Employee flexibility toolkit

How to negotiate and manage a successful
flexible working arrangement

Workplace **Flexibility**

Contents

Section 1: Introduction

This toolkit is designed to help employees understand what flexible working arrangements are, how to request them, and how to integrate flexible working practices into existing work arrangements.

Introducing flexible working arrangements to a job and team can be quite complex, and integrating flexible work practices into your existing work can also be challenging. This toolkit provides information and advice about a number of important issues:

➡ what flexibility means in terms of changes to existing work arrangements

➡ how to request flexibility to maximise your chances of success

➡ things to consider before requesting flexible working arrangements

➡ how to make flexibility work for you

➡ dealing with issues that can arise over time.
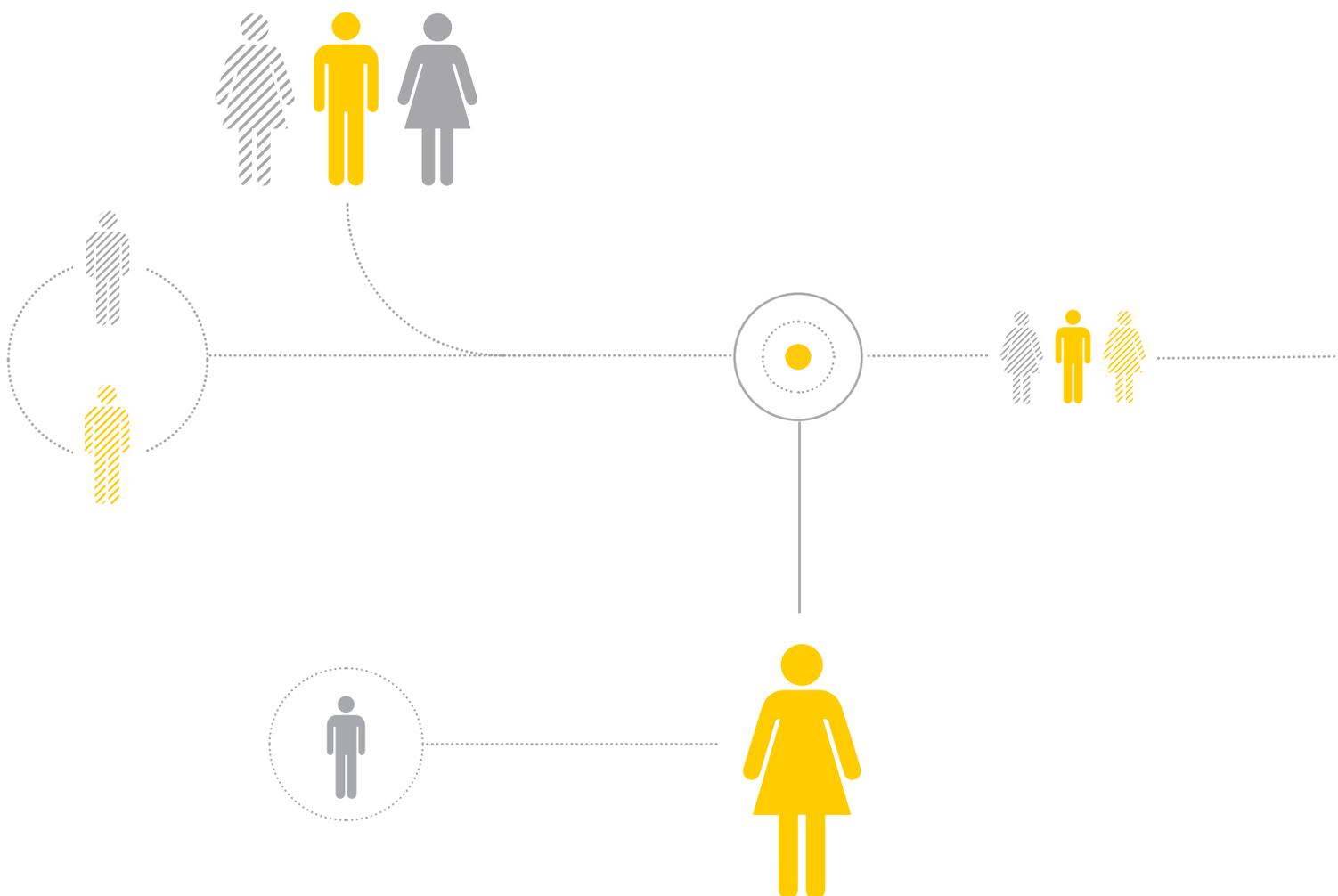
What is flexibility?

