



Australian Government

Workforce Australia



WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY
Toolkit

Career
Revive

Contents

Introduction and overview	3
What is flexible working?	4
Your questions answered	6
The case for flexible work	7
Maturity assessment	8
A policy approach	10
Guidance for managers	15
Additional resources	20



Introduction and overview

In an expanding and competitive economy, the capacity to innovate and provide responsive services rests on a company's workforce. To meet future demands, businesses will need to attract, develop and retain the best talent. Workplace flexibility is a critical enabler for diverse and innovative workforces.¹

While the benefits of flexible work are innumerable, the obstacles for adoption can be significant.

Businesses seeking to increase flexibility can encounter entrenched attitudes about performance and productivity, aged infrastructure, and change aversion from leaders and managers.

Employers also face structural challenges. As factory and production workers will attest, not all jobs are conducive to time and place flexibility, leading to difficult questions about fairness and equity.

Flexibility does not have to be an all or nothing approach. Localised approaches, including effective job re-design, can help to maximise individual and business outcomes.²

PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit provides managers and staff with practical supports to aid the design and introduction of flexible work that meets overall business maturity.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ Queensland Government, March 2020. Flexible by Design Framework. Accessed from: <https://www.for.gov.qld.gov.au/flexible-by-design>

² Future of Work Institute, August 2012. The Benefits of Flexible Working Arrangements – A Future of Work Report

What is flexible working?

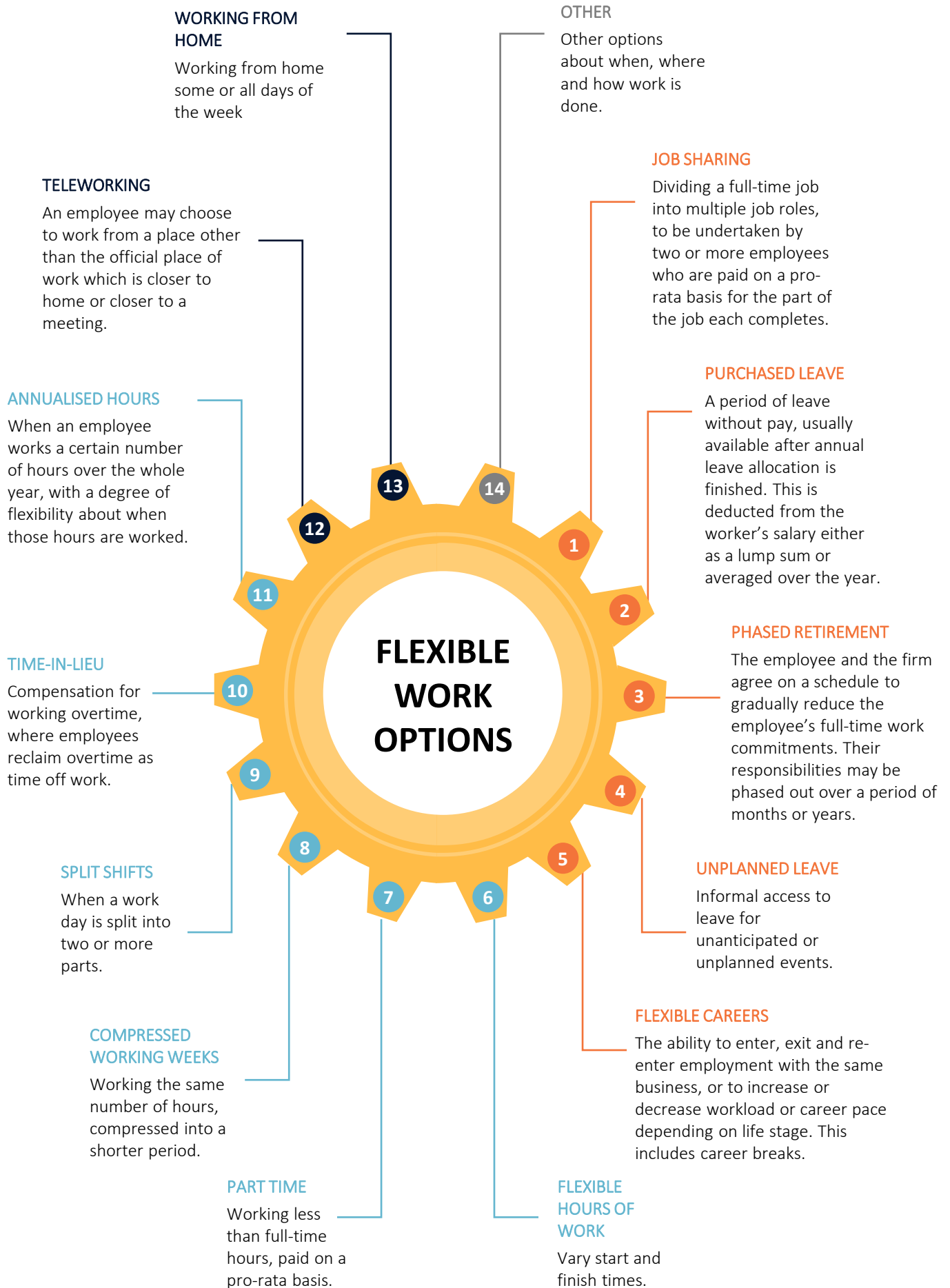
Flexible work is most commonly defined by what it is not – not the 9 to 5, central office arrangement. The absence of a clear definition is in itself a barrier to broader adoption.

