

Flexible Workplaces

**Practical Flexible Work Practices to
Achieve a Work and Life Balance**

A Guide for Employers and Employees

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Introduction

What Are Flexible Work Practices?

Flexible work practices enable employees and employers to better manage the work/life balance. This guide is intended to assist organisations and employees who wish to implement such work practices.

Flexible work practices can be broad ranging and as creative as management and employee negotiations allow. What may suit one employee or organisation, may not suit another.

However, many flexible work practices are widely used in small business through to large organisations and government agencies.

Examples of these include:

- flexibility in hours work
- home based work
- lactation breaks for nursing mothers
- working part-time or job-sharing

This guide lists a range of practical and flexible work options, along with the benefits of those options to both employees and employers. It includes ‘*things to work through*’ for the employer and employee, when considering flexible work practices.

There are other ways in which an organisation can assist its employees such as: scheduling meetings at times agreeable to all parties; offering support for those on maternity leave and providing work and family information. These ideas will be covered along with information about leave entitlements and how they can be made more flexible.

Finally, examples of best practice are included alongside how to decide which flexible work practices are best suited for the employee or the organisation.



*One package
does not fit
all...*

*Be creative
when
thinking
about
flexible work
practices*

Why Have Flexible Work Practices?

Changes – At Home – At Work

During the past few decades the workplace has changed in many ways. Most notably there has been a move away from the 'male breadwinner' model of work and a notable increase in the number of women entering the workforce.

There is also an increase in the number of men becoming primary carers for children and they also need flexibility at work.

Other changes, such as an increase in the ageing population, mean employees are taking on more caring responsibilities for those in their lives.

Obviously these changes impact on all our lives. We are more likely than ever to be balancing family responsibilities and paid work.

Stats and Facts

Statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS Cat 4102.0) reveal that:

- In 2002, of families with at least one parent employed, 56% used flexible work arrangements to assist them to care for their children. Most popular were flexible working hours (35%) and permanent part-time work (24%).
- 70% of employed mothers used flexible work arrangements to help care for children.
- Fathers are expressing a desire for greater involvement with their children and there is an increase in employed fathers working part-time.

Workforce Absences (ABS Cat 6254.0)

A recent survey found that 4% of employees had taken leave of six months or more from their current employment.

Close to three-quarters of these employees were women, of whom 73% had taken a break for 'family reasons'.



*Changes at
home
have led to
more
people
juggling
work with
other
responsibilities*

Why Have Flexible Work Practices?

Flexible Work Practices - Who Benefits?

Flexible work practices not only benefit the employee, but also the organisation as a whole. Statistics show there are more demands on those in the workforce now, particularly those with caring responsibilities.

Many managers realise introducing flexibility into the workplace allows employees to deal with the demands of work and personal life. In turn, employees who have workplace flexibility feel less stressed and are better able to produce quality work and feel more committed to their work.

It makes sense to adopt flexible work practices – not only for the employee, but for the organisation.

Benefits to be gained for employers who make workplaces more flexible include:

- increased productivity
- reduced stress in the workplace
- improved morale and commitment
- reduced lateness and absenteeism
- increased flexibility in management practices including better planning for peak and quiet times
- increased staff retention
- increased ability to attract and recruit new staff
- reduced recruitment and training costs.

Legal Requirements

The *Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act 1998* states a person must not discriminate against another person on a number of grounds including: age, gender, marital status, pregnancy, parental status and family responsibilities.

Further the *Tasmanian Industrial Relations Act* [Section 30(4)(d)] and *The Federal Workplace Relations Act* [Section 659(2)(f)] prescribes termination on the grounds of family responsibilities to be unlawful.



*Flexible
work
practices
make
business
cents*

Stats and Facts -Tasmania

A survey released in 2000 and conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (*Balancing Work and Caring Responsibilities in Tasmania*, Cat No. 4903.6) has the most recent statistics available on how Tasmanians balance paid work and caring responsibilities. The survey shows that there is a clear need for flexibility in the workplace and that many employees have responsibilities that impinge on 'work time'.

The survey found:

- 35.9% of employees took leave from paid work to balance work and caring responsibilities in the three months prior to the survey
- 74.6% of those who took time off, did so to care for children
- various leave provisions were used:
 - 37% of those who took time off work to fulfil caring responsibilities used sick or carer's leave
 - 22% used 'other' provisions
 - 14% took unpaid leave
 - 14% took annual leave
 - 8% used flexitime

Of workers with caring responsibilities 33.3% reported it was 'not so easy' to arrange to work fewer hours and 16.8% reported it was 'impossible to arrange'.

At the time of the survey, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimated that of the 200,000 Tasmanians in paid employment, 6,000 also cared for elderly or disabled relatives and 93,000 had dependent children. The ABS also estimated there were 3,600 Tasmanians looking for work and for whom provisions to meet caring responsibilities were the most important factors when considering employment.

Workers in the survey with caring responsibilities cited the following flexible arrangements as the most valued: being able to use sick/carers leave; access to part-time and job-share arrangements; flexible start and finish times; flexi time; leave without pay provisions and, working from home when the need arose.



*People need
flexibility to
juggle work with
other
commitments*

Glossary

Full-Time Work

Full time employees are people who usually work 38 hours a week.

