

CIPD

*Championing better
work and working lives*

ENABLING FLEXIBLE WORKING

Cross-sector case
studies and practice
highlights

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The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Case studies

Enabling flexible working: Cross-sector case studies and practice highlights

Contents

Introduction	2
Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust	2
Enterprise Rent-A-Car	11
GLF Schools	15
Hachette	23
Lendlease	32
Pharmaceutical Research Associates	41
Schneider Electric	46
Transport for London (TfL)	54
United Living	61
Job-share partnership	67

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1 Introduction

The widespread demand for flexible working and the significant policy drivers to improve flexible working and increase its use have underscored the need for real-life, evidence-based guidance to support flexible working implementation. The CIPD therefore conducted in-depth research in collaboration with Affinity Health at Work, to produce a new guide, *Cross-sector Insights on Enabling Flexible Working*, together with supporting tools to provide that support for organisations and people professionals. Our insight was drawn from ten cross-sector case studies, action learning events and reflective diaries.

Nine organisations contributed these case studies. In each organisation, interviews were conducted with an HR professional, a line manager and a flexible worker to obtain a rounded perspective. A further case study was gathered from a job-share partnership (in which the job-sharers have worked together across different employers).

The full summaries of these case studies and practice highlights are collated here to give clear examples of flexible working operating within different contexts, including at senior levels and in roles and areas of organisations that are not traditionally seen as suitable for flexible working. By examining and adapting as appropriate some of the creative flexible working practices seen, organisations and people professionals can derive solutions that can help them to successfully enable flexible working whatever stage they are at on their journey.

2 Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust

Business sector: Healthcare

Number of employees: around 6,000

Overall lessons learned

- Culture change takes time and ongoing explanation of why it works and what are the key benefits, as well as keeping an eye on the challenges and finding ways to overcome those.
- No one size fits all and you don't necessarily have to reduce your hours: 'allowing someone to pick their kids up from school once a week by leaving two hours early ... you can let them do that and make that time up sometime else, for example working from home ... it's about thinking outside of the box.' Different people need different things – for example, time off on particular days for religious reasons.
- The need for flexible working is going to grow over time: 'Given how the NHS pension scheme is progressing, people are going to want to work for longer, so we need to think differently about how we do that ... how can we create flexible working for people at that stage of their career when some of the physical impact is relevant?'
- There is still more to be done – for example, creating more job-shares at senior level.
- Flexible workers need to be organised and plan well to work successfully.

Key themes from case study

- Implementing flexible working has had tangible benefits at this trust, in terms of retention and reduced sickness absence.
- There are different ways of working flexibly, some of which do not involve a reduction in working hours, but are just about changing or flexing the time, place or pattern of work.

- It is helpful to think about flexible working across the life course and consider the needs of younger and older workers, including options for professional development and 'retire and return' as well as flexing around caring responsibilities.
- Culture, communication and individual conversations are all important for creating an environment in which flexible working is not only accepted, but also encouraged. Having champions and talking about the benefits are key to supporting people to overcome any resistance to flexible working.
- Systems, processes and technology can all help make flexible working possible.

Organisational context

Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust comprises two main hospitals, Calderdale Royal Hospital and Huddersfield Royal Infirmary, plus community sites, health centres and care provided in patients' homes. The trust offers a wide range of flexible working arrangements, including: term-time-only contracts, part-time, job-share, flexible working hours, flexible days, compressed hours, reduced hours, the possibility to work from home when appropriate, annualised hours, career breaks and sabbaticals. There are opportunities to flex the days of the week, hours and times of work and place of work: 'Work is something I do rather than where I go or a specific time to do it in.'

The trust also operates an internal flexible 'bank' for nurses. People who do not want a substantive contract, or who want to choose when they work, or to be paid weekly instead of monthly, can choose to work as part of the 'bank'. These people are not contracted for particular shifts; they simply work when they can work (and when the work is available).

In addition, people are allowed to move up and down the grading structure, without it being seen as a negative. For example, if someone who previously worked at a higher grade decides, when they come back from maternity leave, that they want to move down a band (for example move from ward manager to junior sister) in order to manage their additional responsibilities and have a healthy work-life balance, they are supported to do that: 'we say "you are not lost to us, we still recognise you as having potential talent," so we will meet their needs now and have another career conversation at their appraisal.'

People can also move around the organisation and get support for qualifications through working flexibly: 'people recognise that they might start in one place, but don't have to follow a traditional path anymore; they can swap from specialty to specialty and we will support that and they can move around the organisation - they can do their CPD differently when they are working flexibly too.'

While the organisation previously wanted people to be able to rotate through the full pattern of shifts across 24 hours, it now recognises that people's other needs, such as bringing up children or looking after ill parents, may mean that they can only work at particular times of day/week. They now aim to accommodate individuals' needs, and recognise that these may change over the course of their working life.

The journey started with recognising that, to have a good workforce, the organisation needed to focus on retention as well as recruitment. 'Exit interview data showed that lack of flexibility was the number one reason for people leaving and that, although we thought we had flexibility at policy level, at ward level there was resistance.' Meanwhile, a new person took over as chief nurse and changed the culture from the top to allow any working arrangement to be considered. The organisation has invested in a head nurse, who takes the lead on workforce planning and, as well as overseeing development for nurses, also

interviews everyone who hands in their notice; so, if someone is planning to leave because their line manager is not allowing them to work flexibly, they can get an arrangement in place and discourage them from leaving.

The trust has a 'retire and return' programme, so that people who are retiring are offered to come back in flexible roles: 'even if it is just one day per week or in a teaching role because they don't want to be on the wards – it is a matter of looking at what someone wants and seeing what role fits with that.'

One senior nurse, for whom it made financial sense to retire, had a smallholding, but decided she wanted to come back to work; because of looking after the animals, she wanted to work afternoons/evenings, so she was offered to roll out the hospital out-of-hours team, and that has been a great success. The out-of-office team was set up to assist the other ward teams to provide more effective care during the nights, weekends and bank holidays. They recruited and expanded the night sister role and renamed it clinical coordinator and introduced the role of the clinical support worker. The clinical support worker can provide medical support, which means patients get a quicker response and reduced waiting times as compared with waiting for a doctor. This also releases ward staff to spend more of their time with patients.

Flexible working in non-traditional and/or senior roles

Non-traditional roles

- Flexible working is happening throughout the whole of the organisation: nurses, doctors, nurse consultants, senior managers, Band 7 and Band 8a nurses.

Senior roles

- assistant directors working part-time
- general managers working nine-day fortnight
- senior people working flexibly at home
- senior consultants with portfolio careers

Gaining senior and line manager buy-in

National shortage of nurses

Offering flexible working was a way to increase recruitment when there is a national shortage of nurses: 'When it is hard to fill posts, it is better to have a day of someone good than to have no days.' Once it could be seen that that applied to nurses, it filtered out to all types of staff.

Share success stories

Where flexible working works well, talk about the success stories to show that it does work, and build on those to encourage others to implement flexible working too.

Overcome line managers' fears

Line managers need practical support; for them, having additional people, rather than a smaller, full-time team, seems like more work – more appraisals, more holiday to sign off; however, the organisation is aiming to lessen the load by supporting managers to delegate people management tasks, making the appraisal really simple (more about the conversation than the bureaucratic process), and providing mandatory training online so the onus is not on the manager to provide or monitor the training.

It is also about helping managers see the benefits of having more people available to work; for example, if you have people on part-time hours, when you need additional resource, they can flex up and fill the gap.

Support from the senior team

When the chief executive and the chief nurse are role-modelling and advocating flexible working, that makes it easier for line managers to buy in.

Facilitators to implementing flexible working

Champions and support from the top

- Visible support from the chief executive and the director team: 'It has got to come from the top.' As a manager said, 'it's about leading from the front on it and being consistent in that leadership message to others.'
- The appointment of a new chief nurse changed the dynamics of the board. His positive attitude to flexible working rubbed off on other board members and changed the perception of flexible working to being open to everybody, whatever their reason for wanting to work flexibly.
- You need to have champions, for example, people for whom flexible working is working well, who can describe how it works and support others to think about how it could work for them. 'The more creative we are and the more stories we can tell, that's what builds momentum.'

Structures and processes

- Flexible workforce department: a team of 21 people, who look after bookings for bank and agency staff. They have a constant advert out for bank staff and try to fill slots from the internal bank; and the trust is now using more of its own bank staff than agency people.
- At recruitment, if several good people come to interview for a particular job and there is only one job on offer, the others can be asked to join the bank, so that they are ready and available to be given work when it is available.
- Internal moves procedure: if people request that they want to move wards, for whatever reason, the head nurse for workforce meets with them and helps facilitate that to stop people leaving at that point. 'That saves loads of work on recruitment and it means we can move them quicker and we don't lose them.'
- Use all the different structures, meetings, training for front-line, middle and senior managers to support the narrative about flexible working: 'it's about ensuring that we create the right and consistent narrative that people in the organisation are the most important resource and allowing them to work in ways that are flexible is really important.'

Culture and communication

- Have a culture that supports flexible working: 'You can have all the policies in the world, but if people are not committed to it and it is not in the culture, it isn't going to work ... it has to be a culture that it is better to have one day of a good colleague than five days of someone who is not good.'
- Communicate with people about the options and the possibility to have flexibility without reducing working hours.
- Maintain conversations with individuals and managers: 'checking out with ward managers that they feel enabled and supported to allow flexible working in their team, and recognising that it is not always easy. It is important as senior leaders that you are connecting with the front line to see what else you might need to do to enable them to offer flexibility; sometimes it is just a conversation to talk it through and a fresh pair of eyes helps.'

National-level factors

- National shortage of nurses.
- Public awareness and research about the different needs and attitudes of millennials and younger people, and how people's wants and needs have changed. For example, 'people coming out of uni want different things from what we wanted. We have doctors now coming out of training who want to go travelling for a year; ten years ago that was unheard of ... now we say, "well, you go, and remember us when you come back."'
- Use national examples of best practice about flexible working and how to create the right culture – and network with peers in other organisations to share examples.

Trust

- There has to be trust between the flexible worker and their line manager. A flexible worker said, 'they have to trust I'm doing the hours, that I am working even when I am not visible in the office/on the floor.'
- There also has to be trust and understanding between the flexible worker and their team. The flexible worker said, 'I answer emails promptly, my staff can get hold of me whenever they need me. They don't abuse that ... they respect that if I say no, it means no; it's about being honest.'

Look at individual and team needs

- Consider individuals' needs and implement flexible working with fairness and flexibility.
- Constantly review whether flexible working is working well for the individual and the team, using the appraisal system and informal opportunities to have the conversation: 'understand from the individual whether it is working for them and what is not working as well; and recognising when it's not working well whether that is something that needs addressing or it is something that just needs accepting because the benefits outweigh the challenges.'

Support and guidance from HR

- Have an excellent, supportive HR team who can give guidance, help managers and find ways to meet people's needs.

Technology

- Being a 'fairly digital organisation ... technology has been a key facilitator over the last few years'.
- For a flexible worker one of the key facilitators was being able to control their own diary and to have all their diaries on one device.

Benefits of implementing flexible working (including any data/evidence collected)

Flexible worker perspective

Benefits to the individual

It 'allows me to be a whole person. I can fulfil my roles in work and outside work.'

Benefits to the organisation

The work gets done: 'sometimes I work way beyond my hours to get the job done, but the benefit for me is that I can flex that back at another time. ... It does benefit both ways.' 'If I couldn't work flexibly, I would have to reduce my hours substantially.'

Line manager perspective

Recruitment and retention

Being able to attract different people into the profession because of recognition of different working patterns: 'people that previously wouldn't have chosen us as an employer because of having to work different shift patterns are now able to come into the organisation.'

Attrition is lower – for example, amongst new graduates. And people on 'retire and return' are able to come back at senior levels on flexible hours/working patterns, so 'we don't lose that skill and knowledge. ... We do have three to four examples of colleagues in my team who have come back on that basis and it is fantastic because they are so skilled and knowledgeable that it is a pleasure having them in the team.'

Productivity and performance

When people's needs are met, they are more willing to go the extra mile; for example, 'we have a senior nurse who works flexibly on reduced hours, and we see her go the extra mile all of the time because of the relationship in the team and, because we have met her needs, she will work extra hours at home when needed.'

Sickness absence is reduced and there are indicators of employee well-being; and research shows that having employee well-being impacts on patient experience and compassionate care.

Matching capacity and demand

Flexible working offers the opportunity to link organisational and individual flexibility: 'there are busy times and quieter times and with flexible working you can respond to that.' For example, in paediatrics, more people are needed in winter than in summer, so some people are on annualised hours and work more hours in the winter months, and less in the summer.

HR perspective

Turnover and leavers

- In the year to August 2016, 244 nurses left the organisation, whereas in the year to August 2018, there were only 120 leavers.
- Turnover has gone from 13.55% to 7.55% in two years.
- For the first time the organisation had had more people start than leave (in the most recent quarter). 'We are doing a lot of stuff [around flexible working] and it is hard to say what has the biggest impact, but we do know that the number one reason for leaving was lack of flexibility ... and, while the reasons for leaving haven't changed, the number of leavers has halved, so it is not a massive leap of faith to say that that is because of the flexibility.'

Sickness and absence

Sickness absence has dropped from 5.16% to 4.12% in two years and it is now below 4%.

Performance and engagement

Recently, the trust received a CQC 'good' rating. 'It's a nicer place to work and, if people are happy and can have a good balance, it makes them a more productive and engaged workforce.'

Challenges/barriers to implementing flexible working

Flexible worker perspective

Workload and being 'always on'

- being entirely responsible for the workload: 'if I'm not there, no one picks up my workload; I just have to do the work at another time.'
- needing to be in several places at the same time
- tendency to do too much – sometimes staying up late at night to complete work assignments and meet deadlines
- being 'always on': 'Laptops and mobiles make it possible to work anywhere ... sometimes you might be there in person, but you are not there in mind for the children.'

Visibility

- There can be a perception that if you are not there, you are not working.

Line manager perspective

Volume of flexible working requests

- It can be difficult to roster people when there are multiple people in a team.
- When there are a lot of people working flexibly in a team, it can create tensions within the team: 'when you have got people who will work any time and then you have people with flexible work patterns and different needs, it can be difficult to make the rosters work. There can come a critical point where if you have too many people working flexibly, it can become very inflexible for those that haven't got a flexible working agreement.'

Inflexibility on the part of flexible workers

- Sometimes, flexible workers do not recognise that the arrangement needs to be reviewed annually as part of an ongoing conversation about whether it is working or not.

HR perspective

Attitudes and assumptions

- People's resistance, '...thinking that it is a full-time job and that you can't do a good job unless you are doing that; and some people think "I had to work full-time, so why shouldn't you?"'
- Expectations and assumptions – people thinking it is okay to work part-time because of bringing up children, but not okay to work flexibly just because you want a good work-life balance.
- Fears around 'retire and return' that people will potentially stay on until they are 100 and not be working effectively.

Practicalities

- Rostering – if you have 20 staff that are all part-time, it seems more difficult to roster than 10 people who are full-time.
- If someone reduces hours, the tendency is to use that as an opportunity to make savings (cost improvement), but that makes it difficult if that person wants to become full-time again, because the budget is no longer there.

Overcoming the barriers and challenges

Flexible worker perspective

Switch off when possible

- For example, have a rule of 'no devices at the dinner table', and take up leisure activities that help you switch off from work.

Communication

- Let people know what you have been doing, go into the workplace when you can, and try to be as visible as possible.
- Having good relationships and trust; for example, being responsive: 'If I ring my line manager, I know she will call me back ... she knows I wouldn't ring her if it wasn't important, and likewise I know that she wouldn't ring me if it wasn't important.'

Learning, adapting and accepting

- Learn to live with ambiguity and flexibility; be able to flex at the last minute.
- Work out what suits you and work around that: 'some people never work from home ... but that doesn't work for me. I have an office at home ... and it's about accepting that that is part of life ... it works for now.'

Line manager perspective

Openness and transparency

- It is important to be open and transparent in the team about the challenges and discuss how to manage it, 'to say, "we can do this most of the time, but when we can't, we need a bit of give and take," and if people see the fairness of that and how everyone can get flexibility, not just them, but for others as well, that helps.'
- The new e-rostering system helps with visibility as everyone gets equal visibility: 'everyone can see everyone's patterns and what everyone has requested ... and request their own patterns.'

Communicating the benefits and creating a positive narrative

- Help managers recognise the changing needs of the workforce and that 'having a blended workforce with different forms of flexibility is far more valuable than having lots of vacancies or absences'.
- Create a clear narrative in the organisation: 'really get people to talk about what it means for them, so that you can put the narrative through the organisation that we can work differently.'

HR perspective

Build the culture over time

- Take a range of approaches to changing culture and recognise it's a long journey: 'it doesn't happen overnight.' Initiatives include: buddying upwards where flexible working is happening successfully with those who have not yet implemented it; HR going out and talking to people and communicating all the options that are available.
- Explain the need to be flexible to what different people, and different generations, want in order to attract and retain them at different times in their lives. 'Millennials have a different mindset and we have to change if we want to attract and retain them.'

Practicalities

- Rostering: there is an e-rostering system on the wards now, so the key things are to make sure the system supplier is meeting the needs of the different teams using it and to provide training on how to use it. The e-roster team are going out to give specialist training to people on how to use the electronic system to make the rostering process easier.

- Retaining budgets: ‘when someone goes part-time, we need not to get rid of that budget.’
- Ensure that there are good performance and capability reviews in place and support for managers to have difficult conversations. In terms of the ‘retire and return’ workers staying on beyond when they can work effectively, ‘it’s about being sensible. Most people know when they are ready to finish ... and you can have capability and conduct matters at any age ... so it is about having sensible conversations about it ... let’s treat people as adults and the majority of people behave that way.’

Understand and address line managers’ fears

- To overcome resistance, sitting down and understanding why a particular manager is not supportive of flexible working can help. They may have had an experience that has led to them feeling unable to offer flexible working or they may have fears and anxieties based on no experience; either way, the key thing is to understand and discuss their concerns. ‘When individuals feel unable to be flexible around working patterns, sometimes it is about myth-busting.’