Flexible working arrangements, as defined by the Fair Work Ombudsman, are changes to the standard hours, patterns and locations of work. Flexible working arrangements are usually implemented in response to a request from an employee. While any employee can request flexibility from their employer, only some employees are specifically entitled under the Fair Work Act to make a request. More details are available on the Fair Work Ombudsman's website.

Flexible working arrangements can take a variety of forms and some examples are provided in Table 1 below. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

Table 1: Types of flexible working arrangements

Type	Description
Flexible hours of work	This is where you may vary your start and finish times.
Compressed working weeks	You may work the same number of weekly (or fortnightly or monthly) working hours, compressed into a shorter period. For example, a forty-hour week may be worked at the rate of ten hours per day for four days instead of eight hours a day for five days. Changes to salary are not required.
Time-in-lieu	You may work approved overtime and be compensated by time-in-lieu. It can include 'flexitime' arrangements where an employee can work extra time over several days or weeks and then reclaim those hours as time off.
Telecommuting	You may work at a location other than the official place of work. A wide range of terms refer to working at different locations, including 'mobile working', 'distributed work', 'virtual teams' and 'telework'. These are referred to collectively as 'telecommuting' in this toolkit.
	Note that telecommuting is generally most effective when there is a relatively even split between time spent in the office and working elsewhere. This lessens the sense of isolation that can come from working away from the office.
Part-time work	A regular work pattern where you work less than full-time and are paid on a pro-rata basis for that work. Not all part-time work is necessarily flexible in nature, but it offers flexibility to workers who have other commitments or lifestyle choices that are not compatible with full-time work.
Job sharing	A full-time job role is divided into multiple job roles to be undertaken by two or more employees who are paid on a pro-rata basis for the part of the job each completes.
Purchased leave	A period of leave without pay, usually available after annual leave allocation is finished. Employers typically deduct the amount of unpaid leave from the worker's salary, and this can be done as a lump sum or averaged over the year.
Unplanned leave	Informal access to leave for unanticipated or unplanned events.
Flexible careers	You are able to enter, exit and re-enter employment with the same organisation, or to increase or decrease your workload or career pace to suit different life stages. This may be particularly relevant for employees transitioning to retirement. It can also include employees who are able to take a 'gap year' early in their careers and return to work for the same employer afterwards.
Other choices about hours, patterns and locations of work	Other options about when, where and how work is done, e.g. overtime and having autonomy to decide when to take breaks during the working day.

The benefits of flexibility for teams and organisations

Research has shown there are a number of benefits for individuals, teams and organisations when employees are enabled to work flexibly.

- ➡ **Improved output.** For jobs that require concentration, working at home, working at hours when the office is quiet, or working from another location, can help with the quality and speed of the work.

- ➡ **Flexible workers can be more effective.** Successful flexible workers are excellent self-managers who are both well organised and effective communicators.

- ➡ **Improved ability to serve clients and stakeholders.** Working from an alternate location might allow more clients to be seen or more calls to be answered. An organisation that works flexibly can expand service delivery hours, meeting customer needs for out-of-hours contact with the organisation. This extra level of service can increase customer loyalty.

- ➡ **Retaining knowledge, skills and experience / avoiding the cost of recruitment and retraining.** In the current job market, flexibility has become an attractive feature of organisations. Retaining knowledge and skills is an important issue for most organisations, and offering flexibility reduces the likelihood that employees will leave.

- ➡ **Employers of Choice do flexibility well.** If your organisation aims to become a WGEA Employer of Choice for Gender Equality, your request for flexibility may align nicely with that aim. This could help you to position your request in a way that places it clearly in the context of helping to meet organisational objectives.

- ➡ **Increased job satisfaction.** Employees who have opportunities to work flexibly have been shown to have greater job satisfaction and this increases both their productivity and their sense of loyalty to the organisation.

- ➡ **Setting the example.** When managers set an example by openly supporting flexibility and working flexibly themselves, it helps other employees and teams to understand that working flexibly is a normal and accepted part of work.

- ➡ **Improved teamwork.** Teamwork often improves as knowledge and enthusiasm are shared among a more motivated flexible working team.

