

Book Review

# Navigating the Return-to-Work Experience for New Parents Maintaining Work-Family Well-Being

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## Introduction

Maria Karanika-Murray is Associate Professor of Occupational Health Psychology in the Department of Psychology at Nottingham Trent University. Her research combines different methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches, working with stakeholders to understand the context and develop strategies to promote health and well-being at work. Her work focuses on objective assessments and clear and concise language, using a logical structure to ensure comprehensibility. All technical terms are explained on first use. Emphasis is placed on accurate vocabulary and grammatical correctness.

Cary L. Cooper is a 50th Anniversary Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health Studies at the ALLIANCE Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, and holds a Distinguished Chair in the Institution. He is the President of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and Co-Chair of the National Forum for Workplace Health and Wellbeing.

## Review

*Navigating the Return-to-Work Experience for New Parents*, edited by Maria Karanika-Murray and Cary Cooper, is a comprehensive and thought-provoking collection that addresses the complex challenges of balancing work and family life, especially for new parents. In today's fast-paced and demanding work environments, where parenthood and career aspirations often overlap, this book is a relevant and valuable resource. Drawing from a range of expert contributors, this book provides a multifaceted examination of the nuanced balance between parenting and professional roles.

The book's exceptional structure makes it an essential resource for both parents and professionals. As parenthood can be a highly fulfilling, transforming, and demanding experience, the editors have meticulously compiled practical advice and academic research to develop a comprehensive guide for individuals navigating the intricate landscape of re-entering the workforce after having children.

The book consists of fourteen relatively short chapters. In the first chapter we can read Maria Karanika-Murray & Cary Cooper's study on Understanding the Return-to-Work Experience for Parents: what is and what could be. In the second chapter is a study by Lindsey M. Lavaysse, Erica L. Bettac & Tahira M. Probst on New Parents Navigating the Workplace: Pregnancy, Stereotype Threat, and Work-Family Conflict. The third chapter is a study by Helen Pluut & Sara De Hauw on building a support network for new parents at work and elsewhere. In Chapter Four, Angela Martin, Sarah Dawkins, Vanessa Miles, Sarah Cotton & Justine Alter touch on Practical strategies for managing work-family resources in the return-to-work experience of new parents. Chapter Five, by Marc Grau-Grau, is entitled, Fathers Returning to Work: A Group with Specific Needs? Chapter six is a study by Adrienne Burgess & Jeremy Davies on fathers and parental leave, bearing the title Fathers and Parental Leave : How Can We Increase Take-up? In Chapter Seven, Gayle Kaufman's piece,

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Work-family Integration and Gender Equality: How Nordic Countries Lead the Way, details the advances made in Scandinavian nations in the area of integration and gender equality. In the eighth chapter, Nina M. Junker, Alina S. Hernandez Bark & Jamie L. Gloor expound on the careers of new parents in a Career Progression: Left out of the game? Julia Yates writes in Chapter Nine, Career Development after Parenthood: Choices, Challenges and Opportunities. In Chapter Ten, Joanna Yarker, Hans-Joachim Wolfram & Nina Mareen Junker inform the reader about training and development for employees returning to work after parental leave. The eleventh chapter is by Danielle Boyer & Claude Martin, bearing the title, Childcare Options in France: Beyond Hypothetical Free Choice. In the twelfth chapter we can read the study of Hans van Dijk & Loes Meeussen: What Can Employers Do? Creating an Inclusive Workplace that Promotes Work-family Well-being. In the thirteenth chapter of this book, Inés Martínez-Corts & J. Pablo Moreno-Beltrán's study Going Beyond Policies to Ease Parents Back Into Work and Rebalance Roles: The Importance of Individualised. Cary Cooper & Maria Karanika-Murray pen the fourteenth and final chapter of the book, What We Have Learnt and What We Can Do to Support Parents' Return to Work. Through a collaboration of scientists, psychologists and experts, this book provides a comprehensive approach to the difficulties faced by new parents, with a very wide readership.

The book focuses not only on the responsibilities of parents raising a newborn, but also on how businesses and social norms can adapt to the changing needs of working parents. This systemic change is of paramount importance, not least because it recognises that work and family wellbeing are not just the responsibility of individuals, but also calls for collective efforts in organisations and public policy to change the culture.

A prominent feature of the book is its inclusive approach, which recognises that parenthood takes many different forms and that the challenges faced by working parents can vary widely depending on the circumstances. Whether you are a parent raising your first child, a parent of a same-sex couple, a single parent or an adoptee, you will find valuable perspectives and strategies within the book's pages. This inclusive approach gives a realistic picture of the diversity of experiences new parents have in the workplace.

The book takes a multi-faceted approach to work and family wellbeing. This includes an examination of the impact of parental leave policies, an analysis of the emotional and psychological factors involved in returning to work, and strategies that employers can use to support their employees during this very challenging time. Each chapter encourages a wider debate and develops a framework that addresses both individual and organisational aspects of work-life balance.

This book strikes an excellent balance between scientific rigour and practical advice. It presents complex research findings in a clear and accessible way that makes the concepts easy to understand for all readers. Real-life cases and case studies are incorporated into the studies to further add to the interest and experience. The practical sections of the book provide useful guidance, giving clear strategies for application. The logical structure of the studies helps to ensure a smooth understanding of the information contained. Abbreviations for technical terms are explained and formal language is used, avoiding subjective terms and figurative language. The chaptering, citation styles and footnote formatting further enhance clarity.

The book focuses on new parents. It emphasises the mental health and well-being of these returning parents, pointing out that this can be an emotionally challenging time for the individual. The reader is introduced to feelings of guilt, anxiety, stress and the often overlooked postnatal depression. The authors offer coping strategies that can help at this crucial time in life.

It also sends an undeniable message to employers and policymakers: putting work and family wellbeing first is not only ethical and compassionate, it is good business. By creating a supportive environment for new parents, organisations can improve employee satisfaction, performance and retention. This book is therefore an important guide for employers who want to create family-friendly workplaces, as it provides a good example of how achieving work-life balance is not a zero-sum game, but a mutually beneficial endeavour.

The authors acknowledge the powerful challenges of returning to work after having children, but also highlight its strengths and virtues. Cultural differences, individual circumstances and workplace norms all influence parents' experiences. Despite its complexity, the book offers a flexible approach that readers can adapt to their own personal situation. The authors stress that there is no single solution to the challenges of reconciling work and family life.

### Conclusions

Edited by Maria Karanika-Murray and Cary Cooper, *Navigating the Return-to-Work Experience for New Parents* is, in my opinion, essential reading for anyone dealing with the complexities of juggling parenthood and the workplace. The book's comprehensive insights, practical advice and commitment to promoting a workplace culture that supports new parents make it an invaluable resource. The book provides guidance for parents and advocates for systemic change and support for work and family wellbeing. In an ever-changing world where the demands of work and family life are shifting, this book can be an important source of practical wisdom and hope. Its comprehensive approach and practical advice make it a highly recommended read.

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