Talk to particular groups and individuals

- The organisation is holding retirement workshops, aiming to talk to people two years before they get to retirement about ‘retire and return’ and help them consider the options. It is also looking to streamline the ‘retire and return’ process to make it a lot easier.
- The head nurse for workforce is constantly intervening with those who hand in their notice and finding ways to retain those who ask for flexible working and resign because they don’t get it (though this has to be balanced with not undermining the manager who has made the decision not to offer flexible working, so it is often about finding the person work on another ward/team).

How to measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working

Review the statistics

There are statistics that are reported to the board on a quarterly basis: ‘just looking at FT [full-time] and headcount tells a story in itself. ... If you look at the headcount for 21–25, the FT figures and the headcount is about the same, so there is really nobody working flexibly at that age; but the biggest gap is around 41–45, so more people at that age are asking for flexible working. ... You would think it would be younger, when people are having children, but actually it’s when people are more financially secure and evaluating their lives.’

It is important also to look at sickness, turnover, leavers, and starters to show the benefits (see benefits listed above). Also, looking at patient experience (for example patient feedback and complaints) and triangulating those with workforce metrics can help show that there are links between data about employees and about patients.

Ask questions about flexible working in employee surveys

There are questions in the Investors in People survey and the staff survey about flexible working and work–life balance, so the organisation will get the results of those surveys and understand more about people’s views.

3 Enterprise Rent-A-Car

Business sector: Retail – transportation solutions provider

Number of employees: 5,000

Overall lessons learned

- From an individual perspective, the flexible worker recommends talking with your line manager about your situation and how important flexible working is for you to give your best. It is also important to put a well-thought-out and well-researched business case together.
- The line manager recommends being consistent: ‘Be fair and transparent so that everyone can see what is happening.’
- Be prepared to try different approaches to flexible working: ‘You don’t know what’s possible unless you give it a go.’
- Each organisation is unique and has its own opportunities and challenges: ‘It’s not about copying others but about thinking, where can we be flexible and how can we be creative about our offerings?’
- Acknowledge that you are on a journey when it comes to flexible working and that it is vital to be flexible and adapt along the way: ‘Listen to your employees and ask for their advice on how to make it work for everyone.’

Next steps

- Explore core hours working.
- Promote flexible working to men to encourage uptake.
- Continue on ‘our flexible working journey’ and expand to find creative approaches to flexible working.

Key themes from case study

- Experimentation is key when it comes to flexible working: be prepared to give things a go and learn from them.
- Flexibility can be afforded in non-traditional areas of business such as customer service and call centres; and flexibility can also result in service innovations (like extended opening hours for customers).
- Two-way flexibility underpins successful flexible working relationships.
- Put your employees at the heart of your flexible working strategies: listen to what they want and make it easy for them to ask for flexibility.

Organisational context

Enterprise started its flexible working journey 15 years ago following feedback from a global employee opinion survey. Enterprise Rent-A-Car (Enterprise) offers a range of flexible working options, including:

- alternative working arrangements
- compressed hours
- working from home
- staggered hours with late starts/early finishes
- part-time working.

Offering flexible working arrangements is a key way of retaining employees for the long term. Enterprise’s focus on flexibility develops employee engagement and supports all

employees, regardless of their circumstances. The business fills 98% of positions through promotions within the company, so there is a clear understanding that all employees will need flexibility at some point in their careers.

The HR director for the UK and Ireland says that Enterprise tries to keep flexible working practices – or, as they are known in the business, alternative working arrangements (AWA) – as informal as possible to ‘encourage employees to do it’. The business has found that formalising the process can put some people off taking it up, because of concerns around the perceived impact it might have. Women are more likely to go through the more formal ‘right to request’ approach, whereas men very rarely do. As part of Enterprise’s engagement strategy, the company is keen to promote flexibility to men and to working fathers as much as to women and working mothers: ‘Men have the same thoughts, challenges and fears that women experience.’

Enterprise is keen to support overall flexibility and is looking at ways to ‘allow people to set their own schedules in a way that best works for them.’

Enterprise also offers a flexible approach to benefits and has replaced its sick day entitlement with the more flexible option of ‘choice time’. This can be taken for sick days but also holidays, caring requirements, religious reasons as well as for general well-being. It can be easier for people to say they are taking a ‘choice’ day rather than a ‘sick’ day.

Eliminating ‘presenteeism’ is an ongoing priority, especially among more long-standing employees. However, the HR director for the UK and Ireland maintains that Enterprise is ‘working hard at changing our culture to enable as many people that want or need flexibility to come forward. We are focusing on a culture where the message is, get the job done and move on.’

It is easier to be flexible for the organisation’s office-based staff. Greater creativity is required to ensure customer services staff at Enterprise’s 470 branches can provide service to customers while working more flexibly. Branches and depots are being encouraged to be creative when it comes to flexible working – for example, implementing split-shift options and job-shares. Some branches have deliberately extended their hours to enable more shift working, thereby creating a win-win for both employees and customers.

Flexible working in non-traditional and/or senior roles

Enterprise is innovative in allowing its call centre workers to work flexible schedules: the call centre is entirely staffed by homeworkers, who control their own flexible work patterns. The organisation analyses call volume and schedules accordingly. For example, employees can work three hours and then have a two-hour break during a quieter period, before returning to work.

When recruiting to fill vacancies in this population of 260 homeworkers, interviews are now conducted virtually – replicating the conditions in which successful applicants will do their job. This means that hiring managers can directly assess the core competencies required for the job. They also receive their training virtually.

Gaining senior and line manager buy-in

Flexible working and alternative work arrangements are supported by top line managers and discussed and promoted through internal communications. Flexible working is seen to be important and prioritised. ‘Our senior leaders appreciate how important it is to retain staff and are very open to affording flexibility. They are clear on the benefits for the organisation and the individual, and clearly communicate these.’

Facilitators to implementing flexible working

Experiment

‘You don’t know unless you give it a go. You can provide greater opportunities and service for customers through experimentation – like extending opening hours to accommodate shift working.’

Shine a light on managers who work flexibly and successfully

‘It’s important to show people that you can progress even if you are working flexibly. Shine a light on managers who are working flexibly and successfully.’

Move away from rewarding presenteeism

‘Some people discuss busy-ness like it’s a “badge of honour”. We highlight moving away from inputs and hours worked to outputs and the quality of work.’

Listen to and empower employees to ask for flexible working

‘Listen to employees, trust employees and make it easy for them to ask for flexibility.’

Benefits of implementing flexible working (including any data/evidence collected)

Flexible worker perspective

Attracting and retaining valued employees

‘My alternative work arrangement (AWA) allows me to work. Without flexibility I wouldn’t be able to properly look after my two young children, nor afford childcare.’

Two-way flexibility

It also generates an attitude of flexibility back towards the organisation: ‘If I can be flexible, I’ll stay later to get things done, when it’s needed.’

Line manager perspective

Increased motivation

‘The benefit is that it keeps people motivated and retained. It makes people want to work harder and give more, because of the flexibility the organisation affords.’

Increased well-being

‘Flexibility also supports people’s well-being and leads to a healthier home life, which is good news all round.’

Two-way flexibility

‘Employees are much more likely to be flexible back to the organisation if they are afforded flexibility in the first place. They want to help and will do so if they can.’

HR perspective

Greater employee engagement for all

‘We started our focus on alternative work arrangements as a key employee engagement tool and that hasn’t changed. It’s a key way of boosting engagement for all employees, regardless of circumstances.’

Attraction and retention

Being flexible helps to attract employees and, as most promotions are from within the company, it also means that most employees stay at Enterprise longer and will be looking for some type of flexibility at some stage in their life and career. Flexible working is therefore a key way of retaining employees for the long term.

Challenges/barriers to implementing flexible working

Flexible worker perspective

Traffic issues during work travel

One challenge experienced by some flexible workers is where their role requires a lot of driving, so traffic problems, such as hold-ups and traffic jams, can cause unexpected delays and impact on flexibility.

Childcare requirements in the summer

The summer months can present more of a challenge from a work schedule and childcare perspective because of school holidays.

Line manager perspective

Not wanting to leave the team short

'I have to make sure that the team is not left short at any time. All team members have families and sometimes they might want the same time off.'

People taking advantage

In rare cases, the flexible working system can be open to people taking advantage. 'One employee might not want to change the day they work to accommodate important meetings or training activities.'

HR perspective

Perceptions that flexible working is just for certain groups

People's perceptions in the business can be a barrier to successfully implementing flexibility, particularly when they assume that flexible working should only be afforded to certain groups with certain needs.

Presenteeism

A culture of presenteeism also represents a barrier if people are still judging each other based on their time at their desks rather than the quality of their work.

Overcoming the barriers and challenges

Flexible worker perspective

Two-way flexibility

Two-way flexibility can help with overcoming the challenges of travel and traffic issues, and also of balancing work schedules and increased childcare demands over the summer period. The flexible worker is clear that because the organisation affords them flexibility to help juggle different demands, they will also be as flexible as possible for the organisation – staying late where necessary and where possible.

Line manager perspective

Fairness and open dialogue

When there are conflicts in flexible work schedules and leave requests, the line manager emphasises fairness and open dialogue: 'It's about being as fair as possible, keeping the team happy and maintaining an open dialogue around this.'

Setting clear boundaries and ground rules

It is important to set clear boundaries and ground rules when it comes to flexible working and claiming flexi-time, so that everyone knows what is and is not acceptable and is clear on the organisation's approach.

HR perspective

Clear and open communication about flexible working

It is important to promote clear and honest communication about the organisation's approach to flexible working, including the fact that it is open to all employees, regardless of their circumstances.

Shifting the culture away from presenteeism

It is also important to shift the culture away from presenteeism by not rewarding long hours and placing the focus on the quality of work achieved.

How to measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working

Using customer service metrics

Measuring the success of flexible working will differ depending on the circumstances and priorities of each organisation. Customer service is the core performance metric at Enterprise. We can immediately see where flexible working could be impacting customer service scores. Sometimes scores are improved as people that enjoy their work provide great customer service. That is what we measure most for business insight.

4 GLF Schools

Business sector: Education

Number of employees: 1,758

Overall lessons learned

- It is valuable to use evidence and information from external sources:
 - evidence from elsewhere that shows why flexible working is important
 - sector examples of where it has worked
 - statistics about the number of people leaving the profession and why they have left.
- To work flexibly, people have to learn to manage their own time and juggle responsibilities.
- Flexible working is vital to get the best out of people by meeting their needs: 'it is key that staff know that if there is something they need, they can ask ... ultimately this is all about valuing people as people and creating a culture that will work for staff and students.'
- Culture change takes time: the benefits need to be promoted by head teachers who have made it work by talking to other head teachers.

Key themes from the case study

- Communication is critical for getting buy-in for flexible working, implementing flexible working arrangements successfully, and ensuring smooth ongoing sharing of responsibilities between those working flexibly.
- Trust and collaborative attitudes (give and take) between the flexible worker and their line manager are essential for flexible working to work.
- Creating an open organisational culture supports flexible working.
- School environments have particular advantages for flexible working (for example term-time working is straightforward) and particular disadvantages (for example needing to split classes and form groups to accommodate non-full-time arrangements).

- The recruitment crisis in education has prompted more openness to flexible working as a way to recruit and retain good people.
- Flexible working is seen as a way of supporting people's well-being and helping them feel valued.
- Ad hoc flexibility is as important as contractual flexibility – for example, being able to take time out for ad hoc things like children's assemblies, or for other personal interests.

Organisational context

GLF Schools is a trust comprising 30 primary and secondary schools (academies) across five local authorities. It offers a range of types of flexible working: term-time working is the obvious and easiest form to implement in educational settings, while part-time working, job-shares, and staggered hours (starting late or finishing early) are also common at GLF Schools. It also offers staff ad hoc flexibility to take time off for one-off events. 'Our policies explicitly say that staff are entitled to one day per year for a significant personal reason; in practice, we are keen to develop a culture where we are not tallying those things.'

In addition, the organisation is open to staff having flexibility to do different roles as well as teaching. An internal example of this is that some employees have a split role within the trust, so part of their role is being a teacher and the other part is, for example, leading on a particular subject across the trust. There are also examples where an individual does a role outside the trust for part of their time: for example, a man who does consulting work on one day a week and works for GLF Schools four days per week.

Homeworking has traditionally been offered to non-teaching staff, but the organisation has started to explore opportunities for teachers to work remotely some of the time to do certain tasks such as planning, marking, leadership time, and so on. Associate staff members have options for working from home and flexitime if appropriate to their role.

Historically, GLF Schools tended to introduce flexible working when an employee came back from maternity leave, but they are also now recruiting people into flexible working roles. More candidates are asking for flexible working, and recruitment difficulties in education are forcing people to be more creative about making flexible working work. Their job adverts used not to say that they offered flexible working, but now it is standard to include mention of flexible working in adverts. The next stage is to think about how jobs could be designed flexibly from the point of advert so that flexibility is clear at the point of hire, 'not just saying "we're open to flexibility", but actually thinking about how to build in flexibility, so we're not just putting out an advert for exactly the job the previous person was doing, but thinking through with the manager how it could be changed and made more flexible.'

Flexible working has been happening at GLF for a long time – though not necessarily labelled as flexible working – but this has increased over the last year or so. Now, it is an organisation-wide agenda and is about being an employer of choice: 'we want people to come and work for us and to stay here; if the evidence is that flexible working is what people are looking for, then that is what we must offer to get the best people.' Flexible working has also been linked to the well-being agenda, recognising that teaching and working in education can be stressful and challenging, so if flexible working supports people's well-being, that is another reason to do it.

The aim is that flexible working should be for everyone – men/women, parents/not, old/young – not just about mums with young children, but anyone who wants some kind of

flexibility. The organisation is open to looking at any role to see how it could be made flexible, and to exploring all forms of flexible working, not just part-time or term-time working. In some cases, flexible working (for example staggered working or ad hoc flexibility) is happening and working well without formal processes, but is not thought of as flexible working, so the organisation wants to make clear that flexible working is about all these forms of flexibility.

Flexible working in non-traditional and/or senior roles

Non-traditional roles

- Flexible working in teaching roles and teaching assistants.

Senior roles

- Primary school has successfully implemented a job-share head teacher.
- Deputy head teachers and assistant head teachers are part-time. 'Assistant head teacher was last part of school where I held onto the notion that flexible working couldn't work ... now I believe there is no area of the school where it wouldn't work.'
- Despite some resistance to implementing flexible working in middle leadership positions, a recent request from a head of department wanting to return from maternity leave on three days a week has been agreed on a trial basis and there is a job-share head of maths.
- A senior member of staff has reduced his hours/days at the end of his career, to remain in the leadership team and to continue working for longer.
- Centrally based senior leaders have the opportunity to work a variety of flexible patterns, including homeworking, staggered and compressed hours.

Gaining senior and line manager buy-in

Be clear of the benefits and address concerns

Talking about the imperative to recruit and retain good staff and how being as public as possible about flexible working helps with that. Flexible working can also help contain budgets as it allows schools to employ the capacity they need and not over-recruit within functions. Writing timetables is always about compromise, so flexible working means having to split responsibility for classes, but the plus side is retaining staff, having a full complement of staff and getting good staff: 'recognise that having good-quality teachers is a far greater priority than having a perfect timetable because it won't be perfect if you don't have the staff!'

Make it straightforward

Talk to heads about flexible working to get them thinking about how to implement flexible working and clarify where flexible working (for example staggered hours) has already been implemented but just hasn't been seen as such. 'So, we're showing them that it's not just about people working part-time. ... It is a breakthrough to get senior people thinking more in that way, realising they are already doing it and could make it work in other ways.'

Draw on external data

Give statistics to show the benefits of flexible working and the broader national perspective, for example show the percentage of people that want flexibility. Also, show that it is important for everyone, not just mums returning from maternity leave.

Give examples

'If you can show examples of where it has worked really well, that helps people be more open to it, though no one wants to be the guinea pig, so it can be a bit "chicken and egg".'

There are examples of split roles where an individual does two part-time roles both within the trust, which shows that their school role can be done part-time. The fact that the HR team all work flexibly has helped in the conversations with head teachers as they can give personal examples.

Facilitators to implementing flexible working

Nature of the role

- Term-time working works well for schools because of the fit with the school year; it is welcomed by many staff members who are parents, and is straightforward to implement in educational settings.
- Some roles are easier to make flexible than others. Roles where people are out and about in different places lead naturally to flexible and homeworking. For example, the HR team, education partner and other central functions are all out at schools much of the time, therefore homeworking and flexing hours is a natural thing to do.

Context and timing

- Flexible working works best when there is plenty of warning, so arrangements can be put in place early: it is hard to arrange things if the request is only put in just before the person comes back from maternity leave (or late in the recruitment process).
- Being a large school can make it easier because the bigger the timetable is, the greater the possibilities for flexibility and for teachers to cover one another's needs.

Attitudes of flexible worker and line manager

- Flexible working works well when both parties are willing to be flexible and there is give and take on both sides. 'Flexibility on both sides helps it along in lots of ways.'
- Trust is also key to ensure flexible working works: 'Trust ... has definitely been a key ingredient in my view where I've seen it work well.'
- Having a supportive line manager is vital. 'It is all about having a supportive leader who values flexible working and doesn't see it as a barrier.'
- Output and impact are more important than how many hours you are present at school or in the office.

Communication, technology and good management

- Good communication is vital, particularly passing information between teachers who share a class or form group: managing communication and workload so that the students and families get seamless provision.
- Invest in leadership across the school, having enough middle leaders to support communication and drive the relationships between teachers who share classes and form groups. It is important that leaders share the minutes of team meetings too.
- Invest in technology, such as Google apps (where staff can collaborate on documents easily), and other resources that facilitate better communication.
- Ensure that internal CPD is recorded and materials/recordings are held on the website, so that those who are part-time, particularly those not at work on the CPD day, can catch up afterwards.

External factors and top-level support

- The recruitment crisis in the education sector has helped. When the organisation cannot get good candidates willing to work full-time, it opens the conversation about whether it could get better people by offering part-time roles or other forms of flexible working, and opened up the opportunity for exploring whether there are great people out there who are not currently teaching, but could do if offered flexible working.

