



Exec Shift

rebalance the executive team
The Cycle Superhighway Series
ESCS0: The thirty-year journey

The Cycle Superhighway Series of articles was published in July to October 2014 to look at the many things which have contributed to the amazing increase in the numbers of cyclists in London over the last thirty years. It may be helpful to anyone who's looking at how to change attitudes and behaviour on any issue - but was produced by Executive Shift to ask whether there are similar things we can do to better support flexible working at the executive level. The author has been cycling in London for 31 years.

Executive Shift aims to promote two particular shifts:

- executives changing their attitudes towards flexible working in their companies, and
- encouraging a step change in the level of support for those executives who want to work more flexibly themselves.

I'll focus on these shifts, and it's a parallel which is easy to draw because the drivers for flexible working have some overlap with things which keep cyclists on the road: the desire to be more in control, to save time and to improve health and happiness. We also have to be disciplined with ourselves and good at logistics.

I'm equally enthusiastic about cycling as a mode of transport and about flexible working. I started cycling in London thirty years ago, so I've witnessed the journey on a number of two-wheeled friends. I also started working part-time ten years ago. In that decade alone, the number of cyclists in London has doubled.

Over thirty years I've moved from being a lone person waiting at the lights to being surrounded by all manner of bike users. The "odd ones" (as the Evans current TV ads in the Tour de France coverage describe cyclists) are still odd but varied, but not half as rare as we used to be.

It's not all good. Enthusiasm can become fanaticism. Cyclists can be lumped together and branded with the behaviour of the worst. Motorists, pedestrians and motorcyclists have their moments too. We now have to remind road users to #Sharetheroad rather than keep their eyes peeled for the unusual.

Can we avoid the need for a #Sharetheworkplace campaign in a decade's time, with choice about working modes and mutual respect the norm? The attitudes and behaviours of executives and line managers are vital and we need an Executive Shift. In a decade I hope that shift will be complete.

Sally Bridgeland
2015

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ESCS1: The financial incentive

The year was 1984. Not quite as George Orwell imagined it, but an important one in my life because it was the year that I started cycling in London. It was all Margaret Thatcher's fault. Not that she was an avid fan of cycling, being an Iron Lady rather than one of steel, carbon or titanium.

Somewhat clouded by the mists of time, I remember a feud across the river between Red Ken, leader of the GLC, and Maggie. He was knocking down the price of public transport and she abolished the London student travel grant. Which made a difference to a London student in her first year like me, living across the metropolis from university in South Kensington. So I decided to use my final term's grant payment to buy a bike lock and my bike came from rural Oxfordshire to Kings Cross. The lock was £30.



View of County Hall and Westminster today
new towers, bridges and London Eye,
open unto the public and to the sky

Of course there were other reasons. Not having to travel on smoky or crowded tube trains (in the smoking and non-smoking carriages, respectively). Not having to walk back from the tube station at night, clutching my standard university issue rape alarm in my pocket (and cycling is dangerous, right?). Not having to worry about last tube trains. Wanting to lose some first year flab. Bicycle Repair Man (now Mr Bridgeland) perhaps. But, what tipped the balance for me was a relatively modest amount of money. It was cheaper to cycle, given that I had a perfectly serviceable bike and cycling skills honed from teenage years in a hamlet with no public transport.

So to our Executive Shift: what changes in policy or pricing might tip the financial balance to encourage more people to work flexibly - whether part-time, off peak or at home?

- Travel costs: Increasing the cost of commuter travel? A levy on peak time travel? A further discount for off-peak travel?
 - Home working incentives or office working disincentives: Charging rent for using (hot) desks in the office - or rebates for not using them?
 - Better pricing of products to suit flexible working: Season tickets for travel which buy you a fixed number of days rather than needing you to use them most consecutive days to make them good value? Home contents insurance policies which are better designed to cover home offices?
 - Home technology packages at a discount for employees or attracting a lower rate of VAT/tax?
 - Some kind of commuter tax for those travelling to work more than a certain number of days a week?
 - Grants to establish office clubs like car clubs where you can rent out a local study by the hour?
- What would make a difference to you? What would make your blood boil? What financial incentives/disincentives should government introduce and which should be left to employers?

