduled thing for the morning drop-off, or collect, we decide every Sunday night as it depends what is going on, as to who's going to be there. You can see there, there's a thing that says where the kids are meant to be for whatever it is, whether it be sports or things like that, but also what their lunch is for every day as part of that. I suppose the thing I was reflecting on when I took this photograph was that, one I am fairly privileged to have a lot of flexibility, so actually that week there on that Tuesday morning my son was sick in school so I went home and collected him because I can do that, but it also made me think about the role that partners have around this, where if I decide that I want to go home then everyone else's schedule gets impacted.

I am able to change my schedule but obviously it impacts everyone else - I say I'm not going to be there, tell it to my PA and she changes everything… so it's quite a selfish thing and generally I don't think about the impact that has on other people… it's a great privilege to have that ultimate flexibility. Sometimes I don't have that flexibility but generally you do have a lot of flexibility, which is a great thing about the job, but you have to think about the impact that you have and particularly around that piece – I generally get on my 360 feedback that people want more of my time availability. That's the hardest thing for them, and it's just the impact your own personal life has on everyone else's. And the other thing is that at different times my wife has been either working or not working [outside the home], and at the moment she's working a lot, so that changes the whole perspective of things. So the times that she wasn't working I had a lot more flexibility and freedom and when she is working I need to be a lot more disciplined and it becomes a much more give and take process.
You can see from the light outside of the window that it’s still light when I come home. So, in this time in my life I have decided that I’m not going to work so many long hours which I used to do for the majority of my life, I want to be home early. If there is any urgency I can put in a couple more hours to work on documents when the kids are in bed. I want to be there when the light is still present and able to play with them and to go to a playground when there is still light and play with them at home. The more you become senior, the more you can take some kind of liberty around your life and your work-life balance, but the junior people feel pressure to work all around the clock. As a senior manager myself as well as the directors here, we should really set the pace and be a role model to show that life outside of work can be possible and can work.

It’s a balance... sometimes I’m dragged to a number of different meetings where the real value I bring is a document or a diagram with the full understanding of how the system is going to perform or is going to behave. I don’t need hours to explain it, I can explain it in just 5 minutes. So, if I move my 5 minutes around in a way that I’m comfortable with, it’s probably a privilege of my own position within Deloitte. I believe most of the time we are dragged into very long meetings but actually the value we’re bringing is concentrated in a very short timeframe. So, for example I’ve been dragged into status updates of two hours where I actually only need to speak for 30 seconds to say there is nothing new or everything is ok this week. So, I tend to do these sorts of meetings on Skype, so I can do something else. I believe that everybody is in the same position.
I took this in Dublin airport before I flew out on a business trip. I don’t have to travel too much thankfully with work, I’d say less than once a month—seven or eight times a year I’d have to go somewhere for one or two nights, sometimes it can be longer. I think previously, prior to kids, you might look forward to going away on these kinds of trips, you’d get to experience a new city, meet new people and generally there’d be a nice meal and a bottle of wine involved. Nowadays, you’re kind of going with a little bit of guilt nearly as the impact of being away for a few days has knock on impacts on everyone else, particularly my wife who now has to perform both our roles for the time I’m away. Our routine is that I drop the kids off in the morning and she picks them up in the evenings, so I am conscious that she has to do all that while I’m away… I think we’re both aware it’s a requirement of work as opposed to off enjoying myself but there is that feeling of guilt nonetheless.

Then you also miss the kids even if it’s just for a few nights… they ring you and ask what present are you getting them - they’re not too concerned that you’re away just that you’re bringing them something back but you like to think they miss you. So this picture represents the impact of when you have to go away with work (and I don’t want to over-state it because people travel a lot more than me) but for those nights I am away it does cause disruption.
What I wanted to feature with this is my new parent leave and the reason why I took it. This is my wife in the hospital with the new born and my two daughters, meeting the new born for the first time. I was really glad to have this new parent leave. It was introduced only two years ago so I couldn’t avail of this with the other two, but I was a contractor at the time so I took time off anyway. On this particular occasion it was particularly difficult for me because I was allocated on three projects, I was already over-allocated, and when the time came my colleagues arranged to cover for me. I’m really grateful to them for covering for me on each of those three projects, so I was able to enjoy those moments.

When you experience moments, maybe I’m still in the enthusiastic phase, where I don’t care about the financial issues, career issues, being in three different places at the same time, you just care about what is going on there. I’m completely oblivious of the project I left back at work and I just went back this week and I’m just there for my son and my wife... so that’s me enjoying the first moments with my family.

