



# Is flexible working right for your organisation?

This resource guides leaders and managers in determining whether flexible working is right for your organisation. It considers both the benefits and potential challenges.

## Why flexible working?

Flexible working is about *when* people work (eg start and finish times), *where* they work (eg workplace or from home), and *how* they work (eg job sharing, part-time hours or hot desking).

Changes due to COVID-19 show flexible working can be as effective as traditional ways of working.

- Given the right technology people can be just as productive, if not more.
- In New Zealand and overseas the trend is towards more flexible working across different types of settings.
- With five generations now in the workforce with different needs and expectations, many people want the choice of flexible working.
- The Ministry of Health has signalled the need to increase the use of digital resources, telesupport and e-therapy solutions to enable greater access and choice of services.
- As services become more flexible in the way support is provided to people, this may affect the way staff work too.

- For people accessing services, the COVID-19 period shows some types of support can be successfully provided remotely. Telesupport – support provided by phone or video call – is generally effective in mental health settings and appears promising for addiction and disability settings, depending on people's support needs.<sup>1</sup>
- Telesupport can aid better engagement and service access for people, reduce wait times and travel, and enhance the delivery of more whānau centred support.

Every person has a legal right to request flexible ways of working at any time. Organisations have a responsibility to reasonably consider all requests; see [Employment NZ](#).



<sup>1</sup>American Psychiatric Association. (2020). *The Evidence Base in Telepsychiatry*. <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/telepsychiatry/toolkit/evidence-base>

Lin, L., Casteel, D., Shigekawa, R., et al. (2019). Telemedicine-delivered treatment interventions for substance use disorders: A systematic review. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 101, 38-49

Zhou, L., & Parmanto, B. (2019). Reaching people with disabilities in underserved areas through digital interventions: Systematic review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 21(10), e12981.

## Benefits of flexible working

Flexible working offers a range of benefits to both organisations and staff.<sup>2</sup>

For organisations	For staff
Improved productivity, performance and engagement	Improved health and wellbeing
Lower turnover and costs, improved recruitment and retention, increased diversity	Greater work-life balance
Reduced sick leave	Greater job satisfaction
Reduced organisational costs such as office space	Self-empowerment
Improved organisational reputation and sustainability	Autonomy

## Flexibility enables diversity and inclusion

Flexible working arrangements allow organisations to attract a more diverse workforce. Greater workforce diversity improves responsiveness to the diversity of people accessing services.

- People with disabilities or chronic health conditions may find flexible working arrangements particularly important. Reasonable accommodations should be made under the Human Rights Act 1993. Flexible working may allow people to enter the workforce and/or work more than they may have been able to otherwise. Employment opportunities also increase people's wellbeing, sense of connection and purpose.
- Flexible working supports recruitment and retention of people caring for younger children and other whānau members. Nearly all whānau carers are of working age (15 to 65 years).
- Older people transitioning to retirement often seek greater work-life balance.
- People living further away or with long commutes may be attracted to work in your organisation.
- People from different religious and cultural groups may prefer more flexible working arrangements.

Disabled people are:

- 3 x less likely to be in work
- 4 x more likely to leave work due to health reasons.<sup>3</sup>

Making [reasonable accommodations](#) helps organisations to confidently recruit, retain and support disabled people.

<sup>2</sup> Champions for Change. (2017). *Why have workplace flexibility*. <https://www.championsforchange.nz/>

Joyce, K., Pabayo, R., Critchley, J A., & Bambra, C. (2010). Flexible working conditions and their effects on employee health and wellbeing. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2.

Lyonette, C., & Baldauf, B. (2019). *Family friendly working policies and practices: Motivations, influences and impacts for employers*. University of Warwick.

New Zealand Work Research Institute. (2014). *Telework briefing: A future of work programme report*. New Zealand Work Research Institute.

Employment New Zealand. (n.d.). *Flexible work Toolkit*. <https://www.employment.govt.nz>

<sup>3</sup> Statistics NZ. (2019). *Labour market statistics (disability): June 2019 quarter*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/>

Each generation in the workforce has different needs and expectations. There are also many similarities, like flexible working arrangements and use of technology.<sup>4</sup> Expectations can be managed by appreciating the differences and focusing on what people have in common.

**Traditionalists (born before 1946) may:**

- » prefer in-person contact to use of technology
- » prefer clear job expectations
- » desire flexibility regarding the number of hours worked per week
- » want to stay in the workforce for both personal and financial reasons.

**Baby boomers (born 1946-1964) may:**

- » desire flexibility, particularly phased retirement plans
- » overcommit to work
- » want to stay in the workforce beyond retirement age for both personal and financial reasons.

