

# AN INTRODUCTION TO IMPLEMENTING FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS.

## Checklist 026

### » INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s technological advances have opened up opportunities to work from virtually anywhere and flexible working of various types has become increasingly common. Flexibility in when and where work is carried out has benefits for both employers and employees as it can help people to manage the pressures of modern life, reduce stress and improve work-life balance.

Advantages for employees include:

- › the ability to manage their time more effectively
- › greater ease in handling their personal affairs, including minor emergencies
- › more opportunities to combine caring responsibilities with flexible working hours or part-time work
- › improvements in work-life balance and job satisfaction.

Advantages for employers include:

- › enhanced morale and commitment among employees, leading to increased productivity
- › a reduction in problems with punctuality or absenteeism
- › increased ability to attract and retain staff
- › greater ease in managing fluctuations in demand.

The implementation of flexible working hours also supports increased workforce diversity and equality of opportunity for groups such as those with disabilities or caring responsibilities who find it easier to work on a flexible basis or older workers who no longer wish to work full-time.

When considering flexible working arrangements, employers must keep legal requirements in mind. In the UK, for example, changes to employment law mean that employees with 26 weeks or more continuous service have the right to request flexible working and employers must handle such requests in a reasonable manner. (See Additional Resources below or further information.)

Initial fears about potential losses in productivity and loss of the ability to manage the workforce effectively following the introduction of flexible working have been largely allayed by successful implementations. Nonetheless, it is important to be aware of potential pitfalls and difficulties. These will vary according to the type of flexible working introduced so it's important to think things through carefully before introducing flexible working arrangements. Together with careful planning, this will help to maximise the benefits for all concerned. This checklist aims to provide an introduction to flexible working practices, and guidance on how to introduce and manage them.

'Flexible working' covers any variations to the traditional nine to five working day including those which cater for groups with particular needs or wishes and others which involve standard working hours but allow them to be carried back or forward to provide additional free time. Well-known examples of types of flexible working hours are given below, together with their main advantages:

- › **Voluntary reduced working hours:** opens up work opportunities for a wider range of people
- › **Term time working:** facilitates availability to work, usually for those caring for young children
- › **Employment breaks:** help to retain the service of people who need a temporary break from work
- › **Sabbaticals:** enable employees to fulfil study or travel ambitions, then return to work.
- › **Compressed hours:** allow, for example, a four or four and a half-day working week, or a nine-day working fortnight, where the same number of hours a week are worked, but within a shorter period
- › **Annualised hours:** reduces the overall number of hours and overtime worked and may increase productivity by making seasonal variations easier to manage
- › **Job sharing:** gives employers more continuity in cases of sickness or leave, while job sharers can be more fresh and enthusiastic than full time employees.

### 1. Secure the commitment of top management

The commitment of senior managers and the involvement of the HR team are vital to the success of flexible working. Discuss the rationale and the business case for introducing flexibility with these groups to reach agreement on the extent of flexibility and ensure alignment with current HR strategy.

### 2. Draw up a profile of the existing workforce and their current hours

Don't assume that you have a full understanding of the current situation. For example, you may not realise the extent to which informal flexible working time is already sanctioned by line managers. The time spent in drawing up a profile of existing working patterns and hours worked will enable you to plan more effectively.

### 3. Take cultural issues into account

Organisational culture can hinder the successful implementation of flexible working hours. For example, a long –hours culture or a culture of presenteeism may deter employees from taking up the flexible working options open to them. On the other hand, a culture based on trust, respect and accountability will support the introduction of flexible working. Think about the existing organisational culture and whether any adjustments are needed. If necessary, consider whether flexible working could be supported by a programme of cultural change.

### 4. Decide the extent of flexibility to be introduced

Consider which options will be effective and practicable within your organisation. Decide whether you want to introduce a wide range of options, or wish to limit flexibility to a fixed range. For example, if you introduce flexitime this should apply to everyone at all levels, but it is possible to specify core, non-flexible hours to ensure that staff are available for meetings or that essential tasks are covered. Once adopted, it is hard to pedal back on flexible working time, so consider piloting the scheme, or introducing limited options to start with and expanding the scheme gradually.

## 5. Consult with employees

Once you have established what sort of flexible working pattern/s will fit best within your business, put your ideas before employees to explore whether the system would be acceptable to them. You might use questionnaires, workshops or focus groups to test employees' views, gain feedback and identify any potential problems. At this stage it is important not to raise unrealistic expectations and it may be necessary to manage expectations so that employees do not become disappointed or disillusioned.

