



***Managing Flexible Working in the Public Sector and how Technology could assist
- Survey Findings & Analysis***

Research Paper

Survey background & objectives

Softworks recently completed a survey in conjunction with [Public Sector Executive](#) and are delighted to share the survey results with you. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to complete our survey.

The purpose of the survey was to learn more about the flexible working options available within Public Sector organisations along with how current and future technologies could be designed and developed to improve operational processes.

The survey was carried out in November 2018. It was emailed to **Public Sector Executive's 120,000 subscribers** and promoted on their website and via social media.

Summary of survey findings and results

Part One – Flexible Working Options

In part one we looked at the flexible working options that were available to Public Sector employees. The most popular option was part time working with 94% of organisations offering this.

This was followed by flexitime with 88% of the organisations we surveyed offering this. Other popular options were

- Fixed-term employment (including contractual) - 78%
- Flexiplace/teleworking/remote working – 77%
- Job Sharing - 72%
- Career Breaks/Special leave/Secondments - 69%

The full list of flexible working options offered is set out in appendix 1.

For organisations or departments who didn't offer flexible working options, we asked respondents, in their opinion what were the reasons.

The most common responses were business needs and requirements, company policy, management resistance, staff shortages and financial constraints. For more on this see appendix 1.

“ *The most popular flexible working options in Public Sector organisations are part time working, fixed term employment and flexitime.* ”

Part Two – Challenges Managing Flexible Working Options

We asked respondents to read statements and indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed, that the statement described the challenges that they/their organisation encountered on a regular basis - by choosing the most appropriate response.

The available responses were strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree.

For each statement we also included the option - not relevant to my role - to ensure that the results were not skewed by forcing survey respondents to answer questions on areas, topics or experiences that did not directly relate to their job type and/or responsibilities.

The top two challenges were; **ensuring correct staffing levels to cover skills and knowledge and ensuring fair and equitable application of flexible working policies** for all employees, with just under half or 49% agreeing that effectively managing these areas was challenging.

These were closely followed by the challenges of too many manual processes/high level of administration and difficulties measuring employee performance (47%).

Other notable challenges were;

- Ensuring compliance with health & safety / employment legislation – 44%.
- Managers not trained to manage flexible workers/remote workers – 43%.
- Employees building up too many hours and not using the time – 42%.

We finished this section of the survey by asking respondents if there were any further challenges that they or their organisation are currently experiencing in relation to managing flexible working.

The most common themes mentioned were based around organisational culture and attitude, lack of consistency, balancing continuity needs with employee needs, staff shortages, trust issues and the need for better technology. The full survey results for part two of the survey are set out in appendix 2.

“ *The top two challenges in relation to managing flexible working were ensuring correct staffing levels to cover skills and knowledge and ensuring fair and equitable application of flexible working policies for all employees.* ”

Part Three – Level of automation and satisfaction. Designing technology that meets current and future requirements

In part three we investigated how current and future technologies could be designed and developed in order to improve operational processes. We asked respondents if they had a Flexitime/Time & Attendance System to assist their organisation with managing flexible working options, what they liked/disliked about their system and if they had a magic wand what they would add to their system.

As with part two of the survey, available responses were strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree. For each statement, we also included the option - not relevant to my role to ensure the results were not skewed.

49% of our survey respondents had a Flexitime/Time & Attendance System while 51% had no system in place. For those who had a system they had this to say.

- 63% of all respondents who had a system agreed with the statement that their system is very easy to use.
- Exactly half (50%) agreed with the statement that their system was meeting all of their requirements.
- 34% agreed that their system is good value for money.
- 29% found their supplier to be flexible and responsive to their requirements and requests for changes.
- 25% agreed that they always had a great customer experience.

There were some mixed results in this section with some respondents happier than others with their systems. While it was good to see that 63% found their system easy to use, there is still room for improvement in terms of ensuring that all systems are truly user friendly.

As only half of our respondents agreed with the statement that their system was meeting all of their requirements, there is a great opportunity for technology providers to align themselves more closely with Public Sector organisations and develop features and functions that meet their flexible working requirements. It was also quite concerning that only 25% of respondents agreed that they always have a great customer experience thus leaving a very high percentage of respondents less than happy with their experience/current provider.