Part-Time Work

Permanent part-time employees work less than 38 hours a week on a regular basis.

Casual Work

A casual employee is engaged on an irregular basis to undertake specific tasks, and is paid a loading (between 20-25%) in addition to the ordinary time rate in lieu of personal leave (annual leave and sick leave) and payment for public holidays.

Shift Work

Shift work is a portion of a day that is scheduled as a day's work when work is carried on continuously for up to 24 hours in each day and up to seven days in each week. An allowance is paid to employees who undertake shift work as compensation for having to work outside the normal span of hours fixed for day workers.

Working on Location/Away From Home

Typically, workers in this category work for both an extended number of days on, often away from home, and an extended number of days off. Under these working arrangements workers most often work with natural resources. Workers in this category are often required to work away from home in isolated locations. They generally work a roster involving 10 days on, four off or nine days on and five off every 28 days.

Industrial Instrument

An industrial instrument refers to an award or Industrial Agreement including Employee Collective Agreements or Union Collective Agreements and Individual Transitional Employment Agreements.



Work

Smarter

...Not

Longer

Part-time Work

Part-time work allows flexibility for organisations to better use employees and more effectively and efficiently manage the delivery of services to customers. Employees are also offered greater flexibility in combining their work and other responsibilities and interests.

Example

Work can be done on an on-going basis for less than the full-time weekly hours at mutually-agreed times, for example three full days per week, five half days per week or eight days over four weeks.

Benefits for employers

Potentially reduces absenteeism because it offers more options for employees to manage their personal obligations.

Potentially improves customer service and productivity by meeting peak demands without incurring additional costs.

Increases competitive edge in attracting and retaining staff.

Savings in recruitment and training costs through reduced turnover.

Skilled employees may return earlier from parental leave if they are able to work part-time.

More motivated employees because their needs are met.

Benefits for employees

Ability to maintain employment and skills while meeting family or community obligations or pursuing other interests.

Ability to keep up with technological change through continuity of employment.

Increased life satisfaction through improved balance of activities.

Part-time Work

Benefits for employees (cont)

Provides employment opportunities for those with a disability for whom full-time work would be difficult.

Useful for those approaching retirement who may wish to reduce their working hours.

May be a suitable option for employees who want to ease back into work after taking parental leave.

Things to work through

Employers

When managing part-time employees, consideration should be given to the number of hours worked and workloads adjusted accordingly. Careful planning needs to occur so part-time staff are not expected to do a full-time equivalent workload.

Staff training or meetings need to occur at appropriate times so part-time employees can be included.

Some positions may not be suitable for part-time work. Where this is the case, the position could be re-designed or job sharing may be an alternative.

Things to work through

Employees

Part-time work will affect superannuation benefits.

Being a part-time employee may make attending training or staff meetings more difficult. Open communication between the employee and employer is vital so the employee does not miss out on job opportunities.

Flexitime

This arrangement allows flexibility in hours worked. A variance of set hours (sometimes referred to as core hours) can allow employees to work the hours suitable to them, while still working a prescribed number of hours per week.

Example

While employees are required to work a set amount of hours per week, more flexibility can be achieved by extending attendance patterns through:

- shortening core-hours by making starting and finishing times more flexible (for example employee needs to attend work between 10am-3pm instead of 9am-4pm)
- expanding the spread of ordinary working hours (for example 7am-7pm instead of 8am-6pm)
- increasing the number of hours which can be accrued and the number of flex days available
- fewer days and more hours per day.

Benefits for employers

Reduced absenteeism because it offers more options for employees to manage their personal obligations.

Enables longer business hours without additional costs.

Mutual consent allows temporarily increased work demands to be met.

Increases competitive edge in attracting and retaining employees.

Benefits for employees

Competing responsibilities and interests can be met more easily.

Greater job satisfaction because work can be done when energy levels and motivation are optimal.

Flexitime

Benefits for employees (cont)

Ability to plan organisational and personal obligations.

Assists in meeting dependent care responsibilities.

Things to work through

Employers

In order to manage employees' flexitime, a system regarding the number of hours worked by employees should be developed.

Consideration should be given to security of the building/office if extending the span of ordinary working hours.

A system of negotiation for employees to use accrued flexitime should be developed given there needs to be enough staff on any given day to carry out core business.

Things to work through

Employees

Employees need to carefully record hours of work and any hours accrued.

Employees need to negotiate with management regarding taking time off in lieu of hours worked.

Job Share

Job sharing involves one job being shared between two or more part-time employees. Employers can implement a greater variety of employment options and provide flexibility for employees.

Example

Duties and responsibilities of one job can be shared among part-time employees and/or full-time employees. For instance:

- one person two days per week and one person three days per week
- two people for 2½ days per week each, possibly sharing one half-day
- two people working alternate weeks
- one person working part-time part of the week with a full-time employee working the other part of the job together with another part-time position

Benefits for employers

Potentially reduces absenteeism because more options are available for employees to manage their personal obligations.

Coverage of a full-time position maintaining continuity of customer service and productivity.

More than one perspective can be gained on issues.

Greater potential for innovative problem solving.

By mutual agreement one job-sharer can cover for the other during periods of leave.

Increased flexibility when job-sharers can share peak workloads.

Attracts and retains skilled employees who cannot work full-time.