I was thinking of ideas about how to make work-life balance better, so one thing that came to mind is that I usually take my days off to go on family trips, to visit relatives in Italy or a vacation at the seaside but actually the value of having a certain number of annual leave days is that you can take a day off in the middle of the week, like in this picture, and just play with your kids in the middle of the week. There are plenty of things that are not possible over the weekend so for example, we went to a soft play area and basically it was myself my wife and my three kids, and all the space was for us... and my wife wanted to go shopping in the middle of the week where all the shops are quiet and available. So actually, the possibility is already there and we might feel the pressure if I’m not going on a vacation abroad, I’m not allowed to take a day off, but actually the balance of our annual leave allows us to do these kinds of things. This is the first time I was going to this kind of place, but actually people should be allowed to take some time off and have a different kind of day during the week.
This is my daughter Freya (7), before we take our daily commute to work and her school. Her school is about 4km from our house, the nearest mixed school in the area. I don’t know what we’re going to do next year because she’s getting to the max weight for the seat. It’s a really enjoyable part of my day as she often sings or recites a poem she’s learning in school on her way along. It’s great that I have the flexibility with work that I can start at 9.30. I really enjoy that I can incorporate one of their days into my day, which is brilliant. Leaving/getting home can be more stressful though, as you are constantly struggling between getting that last piece of work out to a client and making it home to help with bedtime and seeing the kids. Most days it’s a case of bringing home the laptop and logging back on after they have gone to bed.

This made me think of being a mum and how one needs to adapt in work and life around existing structures.
This is with my older kids, they are both going into crèche and in those three weeks when I was on paternity leave I was able to bring them to the crèche myself. They were really enthusiastic about dad going with them. I did it a couple of times before, but this time it was for three weeks I brought them to crèche... it was really good, special moments that they will remember that their father was there and not always at work. When I started back at work again this week my oldest kept saying, “oh you need to go to work again?” she believed that it was over. But I believe that they will remember those three weeks that I was with them pretty much 24/7.

My wife stopped working when the first one was born, and the plan is to go back to work in a few years but not for a bit because we have three young kids and it’s impossible. But she will take on a part-time job at some stage and I will be bringing them to school probably, or we’ll share the responsibility over the course of the next years but at the moment she will do the job. I hope to share the responsibility when she wants to go back to work, but it’s not an urgency at the moment. This will be my only experience of bringing them to school for a continuous number of days... otherwise I’ll take annual leave just to take them to school and go to the Christmas party and things like that.
Time is of the essence... exploring the lived experience of parents within Deloitte Ireland
A participatory-photography project conducted by Dr. Maria Quinlan

This is the piano in Pearse Street station - this has become kind of a phenomenon now. Having pianos in railway stations is a ‘thing’, and also at airports. I’ve never seen one being played in airports for some reason, maybe people are in too much of a hurry, but this one gets played a lot. I called this photograph “it’s just there”, and this to me is like the flexibility discussion we had. There is flexibility in Deloitte there is flexibility in your work but it’s kind of just there, no one really knows what to do with it or how to access it... so, I mean with the piano, often I go in and there’s someone plonking away at it, just making a racket and you’re thinking just stop it. Once in a blue moon, you go in and it’s someone playing a Bach sonata or something and it’s amazing, I mean it really contributes to your commuting experience. But most of the time it’s just silent it’s not used at all, so the piano is just there, it’s what people are choosing to do with it that makes a difference, in how I experienced it. What I’m saying is you can only go and play the Bach sonata if you’re trained but nobody says to the guy at the station “you can’t play that piano because you’re not grade 7”, you know if you’re just going to make noise you can still do that.

As Sinead said ‘I have flexibility and I can manage it, but that has a lot to do with the fact that I’m at a certain grade’. It shouldn’t be the case that you can only get to do that because you’ve assumed a level of seniority. If other areas have it figured out and do it better, that’s great for them but that makes me feel worse because now I see inconsistency as well... you know it shouldn’t be the luck of the draw whether you can be flexible or depend on somebody’s mood on a certain day. I know we are a business that is bound by rules but part of the reason we’re successful is because we’re flexible with how we work with clients. But we have to have some common understanding of what’s the shape of the pitch. For example is it ok to say I’m not available before 9.00 but I’m prepared to stay on until 7.00 if I have to, or vice versa? Or to have a travel agreement in place? It is part of the partnership model that it is very much dependent on who you work for and so I think we need to acknowledge that and have a better sense of what does that really mean, because at the moment the flexibility that is there is this vague idea and I think we need to do a better job defining it and setting the right expectations. It shouldn’t be the luck of the draw that one person’s experience means they can take up the flexibility arrangements in Deloitte and make beautiful music out of them and they have a fantastic life, and somebody else just struggles and is stuck hearing discordant notes.
Findings