Ongoing flexible working arrangements alter **HOW**, **WHEN** or **WHERE** work is conducted, or a combination of the three³. Common types of flexible work are included below:



FOOTNOTES:

³ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2018. Why work flexibly? Accessed from: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/topics/workplace-flexibility/why-work-flexibly>



Your questions answered



Do I have to grant flexible working arrangements?

While any employee can request flexibility from their employer, Section 65 of the *Fair Work Act 2009* recognises that there are those who are entitled. Employees (other than a casual employee) who have worked with the same employer for at least 12 months can request flexible working arrangements if they:

- Are parents of a child who is school age or younger
- Are a carer
- Have a disability
- Is 55 or older
- Are experiencing violence from a member of the employee's family
- Provide care or support to a member of the employee's immediate family
- Are a member of the employee's household, who requires care or support because the member is experiencing violence from the member's family.

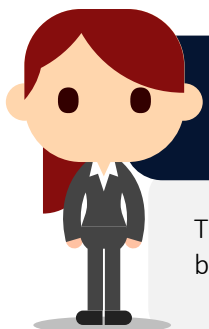
There may also be specific terms in an enterprise agreement or award that grant flexible working arrangements.



Is there a difference between casual and permanent employees?

The right to request flexible working arrangements is available to staff who are continuing or on a fixed term, as well as long term casual staff members have a reasonable expectation of continuing employment on a regular and systematic basis.

Employers are increasingly offering flexibility to employees to boost staff morale and to improve their physical and mental wellbeing.



Should I grant a flexible working arrangement if I don't have to?

There are many benefits to having employees working flexibly however, this is all on a case by case basis. These have been highlighted in detail on page 7.

The case for flexible work

Workplace flexibility is best when it meets the needs of both employees and the business. Research suggests that flexible work and a flexible mindset are essential elements of a high performing work culture.⁴

IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY

Flexible work increases individual performance and can be more motivating than a bonus. Employees can work in environments more conducive to focused work, and choose the time and place they are most effective.¹

WELLBEING

There are clear links between employee autonomy and improved mental health. Letting people choose hours that work for them, to fit around childcare or other commitments, can help to reduce some of life stresses and improve balance, and wellbeing.^{4,5}

SERVICE DELIVERY

Organisations that allow staff to work flexibly can expand their service delivery hours and meet customer needs outside of the standard operating hours.⁶

RETAIN KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND EXPERIENCE

Offering flexible work aides retention, allowing businesses to retain employee knowledge and skills while also reducing the cost of staff turnover.⁴

ATTRACT TALENT

There is an unmet demand for flexible jobs. Advertising jobs as flexible can help businesses attract broader and more diverse talent pools and build future talent pipelines of young people who wish to work flexibly.⁴

INCREASED JOB SATISFACTION

Staff who can work flexibly are more likely to recommend their employer, stay loyal to the organisation and go the extra mile when required.⁴