Job Share

Benefits for employers (cont)

Savings in recruitment and training costs from reduced turnover.

Continuity of work performance will be maintained during periods of annual leave.

More motivated employees because their needs are met.

Benefits for employees

Allows acquisition of a range of skills of a full-time job while working part-time.

Can improve job satisfaction through sharing responsibilities for less stimulating tasks.

Builds teamwork, skills in negotiation, time management, work planning.

Ability to maintain employment and skills while meeting family or community obligations or pursuing other interests.

Increased life satisfaction through improved balance of activities.

Provides employment opportunities for those with a disability for whom full-time work would be difficult.

Useful for those approaching retirement who may wish to reduce their working hours.

May be of benefit to employees who wish to ease back into the workplace after taking parental leave.

Job Share

Things to work through

Employers

It may be beneficial for the organisation to allow extra time for employees to hand over work from one job-sharer to the other.

Consideration should be given to scheduling staff meetings and training so all staff have the opportunity to attend.

Things to work through

Employees

The reduction in salary will affect superannuation benefits for employees in full-time positions.

Employees may need to provide good grounds for job-sharing particular jobs seen by managers as not suitable for job-sharing.

Employees managing the handing over of tasks may require extra time management or communication strategies.

Home Based/Teleworking

Working from home may suit the employer and employee as a short or long-term option. It may allow employees to continue their employment during some temporary, unforeseen circumstance which prevents their attendance in the workplace. It also allows employees to work at home when the manager and the employee are in agreement a certain piece of work can be completed efficiently. This provision could also be used by an employee with a temporary or ongoing disability which prevents attendance at work. While historically this work practice has been used for short periods as a stop-gap measure, it is increasingly becoming a more widely-accepted and used work option for longer periods of time.

Example

This has been used as a short-term or occasional arrangement to allow continuing work when a temporary need arises such as:

- a temporary or fluctuating disability
- caring for sick children or other relative
- recuperation from an injury
- if a particular piece of work is suitable for this arrangement

Or if the need arises it could be used as an ongoing arrangement for one or two days per week.

Benefits for employers

Reduced absenteeism and maximised efficiency because more options are available for employees to manage their personal obligations.

Develops outcome-focused management skills.

Develops responsible, self-managing employees.

May increase productivity and a higher quality of work due to fewer interruptions.

May result in reduced leave absences as employees with minor illnesses or those who need to care for others can continue to work.

Home Based/Teleworking

Benefits for employers (cont)

More committed, motivated employees because their needs are met.

Potential for improved occupational health and safety through gradual return to work after illness.

Increases competitive edge in attracting and retaining employees.

Savings in recruitment and training costs through reduced turnover.

Benefits for employees

Encourages improved time-management and work-organisation skills.

Less distraction from interruptions.

Meets immediate short-term needs.

Saves use of accrued leave.

Time and cost savings on transport which will result in environmental benefits

More relaxed working environment.

Things to work through

Employers

There may be an initial investment required in setting up occupational health and safety approved home-based equipment.

Managers need to monitor outcomes, rather than day-to-day tasks when supervising projects and offering performance appraisals.

Need to consider on-site workers' compensation.

Home Based/Teleworking

Things to work through

Employers (cont)

Staff training or meetings need to occur at appropriate times so home-based employees are included.

Things to work through

Employees

Less social interaction.

There will be less direct supervision: employees may require higher-level self-management skills.

There may be difficulty in keeping family/work life separate.

Over the long-term, not 'being seen' may hinder career and training opportunities.

Open communication with the employer is vital to make sure employees are included in ongoing functions of the office.

Leave Without Pay

Extended leave may be available under an award or industrial agreement that provides for a period of leave to be taken without pay – as negotiated between the employer and employee.

Example

Such leave could be used for the purposes of:

- full-time dependent care for an extended period
- full-time studies
- overseas travel.

Benefits for employers

Retains experienced skilled employees.

More motivated staff because their needs are met.

Increases competitive edge in attracting and retaining employees.

Provides opportunities for career development for other employees.

Benefits for employees

Provides job security while on extended leave.

Retention of benefits of ongoing employment, for example accrual of leave.

Allows employees to combine work with other responsibilities and interests.

Provides leave without pay for an extended specified period and employees may have the right to return to a position at the same level. Employees will need to check such provisions against their relevant award or industrial agreement.

Leave Without Pay

Things to work through

Employers

A contractual agreement stating terms and conditions (period of leave, position level to which the employee will be returning) should be considered. This should reflect the employee's entitlement under their award or industrial agreement.

The employer may need to fill the temporary vacancy when the employee takes leave. Having a register of employees could be considered. The register could include retirees or part-time employees who may wish to work full-time on occasion.

For an employee who has taken extensive leave it is advisable to have a re-entry phase including a management briefing covering work issues for the period of absence.

Things to work through

Employees

Leave without pay will result in less superannuation unless ongoing voluntary contributions are made.

Depending on the amount of leave taken, job skills may lapse or organisational changes may mean new skills are not acquired. In the short term, this may hinder career opportunities on return to work.

If on leave for a long period, it may be advisable to occasionally attend staff meetings or contact the workplace to keep abreast of workplace issues. An arrangement could also be made with the organisation to send relevant meeting minutes or papers to the employee's home address.