3. Work-load pressure
Findings
3. Work-load pressure

Professional services companies are oft-cited examples of what have been termed ‘greedy-organisations’. They demand a very high level of commitment and standards of excellence from their employees, and in return they provide excellent training and high levels of remuneration. Professional services firms attract a very high-standard of employee, with a high-level of dedication and commitment to their careers.

“Everyone here takes on a lot of responsibility and we make sure things are done... that's just the style of work, but it's kind of relentless.” (Sinead)

Like other professional services firms, Deloitte’s work culture is described as extremely pressurised by parents within the study. There is simply more work than people or time to do it.

“I work part-time and for the first two years I really struggled with the amount of work I had to do... everyone is overloaded.” (Aishling)

“My work load feels very high and when I look around at everyone else I think the same... it's relentless and never-ending.” (Sinead)

“...if there was a simple thing that would make a difference... just reduce the workload. There needs to be less work. I cannot keep on top of emails.” (Torunn)

This can be somewhat more manageable for people who have the time to come to work early, stay late and work weekends when needed. Once children enter the equation however, parents no longer have the flexibility or luxury of free time to dedicate to work on a consistent basis.

Many parents within the sample believe that the work-load that is required of employees is excessive and leads to what some term a ‘burn-out’ culture, where people are pushed beyond their limits.

“We've got this sort of burnout culture... that allows you to surpass your limit before you've realised that you've surpassed it.” (Laura)

My youngest daughter insisted that I buy her this notebook when we were doing the shopping last weekend, and I didn’t realise the message that was on it until we got home. It says ‘Life is too short to limit yourself’ – I hate this message with a passion. I think this is a major cause of stress in people’s lives. People have limits, and it’s very relevant to working in Deloitte and managing family obligations and all the rest, humans have limits. My tendency is to go way beyond my limit before I’ve realised that I’ve passed it and I know that about myself but I don’t think that’s something that gets acknowledged in the workplace, so you’re kind of allowed to go past it. We’ve got this sort of burnout culture… that allows you surpass your limit before you realise that you’ve surpassed it and then you have to find your way back to where your limit was in the first place. I think this constant pressure to not just reach your limit but surpass it… I just don’t think it’s a good message for people, I don’t think you should want to do that.

Just because you can doesn’t mean that you should… and that’s the kind of feedback that we give to people all the time – ‘you’re well able for it, you’re really good at it, you’re the best person for this job’, you know that kind of thing. That’s not helpful sometimes because that person sometimes has too much on their plate, it doesn’t matter that they’re really good at what they do, if they’ve surpassed their limit then they need time out or they need help or support or whatever it is. Being good at something doesn’t mean that you can’t actually burn out… or that you don’t have a limit. So I think the challenge here is, particularly in this environment, is to know what your limit is and then try not to let yourself go past it… but it’s almost impossible. And also everyone’s limit is different… and I think people’s careers are therefore limited by their own personal limits. People’s career development is limited by those thresholds and nobody knows what’s causing the threshold. Like nobody knows if it’s four kids at home or, being a single parent… nobody knows what is influencing that personal limit… and nobody cares really to be honest, it’s just a limitation, as far as your career is concerned… and we do lots of other things, we do Business Chemistry, we do Respect and Inclusion, and all that sort of stuff but we don’t really address the limitations that people have to actually keep going.
I was talking to my two daughters last night and I said to them ‘so what do you think would make a better work life balance?’ and I got into a whole conversation trying to explain that. And my eldest daughter turned around to me and said well maybe just have less work. And I thought well maybe it’s the simplest of ideas. My workload feels very high and when I look around at everyone else I think it’s the same, like it’s relentless and never ending and if you go on holiday or take a day off or a half day, well it’s all still there waiting for you when you come back. So even having that flexibility, the work is always there and it’s never going away and I think fundamentally that’s kind of part of the challenge on this... it’s how do you take advantage of flexibility when the workload is just constantly building. There’s no magic solution, it’s just the ways of working. Everyone here takes on a lot of responsibility and we make sure things are done ourselves, that’s just the style of work, but it is kind of relentless. A lot of the time there’s not really anyone who can take on that workload. I take parental leave in the summer and when I come back a lot of the work will still be there waiting for me. It’s like a tsunami hitting me, when I come back. So I have this great flexibility and I can take this unpaid time off but actually the work hasn’t gone away. I think it’s kind of the same for people on three or four day weeks, I feel that we don’t really adjust for it, I think it’s our ways of working, it’s a cultural thing. Deloitte is a commercial business and I get that is a key influence on how we work, but I think that maybe we take it too far. Do we really account for the fact that people are doing shorter days or shorter weeks or taking unpaid leave, I’m not sure we really adjust for it? I think if we want people to be happy in what they’re doing it would be no harm to be questioning the way that’s done.
This was my mood on Monday… it was quite a heavy day, weather wise, clouds were really low… that pressure you know that it’s all starting to fall down around you. That was how I felt on Monday. I know that sounds very dramatic, but I had missed two hours in the morning because I had to drop the kids to school unexpectedly, so I didn’t get into the office until 10am. By 4pm I don’t know what happened, I knew I was exhausted, but then I overreacted to something in work and I got into my car and said I’m going home… and I did. I went home and I went out for a walk, and this is my view on my walk. It was really windy and it was kind of turbulent weather but muggy and heavy at the same time. I felt this weight of the sky on top of me, and I thought this really reflected my frame of mind on Monday evening.