PATHWAY TO GENDER EQUALITY

Normalising flexible working arrangements support more diverse talent pipelines, due to better options for people who find it challenging to work a conventional working week.⁷

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

All people want to live in a society where they feel supported to live a balanced life and connect with their family. Employers play an essential role in enabling men and women to do so.⁸

FOOTNOTES:

⁴ Nous Group, March 2018. Flexible work, good for business? Accessed from: https://www.griffith.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0031/548581/Final-For-public-release-Report-Flexible-work-return-on-investment.pdf

⁵ Black Dog Institute. Workplace wellbeing. Accessed from: <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/wellbeing/workplace-wellbeing/>

⁶ NSW Public Service Commission, NSW Government, 2018. Communication strategy for flexible working in the NSW government sector.

⁷ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2018. Workplace flexibility. Accessed from: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/topics/workplace-flexibility>

⁸ FlexJobs, 2016. How flexible work supports corporate social responsibility. Accessed from: <https://www.flexjobs.com/employer-blog/flexible-work-supports-corporate-social-responsibility/>

Maturity assessment

Understanding the context and maturity of your business is a crucial first step in integrating flexible working arrangements.

The Maturity Framework (P8) will support you to assess your current state and help you focus efforts to suit the particular needs of your business and people.

The tool can also be used as a conversation guide and help you to gain supports internally.

The Flexible by Design Framework has been developed by the Public Service Commission in Queensland to support businesses to find the ‘flexibility within flexibility.’ Understanding where your business sits within this framework can help to guide and focus efforts.

		CHANGE THE POLICY Pg 10	CONSIDER THE PRACTICE Pg 16	
		TRADITIONAL	DEVELOPING	FLEXIBLE BY DESIGN
ORGANISATION		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited appreciation for the benefits of flexible work. Regulated approach to flexible work, and a workplace that is slow to respond to change. Full-time is default for recruitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appreciates the benefits of flexible work and incorporates into business as-usual. Deliberate emphasis on flexibility across the organisation, but application is siloed and segmented. Promotes flexible work opportunities during recruitment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embeds flexible work to capitalise on diversity dividend – better business outcomes. Diversity dividend = flexibility encourages diversity, diversity enables inclusion, inclusion creates innovation, innovation drives high performance. Mutually beneficial flexible arrangements that align with service delivery optimise and prioritise business performance. Attract and retain employees that value balance and flexibility, and want innovative and contemporary approaches to work.
	EMPLOYEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited uptake of flexible work. Flexible work requests are initiated by employees and seen as a problem to address behind closed doors. Lack of trust from colleagues and excessive hours seen as a badge of honour. No one promotes or shares stories about flexible work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate uptake of flexible work. Managers accommodate individual requests so work-life conflict is minimised. Teams accommodate arrangements, but feel others have to pick up the load left by flexible work arrangements. Some employees work flexibly, but do not tend to promote or share stories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All employees can request flexible work – flexible work is the norm and reflects diverse workers, work and workplaces. Teams create flexible work approaches that are less about rules, process and structure, and more about culture, outcomes, ways of thinking and wellbeing. Solutions demonstrate give and take, trust, open communication, cooperation, negotiation and ethics. Employees proudly share and promote flexible work stories.
		PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees and managers agree formal and relatively static arrangements. Risk averse and bureaucratic approval processes where health, safety and wellbeing is not an organisational priority. Limited access to mobile technology and modern workspaces. Time and tasks used as primary measure of performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managers and employees agree to formal and informal arrangements. Managers and employees are risk aware and understand health, safety and wellbeing priorities. Greater emphasis on collaborative space, mobile technology and team processes that support flexible work. Flexible work used as a benefit or reward for high performance.

A policy approach

A formal policy on flexible work explicitly states the intent and practices of an organisation.

Changing the business system is a precursor to changing attitudes, and interrupting 'patterns of bias' that may be restricting flexible work.

The tools below have been designed to aid you in the development of a flexible working policy.

Below are key features of a flexible working policy, adapted from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency resource Developing a flexible working arrangements policy.