Flexi Year/Buying Leave

With this option the employee, by agreement with the employer, may elect to take a number of weeks of unpaid leave. This scheme allows employees to bank a proportion of their regular salary, and then take paid leave on the same proportionate salary for an agreed period of time.

Example

48/52 weeks – employees take an extra four weeks (unpaid) leave per year but their income (48 weeks' worth) is averaged over the entire year (52 weeks).

Three/four years - employees work for three years, but take the fourth year as unpaid leave and their income from the three years worked is averaged over the four-year period.

Benefits for employers

Retains experienced skilled employees.

Provides opportunities for career development for other employees.

Savings in recruitment and training costs through reduced turnover.

Attracts and retains skilled employees who cannot work all year.

Salary savings may be made if a replacement is not needed when the employee takes leave.

Allows better planning for peak and quiet times.

Benefits for employees

Job security.

Ability to combine work with other responsibilities and interests.

Allows retention of the benefits of ongoing employment, for example accrual of leave.

Flexi Year/Buying Leave

Benefits for employees (cont)

May be of particular benefit to parents who wish to take additional leave for school holiday periods.

Things to work through

Employer

The employer may need to fill the temporary vacancy when the employee takes their leave.

More management time may be required to negotiate conditions for those employees who take extra leave.

It would be helpful for employment arrangements to be developed between the employer and employees for the effective operation of the scheme.

Things to work through

Employee

For full-time employees, the reduction in salary will result in less superannuation unless additional payments are made.

If on leave for long periods, it may be wise to occasionally attend staff meetings or contact the workplace to keep up to date with current events.

Casual Work

A casual employee is engaged on an hourly basis to undertake specific tasks, and is paid a loading (between 20%-30%) in addition to the ordinary time rate in lieu of personal leave (annual leave and sick leave) and payment for public holidays.

Benefits for employers

Casual work can provide coverage of a full or over-time position while maintaining continuity of customer service and productivity.

Casual workers can cover for others during periods of leave.

Allows temporarily increased work demands to be met.

Enables longer business hours.

Benefits for employees

Ability to maintain employment and skills while meeting family or community obligations or pursuing other interests.

Ability to keep up with technological change through continuity of employment.

If working casually for more than one employer, allows learning and maintaining a range of skills and experience.

May provide employment opportunities for those for whom full-time work would be difficult.

While casual workers are not entitled to annual or sick leave, it is usual that a 20%-30% loading is paid in lieu.

Casual Work

Things to work through

Employers

If hours worked are sporadic careful planning is required so employees are not expected to take on the workload or responsibilities of a full-time employee.

A system of recording the exact number of hours worked by employees is required.

In certain industrial instruments employers are required to observe specific employment conditions for casual workers.

Things to work through

Employees

Working on a casual basis may suit some employees, for others it may be a necessity. However, employees need to be aware that working on a casual basis does not have the same entitlements as other types of work such as sick leave or annual leave, but do include a leave loading.

The nature of employment is often tenuous, irregular and intermittent.

Other things to check or clarify include:

Extra loading must be included in the hourly rate for casual employees.

Under the Superannuation Guarantee Act the employer should pay contributions to the employee's superannuation fund if the employee earns over a certain amount per month. Some industrial instruments may provide an entitlement in excess of the minimum entitlement. Employees need to clarify this with their employer or superannuation fund.

Shift Work

According to the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations, shift work is generally described as a system of work falling outside the normal spread of hours fixed by awards for day workers. It can either be a system whereby one shift of workers is replaced by another (continuous shift work) or a system where workers are permanently working a shift outside normal business hours.

Although shift work is traditionally associated with manufacturing or critical services it is expanding, particularly into the retail and service industries as demand for these services increase.

Benefits for employers

As demand for products and services increase, so does the demand for continuous production or servicing. If required, shiftwork allows a 24-hour, seven-day coverage of production or services.

Benefits for employees

Shift work can provide opportunities and benefits not available to day workers. Days off during the 'working week' can allow the shift worker to fulfil caring responsibilities or other commitments.

Often shift workers have several days off in a row allowing them to assist with childcare or pursue hobbies or daytime study.

Another advantage to having days off in the working week is the availability to do those things which day workers have to take special time out of their week to do, such as shopping, paying bills or attending medical appointments.

Shift Work

Things to work through

Employers

Shift work is associated with a number of problems for workers including stress, health problems, sleep deprivation, strain on domestic and social life and relationships.

To minimise these problems the following issues should be considered:

- research points to consultative mechanisms as being of benefit to employees when undertaking shiftwork. When designing shift work rosters it is vital to take into consideration the needs and preferences of employees. This may mean having regular meetings during which time shift rosters are worked out between the employer and employees.
- keep long work shifts to a minimum
- give the employee her/his work roster well ahead of time so other commitments can be worked around
- occupational health and safety issues must be taken into account when designing rosters. For example: make sure the employee has adequate supervision and training. Fatigue (which can lead to unsafe practices) is a prime concern for shift workers; and consideration could also be given to different lengths of shifts or keeping consecutive night shifts to a minimum.
- be flexible with arrangements. If an employee needs to change a roster for family or other commitments, try to accommodate their needs as best as possible.
- transport to place of work and car parking also need to be considered.