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ESCS2: Path to Superhighway

Cycle paths are, and have always been, a reassuring sight to a cyclist. The first time you travel a route, they help you get from A to B. Most importantly, they are a visible reminder that cyclists are legitimate users of the road. The cycle superhighway network is a strong statement that cyclists are not just legitimate but welcome in London, alongside other modes of transport.

Back in 1984 when I started cycling in London, cycle paths were few and far between. My route took in a couple in Hyde Park, including one on the road. Not a particularly scary road, unlike the Euston Road which was the first part of my route from student halls to college. When Bicycle Repair Man and I went on a cycling holiday to France in the late 1980s we cycled to Heathrow Airport along the cycle path by the A4. On the pavement, it was scary, bumpy and on and off the side roads and driveways. You got shouted at by motorists if you didn't use it. It felt much more about keeping bikes off the road than welcoming them to the streets.

In the early 1990s the networks started to appear. Sometimes these were the work of undercover campaigners who got brushes out and painted bike symbols on the road at midnight. As roads were resurfaced, legend has it, they were painted in as permanent features. Then signs and numbers appeared for the London Cycle Network. These routes took you mostly on back streets and sometimes round the houses but mostly they were the growing sign that cycling was quietly becoming part of the landscape. Maps were available (apps came later!) if you knew where.



The Cycle Superhighway network takes things up a gear. It marks the main roads. It has expensive-looking signs which give route maps and times that look very much like bus/tube maps and it is Barclays blue, to match the bikes. Car drivers can't miss it.

In our Executive Shift how can we make flexible working more visible? What sorts of visibility will encourage more people to work flexibly - whether part-time, off peak or at home?

- Clearer signs for flexible working facilities in the office such as hot desks?
- Changing your "out of office" email message (or how you use it) so that "out of office" doesn't imply that you're out of touch if you are simply working away from the office?
- Bring back staff planners or use a team calendar to show who's where? This often shows how flexible people are being but makes it more graphic.
- Encourage people not to be shy about working flexibly? Don't leave a jacket/cardigan on a chair when you are working elsewhere? Say how/where you're working if your calendar is visible to others?

What would make a difference? What can you do to make others more aware of how senior people work flexibly? What's stopping you from being more visible about your flexible working?

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ESCS3: From Annecy with love

As I pass through Paris on a migration south, it reminds me just how much cycling in London has drawn on ideas from around the world. What can we learn from other countries about flexible working - and how can we adapt things that have worked elsewhere to fit our culture and habits?

Back in the late 80s, our cycling holiday in France was a revelation. Bicycle Repair Man took photos of the cycle lanes when we landed in Geneva. The local cycles were generally onion transporters or serious velos, with no luggage. Touring cyclists were a curiosity, mostly English and more heavily laden Dutch, and we were welcome. The toots from cars were supportive and the roulers waved their (ultra-cool) bonjours. At the first Gite our hostess turned a car of tourists away, then turfed her teenage kids out of their room to give us somewhere to rest. The bicycles were accommodated in laundry rooms and even, in Cannes, bedrooms.

Annecy in 2014

The thing we raved about most was a 15km cycle path round one side of Lake Annecy. It was beautiful. It was well signposted. It was connected with other cycle paths through the town. This was years before Sustrans, the Tarka Trail, the conversion of canals and railways to accommodate cyclists and, in London, opening up the Thames Path to leisure and commuting cyclists. Today, Annecy is awash with all kinds of bikes.



Cycling in London has also borrowed ideas from cycling icons like Amsterdam. Cycle racks at stations, shared use pavements, cycle lights at junctions were things we marvelled at on our first trip there (and a bike shop with a big Bicycle Repair Man logo outside). Learning from the experience of others means that we can avoid some of the potholes too. Legend has it that only one Boris bike has gone missing since the scheme was introduced. In Paris, a significant number have been lost each year.