## 6 Consider appointing a working group to manage implementation

If the flexible working time scheme is agreed to be suitable, consider selecting a group of employees of all levels and types from across the organisation to help steer the project through and resolve any issues or problems. If one or more trade unions are recognised in the workplace, be sure to include union representatives as well as staff representatives.

## 7. Work out the details

Important questions to consider include:

- › What processes will be put in place to handle requests to work flexibly?
- › What arrangements will be needed to provide cover for essential work and meet customer expectations?
- › How much authority will line managers have to agree to or refuse requests for business reasons?
- › Will the scheme comply with all relevant legislation? For example, in the UK, employees with 26 weeks continuous service have the right to request to work flexibly and to have their requests dealt with in a reasonable manner and within a reasonable period. There are also specific requirements relating to the reasons given for any refusals.
- › Are any adjustments needed in respect of the timing of meetings?
- › Will there be any additional costs, and will these be offset by business benefits?
- › How will you ensure parity of treatment in areas such as training and development, promotion and benefits?

Anticipate risks and potential problems and risks by asking the project group to evaluate all the accepted options for change.

## 8 Communicate the policies to all staff

Publicise the flexible working time scheme widely prior to launch. Give details of the options available with examples to illustrate how the scheme will work in practice. It is particularly important to be clear about any areas where flexible working is deemed inappropriate or unworkable for good business reasons. This will help to avoid resentment from those who are unable to take advantage of flexible working options. Be open about any criteria for eligibility for each option, and set guidelines for their use.

## 9 Identify a co-ordinator

You will need to appoint someone, normally a member of the HR team, to co-ordinate the scheme, and deal with any problems arising. This person will also need to offer guidance on implementing the scheme, and keep an overview of how it is working as a whole,

## 10. Provide training in implementing flexible working arrangements

Make sure that managers and team leaders are fully aware of the details of the scheme and the processes involved and that they have the skills they need to manage flexible working effectively. If managers are accustomed to supervising work closely or exercising tight management controls, for example, they may

need to make adjustments in management practice and style. This will enable them to ensure that work is completed on schedule and in line with objectives whilst developing and maintaining good working relationships with their teams.

## 11. Evaluate the scheme

Work out how to monitor and evaluate the success of flexible working hours, so that you can assess the business benefits and highlight areas where changes may be needed.

Questions to consider:

- › Are employees taking advantage of the options open to them?
- › What impact has there been on individual and organisational performance?
- › Have any particular problems arisen?
- › How effectively are managers handling flexible workers?
- › Are employees satisfied with the options available?
- › Is there any scope for widening the scheme?

## » POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Managers should avoid:

- › gearing flexible working hour options towards specific groups of employees to the exclusion of others
- › making assumptions about employees' needs and wishes
- › ignoring potential difficulties for full-time staff, such as covering for term-time workers.
- › overlooking the need to invest more time in scheduling work, if an annualised working hours approach is taken - be aware that, in practice, this option is difficult to manage over a long period.
- › allowing communications between job sharers to break down and create possible continuity problems.

## » NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

This checklist has relevance for the following standards:

- › Unit DB7 Managing flexible working

## » ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### BOOKS

#### **Flexible working study 968**

London: Incomes Data Services, 2012

#### **Flexitime schemes study 973**

London: Incomes Data Service, 2012

#### **Working better: a managers guide to flexible working**, Alison Maitland

London: Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009

These books are available for loan to members from the CMI Library. [Click here](#) for more information.

## JOURNAL ARTICLES

**Is the five-day week an outdated model?** Lily Howes  
Professional Manager, Autumn 2013, pp38-39

**The end of flexible working? Has Yahoo!'s Marissa Mayer sounded the death knell for remote working?**  
Strategic Direction, Jun 2013, vol 29 no 6, pp15-17.

**Appearance is everything**, Daniel Cable and Kimberly Elsbach  
Business Strategy Review, Winter 2012, vol 23 no 4, pp56-58

This is a selection of journal articles available from CMI's library. More information at:  
[www.managers.org.uk/library](http://www.managers.org.uk/library)

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**DirectGov** <https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working/overview>  
General information on flexible working for employees.

**ACAS The Right to Request Flexible Working** <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1616>  
Code of practice and guides for employers and employees.

**Flexibility.co.uk** [www.flexibility.co.uk](http://www.flexibility.co.uk)  
The Smart Working Handbook is available to download, together with news, views, articles and case studies.

CMI members can access further guidance on flexible working, including the legal considerations, guidance for implementation and sample documents by logging into the **BusinessHR** service on the website at [www.managers.org.uk/businessHR](http://www.managers.org.uk/businessHR).



## MORE INFORMATION

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Revised December 2014