Area	Key features that may be included
Purpose	<p>Provide a level of autonomy and flexibility within work role to accommodate various priorities at work, home and in community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational education while in paid work • Caring, parenting and/or cultural responsibilities while in paid work • Managing health/medical issues while in paid work • Reduced working hours whilst phasing in or out of paid work • Any other personal commitments <p>Describe the process and procedures for establishing flexible working arrangements</p>
Guidelines and procedures	<p>DEFINITIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear definitions of key terms (e.g. flexible working, official worksite, alternative location) and options available (e.g. compressed hours, job-sharing, purchased leave) <p>ELIGIBILITY AND EXCLUSIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An outline of the conditions/exclusions applicable to employment status, tenure, to access flexible working arrangements • An outline of the conditions/exclusions applicable to variable working hours, to leave and other Absences when working flexibly <p>PROCESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An outline of the process involved in identifying positions eligible for flexible working arrangements or aspect of working arrangements that could possibly be modified • An outline on developing and implementing effective consultation mechanisms which encourage cooperation and engagement between employees and the employer • An outline of the operational process and steps involved in applying, reviewing, accepting or rejecting application requests (e.g. application, approval levels, timeline for approval/denial, training requirements, written agreements) • An outline of the operational process and steps involved in changing/modifying or terminating/withdrawing a flexible working arrangement • An outline of support, materials, and equipment provided • An outline of the specific requirements for record keeping, reporting and monitoring of use • An outline of the expectations imposed upon employees who have entered into a flexible working arrangement and their managers: • Define the responsibilities of supervisors and managers of employees working flexibly • Define the responsibilities of employees working flexibly (e.g. performance expectations and monitoring, communication protocols, occupational health and safety issues) <p>PERFORMANCE AND REVIEW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A statement confirming employees working flexibly access the same opportunities as other employees (e.g. work assignments, awards and recognition, development opportunities, promotions) and that the performance of employees working flexibly is evaluated consistent with the employer’s regular performance management system • A commitment to regularly review written agreement of the flexible working arrangements in place • An outline of the consequences of breaches of flexible working arrangements rules and conditions
References and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reference to relevant governing legislations such as Fair Work Act 2009 and National Employment Standards • A reference to relevant internal policies (e.g. gender equality policy, family-friendly policies, IT and cybersecurity policies, occupational health and safety policy)

The Fair Work Ombudsman requires that requests for flexible work are delivered to the employer in writing to ensure clarity on agreements and adherence to legal requirements. The template below will help aid employees who wish to request flexible work:



FLEXIBLE WORK APPLICATION FORM

Full name:

Date:

Job Position:

Team:

Employer name:

Current Work Arrangement

Current Place of Work:

Current Days Worked:

Current Hours Worked:

Proposed Flexible Working Arrangement

Part-time

Working from home

Job Share

Job Share

Flexi Time

Other:

Phased Retirement

I would like the new arrangement to be **permanent** and start from:
(day, month, year)

I would like the new arrangement to be **temporary**:

Start:

End: (day, month, year)

FLEXIBLE WORK APPLICATION FORM (CONT.).

Reason for the request: (optional)

I believe the proposed arrangement may lead to the following benefits and barriers:

	Benefits	Potential Barriers
Myself:		
Business		
Team		
Customer		

I suggest we could fix the potential barriers by:

Signed:

Name:

Date:

All employers who receive a request must provide a written response within 21 days, which outlines whether the request is approved or refused. Employers can only refuse a request on reasonable business grounds, and must elaborate on these reasons in the written response. The template (below) can support employers to engage in conversation with their employees.



FLEXIBLE WORK MANAGERS RESPONSE

Full name:

Date:

Job Position:

Team:

As discussed with you I have considered your request for a flexible working arrangement dated _____, attached.

EITHER

As discussed with you, I can confirm that I have **approved** your request for:

Your new arrangement will start:

OR

As discussed with you, I am **unable to accommodate** your original request. However, I am able to offer you the following arrangement which we have discussed and you stated would be suitable:

Your new arrangement will start:

OR

I am **declining** your request for the following reasons as discussed with you:

We will review this agreement on a quarterly basis. Our next review date will be _____.

Signed:

Name:

Date:



GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS

Increasing workplace flexibility and
boosting performance

The role of managers

Managers are critical enablers of workforce flexibility, serving as the bridge between policy and practice. It is they who define the parameters and expectations for flexible work.

