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# **CROSS-SECTOR INSIGHTS ON ENABLING FLEXIBLE WORKING**

**Guide**  
June 2019

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

## Guide

# Cross-sector insights on enabling flexible working

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# 1 Executive summary

## Introduction

Research shows that many of us (87%) would like to work more flexibly – and there is a strong demand from men and women and across all age ranges. It also shows a need for greater take-up and equality of access to a range of flexible working practices. Despite this, the evidence about how flexible working is best implemented within organisations was previously limited. This guidance, therefore, explores what works in terms of flexible working arrangements and how best to implement them across sectors and roles.

## Aims

Our insight was developed from ten cross-sector case studies, supplemented with action learning events and diaries and provided rich qualitative data on the state of flexible working in the UK. The aim of this process was to: build the evidence base of what works when implementing flexible working; highlight creative flexible working practices to help break the perception that some areas and roles are off-limits to flexible working; and support organisations by equipping HR professionals and line managers with the knowledge they need around flexible working. The research findings have been used to provide guidance and develop practical tools for change.

## Learnings and guidance

To support organisations with implementing flexible working, the data was analysed and distilled to provide guidance about ways to:

- **improve and promote uptake of flexible working**
- **successfully implement flexible working**
- **measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working.**

## Recommendations

Our ten key recommendations for organisations that are considering implementing flexible working:

- 1 Clarify the benefits of flexible working to the organisation and to individuals.
- 2 Find the compelling hook or business imperative that will gain traction in the organisation.
- 3 Communicate to dispel myths around what flexible working is and who it is for, share successes and build communities.
- 4 Find creative ways to encourage a range of flexible working practices for all employees – both in terms of innovative flexible working initiatives and creative ways to build flexibility into job roles that have not traditionally been seen as suitable for flexible working.
- 5 Aim to hire flexibly and design the jobs to suit the flexible pattern (that is, full-time jobs are not squeezed into part-time hours).
- 6 Ensure ongoing access to development and career conversations for flexible workers.
- 7 Set the organisational context and consider organisational facilitators and barriers, including creating a supportive organisational culture, underpinned by leadership and HR support.
- 8 Gain manager buy-in through communicating benefits and sharing success stories and providing support and guidance.
- 9 Consider the facilitators and barriers at manager, team and individual levels.
- 10 Measure and evaluate flexible working and learn from trials using quantitative and qualitative measures.

## Further resources

A toolkit of practical materials and resources for HR, line managers and individual flexible workers has been developed alongside this guide and can be found at [cipd.co.uk/hr-flexible-working-toolkit](https://cipd.co.uk/hr-flexible-working-toolkit)

## 2 Introduction

While there is no single formally agreed definition of flexible working, we draw on De Menezes and Kelliher's<sup>1</sup> definition as 'working arrangements which allow employees to vary the amount, timing, or location of their work'. The term flexible working is used to cover a wide range of working arrangements, including (but not limited to): part-time working, job-sharing, flexitime, compressed hours, annualised hours and term-time-only working, working from home, and mobile working.

### Benefits of quality flexible working

Research shows that many of us (87%) would like to work more flexibly<sup>2</sup> – and there is a strong demand for flexible working from men and women and across all age ranges.<sup>3</sup> It can even motivate us more than financial incentives.<sup>4</sup> According to the case study organisations we examined, quality flexible working can help organisations:

- address skills shortages
- attract and retain talent and support diversity
- narrow their gender pay gap
- improve employee job satisfaction and loyalty
- support well-being
- empower organisations to be more agile and responsive to change.

Everyone in the UK has had a statutory right to request flexible working since 2014, and 99% of businesses say flexible working is important to competitiveness, business investment and job creation.<sup>5</sup> However, the number of people working flexibly has plateaued over the last decade<sup>6</sup> and most jobs (89%) are still not advertised as flexible.<sup>7</sup> The most common form of flexible working in the UK is part-time hours, which is in place for just over a quarter of the workforce,<sup>8</sup> but there is a need for organisations to promote the uptake of a greater range of flexible work practices to all employees to suit organisational and individual needs.