It wasn’t like I said that I’m going to make an effort to actually leave on time this week, it’s like I had to get out. I had surpassed the limit, I was exhausted, and this happens, this is the reality of it. My kids’ dad doesn’t live with us so I get exhausted, physically, emotionally, like I could cry if something goes wrong in work… which next week or last week would have been totally fine… it wouldn’t have bothered me at all, but all of a sudden I’m getting really upset and I know when that happens I’m just exhausted. I had a twitch in my eye, and I know that’s the time to try to take some time back or just relax and my method was just to go for a walk. It didn’t really work on Monday I have to say, probably because the weather really reflected my mood.
I work three days per week because I want to look after my son and to take on the majority of stuff at home so that my husband can rest as much as possible, especially when he’s working so hard. He has a medical condition so we’ve made that decision for me to work part-time to create balance for us. So I’ve a bit more responsibility at home than I would if I worked full-time. For the first two years I really struggled with the amount of work I had to do. I know everyone is overloaded but I couldn’t understand why I couldn’t just manage this workload because it was my first time working part-time and I started to think I wasn’t competent. But it was actually the volume I just couldn’t... I was really begging for help.

I work part-time for a specific reason and feel I struggle to keep up the deal at home. So, it can have a real effect on my family as well which stresses me out. And I still have to go home and do all this stuff, like everyone else. I really struggled with it for a long time, and I’ve had a lot of great support from managers and at home but there doesn’t seem to be any recognition that when you’re working part-time you do have other stuff going on outside, and your workload needs to be adapted accordingly.

We have a pocket-money schedule and we have a task for each of my children to do to get points that gain pocket money.

I was thinking about how it’s a bit like work as well, that lists make things easier sometimes, but they also can make things more complicated.
Tuesday morning, this was the flip side of flexibility... normally I get them up and I leave home about 7.10 and that's ok, so at least I have some time with the kids. But this week just the way it's worked I’ve had to be in early most days, so I’m leaving more along the lines of 6.30, so it just struck me that all this week there’s been the enormous fiery moon and it's kind of an attractive picture, but it's actually not nice being up that hour in the morning. That's just the way the week went... and again it’s not always like that but it does take a toll. I’m very conscious that by Thursday, I don’t really feel that I’ve seen or really interacted with people in my family very much this week... you’re leaving before they get up and you’re getting home around 8.30 or 9.00, so you’re home just as they’re going to bed. It’s just the way the week has gone that you feel like you’re trapped in this other zone.

