

A Complete Guide to **Workplace Flexibility**

Flexibility has grown to be more commonplace in the workplace in recent years; however, managing flexibility remains a challenge, as evidenced by the recent decisions by Yahoo and Best Buy to overhaul their flexibility programs.

To help your organization with similar challenges, we've developed a short guide to instituting and managing flexibility in the workplace.

Step 1: Create a business case for workplace flexibility.

Many HR professionals have to “sell” the concept of flexible work to their leadership team. In doing so, we recommend gathering reliable benchmark data related to how common flexible work options are in your industry and size, and among your competitors.

Be sure to also research the ROI of workplace flexibility and its benefits as far as attracting, retaining, and engaging talent. There are a number of success stories surrounding the use of flexible work arrangements both in specific organizations and in business research. Flexibility and work-life balance continue to be sought-after in the workforce. Additionally, collect internal feedback from employees and managers to determine whether there is a need and desire for flexibility in your workplace, what those needs specifically are, and what segments of your workforce are most interested in flexibility. It’s also helpful to research possible barriers to flexibility in your workplace, such as job design, management styles, and business operations; and identify possible solutions to overcoming these challenges.





Step 2: Choose flexible work options to offer.

Select flexible work options that fit your organization's operations, its jobs, and your culture. For example, is your organization trusting, supportive, and accommodating? Does it value employees' personal and family needs? Will offering flexible work options interfere with your business operations? Which jobs allow for flexible options?

Compare practices with peer companies of similar size and industry, as some options work better in certain industries and for certain roles. For example, compressed work weeks and shift changes tend to be best for production/manufacturing roles and health care jobs. Meanwhile, flex-time tends to be more suitable for office and professional jobs. Below are the most common flexible work options:

- **Flex-time:** Allowing employees to select the hours that they work, typically start and end-times, within a set of core hours (the most common being 9am-4 pm).
- **Compressed workweeks:** Employees work longer work days, but fewer days within a workweek, such as 4 10-hour days or 3 12-hour days.
- **Part-time work:** Employees work a consistent reduced work schedule, such as 24 hours per week.
- **Job-sharing.** Two employees "share" one full-time job on a part-time basis, splitting their responsibilities and tasks.
- **Telecommuting/work-from-home:** Employees work at a remote location, telecommute, or work at home on a full-time, partial, or case-by-case basis.
- **Informal flexibility:** Employees have the option to leave work for appointments during the work day and still be paid or make up the time.

Certainly, there are other options to consider, but these approaches tend to be the most common.



Step 3: Pilot a program.

Pilot the program with a group of employees. Choose one of your departments or a select group of employees to test a flexible work option. This will help you identify potential challenges to an organization-wide program and resolve them before launching it to the entire staff.

Step 4: Create, communicate, and enforce your policy.

Your policy should address your organization's philosophy on flexibility/work-life balance, what flexible options are available, who is eligible to use them, the process employees should take to request a flexible work option, how to use the program and expectations, and consequences for failing to comply with the policy or performance standards while using the program. In addition, communicate the policy and procedure to both managers and employees. Here are some best practices:

- Emphasize that the ability to use flexibility is a privilege given based on continued good performance, and that it is not an entitlement.
- Explain your eligibility requirements and why certain employees are eligible and certain ones are not, given business necessity or suitability of job roles (if eligibility is restricted).
- Clarify the process by which employees can request a flexible work option and the criteria by which their request will be considered.
- Encourage dialogue about flexibility needs and work-life concerns between employees and supervisors.
- Communicate performance expectations and that employees must continue to meet standards and deliver results while using flexible options.

Step 5: Train supervisors and managers.

Managing day-to-day flexibility successfully generally falls on supervisors and managers, so they need to be given the appropriate discretion to enforce your policy and make decisions regarding flexibility. Consider training supervisors and providing them with ongoing support on the following:

- Facilitating the flexible work option request and approval procedure
- Applying discretion and problem solving when having conversations about flexibility, evaluating requests (e.g. assessing jobs and roles and their conduciveness to flexibility, work priorities, and reasons for requests), and granting flexibility
- Overcoming resistance regarding change and possible abuse
- Managing performance while employees use flexible work schedules
- Managing remote or virtual employees





Step 6: Evaluate your program.

Evaluate your flexible work program in terms of who is using it, how it is being used, and the challenges participants and managers are experiencing. Talk to employees and supervisors regarding if it's working, how it can be enhanced, and what their experiences are while using the program. Assess their satisfaction with the program and tweak it as necessary.

Flexibility is common and worthwhile in the workplace. Nonetheless, it's important to make sure that your organization is instituting the right type of program and the right type of management practices to make sure that it's successful and produces the desired effects.

Have a question?

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