Once you have understood what flexibility means in terms of changing the hours, pattern or location of work, and the benefits of flexibility in workplaces, it may be time to consider how you will go about requesting flexible working arrangements for yourself.
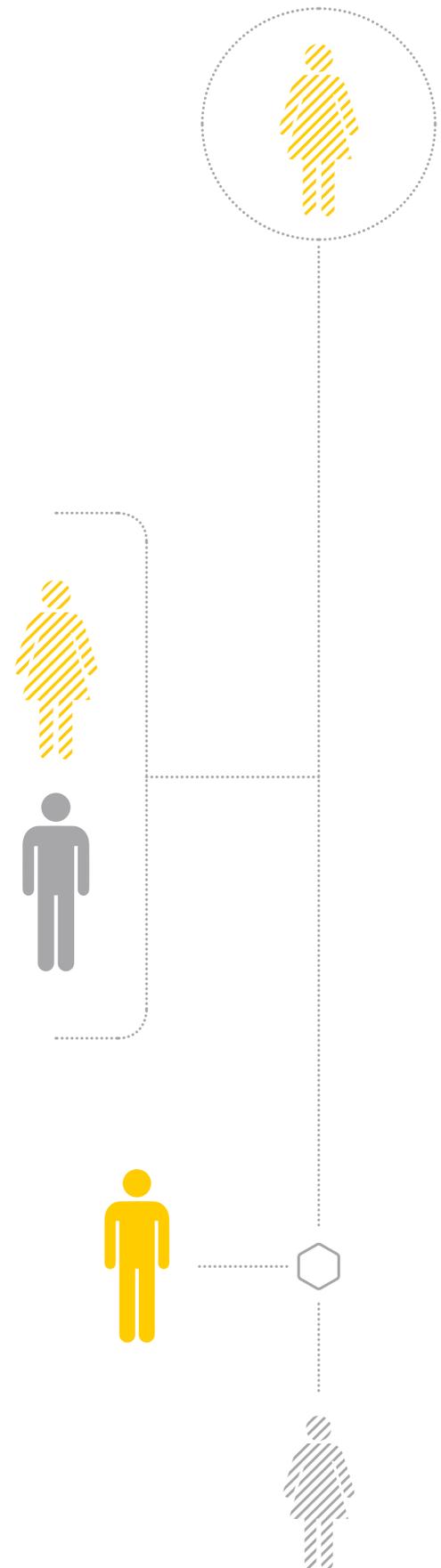
Section 2: Requesting flexibility

When you first think about flexibility, you might wonder: "How should I approach my manager to talk about this?" or "Is there even a chance that I will get this flexibility request approved?" The steps that you are most likely to go through in requesting and accessing flexibility are:

- What sort of flexibility would you prefer?
- What effect might it have on your team and your manager if you adopt this type of flexibility?
- What will your manager be most concerned about in offering you flexibility?
- What can you do to help flexibility work effectively for your manager and team?
- What are your employer's legal responsibilities?
- What if you can't have the specific type or amount of flexibility you want or need?

Note that adopting flexibility and making it successful in your team may require some deep personal changes on behalf of your manager and teammates. Don't let this put you off asking for flexibility, but think about the whole picture so that you will be better able to negotiate effectively.

Depending on your particular workplace culture, you may find it helpful to have an informal chat with your manager first, or it may be more appropriate to submit a formal request straight away. A formal request needs to be in writing, explain clearly what changes you are requesting and the reasons for the request. In most cases, you will then need to discuss the request with your manager.

Identify a few flexibility options that could work for you

Are there particular hours and days that would make a difference to your work life balance? Would it work best for you to work in the office or away from the office? Do you need to be able to change your working hours or location very quickly in some circumstances?

Some organisations limit the flexibility options available to employees. It is important to know what is possible within your organisation's framework, for example telecommuting may only be available to staff members who meet certain prerequisites, such as a strong performance rating for the preceding six months. The flexibility options available to you will hopefully be quite broad, but they are defined by your organisation's policy. Table 1 provides some examples.

What will your manager be most concerned about?

It will help at this point to consider the challenges for your manager that may come with your request for flexibility, and to think how you might help your manager deal with those challenges. Some managers may also have mistaken views about flexible work and flexible workers, based on myths, many of which are not accurate.

Preparing yourself to address your manager's primary concerns in advance of your initial discussion could be very beneficial. We suggest that you first look at flexibility from your manager's perspective and make some notes about the primary concerns they will have about flexible working arrangements. When you have identified some primary concerns, jot down some ideas about how to negotiate your way around them. Table 2 provides some examples.

