

Alice's Maternity Leave – Beneficial Leave or Left Behind?¹

Introduction

Alice² was nervous, but more frustrated with what had seemingly happened to her career. Paid maternity leave; which should have allowed her to balance both her family and her career; seemed to have impacted her career growth. While on maternity leave Alice had missed-out on promotions and pay raises within her department. And unfortunately, upon return Alice faced hurdles in recouping the opportunities she had lost.

Now, on the eve of her conversation with her direct manager at ABC Corp, Alice was worried. How could she say more about how she felt about the situation? She had already expressed herself in several conversations as well as in email. The new policy for paid maternity leave had allowed for 20 weeks of leave, with 4 weeks eligible for use prior to birth. Employees were excited at the time of implementation, including Alice. She had been employed for 5 years, yet, felt as though her time had meant nothing. If benefits were meant to *actually* benefit employees, why is it Alice felt left behind?

Meet Alice

Alice was first hired as a temporary employee in 2012 (*Exhibit 1: Timeline*). As a dual income household with one child, her and her husband both were employed. Her husband worked as a quality specialist for a consumer goods technology and had a long commute to work, however, he could occasionally work from home. In 2013 Alice was hired full-time as a Level 2 Data Associate.

Alice was part of the original team of data associates (DAs) hired for a newly created department at ABC Corp. Some team members worked onsite while others worked remotely from home and went into the office once per month for meetings. The team's responsibilities included customer experience investigations related to machine language technologies and interactions (*Exhibit 2: Data Associate Job Description*).

Alice enjoyed exploring new technology and creating policies and procedures as the department grew, although at times it could be boring. In 2012 the job role was restructured and redefined. All team members, including Alice, were promoted from Level 2 DA to Level 3 DA.

Alice Takes Leave

Alice was very excited at the prospect of paid maternity leave. She had not had that opportunity when she gave birth to her first child. "I was grateful I would not have to worry about being able to afford spending time at home with our second child when we decided it was time." In preparation of her maternity leave, she notified her manager and together they planned the leave time. They also prepared the team to cover her duties while she was on leave. Although she was on leave, Alice did remain in contact with her co-workers throughout its duration. After her 5-month leave, Alice returned to work on a part-time basis as part of the flexible return-to-work program.

¹ This case has been developed for classroom usage and instructional purposes only, based on interviews with the protagonist. It is not meant to represent anything else other than the expressed experience of the subject to facilitate the learning of key objectives for students.

² Names of individuals, businesses as well as dates of event have been disguised.

Departmental Changes During Alice's Leave

While Alice was on leave, the department was split into two teams. Members of the original department could choose to stay on Team 1 or move to Team 2, the newer, faster growing team. Those who moved to Team 2 received the title of Senior Data Associate (SDA), put on the Verify Team, and given a pay increase if their compensation was not within the pay range for the position (*Exhibit 3: Senior Data Associate Job Description and Exhibit 4: Salary Ranges*).

Alice Balances Work-Life

Upon returning to work part-time, Alice tried to make-up for the lost time. "I spent my first two months back at work getting caught up on many changes that occurred while I was out. I did not receive the title or compensation change my teammates that moved to Team 2 received while I was on maternity leave." Seeing that she had not yet had the opportunity to discuss the changes with her manager, Alice emailed her manager in the hopes of discussing her placement into Team 2. Alice was still on the return-to-work benefit and was part-time for the next month. It was only after several emails; including an email to her manager's manager; that she was able to set-up a meeting to discuss the situation. It was also around the same time Alice's return-to-work benefits concluded and she returned to full-time status. After the meeting it was decided that Alice would join Team 2.

Alice Feels Left Behind

Several months after joining Team 2, Alice witnessed multiple Level 2 DAs promoted to Level 3 Senior Data Associate (SDA). Alice sent an email to her new manager asking why she was still not on the Verify Team. "I was a Level 3 DA and qualified for that team. I did not receive a response."

One month later ABC Corp formed an official remote team within Team 2 and assigned a new manager, to whom Alice would now report. Alice took the opportunity to again advocate for herself and discussed her background, expertise, and experience with the new manager. Four months later the new manager informed Alice she would receive a title change to SDA. Her duties and responsibilities increased with this title change; however, she was still not granted the compensation increase that occurred when the department was originally split during Alice's maternity leave.

Shortly after Alice's promotion, it was announced some work within the team would be transitioned overseas. As an SDA, Alice aided in transitioning the responsibilities to the new overseas team. "My responsibilities included training those employees, providing reports on their errors, and giving feedback on their work. This feedback was done partly through live video meetings."

