

The pros and cons of flexible work arrangements

□ More and more, workplaces are investigating a shift to flexible work arrangements. What is all the buzz about and is it earned? Let's take a closer look at these arrangements, their benefits and some of the common pitfalls that they may bring.

What are flexible work arrangements?

Flexible work arrangements can come in different forms. One of the most well-known and widespread versions is **flex-time** which allows employees to make their own hours from a range of available options. Other flexible work arrangements include:

- **Flex-place:** Where the employee works from home or another location other than the office.
- **Compressed work week:** Where employees work longer hours over four days and have the fifth weekday off or another version of this arrangement.
- **Job sharing:** in which two people share one position, dividing the work and hours between them.

What are the advantages?

One of the most well cited advantages of flexible work arrangements is employee retention. It allows companies to keep valued employees who have dynamic lives. Here are some of the other pros of these arrangements:

- Employees can avoid rush hour commutes and have more time to actually work
- A more balanced work and home life, especially for employees with babies or young children
- Offices can more efficiently use space like desks and resources like computers
- Smaller businesses can save costs by having some employees telecommuting, reducing overhead
- Employees can work when they feel they are at their most productive, rather than have their hours dictated by a standard workday

What are the challenges?

Of course there are challenges as well to these new forms of scheduling work. For one, there is **stigma** surrounding these arrangements and people who make use of them are often seen as less hardworking than their peers, no matter their work quality. Women in particular suffer as a result of this bias when they are using it to be able to work and take care of families. Another bias commonly seen is one towards people who work in the mornings, as it is often unconsciously believed these people are sharper and more productive.

Some of the practical disadvantages of flexible work arrangements can include:

- Isolation for people who work from home
- Issues regarding trust and supervision
- Fairness for all staff and feelings of jealousy when some staff feel they have to work regular hours while others get to work "whenever they want"
- Distractions and non-work related tasks in a home environment

How to help flexible work arrangements succeed

To keep work productive and employees on track in flexible work arrangements, here are some tips for success:

- Have a written policy on the arrangement and be clear about expectations
- Communicate with all employees about the possibilities for the flexible work arrangements, and strive for equality and fairness
- Have employees keep track of their work hours and be transparent about when they are working
- Evaluate employees on their quality of work, not when they choose to work

When flexible work arrangements don't work

How will you know if flexible work arrangements just aren't working? Work not getting done or quality well below the level you are expecting is a sure sign the arrangement you have isn't working. Further, if there are hours that you need covered and they just aren't being filled - for example if most staff aren't coming in until 10am or taking Fridays off - you might need to reevaluate how hours are distributed. When flexible work arrangements are clearly not doing what they are meant to do - that is actually *increase* productivity and make a happier, healthier workplace, it is probably time to either change or forego the arrangements.

Flexible work arrangements are likely here to stay and we will see innovative ways of making work even more flexible emerge in the next decade. The key to transitioning smoothly into these arrangements and maintaining positive work environment is regular evaluation and open, effective communication.