### Take-up and equality of access

The CIPD's *UK Working Lives 2019* survey<sup>9</sup> includes a focus on flexible working arrangements and work-life balance. While the findings show that 54% of UK workers are already working flexibly in some way, with those in higher-level occupations most able to use flexible working to support their work-life balance, we also see that flexible working is not delivering for all workers. There remain unmet demands and a lack of equality of access to flexible working. Among employees who have no access to flexible working, 78% would like it. More than half the workforce (55%) would like to work flexibly in at least one form that is not currently available to them. Employees on flexible working arrangements that reduce their hours are more likely to indicate negative career implications. This has implications for equality, as these arrangements are more likely to be used by women.

1 De Menezes, L.M. and Kelliher, C. (2011) Flexible working and performance: a systematic review of the evidence for a business case. *International Journal of Management Reviews*. Vol 13, No 4. pp452-74.

2 Timewise Flexible Jobs Index.

3 Timewise and EY, *Flexible working: a talent imperative. A research study into the UK workforce: who wants flexibility, for what reasons, and how much it matters to them*.

4 Eltringham, M. (2017) *Nine out of ten employees believe flexible working is key to boosting productivity*.

5 CBI and Pertemps. (2017) *Employment trends survey*.

6 CIPD. (2019) *Megatrends: flexible working*. London: CIPD.

7 Timewise Flexible Jobs Index.

8 CIPD. (2019) *Megatrends: flexible working*.

9 Wheatley, D. and Gifford, J. (2019) *UK working lives 2019*. London: CIPD.

Greater take-up and equality of access to flexible working will take substantial cultural change. The people profession has a key role to play in unlocking the full benefits of flexible working. By effectively embedding, monitoring and evaluating flexible working provisions, we can improve work and working lives for the benefit of individuals, businesses and society.

The CIPD is supporting change in this area by producing this practical guidance for people professionals and new tools for flexible workers, people managers and people professionals. These follow our publication of [guidance on flexible hiring](#) and the [business case for flexible working](#) earlier in 2019. We are co-chairing with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) the government-supported Flexible Working Task Force, which is campaigning to increase the uptake of flexible working.

The CIPD has also rolled out its [Steps Ahead Mentoring programme](#) to jobseekers who find it hard to access the labour market due to a lack of flexible working and have piloted a Flexible Hiring Champions programme in partnership with Timewise: upskilling 20 volunteers to champion flexible hiring in their own organisations.

### **Evidence-based guidance**

Despite widespread demand for flexibility and significant policy drivers to improve flexible working and increase its use, the evidence relating to how flexible working can best be implemented had so far been drawn from a fairly small body of research. In collaboration with Affinity Health at Work, the CIPD therefore conducted in-depth research designed to guide practice around flexible working and, in particular, to:

- Build the evidence base of what works when it comes to flexible working and the impact that flexible working interventions can have.
- Highlight creative flexible working practices across all levels within organisations and in roles and areas of organisations that are not traditionally seen as suitable for flexible working (for example customer-facing roles, or in the manufacturing sector), to help change the perception that some areas of organisations are off-limits when it comes to flexible working.
- Support organisations with the process of implementing flexible working by equipping the people profession and line managers with the practical knowledge they need to:
  - improve and promote uptake of flexible working
  - successfully implement flexible working
  - measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working.

Taking a case study approach, supplemented with action learning events and reflection diaries, the rich, qualitative data was then processed using thematic analysis to identify the overarching themes.

A review of the broader literature suggested that facilitators and barriers of flexible working include individual, colleague/team, manager and organisational factors: see [Appendix 1](#).

### 3 Case studies and action learning

Nine organisations contributed case studies and, in each organisation, interviews were conducted with an HR professional, a line manager and a flexible worker in order to get a rounded perspective; plus a further case study was gathered from a job-share partnership (in which the job-sharers had worked together across different employers).