**Generation X (born 1965-1979) may:**

- » prefer a hands-off management style that promotes autonomy
- » desire flexibility in how and where their work gets done
- » be driven by clear, measurable goals
- » desire work-life balance.

**Generation Y/Millennials (born 1980-1995) may:**

- » be extremely fluent in technology use
- » value social and corporate responsibility (including commitment to diversity)
- » expect organisations to provide flexibility enabling a positive work-life balance.

**Generation Z (born 1996-present) may:**

- » be even more technologically fluent than millennials
- » prefer using technology rather than in-person contact.

<sup>4</sup> Bursch, D., & Kelly, K. (2014). *Managing the multigenerational workplace*. UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School.

Murray, K., Toulson, P., & Legg, S. (2011). Generational cohorts' expectations in the workplace: A study of New Zealanders. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 49(4), 476-493.

# How do we make flexible working work for people, teams and organisations?

Flexible working needs to be right for the organisation, team, role and person.

## Who suits flexible working?

Flexible working suitability depends on a range of factors.

### The needs of the organisation and people accessing your services.

- Your organisation should be able to continue your core work without negatively affecting the people you work with.

### Suitability of different roles.

- Flexible working suits roles where support can be provided using technology (eg phone or video support), along with those that are project-based or involve less frequent in-person contact.

### Individual people and preferences.

- People need to be able to work independently with little supervision and social contact. Being self-disciplined and self-motivated is important, as are good organisational, time-management and communication skills.

## Key success factors

- Leadership commitment and modelling expectations.
- An organisational culture of trust and openness.
- Good communication, including flexible working expectations.
- A clear policy outlining what is included and expectations. The policy should allow flexibility to tailor to people's individual circumstances.
- Collaboration between organisations and staff in designing mutually beneficial solutions.
- A shift in management style from behaviour-based (eg “managing by seeing” to outcome-based monitoring (eg “managing by results”). This requires clarity for people on expected outcomes.



A range of factors need to be considered to address potential challenges when implementing flexible working arrangements, particularly when working from home.

Challenges	Key questions
Communication	<p>Can things be communicated in more detail or overexplained to aid understanding?</p> <p>Has enough information been shared with others?</p> <p>Is everyone aware of the vision and expected outcomes?</p> <p>Do we need tools or apps to aid effective communication?</p>
Productivity	<p>Are there clear expectations and guidelines?</p> <p>How frequently are updates on work and priorities required?</p>
Staff connection	<p>How can staff stay connected?</p> <p>Could we meet in different ways to enable better connection (eg is video better than a phone call)?</p>
Co-worker relationships	<p>Would a hybrid model work best to maintain good relationships?</p> <p>Should staff be present for certain days each week?</p>
Work-home boundaries	<p>Are there clear boundaries between work and home?</p> <p>Are leaders modelling expected behaviours?</p>
Individual suitability	<p>Does flexible working suit everyone and their role?</p> <p>Is there a solution that works for everyone?</p>
Career progression	<p>How do we recognise and reward people's achievements and results?</p> <p>How do we foster an organisational culture that rewards good outcomes?</p>
Training and development	<p>What knowledge and skills do leaders and managers need to lead well?</p> <p>Would training benefit our team?</p>
Scheduling meetings	<p>Should staff be available for a core band of hours each day?</p> <p>Should we schedule regular team meetings?</p> <p>Should we schedule team meetings virtually so all team members feel equally included?</p>

## Finding the right balance for working from home

Finding a balance in the number of days for people wanting to work from home is important. A hybrid model may work best, involving some time in the workplace and some time at home. For full-time staff, between 2-3 days working from home works well to maintain a good organisational culture, and 3-4 days for staff engagement.<sup>5</sup> A different balance may be required for part-time workers.

If your organisation is unsure about flexible working, consider trialling it. Regular review and evaluation will help determine if and how it is working for people and the organisation.

## Key tools and resources

**Employment New Zealand's** [flexible work toolkit](#) provides practical tips and tools for small to medium organisations to understand and manage flexible working arrangements. This includes working from home guidelines, information for staff and examples of flexible work application forms.

**Champions for Change NZ** have various resources related to flexible working in New Zealand, including information on how to develop a flexible working policy.

**Business.govt.nz** has an [online flexible work policy builder](#).

**Te Pou** has resources containing [tips for phone and video support](#) and [remote supervision](#).

Resources for people working at home are available from [Blueprint for Learning](#) and [cipd.co.uk](#).

<sup>5</sup> Beauregard, T., Alexandra and Basile, K. A., & Canonico, E. (2019). Telework: outcomes and facilitators for employees. In: Landers, R.N. (ed.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Technology and Employee Behaviour* (pp. 511-543). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

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Gajendran, R. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2007). The good, the bad, and the unknown about telecommuting: meta-analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(6), 1524-1541.

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