Shift Work

Things to work through

Employers (cont)

- when embarking on shift rosters for the first time it is advisable to contract consultants who specialise in design of shift work rosters and can advise on 'best practice' initiatives.

Things to work through

Employees

Shift work may suit the lifestyle of some and may hinder others. Issues for workers with caring responsibilities include finding child care flexible enough to coincide with the hours of work.

Employees may need to negotiate with the employer on an individual basis if time off to do other things is required. While it is harder on shift work to arrange flexibility in hours worked, arrangements can be made, such as shift swapping to allow employees the time to fulfil other obligations.

Shift work not only affects the shift worker but those with whom they live. Often the family of the shift worker needs to adjust its activities to include the shift worker. They may also need to accommodate the shift worker's sleep times. At times, the shift worker's partner may need to take on extra domestic responsibilities.

Shift work can be associated with a number of health problems. See the section above for strategies to discuss with your employer to help minimise health problems.

Working on Location/Away From Home

Typically, workers in this category work for an extended number of days on (often working away from home) and then have an extended number of days off.

Example

Workers in this category are generally required to work away from home and may be required to work in isolated locations. They generally work a roster involving 10 days on, four off, or nine days on and five off every 28 days.

Benefits for employers

Some work requires employees to be on-site for a period of time. Where this is the case, working on location/away from home is a practical solution.

Benefits for employees

Similar to shift work, this type of work arrangement can provide opportunities and have benefits not available to day workers. Workers under this arrangement usually have several days off in a row which, depending on the employee's circumstances, can be used for such things as: assisting with childcare, helping out at a child's school or pursuing hobbies or daytime study.

Another advantage to having several consecutive days off is the availability to do those things day workers have to take special time out of their work day to do, such as shop, pay bills or attend medical appointments.

Working on Location/Away From Home

Things to work through

Employers

Working under these conditions means workers are often isolated from their family and community. This can bring extra stresses to their daily life. However, strategies may be put in place to minimise these and the isolation they and their family members encounter. For this type of work, the following flexible work practices could be considered.

- At times it may be necessary or preferable for an employee to take members of their family to their work site for the duration of their block of working days. As long as it is agreed that the employee does not need to undertake caring/parental responsibilities while working (that is, there is another adult with them to carry out these duties), this practice could greatly assist families.
- On occasion the employee may wish to extend their time away and spend extra time with their family. Providing they have accrued recreation leave and they are not needed back immediately, this practice could also assist families.
- Isolation from the work base can also be a problem. Regular contact and meetings with other workers in the field and supervisors can assist with this.

As problems faced by these workers and their families are different from those of day workers, a support group for families of these workers may assist them as well as the worker.

In cases where it is necessary for the worker's family to live in remote or isolated areas, regular meetings and support from others in similar circumstances would be beneficial.

Working on Location/Away From Home

Things to work through

Employees

This work arrangement may be advantageous for some and a burden for others. Those with caring responsibilities would find it difficult and there are many issues to consider, for example, finding child care flexible enough to deal with the nature of the work or having other family members available to take on the added caring responsibilities.

This work arrangement not only affects employees but the people with whom they live. The family of the employee often needs to adjust their social activities to include the employee. At times, the employee's family is required to take on extra domestic duties.

Strategies need to be considered to assist not only the employee but also their family.

Why Provide Leave Options?

It makes sense to adopt flexible work practices - including leave options.

The benefits to be gained for employers who offer leave entitlements include:

- increased productivity
- reduced stress in the workplace
- improved morale and commitment
- increased staff retention
- increased ability to attract and recruit new staff, particularly those who are planning on having children
- reduced recruitment and training costs

There are also minimum entitlements required by industrial instruments regarding leave options. The only exception to this rule is casual workers or some part-time workers who are instead paid a leave loading (for sick leave, annual leave, etc.).

To ensure you know exactly which entitlements are applicable to the workplace it is important to check the relevant award, registered agreement or legislation under which you are working. However, in general, employees are entitled to the following types of leave:

Types of Leave

Annual Leave

Employees who have been employed continuously for 12 months are entitled to four weeks annual leave. Some types of work, for example shift work, sometimes allow additional leave. Many of the awards also include a leave loading provision.

Employees who wish to take leave before completing their 12 months of service may be entitled to pro-rata annual leave. Awards or agreements should be checked regarding the taking of annual leave.

Annual and Personal Leave

Annual Leave – Making It More Flexible

Allowing employees to take annual leave in single day absences. This may assist employees with caring responsibilities and they could use the leave to attend appointments or look after dependent family members, if unable to access carer's leave. It should be ensured all leave is not used in this way, as it is important that employees have a reasonable block of annual leave as well.

Personal Leave

Sick leave and carers leave have now been incorporated into most awards as personal leave. Personal leave can be taken for personal injury and sickness or to care for an immediate family or household member who is sick and requires care. The minimum entitlement to personal leave is 76 hours per annum.

Further entitlements vary, so check the award or agreement you are working under. Often employees are allowed a number of hours/days each year where a medical certificate is not needed and a number where a medical certificate is required. It is important for employees to notify the employer as soon as they know they cannot work due to ill health and advise of the reason for non-attendance.