Table 2: Manager concerns about flexibility

Manager concern	Sample responses
Productivity: how will your flexible working arrangement affect the team's ability to deliver their work on time and to a high standard?	→ Discuss the team's work schedule in detail with your manager. → Commit to ensuring that your flexible working arrangement will not have a negative impact on delivery capacities in the team.
Employee commitment: the belief that employees who want to work flexibly are not committed to their jobs.	→ Discuss this openly with your manager and try to settle any fears around your level of commitment to the job. → Explain that research has shown that employees who are given the opportunity to work flexibly are in fact more committed because recognition of their needs increases their sense of being valued.
Trust: that you will complete the work you need to, particularly if you are working off site.	→ Consider voluntarily implementing a reporting system that will set your manager's mind at rest.
Anxiety: that you may not always be directly supervised in your work.	→ Offer to provide more frequent updates on work in progress.
Scheduling: how to schedule flexible hours so that they work within the team environment.	→ Discuss any scheduling conflicts or times when the team may be left short a person and devise ways to deal with this.
Communication: will need to be more formal via email or phone, rather than just wandering up and talking to you at your desk (particularly if you are working off site).	→ Be open to your manager's need to check-in with you more regularly when flexible working arrangements first start. Maybe suggest a regular phone check-in?
Snowballing: "If I do it for one, I'll have to do it for everyone".	→ It is becoming more common for organisations to offer flexible working arrangements to all employees, so this a first step towards that flexible future.

Expressing your interest in flexibility

How you express your interest in flexibility may have an impact on whether your request is viewed positively or not. Some points to consider when expressing your interest in flexibility:

➡ show your understanding that there could be challenges for your manager and team and explain that you want to find solutions to those challenges

➡ emphasise that you want to be flexible and results-focused in approaching any arrangement

➡ if possible, link your request to any stated aims the organisation might have to become a flexible employer or employer of choice; to improve its attraction and retention or to improve its gender diversity

➡ suggest that your manager and you each choose a small set of flexibility options that you can start negotiating about, to determine an option that has the best chance of success.

As you commence your journey towards accessing flexibility, it also helps if you understand your employer's legal obligations.

What about the legal framework?

The *Fair Work Act (2009)* provides that certain employees, who have worked with the same employer for at least 12 months, have a 'right to request' flexible working arrangements if they:

➡ are the parent, or have responsibility for the care, of a child who is school aged or younger

➡ are a carer (under the *Carer Recognition Act 2010*)

➡ have a disability

➡ are 55 or older

➡ are experiencing family or domestic violence, or

➡ provide care or support to a member of their household or immediate family who requires care and support because of family or domestic violence.

Casual employees can make a request if:

➡ they've been working for the same employer regularly and systematically for at least 12 months

➡ there's a reasonable expectation of continuing work with the employer on a regular and systematic basis.

Such a request must be in writing, explain what changes are being requested and explain the reason for the request.

The employer must respond to a request within 21 days and can only refuse a request on 'reasonable business grounds' and a refusal must be in writing and outline the reasonable business grounds relied upon.

Reasonable business grounds can include:

➡ the requested arrangements are too costly

➡ other employees' working arrangements can't be changed to accommodate the request

➡ it's impractical to change other employees' working arrangements or hire new employees to accommodate the request

➡ the request would result in a significant loss of productivity or have a significant negative impact on customer service.

Note: an employer does not have to accept or reject a request in its entirety. Following a request, it is best practice for an employer and employee to discuss the request and negotiate to come to an arrangement that balances both parties' needs.

Employees that don't fit into the above categories can also request flexible working arrangements but aren't covered under this legal framework.

Further information about employers' obligations under the *Fair Work Act 2009* can be obtained from the Fair Work Ombudsman. Please note that entitlements under state or territory laws may provide additional flexibility-related rights.

Recognise that your preferred hours, days and location may not be possible

A number of factors may influence whether your preferred flexibility arrangement can be approved. It may conflict directly with the way your team currently achieves its business outcomes, or it may place an unreasonable burden on other team members. Later in this toolkit, we mention a few methods your manager and / or team can use to resolve the challenges of flexibility. For now it is important to recognise that your particular preferences may be difficult to accommodate without some significant adjustments. Be prepared with some alternative ideas if your preferred option is not available.