It was my birthday yesterday and my daughter is an avid baker so she wanted to make a cake but it was about 8.30 by the time I got home last night and I was getting all these texts from my wife saying “where are you? They’re all excited. What’s the story?” So, it was great to get in and they were all really excited, they’d made a lot of effort. But it was all kind of crammed into about 40 minutes and then it was bedtime, rather than feeling like you could really enjoy it. Now we’ll make up for it at the weekend that’s fine, but that was just kind of the concertina effect that you feel because a huge chunk of the night and the day goes into the work portion.
Findings

4. What works well and recommendations for easing the pressure
Findings
4. What works well and recommendations for easing the pressure

The simple act of being thanked, being recognised, via an informal thank you or via a formal mechanism such as a Deloitte Dot is seen as a very easy way to make a big difference in a parent’s life. Several parents within the study cite simple acts of recognition as having had a big impact on their work satisfaction. Given the amount of stress and guilt often experienced by parents as they try to fulfil two (or more) competing roles, feeling like they are doing a good job can obviously have a significant impact on reducing their levels of stress and guilt.

“I got a totally unexpected email from a partner... saying very good, well done... a short email. I sort of floated out of work that evening... a bit of appreciation or acknowledgement... it really does make a difference in terms of how you feel.” (Torunn)

“When I get a Dot I do feel really good because I feel like oh thank goodness it’s been recognised, and someone is saying thanks... it’s not about the money, it’s just about the recognition.” (Aishling)

On a practical level, the provision of facilities such as showers and the ability to start work early and finish early are seen as very helpful and important for parents within the study.

“I start work at 7.00 so that I can make the crèche pick-up. I am very lucky to work in a place that allows different start times.” (Tamara)

“...in the ladies locker room the towels are supplied, you have a shower, shampoo and hairdryer, it’s absolutely brilliant, a great resource. For a working parent, when I go home I can’t go back out to exercise (after work), so I could never go for a run... I just felt like that side of my life was really taking a hit. So this facility was great, I used to get off the bus and then run up to work and have my shower, without having to carry all that paraphernalia... it definitely helped balance my work and life.” (Aishling)

The overall camaraderie and support from colleagues is also seen as a key positive in terms of the Deloitte culture. There is a genuine sense that people care about you within the company.

“[When] my dad died... I had messages of condolences from across the firm, from trainee right up to the executive and really genuine heartfelt messages and nearly my whole team came to my dad’s funeral, including Partners. It meant a huge amount to me...that outpouring of support, human support, that absolutely cemented my commitment to the firm, as an employer of choice.” (Laura)
In terms of recommendations for how Deloitte could make small changes that would have a positive impact on parents’ lives, suggestions include having time and space where people can stop and connect with colleagues or take time out during their day to read up on work-related news. With that in mind, provision of spaces and access to professional publications where employees could read and/or catch up informally with each other is seen as a potential option.

Another suggestion is the idea of promoting a culture which is mindful of people’s responsibilities outside of work. Allied to parenting duties, employees can have a variety of caring or extra-curricular activities which they need time to dedicate to outside of work. Creating an awareness of this, being mindful not to make assumptions about what people can or would be willing to do outside of the working day, is seen as an important step in creating a more inclusive workplace.

“There are all kinds of mixtures of families, people, circumstances, not just working parents, but lots of other things that people have going on outside work. And it’s probably just the need for all of us being more aware of that, that it’s not all about the work, there’s lots of things happening outside of work that do in a real way have an impact on people. Maybe we just don’t talk about it a lot.” (Sinead)

Finally, the idea of engaging with employees to discuss not just their career but also their life goals is suggested. Engaging holistically with members of the team and seeing how Deloitte can play an active role in helping employees achieve the best out of their whole life, is seen as a way of retaining good talent. Realistically seeing the whole employee and allowing them to bring their full selves to work, would perhaps go some way to creating an environment which makes balancing the demands of home and work more manageable, while increasing employee morale, engagement and retention.

“Working in Deloitte I have career goals, but I have life goals too… and I have goals for my kids... so let’s find ways of supporting people to achieve their life goals, as part of their career development... what are your plans for your life and for your family and how can Deloitte support that... it’s not one thing or the other. I'm more than happy to make Deloitte part of my life, if they would let me.” (Laura)
This is a picture of the ladies locker room... the towels are supplied and you have a shower and your shampoo and your hairdryer. I thought this was absolutely brilliant, it's a great resource. As a working parent when I go home, I can't go back out to exercise, or at least I couldn't before my husband changed jobs in July because the hours that he was working were just ridiculous and because I had the baby at home I could never go back out for a run, or go to a class or anything like that and that was something I really missed. And because I'm lucky enough to be able to start work early, I'm up at 5.40am already, so I wasn't getting up any earlier to go running at 5 o'clock in the morning so, I felt like that side of my life was really taking a hit. This facility was great, because I used to get off the bus and then run up to work and have my shower, but I didn't have to carry all that other paraphernalia that I couldn't run with and that I couldn't push the buggy with and everything else. I know it wouldn't be for everyone but it definitely helped balance my work and life. I don't utilise it as much now because I don't need to but it is great. There is a lot of talk that we don't do gym memberships, we get emails in about that, but I think that this is even more beneficial than a gym membership because there are so many classes and gyms around that this just makes things a lot easier. So I think more of this kind of thing would help balance work and life.
Time is of the essence... exploring the lived experience of parents within Deloitte Ireland
A participatory-photography project conducted by Dr. Maria Quinlan