Across the different case study organisations, there was a wide range of examples of flexible working, including: part-time, job-share, compressed hours, term-time-only contracts, flexibility over working days, working from home, annualised hours, staggered hours (with late starts/early finishes), four-day week (with full-time pay), ad hoc flexibility, and temporary flexibility (such as career breaks and sabbaticals). Table 1 provides a list of the case study organisations and highlights examples of flexible working at senior levels and in roles and areas of organisations that are not traditionally seen as suitable for flexible working.

**Table 1: Summary of organisational case studies**

Organisation	Business sector	Flexible working in roles and areas that are not traditionally seen as suitable for flexible working	Flexible working at senior levels
<b>Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust</b>	Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible working is happening throughout the organisation: nurses, doctors, nurse consultants, senior managers, band 7 and band 8a nurses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assistant directors working part-time</li> <li>General managers working 9-day fortnight</li> <li>Senior people working flexibly at home</li> <li>Senior consultants with portfolio careers</li> </ul>
<b>Enterprise Rent-A-Car</b>	Retail (transportation solutions provider)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The call centre is entirely staffed by homeworkers, who control their own flexible work patterns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examples of employees working alternative work patterns at all levels</li> </ul>
<b>GLF Schools</b>	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible working in teaching roles and teaching assistants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A job-share head teacher role</li> <li>Deputy head teachers and assistant head teachers who are part-time</li> <li>A head of department working 3 days a week on a trial basis and a job-share head of department</li> </ul>
<b>Hachette</b>	Publisher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receptionists, print room and post room staff who may swap their shifts</li> <li>A male schools conference producer who works term-time hours only</li> <li>Sales representatives who work from home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior female fiction publisher works part-time 4 days a week and 1 day a week from home (ad hoc).</li> <li>A female deputy managing director works her core hours and then works her additional hours flexibly.</li> <li>The CEO of the company, and a COO of two divisions both work from home one day per week where possible.</li> </ul>
<b>Lendlease</b>	Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project/on-site workers doing construction work with flexible working arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior examples of employees working part-time and working from home (for example head of marketing working 4 days a week)</li> <li>A managing director took a 12-week sabbatical</li> <li>Senior site-based examples of women in construction working shifted hours</li> </ul>
<b>Pharmaceutical Research Associates</b>	Clinical research, life sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexibility in customer services team, which needs to provide 24/7 support to clients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior management team members have flexibility over start and finish times</li> </ul>

<b>Schneider Electric</b>	Energy/ manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job-sharing in call centre roles</li> <li>• Manufacturing roles (with a workforce made up largely of males with long service) with flexible working arrangements</li> <li>• Customer-facing (for example project managers) working part-time</li> <li>• Flexible working in sales/field services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A director working part-time</li> <li>• The senior HR team includes people who work flexibly</li> <li>• Senior-level employees in other areas of the business (reporting to the vice president) work flexibly</li> <li>• At senior levels, roles can generally be flexible on an informal basis</li> </ul>
<b>Transport for London</b>	Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility amongst operational roles (both station and train-based roles)</li> <li>• Flexibility amongst call centre shift workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior employees and directors of TfL who work flexibly</li> </ul>
<b>United Living</b>	Housing (provider of refurbished and new-build living solutions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project managers/site managers/assistant site managers</li> <li>• Quantity surveyors</li> <li>• Health and safety teams</li> <li>• Finance team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior managers involved in flexible working pilots, with a number acting as champions</li> </ul>

Full summaries of the case studies and practice highlights have been put together in the accompanying *Enabling Flexible Working: Cross-sector case studies and practice highlights*.

In addition to the case studies, approximately 15 organisations took part at the action learning events in September 2018 and January 2019, with the majority of attendees working in HR or diversity and inclusion roles. Attendees participated in pair, small group and large group discussions. Four participants further contributed written reflections in the form of diaries. These together highlighted the greatly varied approach to flexible working implementation and the different stages organisations were at on the flexible working journey. A digest of the action learning events and reflection diaries is included in [Appendix 2](#).