Even the most employee-oriented managers are likely to have concerns about managing and measuring employee performance outside of standard work hours.

Traditional performance management is grounded in compliance and process. As businesses mature, they should consider that individual effort and external factors create environments that help staff to thrive.

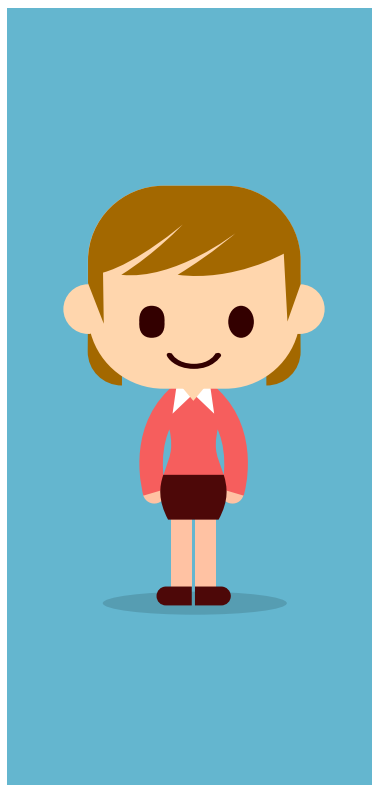
The questions below will help managers consider where they might channel their efforts to integrate flexible work into their teams, and the broader business.

DEFINE THE PARAMETERS AROUND FLEXIBLE WORK

- ? Are managers keeping their staff and teams updated on the evolving context and what this means for how, when and where staff can work?
- ? Have managers defined the parameters and expectations for flexible work?
- ? Are your people clear on the way they need to work under flexible working arrangements?
- ? Have you defined the outcomes and outputs required to enable a clear rhythm for flexible workers?

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

- ? Are staff motivated to support, and engage in new ways of working?
- ? Are strategies in place to maintain the engagement of individuals with flexible work arrangements? For example – have you ensured that people who do work flexibly are included in team activities and continue to receive rewards, training and opportunities for promotion?
- ? Are the actions of managers providing staff with positive role models for flexible working arrangements?



ENGAGE IN REGULAR AND CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATION

- ? Are managers, teams, and individuals checking in to see if flexible working arrangements are effective for the individual, manager, and team?
- ? Are managers and teams sharing information about the work they are doing and how they are progressing tasks and activities?
- ? Have managers established regular conversations with individuals to discuss performance expectations in a constructive and ongoing manner? Not passive-aggressive emails or the annual performance review



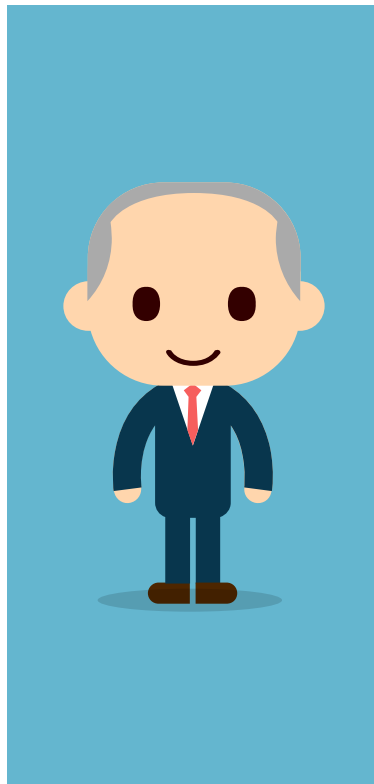
The questions below will help managers consider where they might channel their efforts to integrate flexible work into their teams, and the broader business.

PUT THE RIGHT SYSTEMS IN PLACE

- ❓ Do managers, teams, and staff have access to the systems, platforms, and technology they need to support them to work flexibly? Home based internet, smart-phones, project management software, and helpful computer programs such as Microsoft Teams and Google docs allow employees to maintain contact regardless of where they are located.
- ❓ Are there effective channels for information sharing to enable the handover of work and communication across timeframes and locations?