Section 3: Making flexibility work

Preparing for flexibility

Be willing to 'try it out'

While it is possible that you will get flexibility right first time and enjoy a happy, productive working relationship with your manager and your team, the more common scenario is that fantastic, productive flexibility is the result of a concerted effort to learn from mistakes and adjust arrangements until the right mix is found. That effort comes from your organisation, your manager, you the flexible worker and your team.

It may seem more beneficial to you to 'lock in' your flexibility arrangement by agreeing a permanent arrangement up front but in reality a period of experimentation creates more opportunities to discuss, review and refine your flexible working arrangement, which leads to a better outcome overall and greater chance of success over the long term. This may be particularly useful where there is strong resistance to the introduction of flexible working arrangements.

A trial period gives both your manager and your team an opportunity to see how it can work, and it gives you a chance to decide if a different type of flexibility might suit you better or not. A trial of around three months is usually sufficient, and during this time the flexible working arrangement should be actively monitored. Look at aspects such as team culture, information flow, resource planning, confidence in performance, stakeholder management and self-management. Identify areas that need to be discussed or altered, and make the necessary adjustments. Approaching flexibility as a cycle of learning enables you to avoid dramatic failure and to make the most of flexibility.

Aim to work collaboratively with your manager to identify the flexibility option that you can experiment with for a few months. If you and your manager prefer different flexible work options try to work these differences through, by:

➡ showing willingness to negotiate to find a mutually beneficial agreement

➡ identifying where there is agreement

➡ identifying a small set of preferred flexible working arrangements to further explore

➡ making further investigations if more information is needed

➡ thinking laterally to arrive at a solution

➡ 'meeting in the middle' with a compromise position.

Overall, you'll achieve the best result if you act reasonably, look for solutions and attempt to address your manager's concerns.

Document your agreement

It is important to document your agreement to introduce or to trial flexibility. Documenting the details of your flexibility agreement is a good opportunity to clarify whether both sides have the same understanding of how the flexible working arrangement will operate. The most important outcome is that clear expectations are established between everyone involved in the arrangement.

Be sure to note in the agreement that major adjustments may be needed initially. These should be given with fair notice.

Ensure that your agreement clearly establishes the main details:

➡ The specific flexibility option to be tested, including when, where and how the work will occur.

➡ The duration of the testing phase. A testing phase would generally go for between one and six months. A trial of around three months is usually effective.

➡ The methods that will be used to monitor the arrangement's success and how often you and your manager will review the arrangement's success. As noted above, look at areas such as team culture, information flow, resource planning, confidence in performance, stakeholder management and self-management.

➡ The agreed strategies that will be established by your manager, your team and yourself to resolve the possible challenges that may arise from the flexible working arrangement, together with timeframes.

Prepare proactively

Once your request is approved, or you have embarked on a flexibility test period, it is important to prepare the ground to create as smooth a transition to flexibility as possible. Here are a few strategies that can help:

➡ **Team flexibility workshop:** an opportunity to bring to the fore the potential issues and challenges each team member identifies with a new flexible working arrangement. The workshop should include scenario planning and a brainstorm of specific solutions. See the manager flexibility toolkit for more information about how to run a team flexibility workshop.

➡ **Use communications technology:** explore the availability to your team of tools such as videoconferencing and collaborative work platforms to meet and work with people who are working offsite.

➡ **Find ways to make the results you deliver transparent to your team:** a team project management platform is a good way to bring transparency to team members, so that they can see the part that each team member plays in delivering end results.

➡ **Scenario planning:** play out various scenarios that demonstrate what might happen when and where core business needs and flexible work options meet. Identify the times and places where this could be challenging, and brainstorm appropriate ways of dealing with any clashes.

➡ **Access technology:** use project management tools to provide updates on tasks. Use a central project-planning tool to communicate changes in the project to each of your team members. Find out which other emerging technologies can support flexible work.

➡ **Cooperative team planning:** get together with your colleagues to solve the problems of how to allocate resources to meet business needs and ensure information flows smoothly within the new flexibility arrangement.

➡ **Flexibility training:** become equipped with knowledge and skill to handle the challenges of flexibility through training or other learning and development opportunities.

➡ **Results-based delivery:** when team members are working flexibly, it is particularly important to establish clear goals, outcomes, KPIs and other measures of results, so that each team member's work is clearly described and can be accurately measured and monitored.