At Softworks we continually partner with our customers to ensure that we always deliver an exceptional customer service and develop solutions that are both flexible and 100% relevant to their requirements.

“ *There is a great opportunity for technology providers to align themselves more closely with Public Sector organisations.* ”

Magic Wand – System List

We finished this section of the survey by asking respondents, if they had a magic wand, what else would they like their system to do that would make managing flexible working an easier process.

The main wish list areas were around;

- Ease of use.
- Clearer display and easier access to hours worked including; time off in lieu and flexi balances.
- Electronic rota system.
- Better links with payroll and service requirement alerts.

For some of these areas we were both surprised and happy to see them listed. We were surprised that some organisations were using systems that did not supply these features and functions as standard, but happy that Softworks time & attendance/flexitime and rostering solutions can do all of the above. The full survey results for part three of the survey are detailed in appendix 3.

How Softworks assists Public Sector Organisations to manage their workforce

- Automates the tracking of flexible working options including flexitime, remote working, and working from home.
- Optimises workforce scheduling and deployment by aligning labour resources with demand.
- Improves productivity and quality by making informed real time decisions based on actual data.
- Reduces operating costs by making optimal use of existing workforce and minimising the need for additional hours and temporary labour.
- Attracts, retains and motivates employees by giving them more control and input over their work schedules.
- Takes control of employee planned and unplanned absences and managing holidays, time in lieu and sickness more efficiently.
- Increases payroll accuracy by removing manual processes.
- Consolidates and applies all rules in a fair and equitable fashion.
- Formalises workflow authorisation to enable managers to easily edit, authorise and analyse additional hours, holidays and planned and unplanned absences.
- Facilitates compliance with health and safety and employment legislation.

Softworks Public Sector Solutions have been designed with the specific requirements of the Public Sector in mind. Together with feedback from our customers and industry experts, we have designed solutions that assist the sector to deliver a first-class service.

Conclusion

In recent years we have seen less emphasis on the traditional 9 to 5 office based job and an increased demand for flexible working options, with employees seeking flexibility over both their time and space.

For many young workers, flexible working is now considered the norm rather than the exception. Flexible working gives employees greater ownership and control of their own time and working hours, enabling them to manage their responsibilities outside of work.

This can in turn, reduce unplanned leave and stress and anxiety for employees who are struggling to balance their busy lives. It brings many benefits to organisations including; attracting talent, better retention rates, reduced absenteeism and improved productivity and employee satisfaction.

From our survey we can see that the majority of Public Sector organisations that our respondents work for, have embraced flexible working and offer a wide range of flexible working options.

With such a demand for flexible working, along with the wealth of flexible working options available, it has however become increasingly difficult for organisations to manage, monitor and report on employees' time and attendance. This can be seen in some of the challenges cited in the survey.

However, having a good workforce management system can certainly help with many of these challenges.

With Softworks, for example, all of your organisations' policies, procedures and rules can be input into the system to ensure consistency and fair and equitable application of flexible working policies across your organisation.

Employees can log attendance and activity via a PC, tablet or phone (including GPS location if required) whether by time or trust/honour based.

All employee working hours are captured to the minute and by automating the process both employees and managers have access to this information in real-time e.g. hours worked, flexi balances, time off in lieu etc.

This helps to uncover any employees who are building up too many hours and not using them. With automation you can include rules to restrict this from occurring in the first place. Automation will also remove the challenge of too many manual processes and a high level of administration.

Finally it will enable you to ensure that you are always 100% compliant with health & safety and employment legislation.