So to our Executive Shift: what can we learn from other countries about flexible working? For example, in a financial centre like London which is a global magnet for those attracted to streets paved with gold, long office hours Monday-Thursday may suit those who plan to leave the city (or the country) for weekends but can become part of the norm, even on Fridays.

- Encourage siestas - time to take a long lunch break and catch some art/music/theatre/friends?
- Are there countries, companies or CEOs which make POETS Day (go Off Early Tomorrow's Saturday) work on an official basis?
- Beyond the legendary parental leave, how do Northern Europeans synchronise work and school hours better? Is homework part of the deal for adults too?
- Have other countries, companies or CEOs mastered particular combinations of flexible working?

What kind of flexible working would fit particular organisations or business models and who's already done it around the world? If your real or virtual travels have taken you to flexible working icons, do let us know.

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ESCS4: TV Coverage

Back in 1984, the thought of ITV having a weekly cycle programme was about as easy to imagine as a British multiple Olympic track cycling medallist shaving his legs in a TV ad for a bike shop chain (more about Sir Chris later in the series). The fact that they now do says something not only about cycling but also about cycling in London. It's a talking point and it's product sales.

Now I must confess that TV is not my specialist subject. Bicycle Repair Man (BRM) and I didn't have a TV for over 20 years. One reason being the "blah blah football football football blah blah when will they show any cycling?" ranting from BRM. But we invested in a TV for the 2012 Olympics so it is now used for major sporting events, anything with David Attenborough in it (BRM Jr) and bike programmes.

My take on the evolution of bikes on the box is based on holiday viewing. The coverage of Le Tour de France is a good example. In the mid 90s we were cycling Land's End to John O'Groats with the Tandem Club and would aim to get to our destination for 6pm (I think) to be in time to watch the half hour's summary of the day's events. Woe betide anyone watching the youth hostel TV who thought they'd be watching anything else.

It was still the same a few years later when we had another holiday in the South of France and caught up with Le Tour live a few times. I remember BRM trying to position himself and the TV so that he could watch (adopt French accent and speak quickly) "Autour du Tour" on TV all afternoon while catching some rays on the patio. Mostly he ended up being inside with it turned up loudly enough so that I (sitting outside) could translate if necessary. The things we do.



So, back to 2014, yes there are more TV channels but even so ITV4 gave its own live coverage of Le Tour and an hour of highlights and commentary each day. Recent heroes Wiggo, Frome and Cav and a start in cycling heartland in Yorkshire helped. But cycling has a slot on UK TV now.

To predict our Executive Shift world what would "The Flexible Working Show" look like?

- Interviews with flexible working CEO heroes sharing their top tips
- Profiles on companies or cultures from around the world who are leading the way
- Stories about the impact of flexible working which shows what folk have been able to achieve
- "That's Flexist!" spots for bad behaviour to name and shame?
- Two celebs multi-tasking/using technology against the clock!

As for what products would be advertised in the breaks see the next article for the role of gadgets in helping shift habits. What do you think TV coverage should say about flexible working?

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Where to start and where to end? Back in 1984, cycling was pretty basic. Decent bike U-locks were relatively new and bike lights were operated with big old batteries that didn't last long. When I first started work in 1986, there were very few bike bags (panniers) which would hold an A4 folder. And no PCs. Now you can buy a bracket to mount your iPhone on your handlebars.

After it rained, you'd invariably get punctures from the grit and glass washed onto the streets of London. You'd be late and/or dirty when you and your bike finally made it to work. In the last thirty years the kevlar technology from bullet proof vests which is now routinely used in tyres has made reliable commuting to work viable. I had my first puncture in a few years a couple of months ago because I had worn out my tyre.