➡ **Minimise stakeholder impact:** discuss and resolve scenarios that could impact significantly on stakeholders with your team. If your manager or team hasn't already run a team flexibility workshop (see the manager flexibility toolkit), you will need to identify the scenarios where your flexible working arrangement could impact your stakeholders. You'll then need to think of ways that these impacts could be reduced.

➡ **Have a conversation with your stakeholders:**

- Let them know the practical implications of your flexible working arrangement. For example, there may be days when you will not be in the office, or when a colleague will need to become involved in the work. There may also be new ways that they can contact you.

- Outline the benefits your flexible working arrangement for them – such as having greater engagement from a range of contacts within the organisation, or being served across a wider range of contact hours.

- State your interest in making the arrangement work well for your stakeholders and ask for feedback about how it works for them.

- State your commitment to continuing to prioritise your stakeholders' interests.

- Recognise that there could be challenges for your stakeholders but that you are keen to find ways that these can be resolved.

➡ **Support your stakeholders:** recognise that flexible work can disrupt your stakeholders' expectations and that it may take a significant shift to adjust to new ways of working with you or your team.

➡ **Policy induction:** ask the appropriate representative in your organisation to provide an induction to you and other potential flexible workers or team members with regards to relevant policies.

➡ **Reimbursements and refunds:** Your employer may provide reimbursements for some costs associated with establishing a home office or working flexibly, such as mobile devices. Some expenses associated with a home office may also be tax deductible.

Ideally, resolving the challenges of flexibility will not be seen as entirely your responsibility. We hope that this is the case in your organisation. Nonetheless, being well prepared in advance with options for addressing any problems is likely to help ensure a successful flexible working arrangement.

Monitoring, evaluating, adjusting and consolidating flexibility

Make quick adjustments to improve the flexible working arrangement

When an issue is identified, adjustments should be made quickly so that any downsides do not have a prolonged effect and new, more effective work habits become embedded early. Major adjustments should be made with fair notice, particularly if they could have a significant impact on your manager, your team or your stakeholders.

Encourage open, honest discussions about the trial phase

As a proactive employee, you know that it is vital that you get clear feedback about how your manager sees your progress. Here are a few tips about how to get the most out of these discussions:

➡ refer to your performance measures ahead of any meeting where the flexibility arrangement will be discussed, so that you have a fresh and clear idea of whether you are meeting targets, KPIs, objectives or similar

➡ remain open to seeing the manager's point of view, particularly if you believe that negative comments are made. If you try to see the best in your manager, even when confronted with a negative response to your flexibility arrangements, you uphold trust in the relationship

➡ restate your ideal outcome for the flexibility arrangement i.e. that you want to arrive at a situation that can work as well as possible for both sides

➡ restate your willingness to adjust and adapt to ensure the best outcome.

Be prepared for ongoing adjustments

After the trial phase, you and your manager should have a good idea of what works and what doesn't work in the flexible working arrangement. However, some issues that were not apparent during the trial phase may arise later, for a variety of reasons. To prepare for this, it is useful to agree that during the 3-6 month period after the trial, significant changes may still need to be made to maximise business outcomes and employee well-being. You and your manager need to remain open to the possibility that the flexible working arrangement may still need to change over time.

Keep your manager and team informed of your progress

It can sometimes be difficult for flexible workers to feel integrated into a team. Regular and thoughtful communication with the team becomes more important when a member is not always physically present in the team's working environment. Aside from creating the sense of belonging to the team, formal communication helps flexible workers to demonstrate that they are delivering on expectations, are competent and accountable. Here are a couple of strategies you can use to keep your team up-to-date with developments:

➡ Provide weekly reports – it is a good idea to offer a weekly report even if this is a new practice. When you're reporting, don't just focus on how you spent your time, but on what you delivered in terms of results that contribute to the team's business outcomes.

➡ Create a visible progress area – technology provides a range of options for how you could create a common area where people can see what progress is occurring on your work e.g. project management tools, wikis and shared files.

Ongoing management of flexibility

Manage negative perceptions

Some people at work may have negative ideas about people who work flexibly. They may believe that people who work flexibly are less committed to the organisation, less ambitious, less competent or even less deserving of promotion. Often these ideas are related to a belief that flexibility is primarily a benefit to employees. For flexibility to work effectively, these negative ideas need to be addressed.