Figure 59.

Early mornings 5am. I start at 7 so that I can make the crèche pick up. I am very lucky to work in a place that allows different start times.

Figure 60.

I was trying to focus on what would an ideal day look like, or if there was a simple thing that would make a difference because I was really struggling with that idea, and it kept coming back to just reduce the workload. There needs to be less work. I cannot keep on top of my emails. And then I got a totally unexpected email from a partner that wouldn't be big on handing out praise just saying very good, well done... a short email. But I sort of floated out of work that evening. So, it's just occasionally a bit of appreciation or acknowledgement. You don't need it every day, but now and again it really does make a difference in terms of how you feel.

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Figure 61.

The Deloitte Dots I think are great so I just took this picture because the draw-down is coming soon and it’s a huge project. It does really work because I know that when I get a Dot I do feel really good because I feel like oh thank goodness it’s been recognised. Someone is saying thanks, and really they’re just saying thanks for doing your job which is really nice because they don’t need to, because that’s what I get paid for. So, it’s not about the money, it’s about the recognition and I know in the management group there are management recognition vouchers and lunch with the CEO every quarter and I really do think that does really resonate with people and the feedback we get from them is great so… more of this as well.

Figure 62.

I think this is hilarious, for a couple of reasons, one my child is massively into Marvel Avengers and superheroes. I took this photo mostly because I wanted to show it to my son this evening and to show him that actually we do have some fun in Deloitte. Then I thought you could replace most of the words with parenting analogies… so what Batman is saying there is “how do I balance my crime fighting with my fieldwork planning”… “how do we balance our work with our family life?”… “we are superheroes because we’re doing it all and we need to give ourselves credit for that”! Parents need check-ins too!
The quality of this picture isn’t great but on the night that I took it, the moon was really bright and it struck me that the moon shines brightest in the dark. At the beginning of this year I had a particularly tough time just trying to balance work life with my own home circumstances, and as I was coming to the end of that really tough period, my dad died. So that spring boarded me in to an even tougher time in my life. And the one thing of note from that time, is that I had messages of condolences from across the firm, from trainee right up to the executive and really genuine heartfelt messages and nearly my whole team came to my dad’s funeral, including partners. It meant a huge amount to me. Because the period before that had been so tough, I had really started to question was this career the right one for me, and it was that kind of outpouring of support, human support, that absolutely cemented my commitment to the firm, as an employer of choice. I know it’s hard, but I also choose to be here, you know. And what’s really important to me is not just because of the logistics of ‘this is hard therefore I need to find something else to do’... it’s all about how you feel about being somewhere. For me it’s important for the place you work and spend most of your time, to share your same core values and I think that Deloitte has demonstrated that to me. Not just then but a couple of times, but what I would like to see is more of that. I know it’s there, I don’t doubt that, and generally I believe that the core values are there, and they’re the same as mine and so I choose to be here and get through the difficult bits to brighter times.
This was the weekend and they're my feet and my mam's feet - my mam came to stay for the weekend and this was pretty much what we did for most of the weekend. There's a couple of points in this photograph. Firstly, I know we've talked about not being able to do the conference call at 8.00 because we're dropping the kids to school, but sometimes I like to just do nothing, sometimes my whole goal in life is to finish the work so that there's nothing left to do and then I can wake up and have nothing to do, like it's a dream of mine I just want to have nothing to do. But I suppose the message here from a Deloitte perspective is that flexibility should be encouraged and being able to juggle and balance, yeah that's important, but sometimes downtime should be encouraged as well. It's not that you can't be in work because you need to be somewhere else but you actually just need downtime and space, to recoup you know and get your energy levels back up to where they need to be. It's really important and we are that culture, the high performance culture, the burnout culture as I like to call it, we push ourselves but I think it's really important that we take time out and that that is encouraged as well. Mental health days and wellbeing... we are humans and we need downtime and wellbeing and positive mental health. I think that we are doing a bit around that as a firm, but I don't think we're doing enough. I think the onus is put on the individual to manage their mental health and to manage their wellbeing so I do think as a firm that we can do more.
I got my two girls to help me with this last night and I was thinking what would make life feel easier or more balanced. So, then I got the idea that we should just not assume that every family situation is the same. The Lego people here, the girls helped me to try to make everything look different. There are all kinds of mixtures of families, people, circumstances, not just working parents, but lots of other things people have going on outside work. And it’s probably just the need for all of us to be more aware of that, it’s not all about work, there’s lots of things happening outside of work that do in a real way have an impact on people. Maybe we just don’t talk about it a lot, my close colleagues and friends at work would know my circumstances but beyond that probably not. When meetings are being arranged or things being scheduled, we should maybe be a bit more aware that people are people. It comes up sometimes if we have to go on a last minute flight somewhere and the way my family works, my husband works nights a lot, so nights are really difficult for me to be away, so I need to know and plan because I need to pull in lots of help around those days if he’s not there. That might not be someone else’s circumstances, they might have other constraints.