A year after Alice's original request to move to Team 2, and she still felt left behind, in particular concerning the compensation. Alice voiced this concern to her current manager during a conversation, and expressed, "...disappointment that I did not receive a compensation increase along with the title change. I was particularly frustrated because the team members who made this change, while I was on leave, received an increase." Alice's manager responded that HR was in the process of looking at everyone's compensation and she said they would probably notice the pay discrepancy. Alice was also informed that due to her stock within the company, it may offset the hourly pay discrepancy. After the conversation, Alice sent a follow-up email, noting how she felt taken advantage of with the title change instead of promotion. "I felt like I was penalized, and all my problems began when I took maternity leave."

Alice's Meeting Preparation

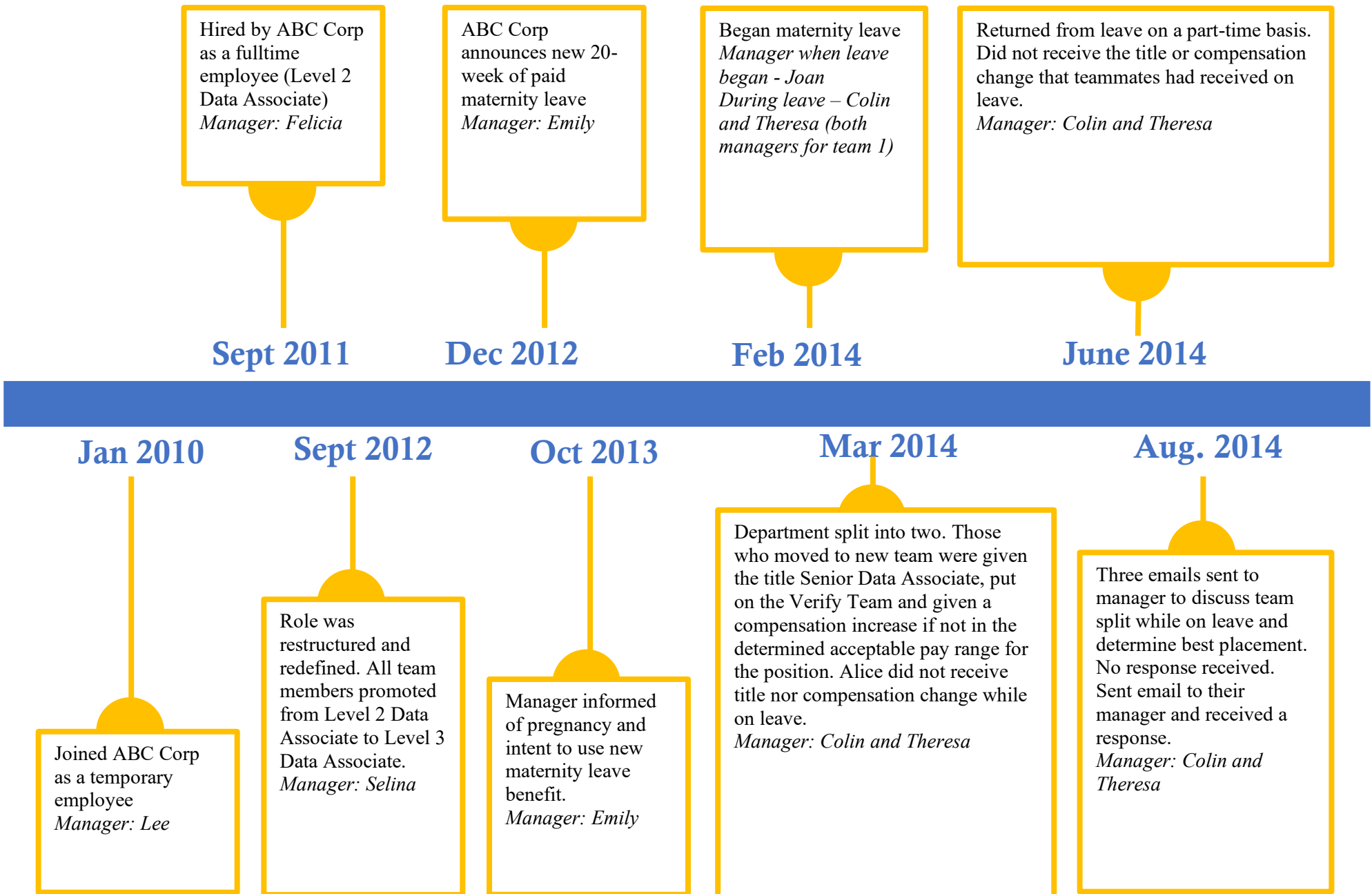
The next day Alice received an email inviting her to have another conversation with her manager, and that she wanted to inform her about changes to the compensation plan. In the interim, Alice had reflected on the first conversation, and "...felt like they are punishing people for loyalty and years of service! I don't care that I've been awarded more stocks because each year we get a couple more and I have more years under my belt. I care that my paycheck is less. The other team members will earn their stocks when they've been here another year and another, just like me."