- Restricted budgets mean schools must not over-recruit within functions and therefore become more open to the notion of part-time workers in order only to employ the capacity needed.
- Being part of the CIPD Flexible Hiring Champions initiative and this research project, and having support from the CEO for that, means that flexible working has been talked about at executive board level and in forums of head teachers. It is seen to be coming from the top and is on the organisation's agenda as something that could have real benefits.
- A head teacher who is supportive and really recognises that to keep good people, you have to be able to support everyone to be the best they can be in every aspect of their life: 'it has to come from the top down.'

Culture of the organisation and other organisational initiatives

- The culture of the organisation is that flexibility is possible: not that there is an open door to anything, but that 'the school would only say no if there was a real reason to say no'. This is not true in all schools, so heads need to remind people that this is the culture we want. 'Open culture in the school.'
- Make flexible working an organisation-wide initiative, rather than just having local pockets of flexible working. 'As an organisation we are talking about it a lot more and talking about it organisation-wide, so that will help us to implement flexible working more across the whole trust.'
- There is a big push in the organisation about well-being and flexible working has been intertwined with that. A lot of sickness absence in the education sector is attributed to stress and flexible working is one way of being able to support people.

Benefits of implementing flexible working (including any data/evidence collected)

Flexible worker perspective

Career, family and mental health

- Being able to progress with your career as well as have time with children, particularly when they are younger. 'I've been in a leadership position in three schools and brought up children, so I've been able to do the two things that are both really important to me at the same time ... I feel very lucky ... I know others who have had to sacrifice something, either home life or climbing the career ladder.'
- Mental health is better: flexible working enables you to feel that you've got a balance and to get things done in all aspects of your life. Flexible working allows you to be less stressed and not feel guilty, much more resilient and able to cope with the job.

Talent and productivity

- If a school doesn't enable people to work flexibly, it risks losing a talented part of the workforce: a senior leader left a previous job because a new head teacher was not prepared to have members of his leadership team work part-time. 'It is short-sighted ... not to allow flexible working. [Here] people have invested in me and I have been a loyal employee and given back to the organisation.'
- Part-time teachers in leadership roles will have a smaller teaching load, but the leadership responsibilities do not decrease: '...good value for money!'
- The flexible worker is better able to do their job. If they feel guilty or stressed in other parts of life, they cannot do the job so well; whereas, when they have an appropriate work-life balance, they are able to be more productive at work.
- Sets a good example to the rest of the staff.

Line manager perspective

Retaining and valuing staff

- Holding onto staff is key and having them feel valued is absolutely critical. 'We do all sorts of things to keep staff. ... flexible working is one of those things that is so important ... it is part of a much bigger package of investing in our staff.'
- Create a culture that will work for staff and students, in which they feel valued as individuals.

HR perspective

Well-being and morale

- Anecdotally, the HR interviewee reported having heard a lot about the positive impact of flexible working on morale and how people feel about where they work.
- When people have flexibility to work in a way that suits them and the organisation, they feel they have more control, and that supports well-being.
- Where the organisation has agreed flexible working for someone as a result of a health condition, people say how supported they feel. Everyone wins in these situations because the individual stays in the organisation, takes less sick leave, and feels well supported.

Recruitment and retention

- In a number of cases, including the HR interviewee's own role, the organisation might not have been able to recruit if it had not been open to flexible working as there were no full-time candidates of the quality they were looking for, but filling vacancies with flexible workers has worked.
- It is also about keeping good people by recognising that everyone has other things in their lives in addition to their role in the school.

Challenges/barriers to implementing flexible working

Flexible worker perspective

Attitudes and emotions

- Dealing with others' perceptions: they don't expect flexible working to work, so you have to prove them wrong. You have to stay in touch, check emails and be available on the end of the phone on non-work days.
- Feeling guilty and as if you need to make excuses on non-work days.
- Working four days a week in role that included behaviour and student welfare was challenging for the flexible worker interviewee, as it was very hard to walk away on a Thursday, knowing she would not be there on a Friday and having to hand over a difficult situation half-finished (for example parent and student meetings).

Practicalities

- Working fewer hours does restrict you in terms of time. For example, you can't arrange meetings before school on days when you have a late start.

Line manager perspective

Poor communication and split classes/form groups

- A key anxiety is always around the impact of flexible working teachers on the timetable and need to have more than one member of staff responsible for lessons and form periods.

- The main barriers are where the quality of communication and leadership has not been good enough.
- Parental concerns: parents want as good provision as possible for their children and where flexible working hasn't been effective, parents are quick to point it out.

Concerns about workload

- Workload is an issue particularly for teaching staff as schools are asking all staff to do more than ever before.
- Those who have responsibilities for leadership tend to do a full-time role in part-time hours, working from home on non-work days. 'I'm acutely aware and concerned ... people say that it is okay because it is their lifestyle, but it is a moral concern and we need to keep an eye on workload and well-being.'

HR perspective

Mindsets

- There is a mindset that certain roles cannot be done flexibly, particularly where there are concerns about the impact on children. For example, some people say 'children need consistency' and argue that job-share and part-time roles disrupt this.
- The biggest resistance to flexible working seems to be around making middle-leader roles flexible – roles involving teaching plus leadership responsibility.
- Problems can arise when someone is already in a role and wants something different. 'When it is about finding a way to make flexible working work for an existing person in an existing role, it can be that mindsets are harder to shift.'

Other issues

- Sometimes the reluctance to give flexible working is not really about the flexibility, but an underlying performance issue or other concern about the person who has requested flexible working. In these cases, the underlying issue needs addressing because it will be a problem however they are working.

Overcoming the barriers and challenges

Flexible worker perspective

Attitudes, trust and understanding

- The person who is working flexibly has to be flexible too; for example, come in on a non-work day if there is something important going on, such as appraisals or staff meetings. It is about give and take, working together with your line manager and accepting that there will be occasions when you have to give up some of the time when you should be at home, then you are allowed to take time elsewhere.
- Trust is key; it is not about recording everything officially, but being trusted to do a good job.
- You also need to recognise the impact on others and find ways to mitigate those.

Practicalities

- For some roles, it may work better to be in school every day with shorter days, rather than having a day off.

Line manager perspective

Communication

- Use dialogue at a leadership level to talk about the issues and putting in place a culture where the impact of flexible working is part of the many things that we monitor and talk about.

- Engage openly, proactively and responsively with parents – parent forums, a range of ways parents can contact staff, and contacting them early and directly about any concerns to explain mitigations being put in place.

Proactive management

- A good timetabler can help minimise the need to split classes/form groups.
- Carefully pair people who have shared responsibility for classes/form groups to ensure a blend of experience and that one of the teachers is really strong to prevent downsides of not having a single teacher for the class/form group.

HR perspective

Understand and overcome fears

- It is vital to understand the concerns about impact on children and parents and to think through all the implications of flexible working in order to mitigate any negatives. To address the argument about children needing consistency, show that there is still consistency for the children, one teacher for Monday–Wednesday and another Thursday–Friday.
- Ask senior people to really articulate why they think flexible working wouldn't work, then talk through options to overcome concerns. Sometimes there are genuine reasons for reluctance around flexible working, and then it is about looking for compromises or other arrangements. The individual requesting flexible working is often open to alternatives, so HR should encourage leaders to think through different options, instead of doing things in the same way.
- Sometimes the fear is that 'everyone will want it', which can be resolved by making flexible working case by case and role by role. Sometimes the fear is, 'if I say yes to flexible working and it doesn't work, I will be stuck', but it is possible just to trial it first.
- The HR team working flexibly means they can use themselves as examples, which can help overcome fears and doubts.

Point out the advantages

- Talk to heads about how they may be able to recruit better people if they offer flexible working at the time of hire. When they struggle to recruit, being open to different arrangements may help them find someone.

How to measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working

As it is early days for the organisation's flexible working strategy, GLF Schools does not have systems in place to know what is working/not working. 'We know about the successes anecdotally, but are not really recording the data at the moment.' However, they have talked about ways they would like to measure and evaluate flexible working, such as:

- Compare absence rates for flexible working/non-flexible working – it would be powerful if they could show that flexible working staff take less time off.
- Recruitment – if they could show that they were filling vacancies more quickly and/or have fewer vacancies as a result of recruiting flexibly.
- Turnover for flexible working/non-flexible working – show that they are retaining staff better in flexible working roles.
- Staff surveys.

5 Hachette

Business sector: Publishing

Number of employees: 1,700

Overall key lessons learned

- The ambivalence from managers is more about lack of confidence than resistance to flexible working. Managers are often doubtful because they don't know how to measure and manage productivity, and that makes them unsure about flexible working. So this is more about building confidence around performance management conversations than flexible working itself.
- The publishing industry is different from other industries, and Hachette is a creative type of organisation, which means accepting that ways of working are different: 'There is less certainty within this industry; it isn't necessarily black and white.'
- It is important to be explicit about the positives of flexible working, especially for those managing people: 'I don't know whether I have been clear enough to say to people "it is a good thing to do, or there's nothing bad about implementing it."' Also, make flexible working public within the team.
- Show positive examples and the benefits of flexible working: 'Showing managers, where they are allowing people to work from home or work flexibly, that this hasn't had a negative impact upon their role.'
- Think about the wider team when considering the impact of flexible working: 'It's about thinking of the impact beyond your role. That's something I am quite aware of.'

Next steps

- Actively promote flexible working in job adverts using positive wording about flexibility and think about how jobs could be made flexible at the point of recruitment; make this more of a regular conversation and thought process for all managers and recruiters. Additionally, add something on the website to show support for flexible working.
- Improve job descriptions containing KPIs, and consider a new performance review system to make sure managers have the tools to address any concerns about performance.

Key themes from the case study

- Establishing core hours can help make flexible working work, and technology is a key facilitator.
- Overt support and promotion of flexible working from the CEO supports Hachette in providing flexible working and encouraging uptake of flexible working arrangements.
- Forward plan and communicate flexible working arrangements and encourage two-way conversations around any impact flexible working may be having on colleagues and the team.
- Given the nature of the industry and the type of work conducted at Hachette, managers and HR professionals are not always able to 'measure' tangible outcomes and outputs from work, which sometimes makes initiatives such as flexible working harder to implement and performance-related impact harder to show.

Organisational context

The types of flexible working within Hachette include:

- part-time working: around 15–17% of employees are working part-time
- working from home: either ad hoc or agreed contractually
- term-time-only workers: mainly sales representatives and customer service staff who are only required to work during school term time as they work alongside schools
- compressed hours: in general this type of flexible working does not work as well within publishing
- job-shares
- uniquely, there is a long-standing cultural tradition within adult publishing, that in June, July and August working hours are compressed so that employees can take Friday afternoon off.

Generally, working from home one day per week works well across the organisation for most job roles, which tend to be office based. It is common for employees in editorial roles to working from home, given the nature of their work, and particularly when working on structural edits of a book. Working from home can offer an undisrupted quiet environment for them to concentrate on their work, as opposed to the busy open-plan office. *'A day working from home is something that does work really well and also brings people a lot of benefits.'* However, there are exceptions in cases where roles require visibility and on-site work, for example, receptionists and post-room staff.

Another type of flexible working common at Hachette is where employees flex the hours they work (flexi hours) across the day, for example 8:30am to 4:30pm instead of 9:30am to 5:30pm. Feedback has suggested that flexi hours are useful for employees, as they allow work to be tailored to the individual's needs, and are easy for the business to accommodate. An HR representative mentioned that there are few times where the flexi hours present a problem, for example, when the whole team or division works very similar arrangements: *'The only challenge is if you have a team who are all working hours which aren't the norm ... for example, no one being in the office after 4:00pm.'*

Working from home and flexi hours are mostly arranged on an informal basis. As a result, it is unclear how many flexible workers there are within the organisation; this is therefore something that Hachette is hoping to capture through a staff survey.

Hachette's standard working hours are 9:30am until 5:30pm. In some divisions, Hachette has agreed that staff can flex their schedule around the core hours (10:00am–4:00pm) by +/- 2 hours: *'People can flex those hours in a way that suits them ... as long as that doesn't impact what you are able to deliver in your role, then we would be able to agree that.'* When booking any team meetings, the organisers try to adhere to the core hours on Mondays to Thursdays as much as possible.

Hachette are also trying to respond to employees' needs through new flexible working arrangements; for example, when it was reviewing shift patterns within its new warehouse to reflect employees' requests and needs. It has found that some employees in this role also work in a second job and therefore would have difficulty adapting to different shift patterns while supporting this.

Hachette have also recently introduced 'Flexible Fortnight', an initiative which aims to encourage employees to trial their ideal flexible working arrangement and encourage the uptake of flexible working across the organisation. Flexible Fortnight was based on four options: non-standard start and end times; working from home; reduced working hours; and working from another office. Following the initiative, employees were able to make formal flexible working requests if they wished to do so and data collected from Flexible Fortnight will be shared for future learning.

Flexible working in non-traditional and/or senior roles

Non-traditional roles

- A male schools conference producer works term-time hours, not for caring reasons but to fit with his wife's working schedule (she is a teacher).
- Warehouse shift workers are able to swap shifts on an ad hoc basis to accommodate personal arrangements where possible and a small number work part-time or during term time.
- Receptionists, print-room and post-room staff may swap their shifts with their manager's agreement.
- Sales representatives working from home as they are not usually office based, though, as they are client-facing, they are required to consider client and business needs. 'If a retailer says, "I would like a meeting at 8:00 in the morning," sometimes that might be a difficult one to say no to.'

Senior roles

- A senior female fiction publisher (who reports to the managing director) works part-time four days a week. She manages a large division of people. She also often works one day a week from home on an ad hoc basis.
- A female deputy managing director works her core hours and then works her additional hours flexibly.
- The CEO of the company and a COO of two divisions both working from home one day per week where possible.

Gaining senior and line manager buy-in

Support from the top

The CEO of Hachette is highly supportive of and actively encourages flexible working. He sends out overt messages to encourage and enable flexible working so that employees feel empowered to work their preferred hours. 'When our CEO talks about flexible working, you know he means it. He firmly believes that it is entirely possible and should work in the majority of roles.'

Recognising and overcoming past negative experiences

Some managers and leaders have a negative opinion of flexible working because of previous experiences where flexible working didn't work well; in some cases this experience is from working in other organisations. However, Hachette aspires to overcome this and support teams that aren't currently working flexibly. To improve any negative perceptions, one manager suggested, 'it is about showing managers flexible working isn't as bad as you feared.'

Facilitators to implementing flexible working

IT and technology

Having the technology required to do the job from remote locations is important to facilitate flexible working. Hachette has supported many employees to switch from desktops to laptops and some have work mobile phones: 'People have moved to having laptops as their main computer. I have my laptop with me every day and I can plug into a workstation in the office, but it's equally as easy to shove it in the handbag and I've got the same set-up at home ... I have a work phone to do emails and calls on the go, so that makes it easier.'

Tangible sales measures

In the sales team, having tangible sales measures makes it easy to see the impact of flexible working and allows managers to know whether flexible working is impacting on the business: 'In sales, you can see what's happening. If there's a problem, you will see it in the sales.'

Being flexible about flexible working

It is important for Hachette, as a client-facing business, to have an element of flexibility around client meetings. For example, if a client would like to set up a meeting outside of the core hours, employees need to show an element of flexibility as meeting clients is a requirement of the business.

Culture change around certain jobs being inflexible

'A few years ago ... maybe it was my previous team and previous managers, but there was definitely a feeling of sales people having to be in the office, should be available, should be visible, and I think that has definitely started to shift. I'm an example of that!'

A supportive, positive and relational culture

The general culture within publishing and at Hachette is supportive and positive, which helps flexible working arrangements. It is a sector that prioritises relational business and fosters creativity: 'I know that the happier the staff are, the better job they will do; that culture is in the majority of our divisions and this really helps support flexible working as being both in the individuals' and company's best interest.'

Much of the work within publishing is relationship focused, particularly in editorial and publicity, with less emphasis on visibility: 'A lot of our employees' value and skills come from the relationships that they hold with clients and with authors; you can't replace that. It's not important whether you are working 9:30 to 5:30; it's about maintaining those relationships for the business because that is really important.'

Senior leader support and role-modelling

Employees feel a sense of support for flexible working arrangements from senior leaders and managers. Managers and senior leaders need to have a positive mindset and publicly promote flexible working across the organisation, and role-modelling from senior members is an important factor. As mentioned, Hachette's CEO is openly very supportive of flexible working and a good example of role-modelling flexible working arrangements, who sends out positive messages around managing work in general: 'He's an example of keeping a good work-life balance and respecting people's holidays - and making sure that they take them!'

Core hours and the Flexible Fortnight initiative

Introducing core hours (that is, 10:00am-4:00pm Mondays to Thursdays) for group meetings and other office work enables employees to avoid clashes with their flexible working schedule and ensures that meetings include the whole team.

The Flexible Fortnight sent out strong positive messages: 'The fact that they implemented Flexible Fortnight really shows that Hachette are behind it and want people to try flexible working and, if they want to, make it a permanent arrangement.' Another example said, 'Flexible Fortnight was a really good way of helping it filter down through the company. Often those in more junior roles find it difficult to ask or even know if they can ask for flexible working. I think, traditionally, it is seen as something you do when you are more senior. This was a good idea to show, "no, everybody can work flexibly if they need to."'

Benefits of implementing flexible working (including any data/evidence collected)

Flexible worker perspective

Balancing work and home life

A flexible worker explained, 'The hours are designed so I can pick up my children and I am really grateful that the company are flexible enough to let me work like that.'

Better sense of well-being

Having days where they can work from home helps to feel calmer and less stressed: 'When I am having to do nursery pick-up, etc, I constantly feel like I am rushing to leave, and working those days from home ... really makes a difference to the week as it is a much calmer day. ... It helps to calm down the stress levels a bit and helps me to make sure I am up to date.'

Higher productivity

Working from home allows the individual to work longer hours (as there is no commute), be more productive and manage their workload as they are able to work uninterrupted: 'Time at home really helps me to get through my "to do" list and get the bigger jobs done without interruptions. I can have a slightly longer day as well because I haven't got the commute to worry about.' In contrast, the flexible worker also talked about the negative consequences when they don't have a working from home day scheduled: 'On Monday I'm in back-to-back meetings all day, which means I'm not going to spend any time looking at my inbox or dealing with emails. Had I not had the working from home day on Tuesday, I would be feeling really stressed about next week and would be starting off on such a bad foot; it would feel so difficult to catch up.'