Personal Leave – Making It More Flexible

Under federal and state awards, personal leave is calculated in hours and can be used for this purpose. However, where personal leave is still calculated in days, employees could be offered the choice of using hours that could be used for attending medical appointments.

Parental Leave

Personal Leave – Making It More Flexible (cont)

There are a minimum number of paid personal leave hours/days per year to which an employee is entitled. Some employers offer more than the minimum per year. It may also be helpful at this time if employees could negotiate access to other types of leave they may have accrued (for example annual, long service leave or accrued flexitime) for the purposes of caring for an immediate family or household member.

Parental Leave

Federal and state awards entitle parents to a basic entitlement of 52 weeks unpaid parental leave to care for a newborn or a newly-adopted child.

Parental leave is generally available to one parent at a time, however both parents may take simultaneous leave for a week from the time of birth or three weeks from adoption. Most awards allow an employee to request an extension of the amount of simultaneous leave up to a maximum of eight weeks.

Under most federal and state awards an employee can request to extend the period of parental leave for a further 12 months. The employer may only refuse a request on reasonable grounds related to the effect on the workplace or the employer's business.

To be eligible for parental leave, the employee has to have completed at least 12 months continuous service with the employer by the expected date of birth/adoption.

Also, there are certain requirements expected of the employee, for example giving due notice to the employer of leave of absence. Check your award or agreement to find out full entitlements and requirements.

Bereavement Leave

Parental Leave Making It more Flexible

Some employers now provide a period of paid parental leave. Employees may then take the balance of the leave (up to a maximum of 52 weeks or as extended) as unpaid or may choose to use a combination of accrued entitlements of either annual or long-service leave.

Making flexible working arrangements when parents return to the workforce is also helpful. Parents returning to work after parental leave may initially like to work part-time for a period of time. Under most state and federal awards an employee has a right to request to return to work on a part-time basis until the child reaches school age. Employees need to be aware this may affect their entitlement to long service leave and should seek advice before entering into any such arrangement.

It is also of benefit to the employer and employee to keep the employee abreast of news and issues in the workplace while the employee is on parental leave. This could be in the form of minutes of staff meetings or relevant newsletters being sent out to the employee.

Bereavement or Compassionate Leave

This type of leave is taken on the death of a close family member. The usual entitlement is up to three days. Employees need to check their award or agreement to see for which family members leave may be taken.

An employee may take additional unpaid bereavement leave with agreement of the employer.

Long Service Leave

Bereavement Leave Making It More Flexible

While this type of leave generally covers the death of a spouse, child, parent or other household family member, this could be expanded to include other family members not living with the employee (for example brother or sister, parents-in-law or grandparents).

The length of paid or unpaid leave days could also be extended, particularly if there are extenuating circumstances such as time needed to travel to the funeral.

Long Service Leave

Entitlements for long service leave are contained in federal awards or state long-service leave legislation.

The minimum requirement under the *Long Service Leave Act 1976* is 13 weeks' leave after 15 years continuous employment. All employees in the public sector and local government have an entitlement to long service leave of 13 weeks after 10 years continuous employment. An employee who has been employed continuously for seven years may be entitled to pro-rata long service leave payment. However, there are various conditions or requirements attached to pro-rata payment. It is best to check with this Act and/or your industrial instrument.

Long Service Leave – Making It More Flexible

Like annual leave, employees may be allowed to take long service leave in smaller blocks – for instance, one week. This may especially assist employees with caring responsibilities who could use the leave to attend appointments or look after dependent family members. Once again, check the relevant act or industrial instrument.

Carers' Room and Telephone Access

Some employers offer workplace facilities to assist employees with dependent care responsibilities. These facilities not only benefit employees but also the employer as they can result in less absenteeism and allow employees to get on with the job knowing support facilities are in place, should they need them. Employers may like to consider the following workplace facilities:

Family/Carers' Room

An organisation may create a family room to enable the employee to stay in the workplace and continue working while caring for a family member.

The room is usually used in emergency situations (such as a child with a minor illness, or a breakdown in childcare arrangements), but could be designed for ongoing use (such as allowing small children to use the room after school hours).

Facilities in the room usually include things to entertain children as well as a workstation for the employee.

Facilities for children could include books, toys, a bed, small chairs and table, drawing pad and pencils and possibly a television and video (with earplugs or headphones).

Facilities for the employee could include: a workstation with a telephone and a computer with access to the internet and software packages appropriate to the business.

Providing Telephone Access

Employees who don't otherwise have access to a telephone could be provided with telephone access not only to make calls but also to receive them. This is a simple and cost-effective way of assisting employees with their family needs.

Facilities for Nursing Mothers

Providing Telephone Access (cont)

This is particularly important for parents with young children who may need to check whether they have safely got to their place of child care or home from school. This is also of assistance in the case where parents have sick children at home and wish to check on their progress.

If employees can be reassured about their children's well being they are more likely to be effective participants in the workplace.

Facilities/Breaks for Nursing Mothers

Many women return to work while still breast-feeding. Many workplaces now have an increased awareness of the requirements for flexibility including the requirements of mothers who want to combine paid work while breastfeeding.

Nursing mothers need a private room that is clean and can be locked. Facilities should include: a small fridge/freezer (for storing milk); power points; preferably a basin (or access to one near by) and comfortable seating.