The evidence collected was then analysed and distilled to provide the following guidance for organisations to implement flexible working, specifically on ways to:

- improve and promote uptake of flexible working
- successfully implement flexible working
- measure and evaluate the impact of flexible working.

These are illustrated with quotes (in green) and vignettes (in boxes).

## 4 Improving and promoting uptake of flexible working

You can take a range of actions to improve and promote uptake of flexible working:

- Clarify the benefits of flexible working.
- Find the compelling hook or business imperative.
- Dispel myths, share successes and build communities through communications.
- Find creative ways to encourage flexible working.

### (a) Clarify the benefits of flexible working

Our research highlighted a variety of flexible working benefits for both individuals and organisations. Communicating these as appropriate to employees, managers and leaders in the organisation can help create momentum and enthusiasm for implementing flexible working.



### For the individual

- **Health and well-being:** Having the ability to work flexibly was said to enhance general well-being and had other health benefits: ‘Flexible working adds to a sense of well-being, which is really important to me.’ It was used as a way of supporting employees whose health is not at optimum level: ‘Having flexible working arrangements can benefit employees’ health and can also be used when health is not at optimal level. The occupational health team often recommend flexible working arrangements for employees who are facing physical and mental health issues.’
- **Positive impact on attitudes and relationships:** flexible working was reported to give employees greater control and choice over their work, and to generate positive feelings about their job and organisation, and more positive manager–employee relationships: ‘As a manager, being open to flexible working also reassures your team members that you trust them.’
- **Balancing caring/non-work responsibilities with work:** flexible working allowed employees to take on caring responsibilities without having to give up working and helped employees stay in work who might have otherwise had to leave: ‘I’ve been in a leadership position and brought up children, so I’ve been able to do the two things that are both really important to me at the same time.’
- **General work–life balance:** flexible working was seen to enable general improvement in work–life balance, reduce commute time and increase time spent at home: ‘flexible working enables employees to have an improved work–life balance.’
- **Flexibility for life’s emergencies:** flexible working gave employees ad hoc flexibility to deal with emergencies when they arise, for example: ‘flexible working allows me to deal with unavoidable emergencies ... for example, when my children are sick.’
- **Flexibility for life’s interests and commitments:** employees felt flexible working allowed them time to engage in interests outside of work: ‘flexible working allows me more time to socialise and become accustomed to life as a semi-retired person without feeling overwhelmed by having too much time.’

### For the organisation

- **Retention and recruitment:** flexible working was reported to help with recruiting and retaining a broader pool of talent, reducing recruitment costs (due to lower attrition) and retaining employees’ skills: ‘We have been able to keep a whole host of people by trying to be flexible with them.’ Being able to recruit and retain employees in this way was said to lead to financial gains and a potential competitive advantage for the organisation: ‘If you can work around them, then you can retain those skills and those people; then you end up with a better workforce.’
- **Employee engagement and loyalty:** flexible working was also linked to higher employee engagement, leading to employees being more likely to be flexible for and loyal to the organisation. ‘Employees feel like they are being supported by the organisation ... they have more pride in what they are doing and want to work hard and have good outcomes for the company.’
- **Positive influence on work performance:** flexible working was seen as increasing productivity and quality of work, with employees working more efficiently, and organising and managing their workload better: ‘Working from home really helps me to get through my “to do” list and get the bigger jobs done without interruptions.’
- **Employees going above and beyond:** employees reported going beyond the call of duty and feeling more motivated to work hard and to give back to the organisation (for example training other staff): ‘Sometimes I work way beyond my hours to get the job done, but the benefit for me is that I can flex that back at another time ... It does benefit both ways.’