What does it take to challenge these negative ideas about flexibility? It can be a simple matter of direct personal experience – "seeing with one's own eyes". This might mean observing improved productivity through successful delivery in the context of flexible working arrangements. It may be more complex, requiring a person to develop more understanding of flexible work through knowledge development (reading research, for example).

Having some knowledge of research findings about flexibility can help to counteract negative perceptions of flexible workers. For example, research indicates that flexibility is a powerful tool for the attraction and retention of employees:

→ The Australian Institute of Management found in a national survey that more than 50% of employees who intended to remain with their employers attributed their loyalty to the availability of flexible working arrangements in their workplace (AIM VT, 2009).

→ Many employees would rather stay with an employer who offers flexible work than leave for increased pay – in fact, 43% of employees surveyed said they would choose flexible work over a pay rise (UnifyCo, 204) .

→ Flexible work contributes to greater employee loyalty (Working Families UK and Cranfield University School of Management, 2008).

Similarly, flexibility has been shown to improve productivity:

→ Stanford University found individual productivity improved by 22% when employees were enabled to choose whether to telecommute or not (Stanford University, 2014). Increased productivity comes from decreased commuting stress, improved ability to manage work and life commitments and increased work satisfaction.

Finally, flexibility is an excellent way to improve morale and job satisfaction:

→ Research has established a positive relationship between workplace flexibility that gives employees greater control over when they work, where they work and how they work, and satisfaction and engagement (AIM, 2012).

→ Up to 83% of employees with access to flexible IT policies such as the availability of technology to work from home report feeling satisfied at work, compared to 62% without access to flexible IT policies (Deloitte Access Economics, 2013).

→ Employees who work from home are generally less distracted and are grateful for the flexibility (London School of Economics, 2013).

Be deliberate about teamwork

Look into good team practices and become educated about what it takes to be a good team player. Flexibility often stretches people's ability by challenging things that they took for granted in their traditional working pattern. Flexible workers may find that some means of actively contributing to the team are no longer available to them. It helps to proactively consider how to manage the changes that flexibility will inevitably bring to your work and your team dynamic. For example, how can you best continue to contribute to team meetings? How can you effectively support your colleagues if you are not physically present in the office? How will you stay in touch with developments relevant to the people and activities of your team? How will you get to know new team members? How will you use technology (or face-to-face meetings) to collaborate effectively? It might be a good idea to discuss these issues with your manager and with the team as a whole, and to brainstorm solutions.

Maintain a sense of belonging

Maintaining that sense of personal connection with people at work that leads you to feel part of a team, a group or an organisation can be difficult if you are not physically present in the workplace at the same times as other team members. Working flexibly can lead to some sense of isolation over time if it is not carefully managed. Balancing time out of the office with time in the office, joining in social activities and staying up-to-date with developments across the organisation can all help to reduce any feelings of isolation. You may be able to establish ways to continue your hallway or water cooler conversations while out of the office through social media or calling specifically for a social chat, for example.

Stay up-to-date

Your preferred work style may be to plan ahead, or you may be a take-it-as-it-comes worker. It is good to be aware of your preferences because with flexibility comes a need to stay informed and to make sure others are informed so that work gets done even when you are not present in the office and able to meet face-to-face. This is particularly important for job sharing, telecommuting and part-time work arrangements, but could be applicable to every flexible working arrangement to some degree. Some teams may use collaborative work platforms, written updates or audio messages to reduce the time it takes for flexible workers to catch up. Whatever platform you use, you will need to factor in some time and effort to stay up-to-date.

Communicate effectively when telecommuting

Some forms of flexible work – telecommuting in particular ¬– raise additional challenges to do with communication and teamwork, both of which can be supported significantly by using the right computing and communications technology in the right way, and knowing when to meet in person.

- **Choose the right platforms.** There is a risk of overusing some text-based technologies such as email and messaging, and it is worth considering verbal and video-based technologies instead of typewritten communication. Recognise that the greater the sophistication of the communication task, the more important it is to leverage non-text-based communication technologies.

- **Seek out face-to-face meetings.** While telecommuting has many advantages, home and elsewhere are not always the best locations for some work activities. Face-to-face meetings can be more productive when complex or sensitive communication is required, such as initial client meetings, providing a mid-project report and discussing a sensitive situation.