FLEXIBLE WORK BY DESIGN

- ❓ Is there an even distribution of workload to ensure employees are not underutilised or over-worked?
- ❓ Have you considered re-designing work to enable greater flexibility? When you break jobs down into component parts, it is likely you will find tasks that lend themselves to time and place flexibility.
- ❓ Have managers considered team-based approaches rather than responsibility for projects resting with a single individual? Team-based approaches allow work to be completed without all members being present.



CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY

- ❓ Do staff or individuals have the skills and capabilities to deliver outcomes via flexible arrangement? If you have an employee who you believe requires more structure and hands-on guidance, talk to them about a trial period, and consider adjusting accordingly.
- ❓ Do staff and managers have the skills to utilise technology to maintain connection and coordinate actions?

Questions to ask when considering flexible working arrangements

Below are a series of questions managers should ask themselves before accepting or rejecting flexible work arrangements.

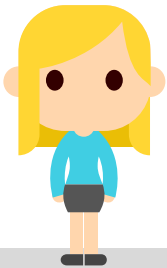


- Do I need to grant a flexible working arrangement to this employee as per the Fair Work Act, award, or agreement?
- How appropriate is the flexible work arrangement that has been proposed?
- Has the employee made it clear what they are hoping to seek from this arrangement?
- How long will the arrangement be in place?
- Can work objectives be met another way if the flexible work arrangement is put in place?
- How will the arrangement impact on the current work team and its priorities?
- Does the request require a level of resourcing that can be accommodated?
- How will workload issues be covered – does this present an opportunity to develop other team members?
- Does the employee have face-to-face client contact, and if so, how can this arrangement be considered without disruption to the service provided?
- Will the proposed flexible working arrangement adequately address the employee concerns, and reason for seeking a flexible work arrangement?
- Will the employee's arrangement impact their participation in important team events?
- Do you have suggestions for alternative arrangements that may suit the employee and the work team if you can't accommodate their original request?
- Does the arrangement require a contract variation, or can it be accommodated informally?
- How will the arrangement be documented?
- How often will we review this arrangement to ensure it is working?

Handling difficult conversations

There may be times when you have to handle difficult conversations relating to flexible working, and that's okay. Leading discussions that enable multiple, contrasting perspectives is how problems are solved, and performance improves. Below are some examples of possible conversations around flexible work, and some suggested responses.

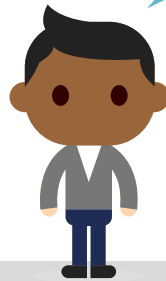
"I'm sick, but I can work from home."



RESPONSE

Remind employees that they should use sick leave when they are sick as a general rule. However, there are times when an employee may be well enough to do some work at home, and this is when to exercise judgment.

"I want to work from home on Wednesdays, like Kevin does. It's not fair he gets to and I don't."



RESPONSE

Remind employees that context does matter. Applying a policy fairly doesn't mean everyone has the same outcome. Instead, offer to talk to them about their needs and desires and how best you and the team can accommodate them.

"I work from home on Wednesdays, but there is a team meeting scheduled Wednesday afternoon."



RESPONSE

Remind the employee that flexible working is about give and take. Making inflexible arrangements around flexible work does not work. Sometimes team events on flexible working days is unavoidable. Discuss whether remotely dialling is an option and the possibility of scheduling the next team meeting on another day.

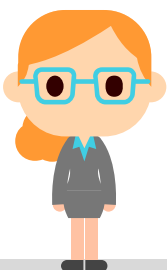
"I want to work from home but will need another computer to do this."



RESPONSE

Response to requests for infrastructure will depend on the context of your business. Have a conversation about why they think they need another computer. When you understand the reason for the request, you will be more equipped to help them find a meaningful solution.

"I'd like to work a compressed week. I could easily fit five days work into four."



RESPONSE

Talk to the employee about the reality of compressed work. Ask if they think they can do the job effectively in four days without impacting on their colleagues and the businesses and discuss whether they will be willing to flex and adapt as required.

"I know I received a poor performance rating, however I want to work from home 1 day a week"



RESPONSE

Remember that poor performance should not preclude flexible working. Have a discussion about their performance and how they plan to address it. Consider trialling a flexible working arrangement with clear goals that they need to achieve.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Apps that support flexible working

Technology tools can both promote and hinder success.