- **Positive work culture:** flexible working was seen as creating a positive working culture, in which employees feel valued: ‘A positive impact of flexible working on morale and how people feel about where they work.’
- **Avoiding negative employee outcomes:** enabling people to work flexibly was seen as a way of preventing work-related stress, reducing sickness absence, and avoiding other negative employee outcomes: ‘the downsides to not doing it [flexible working] are hidden under the surface. When someone has a breakdown, there’s no warning, it just happens. The tangible benefits for me are that I don’t have anyone off with stress.’
- **Workforce in line with needs:** flexibility was also enabling employers to balance their workforce in line with the organisation’s needs: ‘There are busy times and quieter times and with flexible working you can respond to that.’
- **Diversity and inclusion:** flexible working contributed to organisations having a more diverse workforce, inclusive of people from different backgrounds, gender, and so on: ‘The benefits from an organisational perspective include greater diversity and inclusion.’
- **Creating buzz around the brand:** having a flexible working campaign can create a buzz around the brand; being part of a national project or getting media coverage can help create credibility: ‘Working in conjunction with the CIPD and TimeWise, it does give that level of credibility from a professional perspective, which is always good.’

Organisations may also find it useful to refer to [business case for flexible working](#).

It is also important to note that being clear about the benefits expected from implementing flexible working not only helps promote take-up, but can also determine how to evaluate whether flexible working has been successful. By clarifying what is expected from flexible working, organisations can identify what needs to be measured to assess whether a flexible working initiative delivers the intended benefits.

### **(b) Find the compelling hook or business imperative**

While giving general information on benefits is helpful when looking to promote flexible working, people professionals also found it valuable to take a targeted approach and look for hooks and business imperatives that were particularly compelling within their organisation and context. For some organisations, this was about attraction, recruitment, and retention: for example, being seen as an employer of choice in a competitive market or overcoming industry skills shortages. For others, diversity and inclusion was a more compelling reason to adopt flexible working, and especially so in light of the focus given by gender pay gap reporting.

#### **Examples of organisations using compelling hooks**

##### **Being an employer of choice in a competitive market**

Pharmaceuticals Research Associates (PRA) believes flexible working is key to attraction and retention and that their informal flexible working culture acts as a selling point. It is seen as a crucial part of the overall benefits package and a way of differentiating themselves in a highly competitive industry (Pharmaceuticals Research Associates).

##### **Overcoming industry skills shortages**

The recruitment crisis in education has prompted more openness to flexible working as a way to recruit and retain good people within the schools trust. More candidates are asking for flexible working and difficulties in recruiting teachers are forcing people to be more creative about making flexible working work (GLF Schools).

Due to the skills shortage in construction, flexible working has been a way of opening up the pool of potential employees for Lendlease. There has been a drive to recruit more women into the sector, and flexible working arrangements have grown alongside this. Additionally, the organisation recognised that it is just as important to retain staff and skills that are already within the company, so introducing flexible working enables employees to remain in work (Lendlease).

For the NHS trust, offering flexible working is a way to increase recruitment when there is a national shortage of nurses: ‘When it is hard to fill posts, it is better to have a day of someone good than to have no days.’ In addition, once those within the trust saw that this applied to nurses, the approach filtered out to all types of staff (Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust).

#### **Closing the gender pay gap**

A key priority for the PRA is around closing the gender pay gap, which also places a strong emphasis on flexible working and the business imperative of building a flexible culture for all (Pharmaceuticals Research Associates).

Flexible working is a key part of a ten-point equality, diversity and inclusion plan launched by United Living last year and is seen as an important way of tackling the organisation’s gender pay gap (United Living).

### **(c) Dispel myths, share successes and build communities through communications**

Communication around flexible working was seen as key for improving and promoting take-up of flexible working in many of the organisations we examined. As well as communicating benefits, communication was also vital for creating a common understanding of what flexible working is and dispelling myths about who it is for and how it works.

For some individuals and organisations, myths about and lack of understanding of flexible working were initially found to prevent uptake of flexible working. A number of our case studies were combatting this by communication campaigns, and even specific ‘myth-busting’ initiatives, designed to build understanding of flexible working and create a shared, positive view across the organisation.