Loyalty from employees

'It makes me feel really positive about where I work, the fact that they have been open and supportive of me changing my hours, going down to four days and the earlier starts. I think Hachette are really good at supporting people in flexible working.'

Line manager perspective

Accommodating changing needs

The organisation can accommodate those who are coming back to work and/or those with other caring responsibilities: 'We have been able to keep a whole host of people by trying to be flexible with them.' There is also now parental leave available for men with the introduction of shared parental leave in addition to unpaid parental leave and paid paternity leave. A manager highlighted that this was not an option when he had had small children, but the culture is changing to support men, to make it more acceptable for men to take shared parental leave and there are some examples of this within Hachette.

Happier and more productive team

When people are working from home, they are more productive and there is less disruption: 'You are concentrating ... and you don't have anybody interrupting you.'

Retaining talent and delivering results

Flexible working allows the organisation to retain the best talent and people. 'We keep the best people who are very good at selling. If we didn't have flexible working we might not still have those people within the business.' Flexible working is a way of working where the focus is on delivering project requirements rather than having people in the office all the time.

HR perspective

Well-being, choice and retention

- Having flexible working arrangements can benefit employees' health and can also be used when health is not at optimal level. The occupational health team often recommend flexible working arrangements for employees who are facing physical and mental health issues.
- Anecdotal feedback from flexible workers suggests that employees who work flexibly feel positive about their job and the organisation as they feel they have an element of control and choice over scheduling their work around the rest of their life.
- Not losing people at key life stages where they need to change their working schedule.

Challenges/barriers to implementing flexible working

Flexible worker perspective

Scheduling flexible working when needed in the office

Sometimes the number of meetings that require a flexible worker to be in the office can make it very difficult to have working from home days. 'I often look at my diary and try to plan a day to work from home and it can often seem a bit of an impossible task. So I'm just trying to be more organised and plan in advance.'

Leaving 'early' and shifting your mindset

The flexible worker talked about having to get used to the idea of leaving 'early' to be able to pick up their children: 'It does feel early for the rest of the office and before I had children I used to stay at work and finish what I was doing and head off home feeling in control and on top of things. But there isn't that option now; I've got to leave on the dot.' They also mentioned that having to leave on time every day makes the working day feel like a deadline: 'It changes your way of working because the end of the day feels a bit more like a deadline.' Flexible workers have to change mindset and adapt their way of working: 'Reassuring myself that it's okay to leave things half done and have to finish it the next day; that's just the way I have to work.'

Considering the team's schedule

Think about the team's flexible working schedule and how these arrangements may affect the time spent with the team. For example, one team member works three days a week and is in the office for two of those days; sometimes there is a concern about how they make sure their schedules still allow them to meet regularly: 'I would want everyone to work flexibly if they needed to or wanted to, but then it is always thinking about, do we have enough cover in the office? Am I in the office the same days as all my team members?'

Line manager perspective

Seniority can sometimes make flexible working more difficult

A line manager noted that, in some cases, senior roles can make it difficult to work flexibly because of the number of meetings that you are required to attend. They gave an example of the amount of time required to be in the office when at a director level: 'It is trickier as you get more senior.'

Back-to-back meetings

The downside to having core hours is having days where the duration is spent in meetings. This can be frustrating as it takes away from doing other work that needs to be done.

Feeling guilty

A line manager talked about still having feelings of guilt when working from home and suggested that this may be due to their traditional mindset of feeling that they have to be in the office to be working. Knowing this, they actively try to relieve any feelings of guilt that the team might have around working from home by trying to be positive and encourage working from home as a good way of working.

Less interaction with colleagues

Flexible working can sometimes present the challenge of having less interaction between colleagues when in the office, particularly the informal conversations: 'There can be those moments where a conversation will be struck up which is really helpful, in terms of how you are managing an account or thinking about how we are going to sell a certain book. And those moments are less likely with everybody working at home.' These moments are important because they encourage collaboration between different departments and within teams, which helps to avoid individuals working in silos.

Keeping track of everyone's schedules

Keeping up to date with the team's changing flexible working schedules sometimes feels complicated; for example, trying to remember what hours everyone is working on a particular day when there are a number of different flexible working schedules across the team.

HR perspective

Managers' approach, attitudes and concerns

The uptake and implementation of flexible working is reliant upon managers' approach and perspective on flexible working. In the past, there has been some hostility from managers who perceive those working from home as 'having time off', rather than seeing it as working remotely. This way of thinking has now reduced as it tended to be from the older generation of managers.

Managers worry about losing control and the difficulty with managing those working flexibly: 'It's the idea of managers thinking if someone isn't at their desk 9:30–5:30, they won't know what they are doing.' There is variation in attitudes and mindsets around flexible working between managers across the business: 'In most cases we have a supportive culture and very positive approach to flexible working. But there are pockets where it is more difficult.'

Inability to clearly 'measure' work

It can be difficult in publishing to measure output and performance, as the majority of roles are fluid in nature: 'In publishing people are not used to measuring results, output and tracking productivity. ... Quite a lot of managers aren't really aware of the level of their employees' work from one day to the next; they will only know if there is a problem.'

Colleagues' additional discretionary effort

Some workers work beyond their required hours, which presents a difficulty when comparing workers on different schedules and making sure that they are being treated fairly. For example, some employees may work discretionary overtime but feel that only workers who are contractually working flexibly leave on time; this can cause frictions and may make others wary about flexible working.

Overcoming the barriers and challenges

Flexible worker perspective

Forward planning and saying 'no'

It is important to stick to their flexible working schedule and sometimes having to say they are unable attend a meeting if it clashed with their schedule: 'being a bit firmer to things on the days where I've carved out time at home.' They also talked about the importance of forward planning to organise their working schedule better: 'Not having meetings booked in right up until the time I've got to leave, so there's always a bit of time to check through the emails and make sure stuff is in hand. It makes you more organised and more aware.' They gave an example of a helpful technique for making sure they balance their time in the office and manage their workload: 'I've started putting blocks in my diary for me to be at my desk, rather than in meetings. If I don't, then I find the whole day gets booked up and then there isn't time for doing the actual work.'

Using technology to plan ahead

'People have got much better at how they use Outlook for meetings, bookings and do a lot more of looking in your diary to see when you are free to plan a meeting. So this is quite a good way to be a bit more in control; if I have got the last hour of the day booked every day, people might still ask, "could we have a meeting then?" but I can take some time and say, "no, that's not going to work, I have to do this piece of work," whereas if you are free in your diary, people will just pop a meeting in and you feel like you can't decline.'

Half days of working from home

If they are unable to work from home for a full day because of a busy week, working a half day from home can still help with managing workload: 'I left the office at lunch and I was surprised at how productive that felt. Just having three or four hours at home was brilliant because it was interruption free. So even when I can't manage the whole day from home, there is a benefit to going home for an afternoon.' There is also the added benefit of travelling during less busy periods, enabling them to make better use of their commuting time by responding to emails, and so on.

Signposting the benefits to others

They often signpost the organisational and individual benefits of flexible working when talking to their manager: 'Often I will be able to achieve more if I have time at home or if I can do these different hours. I think that's the way you have to approach it and my line manager thinks it's gone quite well.'

Line manager perspective

Encouraging interactions between meetings

When employees are in the office for meetings, arranging them so that people can have informal conversations throughout the day helps make best use of the time: 'If you stagger meetings ... those connections can still be made when people go off for a coffee, etc.' It is also important for employees to have conversations within their own team to help with managing clients and generating ideas: 'It's also a good idea to spend some time within your own team, because someone might be having a problem with a customer which you might also be having.'

Give and take

'If it is important to the business that someone attends a meeting, then they have to be prepared to do that. You can't have a flexible working system which has a negative impact on somebody else or they can't work flexibly because you are.'

HR perspective

Setting out expectations for output and productivity

'We are trying to move to a way of working that, while it doesn't squash creativity, does make it clearer about what the expectations are of each role and how that might be measured in an output, although not working hours.'

Communicating positive examples and consistent messages from senior leaders

Try to communicate positive cases and good examples of flexible working more; for example, share positive cases on the intranet, champion flexible working in different roles, for different people and for different reasons: 'To bring to life the point that, you might not know it, but there are plenty of people working flexibly in different ways who aren't all mothers, or in senior jobs, or just working three days a week. There is a variety and it is available.' Keeping momentum with the flexible working message from the senior leaders is also important to change culture: 'Talking about it and being absolutely explicit ... this is where we stand with flexible working. Then if managers choose to approach it in a different way, that's quite a bold move.'

Being overt about trusting employees

Managers need to be able to trust their employees for flexible working to be successful. Therefore, being overtly trusting, and encouraging uptake of flexible working, will make employees feel that they are able to engage in flexible working. A flexible worker talked about their manager being supportive: 'He is really supportive and I think he understands why it is needed for my role. But if any issues or problems came up, they would be addressed quite quickly.'

How to measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working

Currently Hachette does not have direct measures of the impact of flexible working across the organisation. Indirect ways of considering the impact of flexible working include:

Productivity levels and staff retention

It is easier to see the impact of flexible working in some divisions than others, for example sales teams have tangible measures of productivity and output. 'For me, that's the indicator. If the sales aren't going very well and some people are working from home, it might be one of the problems; it might not be, but it could be.' Flexible working may lead to better staff retention, so this may be considered in the future.

Measuring impact of trial periods

Currently, the organisation can specify a trial period for flexible working arrangements and ask the line manager and employee to consider the impact after six months. This allows both parties to consider any learning: is it working, what has gone well, what hasn't gone well, and so on.

Check-ins with line managers

Ongoing check-ins with line managers to talk through the impact flexible working is having on the employees' workload and performance are important. A flexible worker gave an example of having check-ins with their line manager to discuss any issues: 'We have regular catch-ups and flexible working is often something that comes up in those meetings. It's always part of the discussion. I think if either of us or the team felt it wasn't working, we would look at how we could change things.'

Flexible Fortnight results

Hachette will gather employee feedback after Flexible Fortnight to better understand and make managers aware of the impact, either good or bad. They will encourage team conversations following Flexible Fortnight to see what the reaction has been to the initiative.

6 Lendlease

Business sector: Construction

Number of employees: 1,200 in UK business

Overall lessons learned

- There is increasing uptake of flexible working at Lendlease through informal arrangements and the majority of line managers are encouraging some form of flexible working: 'One of the proudest moments for us is being able to change managers' behaviours and culture so that people feel that they can apply for flexible working and that it is accepted.'
- It is often easy to forget about site-based workers and it is important to understand how best to introduce flexible working into site-based construction roles, to accommodate both the business and individuals' needs.
- Be open-minded about flexible working, as it is the right way to treat staff. 'We are in the people business, so look after your people.'
- Communicate flexible working learning and guidance via different avenues, not just through emails (for example lunch meetings on site, visits from the People and Culture Team, regular flexible working marketing to different areas of the business, liaison with Health and Safety Team, who give quarterly updates).

Key themes from the case study

- Line managers have to be able to trust their colleagues in order for flexible working to work well.
- Being open and honest about flexible working intentions and communicating flexible working schedules are important for colleagues to be able to work well together and be inclusive of those who work flexibly.
- Begin changing negative perceptions around flexible working by:
 - providing flexible working guidance and support from the People and Culture Team
 - challenging traditional mindsets which emphasise importance of visibility over productivity and output
 - communicating examples of where flexible working has been implemented successfully
 - finding out managers' reasons for reservations about flexible working.
- It is better to focus on output and results rather than whether someone is in the office. If the productivity of a team/individual doesn't change, flexible working is not having a negative impact on the business and employees are able to benefit from it.

Organisational context

Lendlease introduced its flexible working and well-being policies in 2012 and started to actively encourage flexible working and well-being initiatives to empower and retain staff and increase well-being. Flexible working is one of the three key pillars of Lendlease's Global D&I strategy (Gender Equity, Flexible Working, Inclusive Workplaces). Most of the flexible working undertaken at Lendlease is done on an informal basis and arranged with the line manager. Where formal flexible working arrangements exist, they are generally the result of requests from employees who wanted to change their hours on return from maternity/paternity leave; these arrangements are agreed on a permanent basis after initial trial and review.

The types of flexible working available at Lendlease include:

- working from home
- flexitime/shifted hours (for example 7:30am–4:00pm)
- part-time
- compressed hours
- job-sharing
- general flexibility (for example for when there are home emergencies): 'there will be a time where there is a crisis situation where you will have to be at home, so this element of flexible working is important, regardless of whether you usually work flexibly or not.'

There are also examples of other flexible working initiatives at local, team levels within the business. For example, one line manager talked about a flexible working rota used across the project team (16 team members). Each week one member of the project team takes ownership for the weekly rota and staff pick a morning where they can come in later or an afternoon where they leave early (flexitime). The general culture on a project site was described as, 'we don't watch the clock either', so that employees feel they can be flexible if needed.

At Lendlease, flexible working is intertwined with general well-being and mental health support, aiming to approach employee health and well-being in a holistic manner. As well as flexible working opportunities, Lendlease also encourage employees to use 'well-being days' (additional days of leave that an employee can take to focus on their well-being). Well-being days also help to encourage conversations about well-being at work and employees are encouraged to have a well-being plan as part of their development. This has been in place for about 18 months and people generally take the recommended one well-being day per quarter: 'because it is drummed into the culture people regularly say, "have you had your well-being day this quarter?" and it seems to be working really well.'

Lendlease recognises that flexible working is important to employees and wants to build its brand to become 'an employer of choice' in line with its values around employee well-being and flexible working opportunities, particularly given the high suicide rates within the construction industry. To do this, those recruiting people into the organisation talk about the flexible working policy early on in the recruitment process and when on-boarding new starters. They are finding that some new employees mention joining Lendlease particularly because of its flexible working policies and the organisation recognises that their flexible working policy can give them a competitive advantage: 'It's not about share price or winning more business. I think it's genuinely about becoming more diverse and retaining more staff and through that we can provide a better product to our clients.'

To promote diverse and flexible working practices, Lendlease is conducting a pilot of flexible working on two construction sites and two control sites for comparison. The aim

of this pilot is to explore the impact of flexible working, with a view to rolling out flexible work practices more widely. The aims of the project are threefold:

- (1) work with managers to raise awareness of the benefits of flexible working and gather information about managers' views and concerns to be addressed at the implementation stage
- (2) conduct pre- and post-evaluations of flexible working to examine the impact on health and well-being, performance and productivity
- (3) conduct a series of interviews with site managers and staff to explore how flexible working is being put into place, and identify any barriers and facilitators that may influence the outcome.

Flexible working in non-traditional and/or senior roles

Non-traditional roles

- project/on-site workers doing construction work
- shared parental leave (men and women can take up to six months of shared leave on full pay)

Senior roles

- senior examples of employees working part-time and working from home (for example head of marketing working four days a week)
- senior site-based women in construction (for example one senior construction manager works shifted hours and leaves early on a Friday)

Gaining senior and line manager buy-in

Promotion and usage of flexible working from the top-down

There are a number of examples of senior members of staff working flexibly and actively promoting flexible working. Such examples help to show that senior management appreciates the importance of flexible working arrangements, and are supportive of and encourage employee uptake. 'There's been a real effort by senior management to promote well-being day use and things like sabbaticals, so employees can see it applied at the top of the organisation and don't feel ashamed to take a well-being day and don't see it as a negative thing.'

Organisational culture

The buy-in for flexible working from line managers and leaders within Lendlease is not just from a legal standpoint but, more importantly, from a cultural perspective in line with the organisation's values. 'The culture is geared from the top to say we support flexible working and we support employees to do it.'

Buy-in on a global level

Global leadership team members have communicated their own personal flexible working experiences and how they have used/plan to use flexible working arrangements within their roles. These personal case studies and testimonials have been sent out via the Global Annual Updates and through the Lendlease portal. The Executive Leadership Team also visited various sites to speak with employees about flexible working and well-being days and talk about personal examples of how they used flexible working/well-being days themselves. 'It's important to have that presence and endorsement from the top-down.'

Facilitators to implementing flexible working

Managers agreeing flexible working on an informal basis

Managers can agree flexible working within their own teams. Since most of the flexible working at Lendlease tends to be done on an informal basis, managers are empowered to make decisions without seeking permission from senior levels. Keeping flexible working informal means that ‘it is an agreement with your line manager and about how the project can accommodate flexible working in a way that suits the individual and the project. It can’t all be one-sided, otherwise it’s not sustainable for anybody.’

Culture around flexible working

As the culture of supporting flexible working is growing at Lendlease, employees are starting to feel empowered to push back when pressure gets too high and to recognise the need not to neglect their own health. A manager gave an example of how it can be difficult to avoid pressurising your staff when you are under pressure yourself; however, when staff push back, it’s a reminder that employee well-being must not be ignored as a result:

‘It’s hard when you are under pressure as a manager to not over-pressure your staff as well and there needs to be that push back and confidence from staff to say “this is too much, I need some time for myself.”’

Another flexible worker talks about the culture being an important aspect to relieve any feelings of guilt: ‘I know I’m not going to get that look from the corner of someone’s eye when I have to go, because I have to pick my daughter up.’

Openness and supportiveness from managers and leaders

Having a manager who is open to and supportive of flexible working arrangements can help the implementation of flexible working. A flexible worker gave an example of trying to work flexibly without speaking to their manager first, which didn’t work; however, once they spoke with their manager about their flexible working request, their manager was supportive and open to the idea: ‘I felt really confident to say, this is what will work best for me.’

Other colleagues also echoed the importance of managers having a supportive mindset: ‘The mindset of managers is the most important thing when implementing flexible working’ and ‘having that manager support where they understand the importance of what you have to do on that particular day is really helpful.’

Supporting managers

The People and Culture Team can help managers who are less supportive or are unclear about the flexible working policy and the benefits of flexible working. ‘If you’ve got a manager who doesn’t quite understand the policy or what we are trying to achieve as an organisation, it’s great that we have the formal application because then the People and Culture function can talk to the manager and help them understand how this can benefit the business and that we don’t want to lose talent over small flexible working changes.’