Keep communication clear and open

Clear and open communication is vital to an effective flexible working arrangement. Keeping communication channels open with your manager and team members usually involves:

- establishing a regular meeting time with your colleagues and manager
- providing written information between meetings
- listening actively: avoid repetition and misunderstandings by checking that you have understood both major and subtle messages
- providing an appropriate level of detail
- creating empathy and connection: focus on your colleagues and manager's needs and interests when appropriate.

Managing yourself

Manage your time

It's clear by now that flexible workers need to be competent self-managers who are able to communicate clearly to make flexibility effective. Another important skill is the ability to plan your work and allocate sufficient time and resources to achieve it. This is particularly important if you are telecommuting. Working at home can seem ideal, but the reality can be quite challenging. Making sure that you are able to work without too-frequent personal interruptions is one challenge. Making sure that you are not too easily distracted by things that need doing at home is another challenge. Planning, setting (and sticking to) boundaries, and raising issues early are all strategies that can increase the effectiveness of flexible working.

Manage your impact on others

Self-management is a valuable skill when it comes to flexible work. While we are often aware of what others need to do to accommodate our flexible working arrangement, we can be less aware of what we need to do to help our flexibility work for others. Here are some strategies that help to increase self-awareness so you can become aware of issues:

- Keep a journal: it is important to become aware of the subtle issues that can derail the success of your flexibility arrangement over time. Differences in team dynamic, emotional distance between colleagues and frequent misunderstandings can all result in significant frustration for you, your manager and your team. Keeping a personal journal can help you become aware of issues so that you can play a role in resolving them.

- Take time to reflect: take the time to think about how things are working (or not working) and see if you can find solutions to any problems before they become too big.

- Attend flexibility training: use any available training on flexibility to become more acutely aware of the challenges that flexibility can present and effective strategies to resolve them.

- Seek out a mentor: mentors can help you resolve and understand issues that are unfamiliar. Seek out a mentor who is familiar with, or sympathetic to, flexibility.

Manage the interaction between your work and your home life

Whether you're in the office or away from the office, near your computer or away from a communication device, it will help your work and the rest of your life enormously if you set clear boundaries and manage other people's expectations about your availability.

➡ **Use appropriate channels to communicate your hours, location or other availability.** Some people use their signature block to provide a clear and accessible reminder e.g. Monday 8am-4pm, Tuesday 3pm-7pm and Friday 11am-3pm. Another strategy is to block out days in your online calendar. Internal stakeholders and clients will need your availability communicated on other channels accessible to them.

➡ **Avoid creating an expectation that you're available outside your work arrangement.** People who respond to emails outside of hours often create an expectation that they are available out of hours, and over time this can evolve so that there is no boundary between work and non-work time. If your job requires you to be available for urgent contact or contact out of hours, then you'll need to provide a way that you can be contacted urgently. Otherwise, it is advisable to resist responding to emails and other contacts outside the hours when your manager, team and stakeholders expect that you'll be working.

➡ **Draw clear boundaries.** Achieving the right balance often comes down to whether each flexible worker is determined to draw clear boundaries. You need to draw boundaries with both your colleagues and your family and friends to ensure that your work time is clearly defined from your non-work time. It can be very helpful to have a conversation with your manager, your team, stakeholders and family about your availability under your new flexibility arrangement. This conversation may include defining 'overtime' in a way that suits your work.

➡ **Act consistently with your boundaries.** You may have heard stories of friends and family who seem to think "you've got a day off today, that means I can pop over" or "you're working from home, perhaps you could just do me this favour". As uncomfortable as it may be, the only way to establish a different view in the minds of your friends and family is to show clearly that you're unavailable during work. Not only do you need to make it clear verbally; you need to act consistently by not responding to requests that are made during work time. No one else but you can play this important role.

What to do if problems arise

If you begin to experience issues with your flexible working arrangement, particularly the way it might impact on your workload or your family life, you may like to:

➡ keep a closer record of the impact of work practices on your work-life balance

➡ review whether there has been 'scope creep' in your role – e.g. the expectations of the role have changed since you started, but work practices have not been adjusted to suit

➡ have a conversation with your manager – it is better to do this early rather than let problems grow until they are unmanageable

➡ you may need to communicate how some expectations or behaviours are keeping you from achieving your agreed goals, increasing your stress or impacting on your family life. This communication should be assertive and respectful.

For trust to develop over time with any flexible working arrangement, your manager needs to feel confident that you are working and achieving your goals. To avoid any potential problems, it is important to be disciplined enough to meet your objectives and gain your supervisor's trust in the process.

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