To build the positive view further, organisations talked about how they were sharing flexible working success stories, either in general communication campaigns or in more targeted approaches to help specific individuals and teams understand how flexible working could work for them. They talked about developing and sharing testimonies, building case studies of successful flexible working, and showing examples of managers working flexibly to show that progression while working flexibly is possible. ‘Keep on talking and showing examples – work together – sell the benefits and the positive impacts.’

Communication campaigns took many different forms, from newsletters and posters to videos, podcasts and blogs, and participants talked about using a range of internal communications and campaigns to spread the word. Pointing to external media coverage can also help to increase awareness and encourage take-up. Organisations also found it useful to improve communication through putting in place champions, creating a flexible working steering group and/or building flexible working communities. These enabled peer-to-peer, local-level communication and support within the organisation.

### Examples of organisations communicating, sharing and building communities

#### Creating an understanding of what flexible working involves

Through a myth-busting poster campaign, the business is able to create a common understanding of what flexible working is across the organisation (United Living).

#### Sharing success stories

Wherever flexible working works well, the NHS trust finds ways to communicate and talk about these success stories, and to build on them to encourage others to implement flexible working (Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust).

#### Sharing examples of managers working flexibly

'It's important to show people that you can progress even if you are working flexibly.' Shine a light on managers who are working flexibly and successfully (Enterprise Rent-A-Car).

#### Having a flexible working steering group

The development of a steering group has helped with front-line ambassadors to support one another as issues come up (United Living).

### (d) Find creative ways to encourage flexible working

Many of the organisations studied were successful with the flexible working initiatives because they were finding innovative ways to offer flexibility. This might be through initial trials and pilots or through longer-term offerings. The vignettes provided here are aimed at offering ideas and stimulus for creative thinking around flexible working.

### Examples of organisations using innovative initiatives and pilots

#### Flexible fortnight

A publishing organisation recently introduced 'Flexible fortnight', an initiative which aims to encourage employees to trial their ideal flexible working arrangement and encourage the uptake of flexible working across the organisation. Flexible fortnight was based on four options: non-standard start and end times; working from home; reduced working hours; and working from another office. Following the initiative, employees were able to make formal flexible working requests if they wished to do so and data collected from Flexible fortnight will be shared for future learning (Hachette).

#### Team-managed flexible working schedules

A construction company uses a flexible working rota within a project team (16 team members): each week one member of the project team takes ownership for the weekly rota and team members pick a morning where they can come in late or an afternoon where they leave early (flexitime). The general culture on a project site was described as 'we don't watch the clock either', so that employees feel they can be flexible if needed (Lendlease).

#### Flexible bank of nurses

An NHS trust operates an internal flexible 'bank' for nurses. People who do not want a substantive contract, want to choose when they work, or want to be paid weekly instead of monthly, can choose to work as part of the 'bank'. These people are not contracted for particular shifts, they just work when they can work and when the work is available (Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust).

**Retire and return**

The NHS trust also has a ‘retire and return’ programme, so that people who are retiring are offered to come back in flexible roles: ‘even if it is just one day per week or in a teaching role because they don’t want to be on the wards. It is a matter of looking at what someone wants and seeing what role fits with that’ (Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust).

**Unique flexible working adaptations in manufacturing and construction**

In some business areas there are quite unique flexible working arrangements available. For example, in the manufacturing organisation, employees are able to: (1) work overtime that can later be taken off in lieu; (2) work at weekends to fulfil their weekly hours if needed; and (3) request night shift work (Schneider Electric).

United Living was piloting different types of flexible working in eight different geographical areas. This included site-based as well as office-based staff and in some cases whole divisions, incorporating many different roles. Around 90 people were involved in the pilots, which ran from January to April 2019, and key performance indicator (KPI) data was collected pre- and post-pilot to assess the impact to organisational performance. The pilots were also testing out a new form of flexible working for the organisation, a four-day week but on full pay (United Living).