Being clear and up front with colleagues

Being clear and speaking to colleagues about flexible working arrangements so that they are aware of any changes was reported to facilitate flexible working: ‘be open and say that if there is a meeting booked after 4pm, I won’t be there.’ In addition, an employee noted that they block out their diary for when they are not in the office so that colleagues are absolutely clear when they are unavailable. Being strict with your

flexible working arrangement is also important so that colleagues work around your flexible working arrangements when possible, 'Saying no is actually okay.'

Skills shortage in construction and the importance of retaining staff

Because of the skills shortage in construction, flexible working has been a way of opening up the pool of potential employees. Recently, there has been a drive to recruit more women into the business, and flexible working arrangements have grown alongside this. Additionally, Lendlease recognises that it is just as important to retain staff and skills that are already within the company, so introducing flexible working enables employees to remain in work.

A holistic approach to well-being

The organisation is committed to supporting employees' health and well-being through a number of different initiatives (for example, the flexible working policy and well-being days). The message, as understood by those interviewed, is 'to not be a slave to the job; if there's pressure that puts you in a place of stress, then it's not going to help well-being. The business helps employees to organise themselves so that they can find time for their own well-being.'

Additionally, another colleague noted, 'it's being able to be understanding and that there are other options, not just working five days a week, lots of hours, always in the office; we're not just talking about flexible working, it's also about mental health and a whole offering.'

Benefits of implementing flexible working (including any data/evidence collected)

Flexible worker perspective

Quality time and dealing with emergencies

- Working from home allows them to take part in the school run and cuts out the long commute to work; it also allows them to get more work done as they can work uninterrupted: 'I am way more productive and I have that quality time with my kids, which I just don't get in the week. It adds to a sense of well-being which is really important to me.'
- There also may be times where unavoidable emergencies arise which require an employee to be flexible, that is, when their children are sick. Having flexibility on these occasions can be a huge plus: 'To have an employer that, if there is a problem you can be open and honest with them and say, "I'm really sorry I've got to go and do x or y" and the employer says, "of course, it's important, go and do it." That employer knows you will catch up with the work and still deliver on your goals.'

Productivity and engagement

Flexible working is a more efficient way of working and often means the employee is more productive, especially as they feel valued by the organisation: 'Employees feel like they are being supported by the organisation, then they have more pride in what they are doing and want to work hard and have good outcomes for the company. As a result the quality of output is greater.' Loyalty and the reciprocal benefit that flexible working can have for both the employee and the organisation was also mentioned: 'As an employee, you will always support a company who supports you.'

Line manager perspective

Avoiding stress, positive atmosphere

Sometimes the benefits are not necessarily tangible: seeing the team working well

together/talk to each other, feeling comfortable and in the right mood at work and not feeling under pressure are all positive signs. 'I don't think people should look too hard for the tangible evidence, the downsides to not doing it [flexible working] are hidden under the surface. When someone has a breakdown, there's no warning, it just happens. The tangible benefits for me are that I don't have anyone off with stress.'

HR perspective

Continuing working and avoiding commuting

Flexible working gives employees the ability to continue working, where without flexible working they may not have been able to continue/return to work: 'People have been enabled to stay in their roles, whether that's been because they have come back from parental leave or because they have now found that they have caring responsibilities, whether it's a partner or an elderly parent.' Another personal benefit was the difference between working in London and being able to work closer to home, which not only reduces their commute, but also increases the time they have to spend on home life.

Challenges/barriers to implementing flexible working

Flexible worker perspective

Managing work-life balance

One flexible worker noted that they don't always have a good work-life balance because of trying to juggle so many things at work and home, though they noted that this is a conscious choice: 'I'm exhausted all the time, but that's because I have chosen to work full-time.'

Missing out on informal conversations with colleagues

One of the challenges faced by one flexible worker was that they regularly miss out on informal conversations with senior colleagues (that is, water cooler/canteen/after-work drinks conversations). 'The issue I have is that a lot of conversations happen over a beer. Well I'm not going to be there because I have to pick the kids up, so I don't get to have that conversation.' It is a challenge for flexible workers to manage this without compromising on their home life.

Team meetings being booked outside of work schedule

There are instances when the team/colleagues have booked meetings outside of a flexible worker's schedule, which sometimes results in the flexible worker having to miss the meeting or leave half-way through: 'There are times where I have felt really uncomfortable having to walk out of a meeting full of senior managers and that's unfair.'

Line manager perspective

Trust

A line manager talked about the importance of trusting your employees to work flexibly: 'It's very easy, because there is no line, for people to misinterpret where the informal lines are for flexible working. You have to not assume the worst all the time; you've got to trust employees.' Where trust is abused you might have to turn to a formal HR process: 'Ultimately, if there is someone in the business who isn't performing as they should be, they need to be managed out of the business. That's difficult to do if you haven't set formal proceedings and can take a lot longer.'

Abuse of flexible working policy

There have been examples where a minority of employees take advantage of the flexible working policies: 'There may be some employees who take it too far.' They have to carefully consider some formal applications for working from home.

Mindsets

There are some employees who still have an old mindset when it comes to presence in the office, who overemphasise the importance of employees being 'visible'. 'Those with the old mindset who don't believe in well-being and do put people under stress and pressure, "where is that person, why aren't they here?"' This can be a real challenge when you have to deal with this mindset.

HR perspective

Less buy-in in some areas

There is less buy-in towards flexible working in some areas of the business because of the nature of work (that is, not office-based) and where people managers have to juggle larger teams: 'The challenge is with people with larger teams or those who have just not got the right idea and attitude towards flexible working.'

Worries around productivity and operational pressure

Some managers are concerned over the effect of flexible working on productivity and how it might increase operational pressures and risk failing to fulfil customer and business needs. There is also sometimes a concern about the idea of having to agree all flexible working arrangements: 'If I agreed it for one person, I have to agree it for everyone.'

Appropriateness to the job role

Certain types of flexible working may not be appropriate to certain roles and jobs, so this is a conversation that needs to be had earlier on. For example, some roles are designed to be shift work and it may be not possible to change the working pattern given the nature and requirements of a particular role.

Attitudes and perceptions of flexible working

It can be difficult to change the thinking and perceptions of flexible working: 'the barriers aren't the traditional ones around offering flexible working, they are around getting managers and employees to understand how we might be able to make it work – and that's an ongoing battle.'

Overcoming the barriers and challenges

Flexible worker perspective

Making connections when office-based

To counteract missing out on the informal conversations with colleagues, one flexible worker talked about making a conscious effort to surround themselves with lots of people (for example near the kitchen area) and consciously trying to talk to colleagues and catch up with what is going on when working in the office. 'I'm lucky in the sense that I have worked for Lendlease for 24 years, so I have been out for beers with most people before I had kids. So I have those relationships.' Although this might seem less productive on the surface, it helps with: decision-making processes, creating ideas, getting people on board with projects, and so on, via the informal interactions.

Forward planning of work events

- Forward planning is important for attending any meetings/presentations/events that are out of the flexible worker's usual hours of working, in order to make the necessary arrangements at home, such as child care, and so on.
- Colleagues also need to forward-plan so that the flexible worker is made aware early on, in case they need to make arrangements to attend a work event/meeting.

- When thinking about flexible working on a construction site, work schedules need to be planned so that the site is covered at all times; without proper planning, the site may not be able to fully function and this could result in a closure.

Being open and honest about your flexible working intentions

It is important to be up front and honest about your flexible working intentions and is also the flexible worker's responsibility to make sure colleagues know about their working schedule. Being honest also means you remove feelings of guilt about working flexibly: 'This means that you are authentic, you're not pretending and therefore your own well-being is improved as a result.'

Line manager perspective

Changing negative perceptions of flexible working

- To gain manager support for flexible working, a line manager suggested focusing on challenging mindsets and traditional thinking by showing the benefits of flexible working for individuals and the organisation, and working on their doubts by proving it isn't a negative thing.
- Flexible working has no cost to the line manager, but clock-watching can damage an employee-manager relationship: 'If you are going to tell someone off for being 10 minutes late, where does that get you? It doesn't bring you any benefits, just upsets the member of staff.'

Trusting employees

- It is important to try and develop the trust between a line manager and employee if flexible working is going to be successful. However, you need to also be mindful that the trust could be abused; in these cases you may need to pull back on some of the freedom and benefits that staff receive: 'If you get to a place where you cannot trust them anymore, then unfortunately some of the benefits need to be withdrawn and you need to become a bit more regimented in how you address that problem.'

HR perspective

Shifting mindsets in those who don't support flexible working

- Lendlease are working hard to change the mindset of managers/senior managers within areas that are resisting flexible working, to encourage them to be open to flexible working, by highlighting examples where flexible working works well and has positive outcomes to both the business and individual: 'More examples of flexible working where it is working well, will change the nay-sayers to yes people.'
- Where managers don't support flexible working and have a more traditional style of managing projects, it is about finding out the root to these barriers, to try and understand how negative attitudes around flexible working can be overcome: 'There is still an attitude in some areas of business where it's, "do I have to agree to this?" and actually it's about thinking why they are saying that. Are they just not an advocate of flexible working or is there a reason why the business can't support this?'

Availability of flexible working guidance and support

- Having flexible working guidance available is helpful for staff to be able to draw upon when implementing/agreeing flexible working.
- Support from a diversity and inclusion manager who talks about flexible working at inductions and supports people managers with flexible working guidance and communication can help managers who are unclear about how to implement flexible working.

- Lendlease also have an annual framework for mid-year reviews (around employees' careers in general and to have conversations around flexible working), for which managers get a reminder through their 'workday system'. There are also other reminders and prompts for managers with details about what to talk to staff about.

Support from leadership team

- The People and Culture Team creates events where they meet with the Executive Leadership Team and think through what support might be needed to help increase the uptake of flexible working, well-being and mental health initiatives.
- The People and Culture Team also inform leaders of the statistics on the uptake of initiatives such as flexible working and the demographics of who is using the flexible working policy (gender, age, and so on) to keep it fresh in the minds of senior leaders to continue promoting and encouraging flexible working throughout the organisation.

How to measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working

Continued project-level productivity

As long as targets are being met and project-level productivity is unchanged or better, flexible working is having a positive impact: 'It's about results; if the team are doing what they are paid to do, then who cares what hours they work and how many days they are here?'

Quality of work versus quantity of time spent in the office

Quality of work is important rather than being present in the office space: 'Are you achieving your goals and the organisation goals? And are the goals not only being met, but are you delivering above and beyond? For example, delivering quality reports where the customer is really pleased with them.'

Difficulty in measuring the full benefits and impact of flexible working

A manager noted the difficulty of having a tangible way of measuring the impact of flexible working. They noted that good temperament of employees and a highly motivated team are good indicators but are not necessarily a direct result of flexible working alone: 'I don't know how I can demonstrate it; if I had to put metrics to flexible working I would find it very difficult.'

People survey (every six months)

This bi-annual survey allows employees to comment on their view of their line manager and the organisation and also has a number of questions focused on flexible working and well-being. The results of the survey provide five to six key focus areas for managers: 'It allows me as a manager to know where to focus on the team, and whether we have forgotten to reward and recognise employees for what they are doing.'

Future work to explore the implementation of flexible working across the business

Lendlease are aiming to consider flexible working data across the organisation to understand uptake across the various levels and areas of the business. They also want to understand how flexible working and well-being initiatives might be influencing retention within the organisation.

7 Pharmaceutical Research Associates

Business sector: Clinical research, life sciences

Number of employees: 15,000+ employees operating in more than 80 countries

Overall lessons learned

- Communication is key and it needs to be open and frequent to help people who work flexibly and remotely feel a sense of team.
- It is essential that line managers trust their team to deliver. It is up to team members how they do their work – managers just want to see the result. The most important thing is the quality of work. The line manager of flexible workers explains that his team frequently request more work: ‘they would prefer that than to sit idle.’
- Show examples of how well it works – this reassures others that flexible working is positive and can bring many benefits.
- Experimentation is also important: ‘Just try and have a go – then you will have a better understanding of whether it could work. There will be surprises. Try different combinations – somewhere in the middle works really well.’

Next steps

- Senior leadership sponsors and role models – more work will be done on gaining senior leadership sponsors of flexible working and flexible hiring and making them very visible throughout the organisation. PRA will also focus on using senior sponsors to reinforce the message that flexibility should be for all and encouraging more men to consider it.
- There will also be a focus on providing examples from senior leaders that show that flexibility won’t negatively impact on people’s careers and show the individual making flexible working work with career progression.
- Offer flexible working from the point of hire. This is already part of PRA’s recruitment strategy but will be given greater focus going forward in terms of communication and coaching of line managers.
- Measurement and evaluation – greater work will be done on measuring the impact of flexible working through the planned employee survey and scorecard work.

Key themes from the case study

- Flexibility is a key differentiator when retaining talent. The interviewees provided two examples of senior-level employees who had been retained because of the flexibility the organisation offered.
 - The first example was that of a manager whose wife’s organisation was relocating from the UK to the Netherlands due to the impact of Brexit. He raised the question about whether he could maintain his role with PRA while relocating, and because of the strong culture of flexibility, he assumed that the answer would be yes. It was.
 - The second example is of a senior manager who experienced a personal challenge, which meant he had to move to Venezuela for eight weeks. He was still able to do his job from there and PRA were very flexible throughout.
- Trust is key. Informal flexibility is based on trusting relationships with line managers.
- The emphasis is on smart flexible working. Employees work in smart, flexible ways that fit in well with work, travel and personal commitments.

- Flexible working is beneficial for multiple stakeholders. Flexibility is equally beneficial for the organisation, employees and, importantly, clients.
- PRA is happy to experiment and pilot different ways of working. They have creative flexible practices in non-traditional parts of the business and role-modelling of flexible working at senior levels.
- There is a focus on education and partnership with line managers. PRA provides conscious and unconscious bias training and general education for line managers to overcome any biases or barriers to flexible working. HR are also keen to genuinely partner with line managers rather than be directive.

Organisational context

Homeworking is the key type of flexibility Pharmaceutical Research Associates (PRA) offers because of the fit with the business and the services it provides to clients. Typically employees will work two or three days in their clients' office or their own main office and then complete the rest of the week working from home. Many employees travel for work internationally, so homeworking is a good option to avoid additional commutes and ensure better work-life balance in between travel. Compressed working is also popular, with a number of employees working a 32-hour week over four days.

The organisation offers both informal and formal approaches to flexibility. Informal approaches to flexibility are often based on tacit agreements with line managers. The relationship is based on trust and line managers are encouraged to talk about flexibility with their teams. They are also coached to ensure that their team members are not overworking or overtired due to the large amount of travel undertaken by many employees. Employees are therefore encouraged to take time off in lieu. Flexible working in a formal capacity is also open to all employees in the organisation.

PRA believes flexible working is key to attraction and retention and their informal flexible working culture acts as a selling point. It is seen as a crucial part of the overall benefits package and a way of differentiating themselves in a highly competitive industry. Flexibility has also helped to create a more diverse organisation and is a way of attracting and retaining people with excellent skills. The culture of the organisation is generally one of flexibility, whereby output is measured '*...not by the time spent sitting in a chair but the quality of your work*'.

Flexible working in non-traditional and/or senior roles

Non-traditional roles

PRA offers flexibility in their customer services team, which needs to provide 24/7 support to clients. Customer service employees can choose to be part of the flexible working programme and pick the specific shifts that work for them, such as a mixture of early and late shifts. Some customer service staff are also enabled to work from home, through the use of online portals that provide access to internal and customer systems so that they are able to respond to customer needs. This also has benefits for the organisation; for example, some of the customer services team are students finishing their university studies, and accommodating them with flexibility often encourages them to work for the organisation in the future.

The more traditional functions of HR and finance offer flexibility but also have more of a requirement to have a presence in the office. The HR director provides laptops for all her staff, including administrators, to ensure that they are able to have flexibility. This acts as a symbolic gesture to ensure that all have equal access to flexibility, regardless of role. Employees throughout the business can also loan a laptop if they don't have one.

Senior roles

The senior management team role-models flexibility and enables flexibility over start and finish times. For example, one member manages a global team and is formally office-based. They often have to take late calls in the evening from the US, so leave the office early to collect their children and get them settled before taking the calls in the evening. The HR director maintains that the tone is set from the top of the organisation: 'Do what you have to do ... the priorities are your family. Our product is our people – the brains, skills and experience of our employees – if we don't look after them and treat them as people, then we won't have a business to run.'

Gaining senior and line manager buy-in

Training and education around flexible working

The HR director talked about the importance of conscious and unconscious bias training that has already been provided to senior managers and is currently being cascaded down to line managers and employees. This is combined with coaching and education around the benefits of creating a flexible culture. As the HR director maintains: 'As HR we want to work in partnership with the managers – we do not want to police. We don't like to operate in that way and they are more likely to listen to us. However, as with anything – there is a mixture of supporters and detractors.'

Building the case

A line manager of a flexible worker thinks it is important to 'provide evidence, demonstrate that quality can be maintained, be open and honest, and make the case internally'.

Development and retention

A line manager also commented on the importance of trust between a manager and flexible worker and how this supports development and retention: 'If you don't trust people, then they won't grow and you will eventually lose them.'

Facilitators to implementing flexible working

Technology

Technology facilitates the ability to work anywhere and helps to support people to effectively combine office and homeworking. It allows people to connect in many different forms and the organisation makes use of some helpful online conferencing and meeting tools. However, PRA works in the service provision industry, so face-to-face still has a place in building relationships with clients, but interviewees acknowledged that you can build a relationship face-to-face and then follow things up in a virtual way.

Education from day one

Another key facilitator is providing education up front. The organisation is keen to offer flexibility from day one, and the HR director is part of the CIPD and Timewise's Flexible Hiring Champions project. There are a number of senior leaders sponsoring flexible hiring internally within PRA and providing positive examples of how it can work. They are developing testimonies from people who have been hired on a flexible

basis to share with the rest of the business. The HR director admits that there is more work to do on this and the emphasis is on continuous education: 'Keep on talking and showing examples – work together – sell the benefits and the positive impacts.'

Closing the gender pay gap

A key priority for the organisation is around closing the gender pay gap, which also places a strong emphasis on flexible working and the business imperative of building a flexible culture for all.

