



WORKING DADS EMPLOYER AWARDS

Leadership and Culture Case Study

How does the CO-OP Group Ltd support working dads?

At the core of our Social Mobility, Inclusion, and Belonging approach is the goal of creating an environment where everyone can thrive. One way we do this is through our colleague networks, such as Parents and Carers Together and our dedicated Dad's Club, which supports all parents in being their best selves both at work and at home. This pioneering initiative provides a safe space for discussing parenting challenges, promoting equality, and encouraging open conversations. Dad's Club also plays a proactive role in promoting

“CO-OP are an empathetic group that empowers togetherness and a sense of belonging, accessible to all and participated in at all levels. Hearing our executive teams share their experiences in an honest and authentic way has empowered me as a senior leader to normalise how I have felt previously on my parenting journey as a father in a blended family scenario. It had also supported me to be a better leader in this space for my team and function by understanding the journeys of others on similar pathways to my own.”

Matt Williams, Head of Channels & Optimisation



men's mental health, addressing a vital aspect of male wellbeing. Through this space, we recognise the challenges of parenting while also focusing on supporting men's mental health. Dad's Club helps our leaders better understand their colleagues' journeys and encourages them to create an environment where openness and vulnerability are welcomed. The CO-OP Group Ltd also offers 4 weeks paid Paternity Leave, Leave for Fertility Treatment and a Buddy Scheme.

What does your organisation do in the area of Leadership and Culture?

CO-OP Group Ltd's Head of Social Mobility, Inclusion and Belonging leads a team of Inclusion and Belonging Managers who work to encourage change that integrates inclusion into processes, policies, and procedures across the organisation. The CO-OP Group Ltd fosters an inclusive and supportive culture through its Parent and Carers Together (PaCT) network and Dad's Club, which provide safe spaces for fathers to connect and share experiences. Our family-friendly policies, including enhanced paternity and maternity leave and gender-neutral language across all policies, reflect a deep commitment to equality. We also have a buddy scheme and events celebrating positive male role models. The Parents and Carers Together (PACT) Network is not just an internal group, it is a hub for connection and learning. Our co-chairs regularly link up with other organisations to exchange ideas and better understand what colleagues need. In summer 2024, we took this further by hosting a Diversity and Inclusion event with around 50 external partners. The day covered the many strands of our colleague network framework, and our Dad's



The CO-OP Group Ltd is one of the world's largest consumer co-operatives, with CO-OP Food operating around 2,500 stores and 13 depots, and employing 53,000 colleagues, supported by a central head office in Manchester.

Club took centre stage, sharing how we support dads at work, telling our story of success, and giving others the practical tools to create their own dad friendly spaces. This provided valuable insights as another business launched their own Dad's circle, inspired by what they had seen.

What challenges have you faced developing this agenda and how did you overcome them?

Driving equality in parenting and supporting working fathers has been challenging, as being a parent isn't a protected characteristic. We faced complaints about the term 'Dad's Club,' and some topics were seen as 'triggering'. We stayed unapologetic, sought guidance from HR and the Head of Mobility on navigating new ground, and secured top-down support. Through the PACT network, we also launched an allyship programme with Senior Leaders actively advocating our initiatives. This ensured wider reach, context, and visible endorsement, which was critical in shifting workplace culture and normalising conversations about fatherhood.

How have your Senior Management Team supported these initiatives?

We prioritised colleague feedback to ensure discussions reflected topics employees genuinely wanted to explore. After challenging feedback and engagement difficulties, we consulted our Head of Social Mobility and Inclusion on how to expand our reach and amplify our positive impact, requesting their help and sponsorship. In parallel, we collaborated with the six Colleague Network Groups, sharing best practice and aligning efforts. This collective approach not only strengthened mutual support but also gave the Senior Management Team evidence that our initiatives were grounded in colleague voice, cross-network collaboration, and a clear business benefit in championing families and inclusion.

How did your leadership team help create this change?

PACT, one of our six colleague networks, connects working parents and carers to share experiences and champion family voices. Fathers play a central role, with several in the steering group and a deputy chair. PACT also helped redefine parental leave policies, including the enhancement of our paternity leave. Dad's Club, a PACT circle, was one of the first of its kind alongside a carers' group. Our senior management team actively sponsor and participate, showing vulnerability that fosters an open, safe culture where people, especially dads, feel confident to share and push for meaningful change.

How do you communicate about your support for working dads?

We communicate our support for working dads through multiple internal channels, including Teams, Viva Engage, the intranet, and weekly colleague newsletters, to promote Dad's Club and encourage both participation and allyship. Since 2023, we have hosted an annual Men's Mental Health event each November, featuring colleague stories and guest speakers from Andy's Man Club and the Samaritans. These have been highly impactful and well received.



We also collaborate with suppliers to embed Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) strategies and have sought expertise from Elliot Rae and Parenting Out Loud to enhance our approach.

What has been the impact of this work?

In 2024, we made significant progress in supporting parents. Paid maternity leave increased from 16 to 20 weeks, and paid paternity leave doubled to 4 weeks. Our policies now support all stages of parenting, including fertility treatment, gender-neutral leave for non-pregnant parents, adoption, and surrogacy. These changes reflect our commitment to helping colleagues balance work and family life.

PaCT worked closely with our Policy team to shape these improvements, ensuring that working dads and all parents benefit. Supporting our parenting network through PACT and our colleague circle has helped reinforce CO-OP's parental policies and provide guidance in areas where people often need support.

In 2025, we continued to engage our parenting network, aiming to expand our reach into parts of the business where working patterns make it harder to attend. This has helped build a wider network of allies and buddies across the organisation who can signpost colleagues to PACT and Dad's Club when needed.

This has been a great success, allowing us to broaden our focus into other areas of male support, such as PTSD support for service members. The value of this work is now being recognised, with colleagues reaching out to support the circle, share their stories, or suggest new topics for discussion. This signifies a mature

What advice would you give other organisations wanting to support working dads?

Our advice is to be clear about the specific challenge you're addressing and set a realistic, achievable plan from the start. Use targeted survey questions to measure impact and adapt as needed. Make policies easy to find and use, for example, attaching all relevant links to paternity and parenting policies on parental leave request forms. Build an inclusive culture by openly sharing updates on diversity and inclusion activities and develop managers' skills to act on data-led insights, especially where disparities exist. Integrate inclusion into everyday processes and policies so it becomes part of how the organisation operates, not just a standalone initiative.

and trusted space that people see value in and want to use as an outlet to support themselves and others.

What have you learnt through this process and what are your next steps?

Starting with a clear intent, strategy, and set of objectives has made a huge difference. We defined our approach to inclusivity and our strategic direction early on, which kept us focused, helped us address challenges proactively, and ensured we stayed true to our goals.

Looking ahead, engagement remains our top priority. We want to find new ways to showcase our work, reach colleagues across diverse working environments, and make it easier for everyone to get involved.

Information accurate as of 2025.

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