I remember just saying one day, no I can’t just go on a flight tomorrow for a few days with less than a day’s notice. There’s just no way of me being able to do it. The response I got was ‘well what do other people do?’ and I remember just standing there dumbfounded and saying well I don’t know what other people do, but I know I can’t do it. It’s just that awareness of maybe it is fine for one person but for me it’s not, I just don’t have that flexibility and that’s just my life. I don’t really like to be put in a position where I have to apologise for that, it’s one of those memories that always sticks in the back of my mind, one of those really negative conversations. So that was basically what this photograph was about, you know what’s the norm for one person, whether they have children or a family is not necessarily the same as the norm for someone else.
I had to do a piece of work last week where I was asked, ‘well you’ve probably read all these articles that Deloitte has written?’ I did have to read a number of them to complete the article but it made me conscious that I have no time to read or keep on top of that. I used to subscribe to The Economist but had to stop that when we had kids. Now I’m delighted if I can get through Saturday’s Irish Times before the following weekend. On a screen it’s usually very superficial headlines in snatched minutes. I already spend enough time on screens for work. I would love if Deloitte had, almost like a library room or somewhere where they had a number of these types of magazines and papers that you could flick through - read the one article in The Economist that was relevant. Something like that would be helpful.

Continuing on with the ideal day for me, I’d have time to sit down and have a coffee with somebody and have 15 minutes to chat. Now I do have time for coffee but rarely have time to sit down for just 15 minutes and... not formally check in because I do make time for those, but just personally catching up with people and that’s what the two empty chairs signifies. Also the kitchens are so small here and we don’t have good facilities for informally sitting down with people. If there were three of us who wanted to have coffee together, only two of us can sit. So, I think that better facilities for connecting and collaborating would make a big difference to creating a positive environment.
This is a photo I took while on a cliff walk in Dunmore East in August. This, it is safe to say, is my happy place. I think any place where I can see the sea, I just feel immediately more peaceful. It actually looked like this... the day was like this, it was amazing and I went along the cliff walk and then I went down into this cove called Portally Cove and the cliffs come down on either side and the water comes in, it's beautiful. And I went up along the other side of the cliff and on the road and then I went through the woods, and the trees were coming in and it was really green. It was just amazing, and I spent the whole time thinking, this is just amazing... I know I can't live like this all the time. I'm not sure what message this was giving me but... working in Deloitte I have career goals, but I have life goals too. Someday I want to wake up in my house and look out my window and this is what I see. I have a life goal, and I have goals for my kids, it's not just about being at Deloitte or being somewhere else... and I think that kind of gets lost sometimes. I do think that Deloitte could do more to talk to people about their life goals. So, let's find ways to support people in achieving these life goals, as part of their career development. So it's not just about the revenue or the billable hours... it's not just about that stuff. It's about what your plans are for your life and for your family and how can Deloitte support that? It's an integral part of your life planning and it's not one thing or the other. I'm more than happy to make Deloitte part of my life, if they would let me, you know. At the moment I think it feels a bit separate.
Most evenings when I come in from work I make a bit of a scene and announce as loudly as I can “Daddy’s home!” I hear the scrambling of feet as one by one they all come racing out as they try to be the first to greet me. In the above picture, I captured all three of them mid sprint. The point of the picture is that sometimes in work unfortunately you can have some pretty shitty days, I’m sure I’m not alone in this... and you go home in foul humour and just not in good form. It can flip pretty quickly when you walk in the door and you see the above coming at you because pretty much straight away you forget about your clients or the person working with you who’s being difficult, or whatever it is. That pretty much goes out the window when you come in to this in the evenings as they have much more important stories to tell me and oddly enough aren’t concerned about the spreadsheet that I couldn’t get to balance. I’m conscious we gave quite a few negatives in terms of combining kids and work, but there are a lot of benefits to it too, including bringing you back down to earth and focussing your time where it should be spent.
A tree to me represents family and the circle of life.