Benefits of implementing flexible working (including any data/evidence collected)

Flexible worker perspective

Productivity and work-life balance

Having a great IT infrastructure and tools such as Skype, Jabba and Webex enables employees to have the same productivity working from home as they would in the office and balance this with their life responsibilities. It also means that when they come to the office, they can be very focused on meeting with people and establishing relationships.

Line manager perspective

Reassures team members that you trust them

As a manager, 'being open to it also reassures your team members that you trust them'.

Better organisation of workload

Employees are more organised and in control of their work and can work with people all over the world.

HR perspective

Diversity and inclusion, belonging and well-being

The benefits from an organisational perspective include greater diversity and inclusion, creating a sense of belonging, well-being, and that the organisation considers employees' personal requirements and cares about them.

Challenges/barriers to implementing flexible working

Flexible worker perspective

Technology difficulties and feeling isolated

Some of the barriers from an individual flexible worker perspective include: small technological glitches; and challenges for people that like to be surrounded by colleagues and feel isolated while working from home.

Building relationships with colleagues

There is also a challenge associated with the lack of office interaction, which means people can miss out on some of the informal, unsolicited connections.

Line manager perspective

Technology difficulties and language barriers

Similarly, line managers of flexible workers point to technological challenges, which are not frequent, but are challenging on occasion, and language barriers, which are sometimes more difficult via the phone.

The need for face-to-face time initially

Line managers also emphasise the need for a certain amount of face-to-face time to establish relationships up front.

HR perspective

Overcoming conscious and unconscious perceptions about flexible working

From an HR perspective, one challenge is overcoming the perception that working from home means slacking.

There can also be both conscious and unconscious barriers that people hold in relation to flexible working, and the organisation's training in this area is helping to identify and overcome these biases.

Flexibility associated with length of service

Another potential barrier is that managers often find it easier to accommodate a flexible working request if employees have been with the organisation longer. In some ways this is understandable because trust has already been built up. However, a new recruit might have been working flexibly successfully for the previous ten years in another organisation, and by not offering this on the point of hire, the organisation would be missing out on this talent.

Overcoming the barriers and challenges

Line manager perspective

Isolation challenges can be overcome to some extent by managers building rapport on team calls and interactions: 'We tend to talk about non-work-related activities for the first 20 minutes of team calls – to build that rapport.'

HR perspective

Overcoming conscious and unconscious negative perceptions of flexible working requires a programme of continuous education for line managers around what it really means to be flexible.

More work needs to be done around championing flexible working from day one and building a culture of trust. The HR director believes that there is always a trial element: 'have a go – have a conversation and challenge things. This can bring benefit to not just the individual, but also the manager, the team and the whole organisation.'

How to measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working

Performance reviews

Performance reviews within PRA have changed and are now a continuous evaluation – called performance pathways. They provide flexible tools that people can use to track their own progress and outputs from their work projects. This can also provide a good measure and evaluation of the impact of flexible working.

Employee survey

PRA are looking to launch a new employee survey, which will include questions to track the impact of flexible working. Customers of the organisation are also interested in an informal survey which would include a flexible working aspect. They are also starting to collect data via a survey for new hires and feedback to leaders in a scorecard. They also collect lots of informal feedback, which points to the value placed on flexible working and the fact that it is seen as a key attractor.

8 Schneider Electric

Business sector: Energy management, automation and manufacturing

Number of employees: Roughly 4,500 in the UK

Overall lessons learned

- Try not to focus on the negative examples of flexible working; show positive examples where flexible working worked well and is a success.
- Focus on the individual, their performance and the specific flexible working arrangement on a case-by-case basis; don't let previous negative experiences decide future flexible working outcomes.
- Listen to people: 'If they are coming to you to discuss flexible working, they are coming to you for a reason or maybe they are struggling. If you can work with them, they will give you something back. We want to retain people and their skills, we don't want them to leave.'

Next steps

- SE wants to increase diversity throughout the organisation. There may be links to flexible working and perhaps more uptake through this focus.
- SE has a 'Global Family Leave Policy', which sets minimum global standards in place for family leave and pay. It covers 12 weeks' Primary Parental Leave (pre-/post-birth or adoption); 2 weeks' Secondary Parental Leave (within 12 months of birth or adoption); 1 week's Care Leave for immediate family or elder care; and 1 week's Bereavement Leave.
- In the UK, SE already had a lot of the elements in place but have implemented Care Leave, extended their Secondary Parental Leave period to two weeks and have an enhanced Primary Parental Leave Pay Policy whereby employees receive the first 13 weeks at full pay, the second 13 weeks at half pay and the final 13 weeks at Statutory Maternity Pay.
- SE UK have also engaged My Family Care, who can provide support to working parents or carers and offer an employee assistance programme.
- Focus on uptake for those less likely to request flexible working, that is, not just for mothers/female workers.
- SE would like to increase flexible working uptake in senior employees to role-model for the rest of the organisation.

Key themes from the case study

- Communication and trust is a key theme for achieving successful flexible working.
- The relationship and openness between line manager and flexible worker can impact on how flexible working is implemented.
- There is an emphasis on a 'give and take' perspective towards flexible working and how it has benefits to both the individual and organisation when implemented successfully.
- Successful implementation of flexible working will look different across different areas of the business, and that's okay; in fact, it is beneficial to think through the specific business area's needs in relation to flexible working for the best outcomes.

Organisational context

Flexible working at Schneider Electric (SE) is available universally across the organisation; employees can request any type of flexibility that they might need. However, given the vast range of job roles within the organisation, some types of flexible working are better suited and more appropriate to some business areas than others. For example: 'We have a call centre environment where we have people job-sharing, which wouldn't necessarily be appropriate in other areas.'

Currently there are examples of a range of types of flexible working at Schneider Electric:

- part-time hours
- compressed hours
- home/remote working
- flexitime (varied start and finish times)
- care leave (where employees can take up to five days' paid leave in a rolling 12-month period in the event of a dependant emergency).

There have been examples of both formal and informal flexible working arrangements, and the most common forms of flexible working at SE tend to be part-time hours. There is also an 'inherent flexibility' so that people can work from home or work remotely, as and when they need, depending on the requirements of their role. 'We are quite flexible generally about people's places of work, according to their job role. They don't necessarily need to be on a particular site on a particular day.' For example, members of the HR team, who travel to different sites regularly, can have a day at home to balance out the travel and catch up on other work. There are also formal flexible working arrangements in place for those who want regular working from home days each week.

In some areas of the business flexible working arrangements are available that are quite unique to the business area. For example, in the manufacturing side of the business, employees are able to:

- (a) work overtime that can later be taken off in lieu
- (b) work at weekends to fulfil their weekly hours if needed
- (c) request night shift work (particularly requested when partners work within the same department to enable sharing of caring responsibilities).

To accommodate flexible working, managers at SE work with the employees to agree a suitable compromise for both parties in order for the flexible working to work. 'We're working with the employees to make sure flexible working still benefits us as well as them.'

An HR professional stated that a key achievement of flexible working was being able to support employees through various life stages that may require an adjustment to their work schedule. For example, balancing caring responsibilities, and helping employees wind down to retirement (through lessening their weekly hours). 'You often associate flexible working with working parents, but I know of a few examples where we have supported employees to wind down to retirement or with other caring responsibilities, perhaps looking after elderly parents. We are working hard to change the perception of flexible working being a female, parental request and ensuring all employees are aware of their right to request flexible working.'

SE has had a flexible working policy in place for at least ten years and emphasised that it is open to all across the organisation. One manager reflected on the journey and how the

culture around flexible working opportunities had changed over the last ten years: ‘Even taking time off for the dentist was frowned upon then, but you don’t fear going up to your manager now and saying, “I need time off for the doctor’s.”’

SE’s rationale for supporting informal and formal flexible working opportunities came from its ‘give and take’ initiative a few years ago. This initiative encouraged informal flexible working and highlighted that managers were empowered to help employees achieve flexible working: ‘It’s about give and take and it doesn’t necessarily have to be a formal request. People give a lot to the organisation and if they need an hour off to go to their son’s sports day, then give them that flexibility back. We try to encourage that and empower managers to have that conversation with their team and encourage their staff to take a bit of time back where they need to.’

The idea behind ‘give and take’ is to also avoid requests having to be formalised when they could be discussed and agreed at a local level: ‘Occasionally we have received flexible working requests for small, short-term changes which could have been agreed at a local level and didn’t need a formal change to their contract.’

Flexible working in non-traditional and/or senior roles

Non-traditional roles

- call centre roles, where job-sharing works well
- manufacturing (which has a workforce made up largely of males with long service) – generally flexible working includes working part-time or working a requested shift to accommodate home life (for example partners working opposite shifts to help with caring duties). Although this is a traditional area where flexible working can be difficult to implement, there is a fair amount of uptake of flexible working (both informal and formal) so they are familiar with receiving flexible working requests
- customer-facing – for example project managers working part-time
- sales/field services – when nearing retirement age, they tend to request office-based roles to reduce travel; however, there are some examples of working from home (on an informal basis).

Senior roles

- A director works part-time (three days a week, winding down to retirement).
- The senior HR team includes three employees who work flexibly, part-time and compressed hours.
- Senior-level employees work flexibly in other areas of the business (reporting to the vice president).
- At senior levels, roles can generally be more flexible on an informal basis, but it is important to be aware that this difference in ability to be informally flexible could lead to an ‘us’ and ‘them’ culture across the organisation.

Gaining senior and line manager buy-in

Although buy-in varies from team to team, there is generally a willingness from senior managers to support flexible working across the organisation. ‘There’s quite a willingness from senior leadership as well. Where we can, we accommodate people. If we agree to put someone on a formal arrangement, then senior management empower us; they leave it to us.’ However, previous experience of flexible working can influence senior managers’ opinions and whether they actively encourage the uptake of flexible working.

A line manager also noted that senior management are conscious about the importance of the workforce not being overworked: 'There is encouragement from senior managers to not work too much as there is a consciousness that sometimes people may be overworking.'

Facilitators to implementing flexible working

Considering the business area/needs

'We are a large organisation with very varied roles, so what works for one area wouldn't necessarily work for another area.' For example, in customer-facing roles, it might work well to have someone in every day but working shorter hours; whereas in manufacturing, they would rather have someone working fewer days a week than fewer hours per day, so that they can manage the workflow through the assembly line: 'If it was five hours a day rather than seven hours a day, that might cause issues because they're planning an assembly line with a certain amount of people, for a certain amount of hours. It really depends on the area you work in and the type of work you are doing, and how it would work best.'

Flexible working will be different across different teams. For example, within the assembly team, there are rosters to plan the working schedule. Any flexible working arrangements need to be agreed with managers to make sure the business has enough people working and can still run and be fully functional. Flexible working in these settings does not mean that staff can just come and go on their own individual schedule (unlike some office roles).

Linked to this, a line manager within the manufacturing side of the business noted the importance of minimising the impact of flexible working on the business, by considering the number of flexible working arrangements per team and spreading flexible working arrangements across teams. 'What we don't want is everyone on a flexible working arrangement working in the same area, because then we will have gaps in the skills that we need at certain times of the shift. So what we've looked at is moving people around from one cell to another, learning different products. So it's just one person in that cell rather than two or three people on the formal flexible working arrangement.'

Having a multi-skilled team of workers enables more flexibility

Having a team of multi-skilled workers within the department means flexible working can be accommodated more easily, because employees can be flexible according to the business needs and skills required for the job. SE aims to develop skills in employees who are on formal flexible working arrangements, so that they are able to work in a range of roles, making it easier to be flexible. 'People who have had to request formal flexible working arrangements, we work with them to develop their skills when they are coming back into the workplace, so they can fill various roles, not just a single role.'

Having an open dialogue and trust between line manager and employee

A flexible worker commented on the importance of having a good relationship with their line manager in order to be able to have an open conversation about flexible working: 'I know them as friends as well as colleagues and I can speak to them as an equal.' They also said that it is important that both parties feel able to talk when things are not going so well; for example, having an open discussion when productivity may be affected by age/physical ability to do the job. If and when this may arise, there is an understanding that they will have a discussion, rather than the

individual just being asked to leave: 'If I start to struggle age-wise, then they would have the discussion, "do you think you should still do this?" and that's what I have always suggested to them that I would want them to do.'

Building trust between line managers and flexible workers is also vital. 'Sometimes there is that resistance from a manager's perspective, the trust that is required with a flexible working relationship. They might not see the individual, so how do they know that they are doing what they are required? So it's about thinking differently about output rather than attendance.'

Support from HR to calm fears and combat resistance from managers

'Sometimes managers have a fear that they need to confirm the flexible working arrangement as is. Rather than having a conversation around, "Well this doesn't work quite so well, but what about this, have you considered this? Would this work for you?"' HR can help to reduce these fears and talk through how to think about balancing both the business and individuals' needs.

HR also have the ability to provide additional support and sometimes can encourage a line manager to think differently about flexible working.

Awareness of the right to request flexible working

Employees know they can request flexible working and this helps with uptake of flexible working arrangements.

Benefits of implementing flexible working (including any data/evidence collected)

Flexible worker perspective

More out-of-work time

A flexible worker talked about flexible working allowing them to have more time to socialise and become accustomed to life as a (semi-)retired person, without feeling overwhelmed by having too much time away from colleagues and work, thereby achieving a balance. They also felt that they were able to give back and help to train other staff.

Maintains social relationships with colleagues

The flexible worker also highlighted the importance of maintaining their network amongst colleagues, particularly as they begin the journey into retirement; they talked about the positives that remaining in work can offer on their health and well-being, for example keeping active and doing a role that they enjoy.

Line manager perspective

Retaining skills and talent

There were examples given where some employees would not have been able to remain at SE if they were not able to work flexibly. One of those examples included a worker who was planning for retirement but wanted to remain in work part-time. SE were able to agree the change in hours and have managed to retain an employee with over 40 years of experience at SE. 'If you can work around them, then you can retain those skills and those people; then you end up with a better workforce.'

Give and take

Flexible working can offer benefit to both the organisation and the employee. 'If we can be flexible with people, then people will be flexible with us and they will probably work harder for us. If we put barriers up and say "we're not working with you," we wouldn't

get the same response from staff.’ A flexible worker also commented on the idea of give and take between organisation and employee: ‘It’s just give and take, we are both getting the flexibility. I wouldn’t take the mickey and get all the flexibility I can and just be rigid towards the organisation.’

HR perspective

More time for home life

Flexible working allows employees to spend more time doing the things that are important to them in their home life. This might be spending more time with their children, spending less time commuting to and from work, and help with any caring responsibility (for example nursery pick-up, caring for elderly parents).

Employees value flexible working and are more loyal as a result

When flexible working works well within an organisation, employees feel more loyal to the organisation: ‘It ties someone into an organisation where it works well and they have been given the flexibility they need.’

More productive and efficient workforce

It was suggested that flexible workers are often more productive and efficient at managing their workload: ‘You can find that people who work part-time are very focused and productive in work so they can achieve what they need to within their working hours.’

Challenges/barriers to implementing flexible working

Flexible worker perspective

Being flexible for the company while also sticking to the flexible working arrangement

It can be challenging to strike the balance between being flexible for the business, and also sticking to the flexible working agreement. One flexible worker explained that they are happy to be flexible, but also require consistency with their flexible working. ‘I am quite happy to be there when we have a panic on, but I will be taking the hours back again when the panic stops. When I started this [flexible working], I knew I could start on three days and end up doing the best part of a week, so I said to my assembly manager that I would be flexible and do more days when the company needs it, but I will always take the days off in lieu rather than working an extra day. And that way I can make sure the hours don’t start accumulating more and more.’

Line manager perspective

Resentment from those who are not working flexibly

There were a small number of examples where there had been some resentment from those who aren’t on flexible working arrangements: ‘Why does he get to work x y z hours, why can’t we all work his hours?’

Changing business needs affecting the status quo

When there are changes to the business needs which affect those on flexible working arrangements, it can be challenging: ‘We’ve started to put shifts on areas we have never had shifts before – so people on flexible working agreements can’t go onto those shifts, so we have had to change some people around to accommodate this. They have been taken out of their comfort zone and possibly taken away from

their friends/colleagues and their secure working environment and put somewhere else. That hasn't always gone down well.'

HR perspective

Lack of trust

Lack of trust between a line manager and their team can hinder the implementation of flexible working arrangements. It is vital to have a trusting relationship for flexible working to be successful.

Line managers' fears and attitudes

Some managers fear that implementing flexible working will open the flood gates for all employees to request flexible working: 'If I approve this one I'm going to open the flood gates and set a precedent and then I will have to approve every single one I receive after this.'

There can be a tendency for line managers to want employees to be present in the office: 'They like to see people in the office, but it is a process of change and it requires trust and thinking about how you measure performance differently; it's still a bit difficult for some managers to change their thinking on that. Being present isn't necessarily a sign of performance, managers should be encouraged to look at output.'

Negative previous experience with flexible working arrangements

Where managers have experienced previous negative outcomes from flexible working, they will often believe that the same negative outcome will happen again. In such situations, HR encourages the manager to consider the individual and their flexible working request on their own merit and potentially using trial periods to test out a flexible working pattern.

Type of request and business area suitability

As SE has a broad range of business areas, managers can really differ on their openness to flexible working. 'I see it on a cultural basis, business unit by business unit. In some areas where it is a bit more traditional, you can get that push back, or maybe they don't have much experience of flexible working because it's very male-dominated and perhaps employees haven't made those requests.' For example, project management is quite male-dominated, with high workloads, and demanding customer-facing roles, and some managers within these areas are more nervous about flexible working. Sales is another area where line managers struggle to see how flexible working could work, because of the targets and the customer-facing nature of the role.

Overcoming the barriers and challenges

Flexible worker perspective

Having a team with different work needs allows for flexibility

Within their team they are able to shift workloads as some workers are interested in working longer hours per day (12-hour shift) and others prefer to work shorter hours (8-hour shift). This enables the manager to make sure the assembly line is covered as there is a mixture of workers wanting more and fewer hours a day. 'There is a flexibility within the team and so my manager doesn't find my "lack of hours" a problem because you can make up the shortfall by other colleagues who want to do them.'