The right tools allow teams to thrive in flexible working environments. Teams tend to perform best when there is one tool type (i.e. Dropbox or OneDrive – not both) and staff clearly know how and when to use it. Some possible applications are shown below in a table adapted from the NSW Government’s handbook, ‘Managing a dispersed team’.

Task	Applications	Description
Communication	Microsoft Teams	Instant messaging, video and collaboration system with ability to share documents, images and emails. It is an all in one application.
	Slack	Slack can be used if you don’t have Microsoft Teams. It offers similar features. www.slack.com
	What’s App	Informal communication application for quick text and images exchange. www.whatsapp.com
	Yammer	Ability to create private channels and share documents.
Note Taking	One Note	Organising thoughts, to-do lists, and projects. www.onenote.com
	Evernote	Taking notes, clipping web pages and recording audio. www.evernote.com
	Google Keep	Ideal for collecting images, drafting documents, and creating checklists. keep.google.com
Project Management	Trello	Visual boards with project cards given to team members to track task completion. www.trello.com
	Asana	Create lists of tasks and subtasks that can be used for project management, goal-setting, brainstorming and meeting agendas. www.asana.com
	Monday!	Create highly customised spreadsheets in which everyone on a team logs the task they need to complete and updates them with status reports and other relevant information.
	Team Ahoy	Simple and visual project management tool. www.teamahoy.com
Document Sharing	Dropbox	Independent cloud storage application. Available across devices (mobile, tablet, computer).
	OneDrive	Cloud storage application own by Microsoft. Available across devices (mobile, tablet, computer). www.onedrive.com
	Google Drive	Cloud storage application own by Google. Available across devices (mobile, tablet, computer). www.google.com

Useful Resources

Resource	Details	Link
Flexible by Design	A framework outlines the benefits, reasons and principles behind flexible work as well as the organisational journey to achieve a healthy work-life blend.	https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/flexible-by-design
FlexAbility Kit for Managers	A kit for Managers that has information relating to how to tackle myths, bias and get buy-in with your peers at the senior level.	http://www.flexibleworkingday.com/flexabilitykit/
Flexible working for Managers	A comprehensive suite of resources to help managers implement flexible working.	https://www.wgea.gov.au/topics/workplace-flexibility/flexibility-for-managers
Flexible working case studies	A set of case studies from various workplaces where organisations have encountered similar challenges	https://www.psc.nsw.gov.au/workplace-culture---diversity/flexible-working/implementing-flexibility--resources-for-people-and-culture-teams/leading-implementation-of-flexible-working/case-studies
A Guide to Managing Your (Newly) Remote Workers	An overview of common challenges face by remotely working teams, and a some tangible hints and tips to improve performance.	https://hbr.org/2020/03/a-guide-to-managing-your-newly-remote-workers
21st Century Work Life and leading remote teams	A podcast that looks at different ways of earning a living, of using technology at work and of managing teams	https://player.fm/series/21st-century-work-life-and-leading-remote-teams
Flexible Working diagnostic assessment	A readiness assessment to understand where you are now, determine your flexibility vision and identify key priorities	https://www.wgea.gov.au/topics/workplace-flexibility/performing-a-diagnostic-assessment

References

1. Queensland Government, March 2020. Flexible by Design Framework. Accessed from: <https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/flexible-by-design>
2. Future of Work Institute, August 2012. The Benefits of Flexible Working Arrangements – A Future of Work Report.
3. Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2018. Why work flexibly? Accessed from: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/topics/workplace-flexibility/why-work-flexibly>
4. Nous Group, March 2018. Flexible work, good for business? Accessed from: https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0031/548581/Final-For-public-release-Report-Flexible-work-return-on-investment.pdf
5. Black Dog Institute. Workplace wellbeing. Accessed from: <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/wellbeing/workplace-wellbeing/>
6. NSW Public Service Commission, NSW Government, 2018. Communication strategy for flexible working in the NSW government sector.
7. Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2018. Workplace flexibility. Accessed from: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/topics/workplace-flexibility>
8. FlexJobs, 2016. How flexible work supports corporate social responsibility. Accessed from: <https://www.flexjobs.com/employer-blog/flexible-work-supports-corporate-social-responsibility/>