Appendix 1

Flexible working options within the Public Sector organisations that we surveyed.

| Rank | Flexible Working Options | Yes | No | Uncertain |
|------|---|-----|-----|-----------|
| 1 | Less than full-time (i.e. part-time) working | 94% | 4% | 2% |
| 2 | Flexible start and finish times around core hours (Flexitime) | 88% | 9% | 3% |
| 3 | Fixed-term employment (including contractual) | 78% | 11% | 11% |
| 4 | Flexiplace/teleworking/remote working | 77% | 15% | 8% |
| 5 | Job Sharing | 72% | 17% | 11% |
| 6 | Career Breaks/Special leave/Secondments | 69% | 15% | 16% |
| 7 | Annualised, staggered or compressed Hours | 57% | 20% | 23% |
| 8 | Term-time and other forms of periodic working | 54% | 24% | 22% |
| 9 | Enhanced maternity/paternity/parental/adoptive leave | 49% | 20% | 31% |
| 10 | Split/alternate work weeks | 32% | 32% | 36% |

Reasons mentioned for organisations/ departments not offering flexible working

Business Requirements – Doesn't meet the needs of the business, nature of the business and/or role. Continuity of the person and contact time required, service delivery, statutory duties.

Company policy - Contract Requirements, fear that staff will not work full contracted hours, not focused on individual roles and employees.

Organisational Management - Managers don't understand modern ways of working, lack of imagination and trust, general feeling of wanting to have people present and accountable to senior management.

Lack of standardisation - different roles have varying degrees of flexible working, no standardised policy, varies from team to team.

Staff Shortages - Amount of available staff / demands of the role determine if flexitime is offered.

Financial - No budget to invest in the infrastructure necessary to make flexible and remote working practical.

Appendix 2

Part Two Full Results - Challenges Managing Flexible Working Options

Over 40% of respondents find the following a challenge

(1) Ensuring correct staffing levels to cover skills and knowledge – 49% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents if they found ensuring correct staffing levels to cover skills and knowledge a challenge. 49% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 22% neither agreed or disagreed. 25% disagreed and a further 4% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(2) Ensuring fair and equitable application of flexible working policies for all employees- 49% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents about challenges ensuring fair and equitable application of flexible working policies for all employees. 49% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 20% neither agreed or disagreed. 25% disagreed and a further 6% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(3) Too many manual processes and a high level of administration – 47% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents if they felt that there were too many manual processes and a high level of administration. 47% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 25% neither agreed or disagreed. 23% disagreed and a further 5% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(4) Difficulties measuring employee performance - 47% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents about challenges around measuring employee performance. 47% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 16% neither agreed or disagreed. 35% disagreed and a further 2% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(5) Ensuring compliance with health & safety / employment legislation– 44% find this a challenge

We asked respondents about challenges ensuring compliance with health & safety / employment legislation. 44% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 23% neither agreed or disagreed. 29% disagreed and a further 4% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(6) Managers not trained to manage flexible workers/remote workers. – 43% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents about challenges in relation to managers not being trained to manage flexible workers/remote workers. 43% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 20% neither agreed or disagreed. 30% disagreed and a further 7% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(7) Employees building up too many hours and not using the time – 42% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents about challenges of employees building up too many hours and not using the time. 42% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 20% neither agreed or disagreed. 29% disagreed and a further 9% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

Over 30% of respondents find the following a challenge

(8) Not having central visibility of who is on site/at work and who is out/not working – 37% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents about challenges of not having central visibility of who is on site/at work and who is out/not working and 37% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 14% neither agreed or disagreed. 42% disagreed and a further 7% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(9) Lack of technology to allow for flexible working – too hard to manage & monitor– 35% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents about challenges due to a

lack of technology to allow for flexible working – too hard to manage & monitor. 35% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 18% neither agreed or disagreed. 43% disagreed and a further 4% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(10) Difficulties monitoring working Hours - 34% find this a challenge

We asked respondents about challenges monitoring working Hours. 34% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 21% neither agreed or disagreed. 39% disagreed and a further 6% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(11) Unable to generate reports/analyse absence patterns and spot possible abuse of flexible working policies– 33% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents if not being able to generate reports/analyse absence patterns and spot possible abuse of flexible working policies was a challenge. 33% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 18% neither agreed or disagreed. 37% disagreed and a further 12% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(12) Organisational change resistance to embracing new flexible working options – 32% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents if there was organisational change resistance to embracing new flexible working options. 32% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 19% neither agreed or disagreed. 44% disagreed and a further 5% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(13) Difficulties managing people remotely - 30% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents about challenges managing people remotely. 30% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 18% neither agreed or disagreed. 42% disagreed and a further 10% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

