

STRIKING THE BALANCE WITH FLEXIBLE WORKING

Working from home or remotely during COVID-19 has produced many benefits. For the most part, evidence suggests employees have shown greater empathy and employers have adopted a more outcomes focused management style.

However, these working arrangements also present a number of challenges for organisations—missed opportunities for collaboration, and blurred boundaries between work and home.

Going forward, the challenge for employers is getting the balance right.



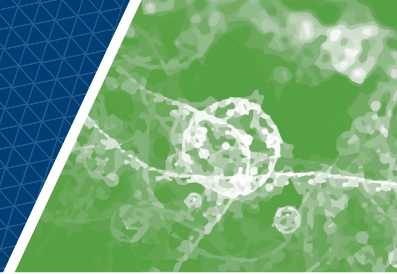
Practical tips for managers

- **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. Clarify any impacts on performance monitoring.
- **Invest in your managers to adopt new styles.** Consider guidance or training on outcomes-focused management styles and virtual communication approaches.
- **Take advantage of WHS tools for remote working.** Consider using [Comcare's Working from Home checklist](#).



Individual factors play a major role for workers

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



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 employees have over their working arrangements contributes to psychological health at work, given that:

- Increased remote working can be related to lower work-related stress
- Working remotely often means that outcomes-orientated management styles are adopted.



Benefits vs. potential risks

Benefits

- Greater job satisfaction
- Reduced absenteeism
- Positive work-life balance
- Supports working families – particularly working mothers

Potential risks

- Difficulty separating work and home life
- Poorer mental health outcomes
- Social disconnection can hinder team cohesion/creativity



For more information

- [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 \(Report commissioned by Comcare\)](#)
- [Handbook—Principles of Good Work Design \(Safe Work Australia\)](#)