Line manager perspective

Two-way dialogue through the flexible working arrangement process

When agreeing flexible working, the first step is to talk with the team leader; this is important because it highlights whether they are able to cope with the changes to the schedule and how this might affect the workflow, skill set on site, and team management. It is also necessary to discuss any concerns the manager might have with the individual who has requested the flexible working; this gives the employee the chance to suggest how they might overcome any business concerns. It needs to be a two-way dialogue throughout.

Dealing with resentment in a positive manner

Sometimes talking about positive outcomes helps to combat the negativity around flexible working. One manager talked about the fact that his team often has to work to very tight deadlines, but if there is a chance for them to leave a little earlier one day then they will try and offer that to show that there is fairness to all staff.

Highlight the benefits of flexible working to encourage the uptake

'The benefits outweigh any problems.'

HR perspective

Coaching conversations around implementing flexible working

From an HR business partner's perspective, it's about talking to managers and working with them so that there is an understanding of the business challenges that flexible working arrangements might present. HR can help managers to think through alternative options which might be better suited to the business area and the individual.

Challenging the attitude of resistance to flexible working

'If somebody performs well and [the line manager] knows they do a good job, if they are not in the office one day a week, that's not necessarily going to change. And if it does change, just have a conversation with them about it.'

How to measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working

Currently data is not collected specifically about flexible working in the organisation as a whole. The impact of flexible working is considered at a local level by having conversations with line managers and flexible workers. For example, performance reviews and one-to-ones give both parties a chance to talk about whether the flexible working is working well and whether there are any changes that need to be put in place. It also gives the line manager a chance to check with the employee whether the flexible working is working successfully for them and any alterations that might need to be made.

A line manager commented: 'We couldn't alter the hours once they are in place, but depending on circumstances we could check whether they could work somewhere different or work with different people, or use a different monitoring system; for example, timesheets that they have to fill in so we know what they have done during times where they haven't been supervised.'

9 Transport for London (TfL)

Business sector: Transport

Number of employees: 28,000

Overall lessons learned

Updating the flexible working policies (following the change in legislation in 2014, then updated in April 2015 and May 2018 for GDPR) has led to a good level of uptake of flexible working throughout TfL, which they hope will continue to rise. Some of the key learning includes:

- Flexible working can support employees' mental health and well-being, and enables mothers to continue working after having children.
- Flexible working encourages employees to work in a more efficient way, as timekeeping is an imperative skill for a flexible worker.
- Flexible working can be helpful for team dynamics and allows employees to balance their working life and home life better: 'you end up with a better team, who trust their manager better, have a better relationship with their manager generally and whose workload and work output is better managed and increased because they are doing what they need to do' (line manager).

Learning about the challenges of flexible working includes:

- For some, flexible working can increase the pressure on the individual, but it is down to the employee to manage their workload and time effectively.
- Traditional thinking around the importance of 'office-based visibility' does not impact on an employee's ability to be productive, but this type of out-dated thinking can impede career progression unnecessarily for those who are seen to be less visible.
- Where flexible working has been particularly difficult to implement, for example, in operational roles, the employee can sometimes become more demanding after a flexible working arrangement has been agreed. Therefore, it is the manager's responsibility to manage employees' expectations around future and additional flexible working arrangements.

Key themes from the case study

- It is imperative that any flexible working requests that are agreed balance both the employee's needs and the needs of the business.
- There needs to be an element of trust between a manager and their employee for flexible working to be successful. Once in place, flexible working may also strengthen the line manager and employee relationship as they already have a level of trust and understanding.
- It is possible to implement flexible working across a variety of roles, even in areas of the business that require shift work, such as in the train and operational side of the business.
- Although it might not seem possible to agree flexible working arrangements initially, managers often go above and beyond to try and accommodate flexible working as much as possible. They do this by: using business networks throughout the organisation (for example roster support network); collaborating with HR for additional support and guidance; and gathering details about other areas of the business that may be able to accommodate the employee's request.

Organisational context

TfL's Smart Working Policy encourages employees across the entire organisation to consider working flexibly (particularly working from home) where appropriate. This is a general policy and is embedded in TfL's culture around flexible working. One interviewee explained the rationale behind the Smart Working Policy: 'you don't have to be working in the office ... and sit at the desk every day, so people can move around and work from home if there are no meetings. I think managers understand this more now.'

The types of flexible working commonly adopted at TfL include: part-time working, condensed hours, working from home, job-shares, and reduced hours. One interviewee also highlighted that there are possibilities for other temporary flexibility within roles, such as career breaks. The interviews explored specific examples of formal and informal flexible working arrangements, including: part-time working, reduced hours, working from home, condensed hours (in one case working outside of the traditional 9am–5pm working hours).

The rationale behind flexible working at TfL is to create a workplace with a flexible and inclusive culture, to foster employees' well-being and work-life balance. By promoting an inclusive culture through flexible working, the organisation:

- (1) enables mothers to return to work after having children
- (2) allows employees with caring duties the flexibility they need to balance work and home life
- (3) includes those without caring responsibilities who are interested in working flexibly.

In cases of internal change and transformation, there have been occasions where a directorate has committed to honouring all flexible working arrangements (for permanent employees) so that flexible working has remained in place following the restructure.

Given that flexible working is embedded in the organisational culture at TfL (and has been for a number of years) and 'smart working' is part of the TfL ethos, there tends not to be any specific promotion around flexible working. Although, where there are job vacancies, flexible working is routinely advertised as a possibility (though subject to agreement of the line manager). Employees at TfL can submit one flexible working application every 12 months.

In terms of implementing flexible working, HR provides support if the line manager needs guidance or the application is rejected, but ultimately it is the line manager's decision to accept or reject the flexible working arrangement. Interviewees reported that having support from HR is helpful for guidance around agreeing flexible working. For line managers this is particularly necessary when dealing with complex cases or areas of the business where it is more difficult to implement flexible working arrangements (for example in the operational/customer-facing side of the business).

As part of TfL's flexible working policy, once a flexible working arrangement has been agreed, the decision is binding on a long-term basis and cannot be retracted unless a review period is agreed up front (with the exception of the employee moving positions or gaining a promotion). Once the flexible working arrangement is formally agreed, HR steps back from dealing directly with the employee and arrangements are mostly made between the line manager and employee.

Flexible working in non-traditional and/or senior roles

Non-traditional roles

- fathers who work from home
- flexible working arrangements agreed with those who do not have caring responsibilities
- employees with medical issues supported to work flexibly
- flexibility amongst operational roles (both station- and train-based roles)
- flexibility amongst call centre shift workers

Senior roles

- senior employees and directors of TfL who work flexibly

Although there are areas of the organisation where it can be more difficult to implement flexible working, there have been examples from areas such as train operators and customer-facing shift workers where flexible working arrangements have been agreed and work successfully. Because this type of role is typically shift work and rostered, it can be more difficult to formalise and agree flexible working, because of the impact on the rest of the team and operations, but it is possible.

Flexible working requests are always considered on a case-by-case basis and are dependent on the type of request and whether it can be accommodated within the team. Team size is a key factor, as a team of 250 operators can accommodate more flexible working requests than a depot of only 60. As a line manager pointed out: 'You would look at the number of flexible working arrangements that you already have in place ... in regard to the new flexible working request that you have received, and whether that can be accommodated in addition to the existing flexible working arrangements. ... Because you would get to a saturation point. You might be able to agree the same hours for two people, but you won't be able to agree it for more than that.'

Gaining senior and line manager buy-in

Highlight positive outcomes and benefits of flexible working

While there seems to be support for flexible working from senior leaders (that is, directors), middle management tend to need more convincing to understand the benefits of flexible working. It was suggested that highlighting the benefits and positive outcomes of flexible working (for example higher productivity and more knowledge across the team) would be a good way of beginning to gain buy-in from middle managers. In addition to this, showing clear examples of cases where flexible working is working well within the organisation would be helpful to gain buy-in.

Improve knowledge around flexible working

Provide more guidance to improve knowledge around flexible working and begin changing and challenging individual team cultures that are not supportive of flexible working or view it to be detrimental to the business needs when this is not the case.

Financial benefit – more talent for the same pay

One way of gaining buy-in is to recognise that more part-time/job-sharing contracts (that is, where there are two employees per role) can provide instances where there is more talent, and a wider breadth of skills and knowledge for the same amount of money that an organisation would be paying one full-time individual.

Support with roles which are trickier to adapt to flexible working

There appears to be less support and buy-in on the operational side of the business; in particular, senior management within this business area can sometimes see flexible working as an obstacle to delivering customer service. Managers within the operational side of TfL feel that they are less supported by colleagues when agreeing flexible working arrangements. In addition, it is generally more difficult to accommodate flexible working in this area of the business than it is in office-based roles (given the shift work nature and the 24-hour operations required). Therefore, managers within this part of the business may need to seek further guidance and support from colleagues and HR to make flexible working possible and easier to implement.

Culture around flexible working

The culture around flexible working at TfL is such that flexible working has been embedded within the organisation for a number of years. This is perhaps why so many of the senior managers and leaders really champion flexible working, with clear examples of senior management actively encouraging flexible working and being as accommodating as possible of flexible working arrangements. In addition, the Smart Working Policy also supports the organisation's commitment to flexible working at an organisational level.

Facilitators to implementing flexible working

Collaboration and networks

The implementation of flexible working is supported by collaboration and utilising networks within the business. Specifically, a line manager mentioned opportunities to work alongside HR and the 'roster support network' to gain access to other locations/ areas of the business, which might be able to accommodate flexible working requests that might not be possible within the employee's current team.

Employee-line manager relationship

The employee-line manager relationship was highlighted as an important factor for flexible working to be successful. When taking working from home as an example, one interviewee suggested that there has to be a level of maturity, understanding and trust between a manager and employee: 'it's not a case of monitoring when you can physically see someone is logged on but instead more focus on what is being delivered in terms of results and targets.'

The focus on the outputs and delivery of a flexible worker challenges the traditional thinking about physical presence being important and shifts the emphasis to actual productivity. Additionally, a manager suggested that flexible working can actually strengthen the relationship between manager and employee as there is an acknowledgment of trust between them: 'there is trust there if they need to confide in their manager further because they know they are flexible.'

Technology

Another important factor in implementing flexible working is the technology available to support flexible and agile working. For example, the technology in place at TfL allows flexible workers to join meetings using conference calling, instead of the traditional face-to-face set-up, which promotes inclusivity across the team: 'Everyone has an opportunity to attend those meetings and those who can't attend can be updated later.'

Benefits of implementing flexible working (including any data/evidence collected)

Flexible worker perspective

Benefits to the individual

Benefits of flexible working include being able to go back to work after having children and being able to work around childcare arrangements and caring responsibilities. Specifically, flexible working enabled them to be more than a caregiver: 'I can have my work life as opposed to being restricted to being a mother at home.'

Benefits to the organisation

Flexible workers often go beyond the call of duty; for example, where workers are employed on a part-time basis with similar objectives to those who work full-time, they have to work more efficiently. It could be said that the organisation is getting more for less: 'we all end up doing more than our part-time hours.' On the other hand, the challenge with this is for flexible workers to still spend time building relationships and networking with colleagues.

Line manager perspective

Positive impact on work, attitudes and relationships

There are specific case examples where flexible working has increased productivity and quality of work. Additionally, flexible working has a positive impact on employees' outlook towards life and the relationship between manager and employee, fostering trust, and meaning employees feel able to confide in their manager further (if necessary) because they have been flexible in the past.

Retention and longer working lives

When thinking about retention and longevity of an employee's working life, a line manager said: 'It enables people to work better over the time of their career.' This staff retention offers both a financial gain for the organisation, and a potential competitive advantage.

HR perspective

Engagement, work-life balance and retention

Employees seem more engaged when given the opportunity to work flexibly. Flexible working enables employees to have an improved work-life balance and can empower returning mothers to remain in the workplace.

Challenges/barriers to implementing flexible working

Flexible worker perspective

Scheduling, keeping in touch and managing workloads

- A personal challenge was fitting team meetings into their working schedule. Although the team (around 40 employees) is accommodating, working around their schedule is not always possible and in these cases it is the individual's responsibility to make sure they are kept up to date. Initially, they had to speak with the wider team on an individual basis to explain their hours and flexible working arrangement.
- The flexible worker mentioned that transitioning from full-time to part-time was also an interesting change. Switching to a part-time schedule meant that the working week tended to go much quicker because they were only in the office three days a week. As a result, managing their workload and knowing when to say 'no' to additional work became particularly important: 'You have to be prepared to say no because you can end up taking on too much.'

Career progression

The flexible worker also said that it can sometimes feel like there is a barrier for flexible workers when applying for more senior roles. They found that many roles are not advertised with the option of flexible working and there appears to be a perception across the organisation that more senior roles require more visibility in the office, which may be difficult for some flexible workers, depending on their flexible working arrangement. They felt that this perception might influence their ability to be promoted into a more senior role and that perhaps a certain stigma still exists towards part-time workers being promoted.

Line manager perspective

Policies not allowing travel time as work time

- One barrier to remote working is that the current flexible working policy does not incorporate travel time as part of working hours (if appropriate). In one specific case, an employee had requested a flexible working arrangement of compressed hours incorporating some travel time, because of their ability to work on the train during their commute. Under the current policy, commuting time is not included as part of working hours, despite some employees working remotely during their commute.
- The line manager suggested that the policy be adapted/updated to explicitly consider whether remote working (that is, where employees are working from locations other than at work or at home) could be included in flexible working arrangements and under what circumstances. Without this, the policy around remote working is rather inflexible in terms of supporting the breadth of flexible working arrangements.

Technology

In addition, technology can be a barrier to flexible working: in cases where employees are encouraged to work from home under the Smart Working Policy, it is assumed that employees supply their own technology to support this. The formal flexible working policy clearly states that TfL will not purchase extra equipment to assist an employee working from home, even though employees are encouraged to work from home in line with the Smart Working Policy.

HR perspective

Number and volume of flexible working applications and job roles

- A challenge to implementing flexible working arrangements can also be the sheer number and volume of flexible working applications per business area. While it is positive that the uptake of flexible working arrangements is increasing across the organisation, it can also mean that not all applications can be accepted within a particular business area.
- Managers may be unable to agree certain flexible working arrangements because of impracticality or because they may be potentially detrimental to the business or wider team – for example, where there is already a high number of flexible workers in one area of the business, or where the nature of the job role does not allow flexible working (for example where an employee works shifts including weekends and requests Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm hours).

Overcoming the barriers and challenges

Flexible worker perspective

Flexibility of flexible working

- It may be necessary to be informally flexible to work around communications/ meetings and the schedules of the wider team, and not miss out on important communications or meetings, which sometimes cannot be rescheduled. In terms of workload, when a piece of work requires a quick turnaround, they will work alongside their manager to engage other colleagues who may be able to provide support.

Line manager perspective

Openness and honesty

- When agreeing flexible working arrangements, it is vital to be open and honest with the employee from the start. Managers can provide support by giving employees guidance around their flexible working requests and whether they can be accommodated or not. It is also best practice to send them the flexible working policy, application form and company guidance, and to make them aware of any impact flexible working may have on them financially (for example, salary changes) or in terms of work-life balance (for example, holiday entitlement), so that they are in the best position to apply through the formal channels.
- Being open and honest can reduce any hostility from the start, for example being up front about problems: ‘Sometimes I need to say, “I don’t think that would be acceptable in the job that you do” or “that might have too much of a negative impact on the team.” If you are open and honest with people, I think they are generally appreciative of it.’
- Importantly, having a conversation early on means a line manager understands what the employee wants, so that they can manage their expectations and assess whether the flexible working arrangement is suitable in relation to the rest of the team, before they formally apply.

Holding to own views

In cases where the line manager has experienced hostility from other managers who don’t agree with their decision, they take the view that ‘it’s not their call’. ‘My advice would be that you do what is right for you, your group, the individual and the team in general.’

HR perspective

Accommodating line managers

Generally, line managers try to accommodate flexible working arrangements as best they can. There have been instances where flexible working could not be accommodated in the employee’s current role, but managers have gone above and beyond to try and accommodate the request in another capacity. For example, an employee requested to work three days per week instead of four, but their current role could not accommodate this; so the manager agreed to create a job-share for the role so that another employee covered the work. This was a particularly complex arrangement due to complications with different pay bands, contract, salaries and tax implications, but with the support of HR these were overcome.

How to measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working

Currently, the potential impact of flexible working is considered prior to agreement of the flexible working arrangements in the following ways:

- Objectives and work output are agreed and reviewed at performance reviews every six months, including discussing any performance-related issues.
- An initial discussion meeting can be useful to gain an understanding of what flexible working the employee is asking for and what the impact on them is likely to be. In some cases, the requested flexible working arrangement might not have the benefits that the employee is hoping for and in these instances the line manager may need to challenge the employee to rethink their request or conduct a formal review.
- If there are concerns about physical impact, for example when an employee is working from home, the manager can request a visit to the employee's home to assess if they think their working environment is suitable for working from home.
- If there are concerns about performance and flexible working arrangements, they can seek formal feedback from the team (anonymously) prior to accepting any flexible working requests.
- A trial period may be appropriate if there are any concerns that flexible working arrangements may negatively impact on the team. This allows managers to gain feedback from their team and peer group to understand whether the flexible working arrangement is impacting on their individual output or their team.

In terms of the impact of flexible working once the arrangement is in place, the following impacts were noted:

- One flexible worker felt that they had positively impacted on the team in terms of reducing stigma around requesting flexible working arrangements: 'people feel like they can ask for it.'
- The Equality & Inclusion (E&I) Team is currently working through the metrics around engagement and flexible working. The data is collected via the annual survey, which includes an equality and inclusion index and well-being index (which relate to flexible working arrangements). The survey is a new initiative since last year and results will be fed back by the E&I Team.

10 United Living

Business sector: Provider of refurbished and new build living solutions

Number of employees: 560 employees supported by 90 agency employees

Overall lessons learned

- Senior-level buy-in is crucial.
- Develop robust guidance to ensure consistency around flexible working values across the business.
- Develop a thorough communications plan – ensure everyone is on board.
- Develop a robust evaluation procedure through tangible KPIs.
- Ambassadors are key at all levels – people that live and breathe it and promote it.

