

# Introducing flexible work

Flexible working is increasingly a standard part of the employment package at productive, competitive workplaces that retain great people and attract new talent.

Flexible work practices give employees control over when, where and how they work, such as:

- Hours (earlier or later start and finish times)
- Location (working off-site for part of or the whole day, or in different spaces on-site)
- Days of work (such as part time or a compressed work week).

Flexibility is part of an agile business model that responds quickly to environmental changes; the changing needs of employees; and those of the organisation. This model focuses on outputs and results, not time in the office. It is about supporting work styles that best suit the individual employee and team to enable them to be most productive.

Flexibility gives employees autonomy. Autonomy – having control over at least some of the decisions about your work – is a critical element of job satisfaction and happiness at work<sup>1</sup>. These are just two of a long list of benefits backed by evidence-based research<sup>2</sup> and the experience of major workplaces. Flexibility also increases retention rates and makes workplaces more appealing for in-demand knowledge workers.

When introducing flexible working, it is important to consider both policy and culture. Most workplaces now have flexible work policies, but the informal culture can be slow to catch up.

A trial in Sydney by the NSW Government's Behavioural Insights Unit<sup>3</sup> found employees' start and finish times mimicked not their team leader, but their director. Executives' behaviour, for example leading by example, is key to instilling a flexible work culture that delivers on workplace policy.

## LEAVING LOUDLY

To avoid junior staff waiting for Directors and senior employees to leave before they do, encourage your team leaders to leave loudly. Making a point of embracing flexible work times at a senior level demonstrates that it is acceptable to leave before your boss and that flexibility is for everyone.

## CORE MEETING HOURS

One simple strategy to encourage flexible work is to narrow core meeting hours, say from 10am to 3pm, to enable people to adjust their start/finish times. Changing default settings,

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<sup>1</sup> [Cooper, 2016, The Key to Happiness at Work Isn't Money it's Autonomy, Quartz Journal](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Diversity Council of Australia, 2012, Get Flexible! Mainstreaming Flexible Work in Australian Business](#)

<sup>3</sup> [NSW Behavioural Insights Unit, 2018, Behavioural Insights Report](#)

such as the 'active hours' on calendars will reinforce the message that people may not be available at the start and end of the day.

Remember that flexible work is more than just a policy. Talk to Connect about different strategies for growing your flexible culture, and check out the tips and tools in the [Travel Choices Flexible Work Toolkit](#)<sup>4</sup>.

### **MANAGING CHANGE**

Before you introduce flexible working, managers and senior managers need to be briefed, ready and supported to lead by example. The perception that effective team collaboration requires daily face time needs to be challenged through direct experience, as well as training in effective communication methods. Be wary of people who count hours spent in the office when productivity and output should be their focus.

Acknowledge that change can be a challenge, and consider using trial groups or trial times before scaling change across the wider organisation.

Remember the importance of senior staff demonstrating trust, communicating openly and leading by example.

There are significant benefits of flexible work. Flexible start and end times mean people can retime their commute to avoid the peak, and in turn help reduce the peak time burden on the local transport network.

Making travel just a bit easier can make employees just a bit happier, which counts towards benefits for the business benefits and a more engaged workplace.

### **INSIGHTS**

- Establish trust and accountability – a two-way responsibility between manager and employee
- Plan, prioritise and communicate – have the tools and systems you need to communicate well. Technology is critical to make this work.
- Face time is still important – regular formal and informal face time supports collaboration and avoids isolation.

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<sup>4</sup> [Transport for NSW 2016 Travel Choices Flexible Working Toolkit](#)