Other things which have changed my cycling life over the years (and were the best thing since kevlar at the time) include: Nike cycle touring shoes for women, Ventile cotton waterproofs, a thing for fixing a baby buggy onto a bike rack, LED lights which you recharge through a USB, my much admired flowery panniers and merino legwarmers. That's without mentioning serious bike hardware componentry like click shift gears, hub gears and dynamos with capacitors. Or purpose-built bikes. Technology has worked to counter some of the specific criticisms and fears of London cycling. Apps help with cycling routes and give information about availability of nearby Boris Bikes.

As well as the heroes there have been some zeroes. Gel saddle covers, breathable jackets and Gortex socks didn't work for me. But it's important to emphasise the vital ingredient of personal taste and attitude - also key for flexible working. The iPhone and iPad are heroes for me but others find them the nemesis of the flexible worker, by making it difficult to switch off as well as changing the norms and expectations about availability. The latest gadget in the Bicycle Repair Man repertoire is a bike broly from popins.fr (pictured, but his is red) which would not suit those cyclists who prefer a streamlined lycra look but is perfect for those eccentric black tie Brompton occasions.



Which gadgets and apps are your flexible working heroes and zeroes? Which things are new now but will become the kevlar bike tyres of the future, making flexible increasingly viable and robust? What's on your wish list for things which would make flexible life easier in the future?

- Video conferencing facilities - or do you prefer telephone?
- Apps which help you measure your productivity in the way that apps can measure calories?
- Apps to generate responses to Sludge - comments by co-workers or bosses knocking flexexecutives. (Read about Sludge in the Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE))

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ESCS6: Groups and gatherings

My first contact with cycling groups was in the late 1980s when I went to a meeting for cyclists in Peckham. A very articulate lady ran through the things that a local cycle group were doing to work towards better cycling facilities including cycle lanes to make things safer. It was inspiring.

We were living close to the Old Kent Road. It wasn't good for cycling. Bicycle Repair Man (BRM) kept ranting about it while I was trying to study so I encouraged him to get involved. One thing led to another and by the time we moved to Lambeth, He was coordinator for the Southwark group of the London Cycling Campaign. On regular occasions we had a hall full of bikes and deployed the traditional formula of baked potatoes, baked beans and grated cheese to feed the volunteers.

Armed with this nourishment, BRM was great at focusing the enthusiasm and idealism into Plans for bike events, bike counts, bike rides and bike lanes. There were also social events with the neighbouring Lambeth group. Some of these people remain some of our best friends.

At about this time, Critical Mass rides started in London. The last Friday of every month cyclists met on London's south bank and took to the streets in such numbers that other road users gave them space. It was an amazing experience. When you cycled home with cars whizzing past again you remembered how vulnerable you were.

The Critical Mass rides continue to this day. But in the mid noughties we called it a day. The need wasn't the same and there were increasing numbers of cyclists who wanted to shout at motorists and the police. In the USA it was rumoured that the police had arrested those taking part in a ride, forcing them to sleep on the street. With a small child on board and a sleeping bag in the pannier just in case, we did one last ride.

[Bike Commuters on Linked In](#)
3726 members



In person cycling groups and clubs continue but today are joined by virtual groups such as those on Linked In. The enthusiasm continues and articles and images shared, but the absence of eye contact and/or baked potatoes means that dialogues are tricky and hobby horses can prevail. The cartoon about the future of cycle lanes - shared use and single occupancy lanes - led to a comment about fast and slow lanes for bikes.



So on to flexible working. Linked in groups reach a bigger, global pool of enthusiasts and ideas. But the Executive Shift trustees are keen to know whether there is any enthusiasm out there for meeting in person, for gatherings or groups where you can voice the things which you can't type and where a real conversation may beat an electronic discussion. But if you want more time in your life, is that something you'd give time to? What would it look like?

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ESCS7: Research

Executive Shift, as a charity, is keen to undertake research to support its aims of encouraging more flexible working at senior levels. Whether it's market research, opinion polls or statistical analysis, research can help support spend and action by government or businesses ... or even individuals.