- Learning from other work is also important – such as being part of the CIPD/ Timewise Flexible Hiring Champions scheme. Ensure that you are not an island.

Next steps

- Thorough review of the pilot process.
- There will be a full set of results by May, which will put the organisation in a good position to roll this out across the business.
- The review will take on board the lessons learned, evidence from the KPIs and action plan on rollout and communication.
- Keep it live – keep the momentum going on flexible working when it is available to all. Remind people and keep it fresh in people’s minds through videos and interactive messages.

Key themes from the case study

- Create a common understanding of what flexible working is through a myth-busting poster campaign.
- Switch mindsets around to start with the default position of, ‘why can’t this job be done flexibly?’
- Pilot flexible working across entire divisions – encompass all roles including non-traditional site-based jobs.
- Innovate in terms of flexible working options within the pilot, such as a four-day working week on full pay.
- Get line managers and people at different levels to champion the process to overcome any resistance.
- Hand over responsibilities to teams to arrange their flexible working patterns in a self-managed way.
- Develop a strong focus on evidence and collect data around tangible KPIs before and after the pilot, including, importantly, evidence from clients.

Organisational context

United Living offers a range of flexible working options, including:

- compressed working
- working from home
- staggered hours with late starts/early finishes
- part-time working
- term-time working
- job-shares
- four-day standard week paid full-time.

Flexible working is a key part of a ten-point Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan launched by the organisation last year and is seen as an important way of tackling the organisation’s gender pay gap.

The business is currently piloting different types of flexible working in eight different geographical areas. This includes site-based as well as office-based staff and in some cases whole divisions, incorporating many different roles. Around 90 people are involved in the pilots, which run from January to April 2019, and key performance indicator (KPI) data is being collected pre- and post-pilot to assess the impact to organisational performance.

The pilot is being supported by a steering group with a board-level sponsor and driver, MD Refurbishment South, as well as champions in different roles and levels throughout the business. Although, as above, the business already offers a great deal of flexibility, it is hoped that the pilots and potential wider rollout will ensure consistency when it comes to flexible working for all employees. However, the pilots are also testing out a new form of flexible working for the organisation – that is, a four-day week but on full pay. It is anticipated that productivity and work completion levels should stay the same, but motivation and well-being levels increase through the provision of a three-day weekend.

Flexible working in non-traditional and/or senior roles

The pilot is incorporating flexible working in a whole range of non-traditional roles of people at different levels and different locations in both new build and maintenance. These include:

- project managers
- site managers
- assistant site managers
- quantity surveyors
- health and safety teams
- Wales division
- finance team.

Gaining senior and line manager buy-in

Senior and line manager buy-in was developed from the outset of the pilots, through the development of a steering group with a board sponsor and senior-level employees, on site overseeing the flexible working pilots. The people services manager described it as ‘knocking at an open door at a senior level’.

A policy and comprehensive toolkit was developed for line managers underlining the organisation’s values around flexible working – that you should provide flexibility for all sorts of purposes to improve quality of life – ‘don’t box people into particular needs’.

Communications started around four months before the pilots to raise awareness amongst all staff, including line managers, through articles and posters on flexible working as well as guidance on homeworking with a list of practical dos and don’ts.

Facilitators to implementing flexible working

Senior buy-in from the management team

Get buy-in from the management team right from the start and a board sponsor pushing the agenda of flexible working: ‘The leadership team put it on their agenda and spoke to their teams.’

Steering group

The development of a steering group has helped with front-line ambassadors – supporting one another as issues come up.

Role-modelling

It’s important to have role models at the top of the organisation who aren’t afraid to talk about their flexible working pattern, and consciously: ‘leave loudly.’

A toolkit for line managers

A practical toolkit for line managers helps them to facilitate flexible working and empowers teams to reach their own agreements relating to scheduling.

Constant communications

Constant communications and messages underpin the value the organisation places on flexible working and builds up understanding, awareness and momentum.

Measurement and KPIs

KPIs help to show the impact on the bottom line. Properly measuring and evaluating progress makes the process more business-like and meaningful.

Benefits of implementing flexible working (including any data/evidence collected)

Flexible worker perspective

Increased productivity

While working flexibly from home there are fewer distractions, meaning that: 'Productivity is higher than in the office environment – particularly for focused work on spreadsheets and numbers.' It can be easier to concentrate in your own environment and you can also more easily finish a piece of work and have an unbroken schedule.

Line manager perspective

Increased workload management and productivity

The introduction of flexible working has meant a reduction in travel time and a greater ability to focus on work and manage workload, which has led to increased overall productivity – that is, more work is being completed and potentially to a higher standard.

Increased motivation and morale

'Everyone is happy to be on the pilot and motivation has increased. The organisation has been very inclusive in its communications about flexible working, so even those that are not participating in the pilots currently are being thanked for supporting it and there will be opportunities for them to work flexibly in the future.'

HR perspective

Attraction and retention

Creating a culture which supports flexible working will help to attract new talent and retain existing employees: 'Timewise surveys show flexibility to be high on prospective candidate agendas. We are fishing in a competitive pool; flexible working will also help in the hiring of hard-to-fill roles such as quantity surveyors and estimators.'

Improving morale and engagement

There is also evidence in the business already of flexible working improving morale, engagement and overall teamwork. The company has been able to retain key staff who were planning to leave because of retirement or were on maternity leave by providing flexible hours, allowing employees to better manage work-life balance and thus increasing morale. A recent staff survey found engagement scores to be high and better than benchmark comparators.

Health and well-being

Allowing employees greater flexibility to stagger start and finish times and work from home means less time commuting and benefits for overall health and well-being.

Challenges/barriers to implementing flexible working

Flexible worker perspective

The flexible worker felt that there were no challenges or barriers to implementing flexible working within the organisation.

Line manager perspective

Perceptions

‘Managers deciding what will and won’t work when it comes to flexible working rather than following the policy advice and toolkit.’

Understanding of flexible working

Develop people’s understanding and knowledge of flexible working so that they understand that it is all kinds of flexible working, not just homeworking.

Trust

Build trust between team members and with line managers to enable successful flexible working.

HR perspective

Perceptions

There is still a challenge around overcoming perceptions of who flexible working should be for – that is, mums and carers and no one else.

There is also a challenge around those who are used to working traditional hours – on site this is 7:00am–5:00pm – and that everyone needs to be there for those hours.

A final perception challenge that needs to be overcome is the idea that ‘if you are not putting in the hours, then you are not doing a good job’.

Health and safety requirements

There is also a challenge around on-site health and safety requirements and the fact that most site-based staff need to work with contractors and manage client relationships, which some believe requires workers to be physically on site all the time.

Robust KPIs

Developing robust KPIs historically has been a challenge. However, a significant amount of time has been put into developing these to evaluate progress for the flexible working pilots.

Overcoming the barriers and challenges

Flexible worker perspective

Regular communication with your line manager

‘I talk to my line manager on a regular basis – two or three times per week. This way I know what is expected of me and my deliverables have all been achieved.’

Line manager perspective

Regular item on leadership team meeting agenda

To gain senior-level support and buy-in across the different areas of the business.

Face-to-face meetings with line managers

To explain the pilot in full and to gain their buy-in for taking it forward in their teams.

Myth-buster poster campaign

The campaign helped overcome some of people's misconceptions about what flexible working is and what should or should not be allowed. It also helped to educate people and develop a shared understanding about flexible working across the business.

HR perspective

Using champions at all levels

Champions at all levels provide profile for all of the flexible working pilots. There are also very senior people leading the site-based pilots of the construction division who are 'able to drive that change through'.

Keeping everyone on board with communications

Communications side: 'Keeping everyone on board. Keep it live. Make sure that the wider business knows and the champions are out there sharing it with everyone.' Ensuring mixed communication means posters, intranet, newsletters, team meetings and videos.

Develop a default position of starting with flexibility

All pilot attendees have been asked to make their default position as being prepared to consider flexibility: 'We are asking them to test it; it might feel uncomfortable and we are happy to take feedback on this.'

Measurement and KPIs

The table of KPIs is helping overcome some of the barriers and perception challenges. It's particularly important to include clients in the measurement and evaluation process.

Training on unconscious bias for line managers

This will include recruitment, promotion, flexible working – this should help to overcome some of the key conscious and unconscious perception barriers.

How to measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working

A snap survey is being run before and after the flexible working pilot with teams and also important stakeholders such as clients to help evaluate the project. They will also be evaluating how well teams are meeting their project timetables and financial targets for the pilots. The organisation is also collecting KPI data to identify emerging trends in:

- diversity in recruitment and promotions (applications, shortlist and successful candidates)
- absence, sickness and turnover
- travel time saved
- overall expenses saved.

Finally they will be looking to evaluate, over the longer term, the difference flexible working is making to the organisation's gender pay gap as a measure of success.

11 Job-share partnership

Job-sharing partnership continuing across different organisations

Overall lessons learned

- Key principles to remember:¹
 - trust
 - honesty
 - shared vision
 - shared values
 - perfecting the handover.
- Don't focus on why flexible working might not work and remember the benefits that could be gained: 'Too often, people focus on the reasons why a job-share (or talent partnership) won't work. But the benefits to the individual and the organisation can be enormous if done well. By retaining us both, the organisation keeps hold of our knowledge and experience, and benefits from our collaborative way of working, without any drop in performance. And we have been able to balance our high-level careers with our other responsibilities.'²

Key themes from the case study

- There needs to be honesty and trust between a job-sharing partnership for it to work successfully.
- Feedback between job-sharers is an important element of keeping on track with organisational and personal objectives. Continuous coaching also allows the job-sharers to grow and develop individually as well as together.
- Planning is vital, particularly when trying to perfect the handover and when thinking about the impact of the job-share on the rest of the team.
- There is a variety of benefits that the organisation can gain by introducing job-sharing.

Job-sharing context

Hannah Essex and Claire Walker have been job-sharing since 2015.³ They currently job-share as Co-Executive Director at the British Chambers of Commerce. They began working in this job-share role in September 2018 and work a six-day week between them: Claire works Monday to Wednesday and Hannah Wednesday to Friday, so they have a crossover day on Wednesday.

Prior to their current role, Hannah and Claire worked together as job-share Co-Directors of Communications at Teach First for nearly four years.⁴ Hannah was working at Teach First as Director of Communications: when she went on maternity leave in 2014, Claire successfully applied to cover her maternity. The two already knew each other, having collaborated on a project previously in 2009, but it was during Hannah's maternity leave that the job-share idea emerged. 'I didn't know how I was going to return to work; I knew I didn't want to return full-time and that my job would be incredibly hard to do part-time. About three months into my maternity leave, Claire phoned and asked, "what do you think about job-sharing?" It was the best thing and felt absolutely right.'⁵

¹ Hargreaves, C. (2018) *Job sharing at the executive level*.

² Timewise. *Job-shares: making two heads better than one*.

³ The information for this case study was drawn from the referenced articles, along with email exchanges with Hannah and Claire.

⁴ Teach First. *Two heads are better than one: how co-leadership makes you a more effective leader*.

⁵ Hargreaves, C. (2018).

On a typical Wednesday, the pair begin the day by giving each other a detailed handover, with a focus on any strategic issues that need discussing. After that, they usually go off to different meetings or locations, to maximise their reach and their value to the organisation. External contacts and internal teams seem to have got used to the job-sharing arrangement very quickly. They ask their colleagues to consider them as one person.

Facilitators to implementing flexible working

Learning from other experienced job-sharers

After taking the decision to work as a job-share, Hannah and Claire met with a number of other successful sharers, in a range of sectors, to gain understanding about working flexibly in this way. They also researched different types of job-shares; a report by Capability Jane proposes three different models of a job-share:

- (a) job split – divided responsibility
- (b) hybrid job-share – sharing a role with some shared responsibility and some divided responsibility
- (c) pure job-share – one job that happens to be done by two (or more) interchangeable jobholders. Claire and Hannah chose to operate a ‘pure share’ arrangement with shared objectives and accountabilities.

Having common career aspirations and ambitions

For an effective job-share partnership, it is important that their ambitions and career aspirations are closely aligned. ‘We’re very different people but we shared the same values and work ethic – and everything else could just be worked out.’⁶

Perfecting the handover process

The pair use a mixture of verbal and written communication to create a seamless handover process. As well as their face-to-face handover on Wednesday, Hannah writes a briefing note every Friday and Claire does the same at the end of Tuesday: ‘Our handover process is the engine that makes our partnership work. We read our briefing notes before we come back in to ensure we stay up to speed. We also share an email account and make sure we read anything flagged up by the other before we start our first working day.’⁷

The importance of trust and shared values

Claire and Hannah note that their experience has shown that trust, respect and collaboration are key ingredients for a successful job-share. ‘The critical thing is that we completely trust each other. We have a very open relationship where we give honest feedback without it ever becoming an issue. In effect, we coach each other through tricky things we do. We share values in the way that we approach things: team management, the culture we want to create, and our vision for what we want to achieve. It is highly effective – for us, our teams and our organisations. Leadership is often isolating and challenging, but we draw on our partnership and collective experience to drive impact.’⁸

⁶ Hargreaves, C. (2018).

⁷ Timewise.

⁸ Hargreaves, C. (2018).

Working as an equal partnership

‘Finding the right person and feeling like equal partners is really important. If you get to a point where you feel like one is carrying the other, that’s where we’ve seen it create challenges. That’s where you really need some coaching and some honesty with each other to try and work it out.’⁹

Regularly reviewing organisational objectives

Once every four months, the pair take a Wednesday away from the office together, to consider whether they are meeting their objectives and to plan their next steps. They believe that leaders often fail because they are isolated or have a set mindset. Their job-share allows them to bring different perspectives and experiences into play as they tackle tough issues.

Technology

Technology is a key facilitator of job-sharing. Hannah and Claire’s shared OneNote, phone number, Skype, calendar and email address have been critical to making their partnership work. They often type notes in meetings so that they can each pick up where the other left off, and keep a rolling ‘to do’ list that they both update daily, and review when they hand over.

Benefits of implementing flexible working (including any data/evidence collected)

Better work-life balance

The job-share allows Hannah and Claire to be at the school gates to collect their children twice a week. Outside of work, Hannah is also vice-chair of a charity and Claire has held trustee positions and worked on community projects in her non-working days. In addition, Claire has a long-term disability, which means that a full-time role at this level and pace would be very difficult.

Personal and professional growth

While they both have individual strengths and weaknesses, Hannah and Claire feel they have grown as leaders since working as job-sharers. They give each other constant feedback on how they could improve within their roles and how their co-leadership could drive more change. Since working as a partnership, Hannah thinks she has become a braver leader and Claire believes she has become a more rounded leader. The job-share has also enabled both to continue to progress in their career and hold a senior, busy and fast-paced role.

Better results and more experience

Because of the time they spend together and the coaching they give each other, the pair believe they get better results. The years of experience and knowledge that two people can bring to a job role can be a huge benefit to an employer. Their combined 40 years of work experience also means that they have a wide external network to use to deliver impact.

Sustaining momentum and covering extra ground

As their role is related to media and politics, there is a need for continued momentum and pace, which can be difficult for one individual to manage, especially if they have other commitments outside of work. Claire and Hannah frequently cover each other’s annual leave and ensure that one of them is always contactable. This enables their employer to get much more out of two job-sharers than is possible with one person who is trying to

⁹ Hargreaves, C. (2018).

manage everything single-handedly. In a busy media and political environment, the job-share can also provide a fresh injection of energy mid-week.

On their handover day, in particular, they can cover additional workload: ‘Our current job, like our previous one, is very busy and external facing. This means that on our handover day we can be in two places at once. For example, last Wednesday, Claire was at a range of internal meetings, while Hannah gave evidence at a select committee, before meeting the prime minister with other business leaders. Our ability to do this means that we can cover a lot of ground.’¹⁰

Challenges/barriers to implementing flexible working

Keeping the team in mind

As with any flexible working, it is important to bear in mind the impact on the team. Therefore, the pair make it a priority to ensure that their role works as smoothly as possible for their colleagues, both internally and externally.

Managing two busy schedules

While the pair are able to do more with a two-person job-share, it is also important not to overlook the complexity of dealing with and managing two different schedules.

Convincing the sceptics

Claire and Hannah comment, ‘We have been lucky to find employers who have embraced the way we work and have recognised the huge benefits it brings to the organisation. But from others we have faced questions such as, “How do you build relationships with team/stakeholders when there’s two of you? How can you build a team culture when you are two different people?” It can be exhausting trying to win people over, so it’s important to focus on selling the benefits rather than being defensive. Ultimately, the proof is in the pudding.’

They continue to explain that they have strong, trusting relationships with their stakeholders, sometimes with people that only one of them has met. They find that generally people quickly see them as a unit and are completely comfortable with them being seen as interchangeable.

Overcoming the barriers and challenges

Having a clear plan

‘From the start, we drew up a clear plan of how we wanted to operate as a partnership. We knew our vision and values were similar, but we also knew we needed to agree what that meant in practice, and discuss how we would tackle any issues. For example:

- How did we want to be viewed as a partnership?
- What was the culture we wanted to create?
- What was the impact we wanted to make?
- How would we manage disagreements?
- What would we do if one of us wanted to separate?

We take collective decisions on three things: strategy, people and money. For everything else, the director who is working on a particular day takes the decisions, with the other’s full support.’¹¹

¹⁰ Hargreaves, C. (2018).

¹¹ Timewise.

Learning from others and evaluating performance

As mentioned above, they spent time learning from senior job-sharers in other organisations, focusing on the set-up of their systems and processes to become a unified partnership and perfecting their job-share model. After their first six months as a job-share, they underwent a full 360 review to ensure that they had successfully implemented and managed their role.

Honest feedback and championing one another

'A key strength of our partnership is our willingness to give each other honest, constructive feedback. We discuss what is going well and what we need to work on, and jointly celebrate our successes and learn from our mistakes. As well as accelerating our professional development, this has helped us acquire a huge amount of strength, resilience and momentum. We respond more quickly to setbacks, our decisions are better and our impact has been amplified.'¹²

Pointing out other positive job-share examples

Claire and Hannah also note that being able to have good examples of other job-shares who are making their flexible role work well for them helps with convincing the sceptics.

¹² Timewise.



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