Time for expressing milk or feeding a baby needs to be negotiated between the employer and employee well before the employee returns to work. This may take the form of extended flexitime (using lunchtimes and other breaks) or reduced paid hours.

Employers and employees can both benefit by contacting the Australian Breastfeeding Association. The association has numerous information booklets and advice outlets to help mothers successfully combine work and breastfeeding. The association can also provide advice to the employer in terms of requirements of nursing mothers (lactation breaks, facilities, child care, flexible work options, etc).

Employers who provide the above facilities and breaks are eligible to apply for a *Mother Friendly Workplace Award* through the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

Scheduling and Family Assistance

Scheduling Meetings and Training

In a flexible workplace meeting and training times need to fit around the hours of all employees. Even employees who work regular hours may have problems with meeting or training times which start too early or finish too late, particularly if employees have caring responsibilities. Any 'outside hours' work could create difficulties. This may take a little more planning but being aware of the needs of all employees will create positive benefits for employer/employee relations and create a more productive workforce as all employees will be given equal access to work opportunities.

Work and Family Information/Referral

This is an inexpensive way to assist employees. An information stand containing brochures and literature regarding all aspects of combining work and family is of benefit to all employees. Good places to start sourcing such material include: local government/councils; community health centres; Women Tasmania; Australian Breastfeeding Association; local child care centres; and state and federal agencies dealing with childcare.

Some employers contract a professional counselling service for employees to use for any issue that may be affecting their work or family life.

Assisting with Dependent Care Responsibilities

An information stand like the one mentioned above dealing with care of the elderly and issues to do with child care (brochures on local child care centres or types of care) is a good and inexpensive way to assist employees with caring responsibilities.

Some employers refer employees to relevant agencies dealing with care of the elderly or child care issues.

Some employers subsidise childcare costs for employees. Others join together to establish before and after school care close to the workplace. Some employers reserve places in local child care centres for children of employees.

Determining Employees' Needs

Needs Analysis

What may suit some employers and employees will not suit others. Each organisation has different requirements, just as each employee has. The most effective way of determining which flexible work options your organisation needs is to do a needs analysis. Basically this is gathering and putting together information about your organisation and your employees. There are many ways of doing a needs analysis depending on the size of your organisation, time available and resources. Below are some suggestions.

Determining Employees' Needs

Group/Individual Meetings

In the case of smaller organisations, employers and employees could hold meetings to discuss work and family issues, including how changing the workplace could assist with work and family life. It may be an idea to bring in a consultant for the initial meeting to discuss flexible work options and the benefits to both employers and employees. The consultant could go through the pros and cons of flexible work options for your organisation.

Alternatively, employees could meet individually with either a consultant or the employer to better determine individual requirements.

Conducting a Survey

A survey of employees is also a useful tool for identifying flexible work options.

Along with the survey it would be beneficial to provide some information on balancing work and family issues. A policy document may be appropriate at this time, stating the organisation's intention to consider 'family friendly work options' in order to improve productivity and assist employees with caring responsibilities.

Determining Employees' Needs

Determining Employees' Needs (cont)

Conducting a Survey (cont)

The survey could identify:

- The employees' caring responsibilities (particularly, dependent care responsibilities)
- special needs of employees to do with caring/other responsibilities
- which flexible work options would most suit employees. For this purpose, employees could be given a list of flexible work options suitable to the organisation and asked to tick or prioritise which option/s they would consider using if they were available
- whether employees are aware of any other flexible work options they think would assist them and other employees
- whether employees think having flexible work options would enhance their work performance and in what way
- whether employees think having such options would assist them in balancing work/life

From the above, the employer can firstly determine what percentage of employees have caring/other responsibilities and to what extent this impacts on their working life. Employers can also determine which are the most popular flexible work options. It may be the case of starting with these and gradually introducing others.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Determining the Organisation's Needs (cont)

For larger organisations it may be wise to hire a consultant specialising in this area to assist in determining what is feasible for the organisation.

It is important to work out the costs and benefits of introducing flexible work practices. Many flexible work options are cost-neutral. Some may cost in dollars as well as in time, resources and training. However, these costs should be weighed alongside the benefits (dollars and otherwise) to the organisation and the employee.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

A cost-benefit analysis for each flexible work option asks what are the: objectives; options; outcomes; and costs (recruitment, training, staff turnover) of introducing or not introducing the initiative.

Other questions to ask are:

- who will use the work option?
- who does it affect? (for example employees, those who implement it)
- are there other factors and benefits? (corporate image, complying with legislation/EEO principles, increase in commitment to organisation; increase in productivity)

A cost-benefit analysis can be a time-consuming and often complex process; however it will assist in determining what is best for the organisation. Below are some things to consider during this process:

Look at the flexible work options you are considering and calculate the costs. For example flexitime and work and family information stands are fairly cost neutral. However, setting up a room for nursing mothers, a family room, providing telephone access or allowing for more leave entitlements above the minimum requirements may involve additional cost.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Determining the Organisation's Needs (cont)

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Calculate the costs/benefits of providing flexible work options and thereby retaining valuable employees:

- reducing costs associated with training new staff – make sure you factor in not only training but overall workplace experience
- costs associated with temporarily employing casual workers until you can recruit and retrain new employees
- costs associated with the recruitment process such as advertising and resources involved in interviewing new employees

Look to 'best practice' organisations to work out the reduction in absenteeism by introducing flexible work practices.

