



Champions for  
Change

# Leading a flexible working environment



"Flexible working is a great example of the trust you have to have in your staff. We need to trust our staff that working at home means genuinely working at home and not another day at the beach. Being flexible means trusting that the outputs change, regardless of how staff are working or where they are working from."

**MARK AVERILL**  
CHAMPION AND CEO, PwC



"Creating a culture of trust is essential. By focusing on outcomes rather than hours logged or time at the desk you empower people to work in ways that produce the best results. We hire smart people and we trust in their ability to get the job done; micro-managing the time or place they work is often counter-productive."

**PETER VIAL**  
CHAMPION AND NEW ZEALAND  
COUNTRY HEAD, CAANZ

## What is a flexible working environment?

A flexible work environment is one where employees are encouraged to use flexible working environments. This might mean a physically flexible work space, like an agile work environment, or it might just refer to employees' ability to apply flexible working practices to their roles.

There are a variety of ways people can work flexibly:

- » **flexibility of role** – how a role is performed or divided
- » **flexibility of place** – working from alternative locations
- » **flexibility of work schedule** – working flexible hours
- » **flexibility of leave** – supporting flexible leave arrangements

### It can occur in various ways:

- » **ad hoc or temporary flexibility** – for example, adjusted hours to meet personal needs temporarily
- » **regular flexibility** – for example, working from home every Wednesday
- » **formal flexibility** – for example, permanent part-time working

Successful workplace flexibility ensures individual employee needs, commercial needs, and customer needs continue to be met.

**Why flexibility?**

Workplace flexibility is an essential enabler for managing the pace of change in today's world of work.

It allows you, as an employer, to attract and retain top talent (your people), achieve increased productivity (your business), and foster an agile response to changing market needs (your customers and environment).

It's a diverse and in-depth strategy that goes beyond the traditional thinking of 'part-time work for new parents' to an integrated mindset and way of work accessible to all.

# Why is leadership important?

**With over half of the New Zealand workforce either currently working flexibly or wanting to in the future, leadership in a flexible environment is critical to managing the workforce of the future.**

Mainstreaming flexible work means changing the culture and practices of the organisation as a whole, not simply responding to an individual or small group of employees' requests for flexible work arrangements.

When flexible work is considered normal in the workplace, it becomes much easier to negotiate and implement flexible work arrangements for both leaders and employees.

Every employee has the right to request flexible working and you, as the employer, need to give the request due attention and consideration and respond within one month. The arrangement needs to work for the organisation as well as the employee and there are specific business reasons why a request can be declined. The more consideration that an employee is able to give to the impact on the business, the more comfortable the manager will be with that employee working flexibly.

Often the responsibility for making flexible working successful is on the person working flexibly however the leaders and the organisational culture play just as important a role. Seeing the CEO and senior leadership team role modelling flexible working is powerful in establishing it as a normal work practice.

Equipping managers to lead teams that they don't necessarily see every day means focusing on outcomes rather than hours logged. Trust and communication are key to managing flexible teams that could be working different hours to each other and even from different locations. Fostering a sense of team is even more important when managing in a flexible environment. Technology plays a vital role in this.

It is important to set and manage expectations on both sides to avoid any misunderstandings and potential misuse of flexible work arrangements. Setting clear performance measures and having regular check-ins ensure that any performance issues are not confused with flexibility issues.



## Tips



### Communicate, communicate, communicate!

- » Ensure regular, open and honest communication
- » Make a personal connection by using the phone or Skype as well as email
- » Keep the conversation going - be honest if it is not working and be open to finding alternative solutions
- » Be proactive - check in people about how flexible work arrangements are going and be responsive to changing needs
- » Ensure there are alternatives available if people cannot attend meetings in person
- » Circulate agendas and minutes
- » Create time for building team relationships from virtual Friday night drinks to in-person team meetings



### Ensure there is a culture of trust and mutual respect



### Acknowledge that change is difficult



### Establish clear expectations and responsibilities

- » Establish team norms, i.e. everyone is in the office on a Wednesday; everyone works core hours of 10am-3pm; fortnightly team catch ups; request to work from another location 24 hours in advance
- » Ensure everyone understands what is expected and what the non-negotiables and negotiables are



### Empower your team by changing from defining the 'how' people work to focus on the 'what', to enable people to come up with their own solutions



### Use technology to your advantage

- » Use calendar functions
- » Develop best-practice wording for email signatures and 'out of office' email responses
- » Set up voicemail messages

## Potential challenges

## Possible mitigants

The ability to make flexibility available to all, in some form

Ensure a whole business approach to flexibility. Create awareness on the different types of flexibility and role model at all levels throughout the business

Might require more effort to create and maintain the sense of team

Take the time to consciously develop team spirit rather than expecting it to automatically happen, look for ways to communicate as a group

More complexity with rosters, meetings, training

Where possible, involve the team in how flexibility would work for the group

Attitudes from other team members who are not working flexibly, there may be perceptions that they are not working as hard

Build a culture of trust. Be open and transparent, speak up if something is not working, share success stories

Highly collaborative roles may need to be more organised

Utilise all available forms of technology

Some managers might struggle to relinquish control and giving autonomy and decision-making power to the team members rather than being a directive leader

Flexibility and leadership training for managers on how to effectively lead flexible teams. CEOs and Senior Leaders need to also lead from the top and role model flexibility

Some people may take advantage of flexible working to do less

This should be addressed as a performance issue rather than an issue with the concept of flexible working

Client expectations that people are available during traditional office hours

Ensure clients are communicated with and kept informed

Some roles require specific hours and/or specific locations to be adhered to. This does not mean that there cannot be other types of flexibility however

Ensure your team is aware of the types of flexibility offered within your organisation and what the negotiables and non-negotiables are in your team

Some employees may suffer from technology encouraging an 'always on' mentality

Lead by example and acknowledge that people handle 24/7 connectedness differently

**Overall, the positive impacts of flexible working outweigh the challenges. However, strong leadership is crucial to the success of moving from a culture based on inputs to a high-performing organisation focused on outcomes.**



Convened and supported by Global Women, Champions for Change is a group of New Zealand CEOs and Chairs from across the public and private sectors who are committed to raising the value of diversity and inclusiveness throughout the wider business community.

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