

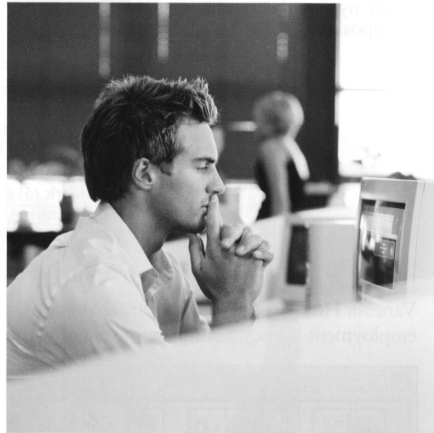
# 4 Employment and employability

## A Outsourcing

Nigel, a 30-year-old information technology (IT) specialist, talks about his career so far:

'I used to work in the IT department of a bank. All the IT work was done **in-house**. I thought I had a **job for life**. But then one day the bank decided to cut costs by **outsourcing** the work to a specialist IT company called IT Services (ITS).

Luckily, the bank didn't make me **redundant** so I didn't lose my job, and after a while I decided to work for ITS instead. At first, I didn't know what to expect, but now I'm very happy. We work with a lot of different clients – I'm a **consultant** and I give them advice.'



## B Employability

'ITS put a lot of emphasis on **professional development** and we often go on training courses so we can keep up with **current trends** in the industry.

ITS tell us that although we may not have a **job for life** with the company, our up-to-date skills will mean that we will always be **employable**. Companies and governments talk about the importance of **lifelong learning** – continuing to develop our knowledge by going on courses and reading journals, for example.

I really enjoy my work but in the next year or two, I may make a **career move** and join another company.'

## C Freelancers and portfolio workers

'When I'm about 40, I want to **set up on my own** as a **freelancer** offering **consultancy services** to different companies. The idea of working **freelance** on different projects for different clients attracts me.'

The management thinker Charles Handy<sup>1</sup> calls freelancers **portfolio workers** because they have a **portfolio** or range of different clients. Some experts say that increasing numbers of people will work this way in the future, as companies outsource more and more of their work because they want to concentrate on their **core functions**.

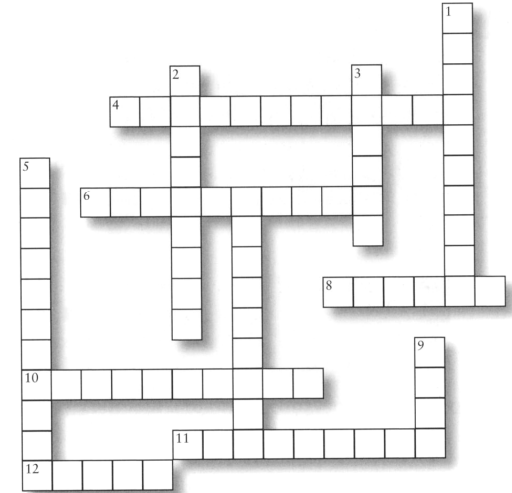
**Note:** People are called **freelancers** or **freelances**. The corresponding adjective is **freelance**, as in 'freelance work'.

<sup>1</sup> *The Age of Unreason* (Random House 2001)

4.1 Complete the crossword with appropriate forms of expressions from A, B and C opposite.

### Across

- 4 Training courses etc. related to work: ..... development. (12)
- 6 What many companies no longer offer. (3,3,4)
- 8 and 9 down When you get a better job you make a ..... . (6,4)
- 10 Someone who offers professional advice etc. to companies. (10)
- 11 Companies that buy in services from outside suppliers ..... these services. (9)
- 12 If you start work as a freelancer, you ..... on your own. (3,2)



### Down

- 1 Having the skills needed to get a job. (10)
- 2 and 3 Someone who does work for a number of different companies. (9,6)
- 5 The people in 2 and 3 down are also called ..... . (11)
- 7 If you lose your job, for example because it has been outsourced, you are made ..... . (9)
- 9 See 8 across.

4.2 Complete the sentences with appropriate forms of expressions from A, B and C opposite. (There are two possibilities for one of the gaps.)