Look to 'best practice' organisations to calculate improvement in productivity levels (less stress and improved commitment and morale of employees often lead to improved productivity).

Look at improvements that might be made in customer relations (for example by meeting peak demands and providing continuity in staff).

Work out how flexible work options could assist the organisation in meeting its objectives.

Consider the competitive edge you have in attracting talented employees to your organisation.

Factor in occupational health and safety issues and how these may improve in a more flexible work environment.

Implementing Options

Determining the Organisation's Needs (cont)

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Note there is now a lot of research material available which details the business argument for flexible workplaces.

This research often outlines case studies of organisations that have saved themselves literally tens of thousands of dollars by retaining staff and increasing efficiency and productivity through the introduction of flexible work practices.

Refer to the 'Examples of Best Practice' section of this guide for further information on organisations that have successfully introduced flexible work practices.

Implementing Flexible Work Options

Once the organisation has decided on the flexible work options to be adopted, a communication strategy should be developed. Communication with employees and training of managers are the keys to successful use of flexible work practices. Many organisations have flexible work practices on offer but staff are ill-equipped to implement them. The managing and implementation of flexible work options makes or breaks a flexible workplace. Below are things to consider when implementing flexible work options.

Checking Legalities

Compare your proposals against the appropriate registered agreement or award, ensuring there are no issues that may affect implementing them.

Eventually you may need to change a registered agreement to reflect the organisation's new policies in relation to flexible work options.

Implementing Options

Implementing Flexible Work Options

Initial Information

Ensure all employees and managers are aware of what flexible work options are available. This can be done through newsletters, an official letter to each employee or a general meeting where options are discussed and information brochures handed out.

Organisations often include practical examples of flexible work options in information material to assist employees and managers implement them.

Facilities/Arrangements

Consult your occupational health and safety area or specialist for requirements of certain flexible work options (for example home-based work).

Consider all equipment needs in establishing family rooms, rooms for nursing mothers and those working from home.

Ensure meeting and training times do not exclude those who are now working more flexible hours.

Requirements of Managers

It is essential managers are trained/briefed on the options and how to implement them. All managers need to recognise a flexible workplace is an organisational goal that will benefit both employees and the organisation.

A large organisation may need to appoint work-place representatives/managers who are fully trained in flexible work options and who may address employee issues as they arise.

Implementing Options

Implementing Flexible Work Options (cont)

Requirements of Managers (cont)

Ensure managers understand flexible work options should be equally available to all employees, including supervisors and managers.

Managers need to be aware of the relevant legislation that applies in their workplace. They also need to know about the *Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act 1998* which states a person must not discriminate against another on a number of grounds including age, gender, pregnancy, and family responsibility.

Requirements of Employers

Identify clear objectives for each flexible work option. For example in the case of job sharing or part-time work, make sure employees know what the work requirements are.

Don't fall into the trap of giving a full-time workload to those who are working fewer hours. Re-designing position descriptions and performance indicators for those positions are essential.

Design written agreements for staff who wish to work more flexible hours stating all requirements and conditions.

Those working from home will need to be managed differently. You may need to develop a contract stating specific work goals and timelines.

Trial Period

Initially data should be collected before introducing flexible work options so there are benchmarks with which to compare results.

To begin with it is advisable to implement flexible work options for a trial period, for example three to six months.

Implementing Options

Implementing Flexible Work Options (cont)

Trial Period (cont)

At the end of the trial period resolve any issues through discussions with employees and managers, and make appropriate changes.

Monitoring Outcomes

Monitoring of outcomes should be done after the initial trial period and on an annual basis thereafter.

Like the needs analysis, there are many ways to determine outcomes. A survey of all employees to gauge general morale and work satisfaction is a good first step. This type of information can be just as useful as the collection of statistics. Statistical data to consider collecting includes:

- Staff turnover. Before you introduce flexible work options compare the following associated costs:
 - training new staff – make sure you factor in not only training but overall workplace experience
 - number of payout of entitlements to staff who leave
 - temporarily employing casual workers while you recruit and retrain new employees
 - the recruitment process such as advertising and resources involved in interviewing new employees
- Absentee rates.
- Take up rates of flexible work options (by income, gender, age, etc.).
- Costs of work options.
- Rate of return to work after parental leave (how soon do they return, what work options they are using after return to work) and associated costs and benefits.

Implementing Options

Implementing Flexible Work Options (cont)

Monitoring Outcomes (cont)

- Improvements in productivity.

If the take-up of some flexible work options is low, endeavour to find out the reasons. Perhaps employees do not need this work option at this time or perhaps it is not being implemented correctly.

Useful Links

- **The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations – Fresh Ideas for Work and Family**
 - Why flexible work arrangements are good for small business
 - Why family friendly policies are good for small business
 - How your business can benefit
 - 20 Simple and Inexpensive Family Friendly Ideas
- **Workplace Standards Tasmania**
- [Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner](#)
- **Awards/Recognitions:**
 - The Tasmanian Government's Employer of Choice Program
 - [2009 National Work/Life Balance Awards](#)
 - Diversity at Work Awards



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