

# MANAGING FLEXIBLE WORKERS

Ideas and action points to help employers build inclusive workplaces, where people who need to work flexibly can progress their careers and maximise their contribution to business.



# 1. Get the right culture in place

One of the main problems for many flexible workers is an unsupportive workplace culture. Successful management of flexible workers starts with a positive mind-set. If senior managers and other employees are unaware of the business benefits of flexible working, they may be resistant to supporting it. For flexible working to succeed, it's essential to explain the benefits clearly and create a culture in which its positive impact is celebrated.

## Find out what people think

Your employees may have views about flexible working based on opinions rather than facts. For example, people who want to work flexibly may think it's not allowed in certain roles. And people who do not work flexibly may resent flexible workers, thinking that they put an extra burden on the rest of the team. Finding out how flexibility is perceived at all levels will help you identify hidden demand, highlight barriers, and challenge myths.

## Lead from the top

Senior buy-in is critical to the success of flexible working. Getting leaders and HR managers familiar and comfortable with the benefits of flexibility is the starting point. They will then display positive attitudes, and follow through with supportive practice.

## Communicate the benefits

Once the senior leaders are on board, you'll need to ensure that the culture for change ripples through the organisation. Strong internal communication will be at the heart of developing the right mind-set. Training for line managers may be necessary too. The more people talk about it, and the clearer people are about the benefits of flexible working, the sooner it will become the norm.

## Create flexible working champions and role models

Seeing flexible working succeed is one of the best ways to encourage buy-in from employees at all levels. Encourage flexible workers who perform well in their roles to share their experiences, and to act as mentors for others.



## 2. Inspire change in management practice

In order to retain and develop flexible workers, you will need to ensure that they are managed effectively. Below are some key principles of a good flexible working strategy.

### Detailed knowledge and understanding

Line and senior managers need to understand the benefits of flexible working for both the organisation and the employee. This includes being familiar with the data (such as the extent to which flexibility increases productivity), and getting to understand the different reasons why people need to work flexibly.

### Mutual trust and responsibility

Successful flexible working is about give and take; it's not just about making the employee's life easier. Managers need to set clear expectations around time at work and completion of duties, and trust the employee to fulfil them – holding them accountable if they don't. Training may be useful to support employees with this.

### Appropriate KPIs for part-time workers

Performance management based on outputs is always advisable – but even more so for part-time workers. As for full-time workers, targets need to be challenging but achievable. So they need to be pro rata. And when a part-time worker hits their targets, their contribution should be recognised and valued.

### Clear progression goals

Similarly, a clear understanding of what career pathways are available for flexible workers will be central to retaining and progressing staff.

### Supportive processes and technology

It's a practical point, but making sure that employees have the right equipment and networks to do their jobs flexibly will make a big difference. Tools such as Skype can make employees feel involved even when they are working elsewhere.

# 3. Talk to carers about their needs

According to the organisation Employers for Carers, 1 in 9 of your employees are likely to be caring for a relative who is sick, disabled or elderly. And they are likely to be your most valuable staff - 45+ year-olds with plenty of skills and experience. What's more, our ageing population means that the number of carers in the UK is likely to grow rapidly in the coming years.

Whilst traditional professional behaviour is to separate personal issues from work, in today's world that's increasingly difficult to apply. With a vastly greater proportion of adults needing to work, rather than depending on partners, those with caring commitments have got to find a way to make their work and non-work lives fit. And employers who need to access their skills must help them find that way.

However, the conversation doesn't need to get emotional – employers should focus on **how** they can support an employee by making their role flexible, not **why** the person needs support. But it is important that employers watch out for signs that their employees need help, and initiate a discussion before stress levels build and a problem arises.

For further advice, you'll find plenty of resources on how to develop a carers' policy and how to support carers in your workforce at [Employers for Carers](#).



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