**A two-way approach to flexibility**

For a manufacturing organisation, the rationale for supporting informal and formal flexible working came from a ‘give and take’ initiative a few years ago. This initiative encouraged informal flexible working, where managers were empowered to help employees achieve flexible working: ‘It’s about give and take and it doesn’t necessarily have to be a formal request. People give a lot to the organisation – if they need an hour off, then give them that flexibility back. We try to encourage and empower managers to have that conversation with their team and encourage their staff to take a bit of time back where they need to’ (Schneider Electric).

The case studies suggested that, while flexible working arrangements may vary across different sectors and job roles, it is possible to consider some form of flexible working arrangement in almost all roles and achieve benefit for both the organisation and the individual – even in roles that are traditionally seen as being difficult for flexible working, including senior roles, customer-facing and manufacturing. Table 1 in Section 3 sets out a range of examples of this and the vignettes provided here are designed to support further creativity.

**Flexible learning examples from roles that are traditionally inflexible****Split shifts and job-shares in customer-facing roles**

In a car rental organisation, branches and depots are being encouraged to be creative when it comes to flexible working – for example, implementing split shift options and job-shares. Some branches have deliberately extended their hours to enable more shift working, thereby creating a win-win for both employees and customers (Enterprise Rent-A-Car).

**Flexibility and homeworking in call centres**

Enterprise is also innovative in allowing its call centre workers to work flexible schedules: the call centre is entirely staffed by homeworkers, who control their own flexible work patterns. The organisation analyses call volume and schedules accordingly (Enterprise Rent-A-Car).

PRA offers flexible working in their customer services team, which needs to provide 24/7 support to clients. Customer service employees can pick specific shifts that work for them, such as a mixture of early and late shifts. Some customer service staff are also enabled to work from home, through the use of online portals that provide access to internal and customer systems, allowing them to respond to customer needs (Pharmaceutical Research Associates).

**Flexibility for train drivers**

Within Transport for London (TfL), train operators and customer-facing shift workers have flexible working arrangements. As this type of role is typically shift work and rostered, it can be more difficult to formalise and agree flexible working, because of the impact on the rest of the team and operations, but TfL is finding ways to make it possible (Transport for London).

**Job-shares for head teachers**

A primary school has successfully implemented a job-share head teacher (GLF Schools).

## 5 Successfully implementing flexible working

Implementation of flexible working can be facilitated at different levels in different ways, and there are also barriers that will need to be avoided or overcome at each of these levels. To successfully implement FW, make sure you:

- (a) set the organisational context
- (b) consider organisational facilitators and barriers
- (c) gain manager buy-in
- (d) consider manager facilitators and barriers
- (e) consider team facilitators and barriers
- (f) consider individual facilitators and barriers.

**(a) Set the organisational context**

Organisational culture and context were essential factors in achieving success when implementing flexible working. Support from key individuals within the organisation is part of this, with both senior leaders and HR seen as key players.

- **Culture:** a range of cultural factors were seen as important for flexible working, for example having a culture that:
  - supports and prioritises flexible working: ‘You can have all the policies in the world, but if people are not committed to it and it is not in the culture, it isn’t going to work ... it has to be a culture that it is better to have one day of a good colleague than five days of someone who is not good’

- encourages listening to employees and making flexible working easy to request: ‘Listen to employees, trust employees and make it easy for them to ask for flexibility’
- empowers and encourages employees to seek flexible working
- avoids stigmatising flexible workers
- communicates consistent messages about the value the organisation places on building understanding, awareness and momentum around flexible working: ‘The culture is geared from the top to say we support flexible working and we support employees to do it’
- sees flexibility as the default and offers flexibility from the point of hire: ‘not just saying “we’re open to flexibility”, but actually thinking about how to build in flexibility, so we’re not just putting out an advert for exactly the job the previous person was doing, but thinking through with the manager how it could be changed and made more flexible.’
- **Support from leaders:** having support from the chief executive and executive team, national/global level as appropriate, and senior leaders was reported as being vital, including:
  - senior leaders as champions for flexible working: ‘It has got to come from the top. It’s about leading from the front and being consistent in that leadership...’
  - leaders speaking to employees about flexible working
  - leaders role-modelling flexible working themselves: ‘When the chief executive and the chief nurse are role-modelling and advocating flexible working, that makes it easier for line managers to buy in’
  - sponsorship from the very top of the organisation.
- **HR support:** having a supportive HR function to provide guidance and advice to managers and employees was also seen as an important ingredient. ‘HR can help to reduce these fears and talk through how to think about balancing both the business and individuals’ needs. HR also have the ability to provide additional support and sometimes can encourage a line manager to think differently about flexible working.’