- 1 There's a lot to be said for ..... . I would encourage more working men and women to refresh their skills on university short courses tailored to their needs. That way they can keep up with ..... and make sure they are always aware of the latest thinking in their area.
- 2 I love my new job. This is definitely the best ..... I could have made.
- 3 The company fired 11,000 employees and sold several business units. Non-core ..... were outsourced.
- 4 Some former advertising executives offer ..... to ad agencies, bringing expertise the agencies do not have themselves.
- 5 Some 'creative' businesses, like design services, have hardly any permanent staff and rely on work done by .....
- 6 Of course, there are advantages to doing some things .....: you don't have to explain to outsiders what you want them to do.

### Over to you



Would it be possible to do your job or one you would like as a freelancer? Why / Why not? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a freelancer?

# 5 Flexibility and inflexibility

A



## Ways of working

Nordland is an advanced industrialized country. In addition to outsourcing some functions to freelancers (see Unit 4), many organizations there are looking for ways of having more **flexible working**, for example:

- **temporary workers** who only work for short periods when they are needed, either on a **temporary contract** with a company, or through a **temp agency**
- **part-time workers** who work less than a full working week
- **job sharing**, where two people share a particular job, each of them working part-time.

## B Job flexibility

The government of Nordland is trying to encourage this kind of **job flexibility**, and it has passed laws that allow companies to **hire and fire** employees easily. When **letting people go**, companies only have to **give them two weeks' notice** and relatively small **redundancy payments**; one week's salary for every year worked is the norm.

The government has also reduced **unemployment benefits**, the money paid to people without jobs. They say that all these measures make for a **flexible job market** and encourage **job creation**. Critics say that this approach leads to **job insecurity**, with employers able to get rid of employees too easily.

## C Job protection

Sudonia is an advanced industrialized country with a very different approach. Companies in trouble are only allowed to **make employees redundant** after a long period of **consultation**. If employees are made redundant, they receive generous redundancy payments and then unemployment benefits. The government says people need this sort of **job protection**, and **trade unions** are fighting hard to keep it.

Payments to employees such as **sick pay**, and **parental leave** when they have time off following the birth of children, are also very generous.

Mothers get 18 months' paid **maternity leave** and fathers get six months' **paternity leave**. But the **social charges** which employers and employees have to pay the government are very high.

Critics say that this contributes to a **rigid labour market**, one with too much job protection. They say that this sort of **inflexibility** discourages job creation and leads in the long run to higher **unemployment** and slower **economic growth**. As a consequence, companies may look abroad for cheaper bases and workforces.

BrE: trade unions;  
AmE: labor unions

5.1 Look at A opposite. Which type of work is each of these people referring to?

1 I work at the local council for two days a week, and my friend works in the same job on the other three days.

2 I work in a petrol station 20 hours a week.

3 I'm on a job at Clarkson's until the end of next week. Then I'll try and find something else.

5.2 Melinda and Nigel, two managers from Sudonia, are talking about the issues in B and C opposite. Replace the underlined phrases with expressions with items from those sections. Pay attention to the grammatical context. (The first one has been done for you.)

Melinda: It's ridiculous! We can't get rid of employees without a lot of meetings and discussion with employee organizations, government officials and so on. We have to keep even the laziest, most incompetent people.

*We can't make employees redundant without a lot of consultation with trade unions, government officials and so on. We have to keep even the laziest, most incompetent people.*

Nigel: I know what you mean. I don't have the opportunity to recruit and get rid of people as I want! This sort of rigidity must be bad for the job market. The number of people without jobs in this country is very high.

Melinda: It's a nightmare! If you do want to get rid of people, you have to tell them three months in advance.

Nigel: Yes, and you should see the amount of tax I have to pay for each of my employees just so they can get money when they fall ill, and so on.

Melinda: We should move to Nordland, where they have a job market that gives employers a lot of freedom. The level of new jobs being created there is incredible. Sudonia should copy Nordland.

Nigel: I agree, but it never will, until it's too late!

5.3 Look at the expressions in B and C opposite and say if these statements are true or false.

- 1 When companies let employees go, they make them redundant.
- 2 One person's job flexibility might be another's job insecurity.
- 3 In flexible job markets, hiring and firing is complex.
- 4 Employee benefits are paid for through social charges.
- 5 'Rigidity' is another word for 'inflexibility'.
- 6 When fathers take parental leave, this is called 'fatherly leave'.
- 7 The cost of job protection might be higher unemployment.