Over 20% of respondents find the following a challenge

(14) Find it hard to meet operational needs due to a lack of visibility of staff availability - 23% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents about challenges meeting operational needs due to a lack of visibility of staff availability. 23% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 20% neither agreed or disagreed. 50% disagreed and a further 7% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

(15) No Employee Self Service facility to allow employees to check their own flexi balances / request absences etc - 21% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents about challenges around not having employee self service facilities to allow employees to check their own flexi balances / request absences etc. 21% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 11% neither agreed or disagreed. 58% disagreed and a further 10% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

Further challenges mentioned:

- **Organisational culture & attitude challenges**
Resistance to change within the organisation and by some managers and employees. Feeling that staff should be at their desks / seen at all times. Lack of cultural acceptance. Attitudes of older workers who claim to be 'old school'.
- **Technology – Lack of investment in IT**
Better technology required to manage remote working and to support agile working. Software that takes into account shifting rotas.
- **Balancing business continuity needs with employee needs**
Difficulties balancing employee needs with business needs of continuity.
- **Performance Management**
Lack of confidence and trust in performance management.
- **Staff misusing or bending flexible working schemes for personal benefit**
Employees working long hours every month in order to take days off the following month rather than working long hours to meet actual workload demands/operational reasons.

- **Lack of Consistency & clear policies**
Flexible working not being consistently managed across the organisation/different teams/departments. Some people are on flexitime and others are not. Not equitable for front line services where core hours are needed. Some policies not being properly implemented due to managers not following up/different interpretation of policies.
- **Staff shortages/lack of funding**
Staff cuts have resulted in increased demand on present staffing - too few staff for too great a workload.
- **Trust Issues**
Lack of trust in employees due to past experiences/abuse of flexible working.

Appendix 3

Part Three Full Results – Level of automation and satisfaction. Designing technology that meets current and future requirements.

Our time & attendance/flexitime system is very easy to use – 63% agreed with this statement.

We asked respondents who had a time & attendance/flexitime system if their system was easy to use. 63% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 18% neither agreed or disagreed. 11% disagreed and a further 8% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

Our system meets all of our requirements – 50% agreed with this statement.

We asked respondents who had a time & attendance/flexitime system if their system meets all of their requirements. 50% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 24% neither agreed or disagreed. 16% disagreed and a further 10% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

Our system is good value for money – 34% agreed with this statement.

We asked respondents who had a system if they felt their system was good value for money. 34%

responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 27% neither agreed or disagreed. 9% disagreed and a further 30% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

Our current supplier is flexible and responsive to our requirements and our requests for changes – 29% agreed with this statement.

We asked respondents who had a system if they found their current supplier to be flexible and responsive to their requirements and their requests for changes. 29% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 31% neither agreed or disagreed. 5% disagreed and a further 35% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

We always have a great customer experience – 25% agreed with this statement.

We asked respondents who had a system if they always have a great customer experience. 25% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 34% neither agreed or disagreed. 13% disagreed and a further 28% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

The Magic Wand Wishlist

- **Easier to use**
More configurable and user friendly, easier input of information.
- **Hours Accrued / Flexi Balances**
Clearer display of flexi time and TOIL (Time off in Lieu) that staff have accrued. Not very clear at present. Ability to see staff 'clockings' online, rather than only from reports.
- **Employee Rostering**
Automated system to easily create fair and equitable employee rosters. The ability to map employee tasks with skills and constraints.
- **Link with Payroll system**
Directly transpose time worked into salaries.
- **Service needs alerts**
System that can manage correct number of staff required for safety and generate alerts when service needs are not met.



ABOUT SOFTWORKS

Softworks assists Public Sector organisations to accurately record hours worked; maintain flexi balances and manage planned/unplanned absences. Softworks Time & Attendance, Flexitime, Remote Working, HR, Rostering and Employee Self Service solutions, provide the tools and processes Public Sector organisations need to reduce labour costs, increase efficiencies, accommodate variable staffing needs and comply with complex labour laws and union agreements. Softworks can provide you with a completely automated workforce management environment.

For further information about Softworks Public Sector Solutions:

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or

Visit us : softworks.com