Alice also thought about the overall experience the past year. It seemed as if it had been mishandled from the beginning, yet, this past year alone she had reported to 4 different managers. One of her colleagues had experienced the same situation, however, she received an increase. After talking with a few other employees, Alice realized that not only was she probably not within the pay range, but there were employees within the department who had been promoted with the original departmental split, had been there for less time than her, but earning more. "The problem isn't that people are discussing pay. These conversations are helping shed light on an obvious problem. Employees discussing pay would not be a problem if there was pay equity on the team."

"I am not interested in explaining this to any additional managers because the managers coming in now are too far removed to understand the situation. The high turnover of managers and the number of restructures is frustrating. But what frustrates me the most is that none of this would have happened if I had not taken a maternity leave. If I had not gone on maternity leave, I would have been present for the split and received the title change and compensation increase with my coworkers who also moved to Team 2."

With these thoughts in mind, Alice prepared for her meeting.

Exhibit 1: Timeline



Joined Team 2.
Manager: Amelia

Oct 2014

Formation of official
remote team with new
manager
Manager: Kelly

Feb 2015

Oversees transition
announced.
Manager: Kelly

June 2015

Sept 2014

Resumed working full-time. Met with manager, his manager, plus the Director of Team 2 to discuss moving to Team 2.
Manager: Colin and Theresa
Director: Peter

Jan 2014

Multiple Level 2 team members promoted to Level 3, with title Senior Data Associate. Email sent to manager to inquire about status with no response.
Manager: Amelia

May 2015

Manager informs Alice she will receive a title change to Senior Data Associate. Duties and responsibilities increased without a compensation increase.
Manager: Kelly

Aug 2015

Alice sends email to manager expressing disappointment. Manager invites Alice to have a meeting.
Manager: Kelly

Exhibit 2
General Job Description for a Data Associate³

Job title	<i>Data Associate</i>
Reports to	<i>Team Manager</i>

Job purpose

Process speech and language data for machine learning technologies.

Duties and responsibilities

- Deliver high quality under aggressive deadlines
- Work autonomously with minimum direction
- Handle unique analysis requests from a range of customers
- Contribute to process improvements to reduce handling time and improve output

Qualifications

Required:

- Proficiency in English, both verbal and written skills
- Ability to understand English speech with various accents
- Ability to listen to audio content
- Proactive in addressing issues and problems
- Excellent communication, strong organizational skills, and very detail-oriented
- Comfortable working in a fast paced, highly collaborative, dynamic work environment
- Willingness to work on several projects at one time
- Flexible and able to accept re-prioritization as necessary

Preferred:

- Bachelor's degree in a relevant field, such as Communications
- Professional experience with speech or language data
- Experience in data processing

Working conditions

Sitting at a desk for lengthy periods of time.

Physical requirements

Ability to listen to audio content to confirm automatic transcription of voice data.

Direct reports

None

³ Job Description is a general description that could be applied to a similar role in any company

Exhibit 3
General Job Description for a Senior Data Associate⁴

Job title	<i>Senior Data Associate</i>
Reports to	<i>Team Manager</i>

Job purpose

Process speech and language data for machine learning technologies. Provide leadership on the team by training other employees and verifying the work of Data Associates.

Duties and responsibilities

- Deliver high quality under aggressive deadlines
- Work autonomously with minimum direction
- Handle unique analysis requests from a range of customers
- Contribute to process improvements to reduce handling time and improve output
- Check the work of Data Associates
- Update workflow guidelines
- Train other employees in new workflows
- Assist in transition of work to newly created teams

Qualifications

Required:

- Minimum of one year as a Data Analyst within ABC Corp.
- Proficiency in English, both verbal and written skills
- Ability to understand English speech with various accents
- Ability to listen to audio content
- Proactive in addressing issues and problems
- Excellent communication, strong organizational skills, and very detail-oriented
- Comfortable working in a fast paced, highly collaborative, dynamic work environment
- Willingness to work on several projects at one time
- Flexible and able to accept re-prioritization as necessary

Preferred:

- Bachelor's degree in a relevant field, such as Communications

Working conditions

Sitting at a desk for lengthy periods of time.

Physical requirements

Ability to listen to audio content to confirm automatic transcription of voice data.

Direct reports

None

⁴ Job Description is a general description that could be applied to a similar role in any company.

Exhibit 4**Salary Ranges for Data Associate (Level 2)/Senior Data Associate (Level 3, Level 4)⁵**

	Min	Mid	Max
Level 2	\$33,000	\$38,500	\$44,000
Level 3	\$41,000	\$46,000	\$51,000
Level 4	\$45,000	\$50,000	\$55,000

⁵ Developed for usage with this case only and are not representative of corporate pay ranges.

Exhibit 5
Benefits

Medical	Paid holidays
Dental	Employee Assistance Program
Vision	Adoption Assistance
401K	Paid Maternity Leave
Paid time-off	Stock units granted as part of the compensation package each year during the annual review period

Exhibit 6**Reporting Lines**