Over to you

Is your country more like Nordland or Sudonia? What are the advantages and disadvantages of flexible working?

# 6 Work-life balance

## A Stress

People talk about being **under** (a lot of) stress or **pressure**. They say their work is **stressful** and that they feel **stressed** or **stressed out**. They want to find ways to **de-stress**. They may complain that they have **stress-related illness**. Some people may suffer **burn-out** or a complete **breakdown**, which means they are no longer able to work.

'Stress' often occurs in these combinations:

|        |                   |   |
|--------|-------------------|---|
| stress | <b>factor</b>     | something that causes stress  |
|        | <b>symptom</b>    | a sign that someone is under stress   |
|        | <b>toll</b>       | the total amount of damage caused by stress   |
|        | <b>management</b> | ways of dealing with stress   |
|        | <b>industry</b>   | term used by critics to refer to counselling, research, etc. done in relation to stress |

Note: 'Stress' and 'pressure' are both countable and uncountable: you can also talk about the stresses and pressures you are under.

## B The causes of stress

The most common causes of stress are:

- **heavy workloads:** too much to do in the limited time available
- **office politics:** problems with colleagues who above all, want to advance their own position. These people like **playing politics**
- **role ambiguity:** responsibilities are unclear
- **lack of management support:** managers do not provide the necessary help and resources
- **effort-reward imbalance:** not getting sufficient recognition or pay
- **home-work imbalance:** not enough time for family, personal interests, etc.

## C Quality of life

Some people are **workaholics** – they think about very little except work. Others are increasingly looking for **quality of life:** less commuting, more time with their families, etc. Journalists write about people **downshifting** or **rebalancing** their lives. They may work part-time, work from home, move to the country and so on.

In a recent survey:

- a 95 per cent of **homeworkers** said they have a better **work-life balance** or **home-work balance** than when they were in-company because they can spend more time with their families and on leisure activities.
- b 82 per cent said they have more **autonomy** and **independence:** they are able to organize their work and their time how they want.

But in the same survey homeworkers also complained that:

- c there is no **boundary** between work on the one hand and personal life on the other – the two **overlap** (73 per cent)
- d they feel lonely and **isolated** because they are out of contact with others and don't have colleagues around them (57 per cent).



6.1 Complete the article with appropriate forms of 'stress' from A opposite.

## Payouts predicted for stressed teachers

Teachers could win settlements of up to £250,000 over work-related (1) ..... a senior lawyer for the National Union of Teachers has predicted, following last week's £47,000 compensation deal for a Wirral secondary teacher made ill by overwork.

For those who believe that teaching is an easy life, the story of Muriel Benson came as a reminder of the pressures. She was forced to retire three years ago from a senior post at Prenton High School because her health could not stand up to a 66-hour weekly workload.

Wirral council is refusing to discuss Benson's case, but, according to her side of the story, the breakdown that led to her early retirement also followed a failure by her employers

to address the problems causing her (2) ..... illness.

Doug McAvoy, the general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said: "This case is clearly a warning to teachers' employers that neglect of a (3) ..... situation could lead to significant medical damage. They must not allow that danger to develop and destroy a teacher's career. We know there are hundreds of teachers out there who are feeling (4) ..... and pressured. They can be protected if they come to us for help."

But Neil Fletcher, education secretary of the Local Government Association, said: "There is no evidence that teaching is becoming more (5) ....."

*The Guardian*

6.2 Which two of the causes of stress in B opposite are specifically mentioned in the article above?

6.3 Match the statements (1–4) to the findings in the survey in C opposite.

1 Sometimes I wish I was working every day as part of a team in an office.

3 Yes, my boss isn't breathing down my neck the whole time.

2 Yes, I see much more of my children.

4 I work in the living room, and the work is always there, waiting. I can't get away from it.

## Over to you

Look again at the article above. Do you think that working 66 hours a week is always stressful? Why / Why not?

What are the main causes of stress in your job or one you would like? How do you combat stress?