Over the last thirty years, there have been many studies on cycle use, behaviour and the effectiveness of technology. Cycling groups have carried out their own cycle counts to evidence where better provision is needed - one in the mid 1990s about the "best kept secret" of the Elephant and Castle cycle by-pass led to better cycle signposting around what was a particular accident black spot. Today cyclists have a choice between the bypass and advance stop lines and bus lanes, and larger numbers of bikes on the main roundabouts.

Of course, research isn't just about cyclists and potential cyclists, but other road users. The average speed of traffic in London 100 years ago was 12 mph. It still is today, on a good day. And cyclists can generally match or beat that, as is demonstrated frequently by the annual challenge which pits those using car, bike and bus against each other. The congestion charge and the improvements in public transport have changed the stats over the years, but cyclists still do well.

My own passion is about reducing risk and increasing safety on the roads and my fascination is about behaviour and attitudes - especially those which seem counter to intuition. Making road surfaces and junctions ambiguous makes everyone drive more cautiously, for example. My favourite study is one which says that it's safer to wear a blond wig and a flappy coat than a helmet - the number of accidents being reduced because motorists give such cyclists a wide berth, because they assume the rider is not as competent as those in helmet and lycra. Do you take more risk when you are wearing a helmet? As controversial as whether iPhones and Blackberries mean we are more or less stressed about work.



Executive Shift is about two shifts: about executives changing their attitudes towards flexible working in their companies, and about encouraging a step change in the level of support for those executives who want to work more flexibly ("flexexecutives" as they are sometimes known). Our research this year looks at the attitudes of:

- potential trailblazers in their 50s who might want to stay working longer than they had hoped, and
- line managers - who are key to recruiting and retaining flexexecutives.

What other research do you think we should do to support our executive shifts? What concerns do you have about the risks of working flexibly? Are there any solutions out there which we should test and research to help give you the confidence to give it a try?

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ESCS8: Diversity

Thirty years ago, there were so few cyclists in London that they were just "cyclists" as a group. Since then, several tribes emerged, dominated ... and then merged. As Bicycle Repair Man (BRM) said on Monday morning, we now have "Every kind of muppet under the sun!", adding quickly "But just look at all these bikes!". How does this visible diversity help cycling in London and what can we learn about flexible working?

Cycle couriers were one of the first tribes to appear: things had to get there as fast as in the early 80s but cash was a bit tighter and traffic problematic. Then there was the rise of the MAMILs (Middle Aged Men In Lycra). Whether inspired by BUPA or Sir Chris Hoy, this group had the budget to make a quality purchase and support the proliferation of bike shops. However, cycling in London also became more competitive and aggressive.

Boris bikes and the superhighways have changed all that. Look at the superhighway sign. It's not a MAMIL. The cyclist is wearing a normal/flappy jacket and a cap or Boris/Tintin quiff, not a helmet. And it's pink. Boris bikes are not top end or flashy (other than their lights). They don't normally go particularly fast and are ridden by people who have never ridden that bike before (probably). They are a very diverse group - some regulars, some tourists, some occasionals - who just find it more convenient or fun to cycle. The mix has changed the pace and made it easier for new cyclists to join in, without feeling that they have to wear lycra.

At the same time, there has also been a huge increase in the number of younger sporty women on bikes. Younger men are less lycra and more sporty casual. Muppets or not, the group is so diverse and big that we are forced to use the sweeping generalisation of "cyclists". We even talk to each other more, generally to admire quality bikes.



Senior flexible workers rarely have the opportunity to share their tips - it's one reason why Executive Shift was set up. As the recent Timewise Power Part Timers lists and articles have highlighted, flexible workers tend to keep in the closet and hide their working habits, particularly when working at a senior level. This invisibility is a challenge. It can mean that different groups of flexible workers think more about their different motivations (whether parenthood, promotion, health or quality of life) rather than their common desire for a shift from traditional working patterns.

Who are the MAMILs and the Boris Bikers of flexible working? Power technology users and working parents? What can they learn from each other? How can they join forces to support each other in improving flexible working practices rather than being different tribes in the workplace?