Brendan, my husband’s father, passed away suddenly in August. Our hearts were broken we adored him. We lost a man I truly loved and respected. Family has always been at the root of our relationship. We were very fortunate to be in a position to buy a house with a garden four years ago. The first thing we decided to do was to plant fruit trees. I cherish the memories of my Granny’s fruit trees and also wanted our children to experience the transformation from bud to flower to fruit. They say that apples are for your children and pears are for your grandchildren. (Pear trees don’t usually bear fruit until they are a mature tree). Our tree must have been very special, as we got two pears in the first year. In spring the trees are budding and flowering and by July and August they are maturing. By the end of August they are ready to be picked or have fallen off the tree. I took these pictures two weeks after Brendan’s passing. The fallen apples made me think of the loved ones we had lost on our family tree. It also made me face my fears.
Appendices

- Ethics and safety
- Acknowledgements
- Participants
Appendices
Participants’ safety and emotional wellbeing is the primary consideration of this project. Throughout each stage of the project, participants were given the option of sharing their photographs, thoughts, experiences or of choosing not to. The main aim of this project was to create a safe space where participants could express themselves via photography to the degree that they wished to do so, without any requirement to share that with the other members of the group, the project facilitators or ultimately with the wider public via this catalogue and the associated exhibitions.

Dr. Maria Quinlan has received specialist training in the photovoice methodology from the PhotoVoice Organisation and adhered to the organisation’s statement of ethical practice. Informed written consent was achieved over a phased basis to ensure that participants had clarity regarding what they were being asked to consent to, how their information would be used and what participating in this exhibition and catalogue would involve.

I would like to firstly thank the eleven men and women who participated in this project for sharing their experiences with such openness, honesty and vulnerability. This project is fundamentally their work and would not have been possible without their generosity of time and spirit. It was a pleasure to work alongside them on this project.

I would secondly like to thank Deloitte Ireland, and particularly Torunn Dahl, Eimear McCarthy and Brendan Jennings for their vision in understanding how the photovoice methodology could be used to both help give voice to the experience of parents within Deloitte, and to raise awareness regarding the complexity and nuances of what it takes to be a truly respectful and inclusive organisation.

Photovoice is a method that demands transparency and openness from participants with the aim of revealing truths. It takes an organisation that really wants to understand a topic to trust their employees with such a method. Deloitte is a great example of such a company, unafraid of hearing what its employees have to say.

Dr. Maria Quinlan
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About the researcher
Dr. Maria Quinlan is a sociologist and founder of The Pink Flower Company which specialises in the use of creative, person-centred research methods that facilitate people in sharing their lived experience. She was previously Research Lead at the Applied Research for Connected Health centre at University College Dublin, where she also lectures in Organisational Behaviour. Maria is Head of Research at the Institute of Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy (IICP), where she lectures in Equality and Inclusion; the Sociology of Mental Health; and Research Methods. She has carried out a variety of projects within the area of organisational behaviour, diversity and inclusion, including an in-depth study of gender and career progression within the financial and professional services in Ireland. Maria is a former Human Capital consultant at Deloitte Ireland.

www.pinkflowercompany.com
Participants

Aishling
Consultant
Talent & Learning

Shane
Director
Audit

Donncha
Senior Manager
Tax

Sinead
Senior Manager
Risk Advisory

Glenn
Partner
Audit

Sinead
Director
Consulting

Ian
Director
Consulting

Tamara
Senior
Clients & Industries

Laura
Director
Risk Advisory

Torunn
Senior Manager
Talent & Learning

Marco
Senior Manager
Consulting
Time is of the essence... exploring the lived experience of parents within Deloitte Ireland
A participatory-photography project conducted by Dr. Maria Quinlan
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