Information for employers and workers

Flexible working arrangements are a common feature of Australian workplaces. Since the shift to working from home during the pandemic, many employers and workers have embraced hybrid arrangements that offer a mix of working remotely and attending usual workplaces.

While these arrangements provide obvious benefits for work-life balance, they also present a number of challenges for organisations and individuals, including missed opportunities for collaboration and blurred boundaries between work and home. Research also suggests there is a disconnect between workers' and managers' perceptions about flexible work.

It's not one size fits all

The challenge for employers and workers is getting the balance right and communicating clearly.

Individual factors play a major role for workers. Research shows different workers thrive in different arrangements, and ongoing consultation and communication is important – especially as individual situations can change over time.

Some factors to consider:

- **Personality type:** communication skills, self-motivated, works independently.
- **Family/life arrangements:** caring responsibilities, available social support networks.
- **Home environment:** suitability of the workspace, living alone or in shared accommodation.
- **Workplace culture:** supportive with openness and trust.
- **Manager/worker relationship:** positive team dynamics support commitment, job satisfaction and performance.

Remember: employers' and workers' work health and safety duties still apply in home-based work. For further information on your obligations, view Comcare's **working from home checklist** and **Office Safety Tool**.

Research and evidence

The evidence is compelling. Good work improves general health and wellbeing and reduces psychological distress.

Good work is about balancing the interests of individuals, employers and society to deliver performance, engagement and fairness.

Evidence suggests there are four domains:

1. Engage workers and create a culture of work participation
2. Balance job demands, job control and job security
3. Promote civility, fairness and respect and do not tolerate incivility, discrimination and bullying
4. Engage with community culture where appropriate.

Job satisfaction and productivity are interdependent. Balancing these outcomes is the foundation of good work design because:

- They are positively related—high scores on one are associated with high scores on the other
- They influence each other—strong performance leads to greater job satisfaction, and more job satisfaction can lead to higher performance.

Sense of control is a key factor. Beyond individual differences, research indicates the degree of flexibility and control workers have over their working arrangements contributes to psychological health at work, given that:

- Increased flexibility and choice can reduce work-related stress
- Flexible working often means that outcomes-orientated management styles are adopted.

Considerations for getting the balance right

Blurred boundaries
Job satisfaction
Technology fatigue
Support for working families
Reduce absenteeism
Longer working days
Social disconnection

Networking opportunities
Separate work and home lives
Greater innovation and creativity
Office
Improves team cohesion
distractions
Team collaboration
Commute time

Working remotely

Usual workplace
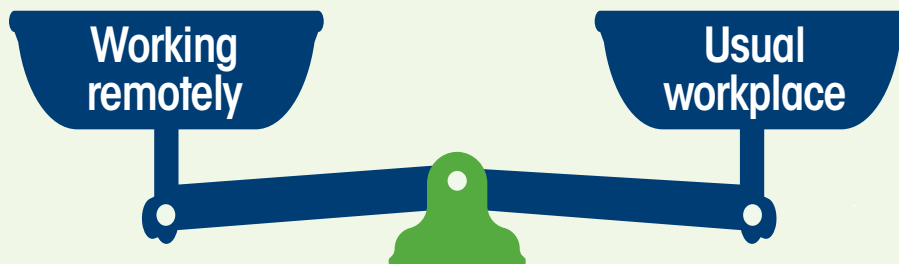
Considerations for flexible work

Working with colleagues in shared workspaces can

- Improve productivity for collaborative tasks
- Improve team cohesion leading to greater innovation and creativity
- Enable positive boundaries between work and home lives
- Provide more opportunities for career development and networking
- Support safer physical workstation setup to minimise musculoskeletal stress

Enabling remote working can foster

- Greater job satisfaction
- Reduced absenteeism
- Less commuting time and positive work-life balance
- Support for working families
- Improved productivity for independent tasks due to reduced distractions
- Enhanced motivation and engagement

Potential risks for remote work

- Longer working days which can cause burnout and fatigue
- Social disconnection
- Technostress caused by negative aspects of digital communication, poor user experience of ICT systems, and a need to improve organisational resources and capability.

Practical tips for managers

- Understand your organisational requirements. Some work will need to be done from the usual workplace, while other activities can offer more flexibility.
- Ask your teams what works for them. Don't assume that you know what your employees prefer—take the time to discuss their preferences.
- Clearly communicate expectations and arrangements. If there are criteria determining access to flexible working, make sure this is fair and clearly communicated.
- Learn about and adopt different styles of management, such as outcomes-focused management, and virtual communication approaches.
- Maintain regular contact with employees working remotely including regular check-in arrangements and structured performance and goal-setting conversations.
- Monitor working hours and adjust workloads accordingly to ensure employee wellbeing and reduce the risk of burnout.
- Maintain effective self-care strategies for your own health and wellbeing, and encourage your team to do the same.

Practical tips for workers

- Understand your employer's flexible work policy and consider what type of flexibility would work best for you such as, hours, pattern and location.
- Be prepared to negotiate to find a mutually beneficial arrangement.
- Commit to ensuring your flexible arrangement won't have a negative impact on the team.
- Communicate clearly and openly with your manager and team.
- Draw clear boundaries between work and home life.
- Build flexibility into your schedule so you can respond to changing needs in work, caring responsibilities and self-care.

For more information

- Comcare—Good work design
- Comcare's working from home guidance for employers and workers
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians—What is Good Work?
- Australian and New Zealand Consensus Statement on the Health Benefits of Work
- Principles and Evidence for Good Work Through Effective Design (Report commissioned by Comcare)
- Safe Work Australia—Principles of good work design