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ESCS9: Megastars and Moviestars

This week saw the bicycle film festival in Stockholm so it's a good time to think about the role played by stars of track, road and screen in improving the popularity of cycling in London and executives working flexibly.

The 2012 Olympics in London was one of both ecstasy and agony with Sir Chris and others coming good, and others missing out. A continued track record of national role models for commuting cyclists to admire.

On the big screen, one of our favourite movies of 2012 was Premium Rush in which Joseph Gordon-Levitt took to the streets as a cycle courier for a thriller made all the more exciting for the cycling action and thinking. It used five stunt cyclists with different skills including the jaw-droppingly talented Danny Macaskill, whose latest short film "The Ridge" on Skye is more scary than Jurassic Park (I watched both last night).



These films of real people doing seriously scary cycling make cycling round Hyde Park Corner or Elephant and Castle seem very dull and boring. Which, frankly, it often is. They also help me remember that however good I am in traffic, there is another league which I am not part of, so I don't pretend that I am.

The images of flexible working on the small and large screen have a way to catch up if they are to be role models for executives. Working mums trying to juggle children and some semblance of career are incredibly funny (think Claire Skinner as the overwrought and Outnumbered mum). The next Bridget Jones story, when filmed, will continue with that theme. Those business folk working from planes, phones and business trips are workaholics rather than flexaholics.

We need this range of characters so that we hold up the mirror to our own lifestyles. Not all real-life cycling heroes are angelic, but at least most people, cyclist or not, will have heard of Lance Armstrong's Tour de France wins, defeat of cancer, drug use and downfall. In contrast, coverage of flexexecutives is modest. The annual Timewise Power Part Timers list helps expose some key issues - those who work part time but stay in the closet (2012), the senior men who are working part time (2013). In the wake of the new laws on flexible working, Richard Branson has used his take on a results-only workplace to focus on flexibility.

Is there enough exposure of different working styles to help us stop and think about what's possible? What stories would you like to see in the media about flexexecutives? What would help you challenge what you think is scary and take a further step to making the most of your time?

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ESCS10: Red Routes

I've saved the best til last: for the final article in this flexible superhighway series I'm going to look at the single development which I think had the largest impact on cycling in London. Red routes are the major roads with red lines at the sides. What differentiates them from other roads in the metropolis is that they are the responsibility of Transport for London (TfL), rather than the local boroughs. They also have to cater for cyclists (whether on the roads themselves or nearby) so that all modes of transport are accommodated. The thinking has to be joined up, coordinated and integrated. And the provision had a budget behind it.

They were introduced about half way through my thirty year story. Before then, when you pedalled across the Lambeth and Southwark border you'd find gaps in cycle routes and even a change in colour on the road surfaces used to designate cycle lanes. The major junctions lacked the beneficial features which now make cycling safer. Junctions were too expensive to reengineer under a local borough budget.



Cycling out to Croydon on a new route for me was a cheering experience about the lasting impact which this initiative has had. Although there were some faded London Cycle Network signs on the road, the signs which led you safely across the major arteries were shiny and there were some great shared use (pedestrian and bike) paths along and under railways. Red route thinking meant that if you couldn't accommodate cyclists on the main roads money was invested in alternatives.

Different modes of road transport don't always work well together. Different types of flexible working don't either. Teams where the members work different part-time hours or home days need more planning and more effort to sustain a team feel. But not all tasks need teamwork and face time. Alternative working patterns can be designed for the right kind of activity.

The key is for the employer's flexperts (usually HR) to take control and decide what works for them. They are the TfL of the workplace, deciding what types of working they want to accommodate in their corridors and what provision can be made for alternatives. They can decide what works for them, where the spend on technology will give them a competitive advantage in attracting a more diverse workforce. They also define what can be left to line managers to decide in response to other requests for flexibility, and where the boundaries are.

How flexperts respond to this challenge will drive the pace of change on flexible working for executives. And change is required. Over 50s want to work differently and line managers are not prepared for the conversations ahead. The next series will look at our research into the over 50s' changing needs.