### Organisational context

#### Encouraging an informal approach

Enterprise tries to keep flexible working practices as informal as possible to ‘encourage employees to do it’. The business has found that formalising the process can put some people off taking it up, due to concerns around the perceived impact it might have (Enterprise Rent-A-Car).

#### Flexibility as the default position at the point of hire and beyond

United Living has aimed to switch mindsets around flexible working, so that hiring managers and people professionals start with the default position of ‘why can’t this job be done flexibly?’ (United Living).

Within the schools trust, job adverts used not to say that they offered flexible working, but now it is standard to include mention of flexible working in adverts. The next stage is to think about how jobs could be designed flexibly from the point of advert so that flexibility is clear at the point of hire (GLF Schools).

**(b) Consider organisational facilitators and barriers**

In addition to getting the organisational culture right and having supportive senior leaders and HR teams, the research pointed to a range of organisational factors that facilitate or act as barriers to implementing flexible working. Exploring whether these are present can help organisations put in place as many facilitators as possible and find ways to overcome potential barriers.

**Organisational facilitators**

- **Integrating flexible working with other strategies and policies:** if flexible working is aligned to and integrated with other relevant strategies and policies, it is more likely to succeed than if it is a stand-alone initiative. For example:
  - **Attraction and retention:** having a strategy for attracting and retaining talent that explicitly includes flexible working, as a competitive advantage, a way of retaining people and/or a way to enhance employer brand: ‘It’s about image, reputation, and it’s having that competitive edge over other organisations ... do you want to stand out from the crowd?’
  - **Health and well-being:** showing organisational commitment to health and well-being and making flexible working a part of that: ‘A lot of sickness absence is attributed to stress and flexible working is one way of being able to support people.’
  - **Diversity and inclusion:** building flexible working into diversity and inclusion policies and making flexible working part of the approach to increasing diversity and inclusion in the organisation: ‘...support from a diversity and inclusion manager who talks about flexible working at inductions and supports people managers with flexible working guidance and communication; this can help managers who are unclear about how to implement flexible working.’
- **Plan and trial flexible working:** planning before implementing flexible working arrangements (to minimise impact on the organisation) and allowing/encouraging people to trial different ways of working flexibly can help pave the way to wider flexible working initiatives: ‘You don’t know unless you give it a go. You can provide greater opportunities and service for customers through experimentation – like extending opening hours to accommodate shift working.’
- **Make flexible working universally available:** flexible working availability across the entire organisation, across different job roles (although flexible working type will vary) and regardless of why the employee wants to work flexibly was found to facilitate its implementation across an organisation. ‘Everybody can work flexibly if they need to.’
- **Have supportive technology and practical tools:** having technology and IT infrastructure that enables flexible working can make a big difference to the success of flexible working: ‘Technology has been a key facilitator over the last few years.’ Conversely, not having appropriate technology in place can act as a barrier to implementing flexible working. Providing practical guidance and tools for managers and employees to enable flexible working can enable and smooth the process of implementing flexible working at the local level.

**Organisational barriers**

- **Volume of applications and costs:** dealing with large volumes of flexible working applications, difficulties with rostering when accommodating different flexible working schedules, and organisational costs (for example for locums and contractors) were found in some organisations to affect the budget and structure for supporting flexible working, thereby acting as a barrier: ‘The volume of requests can be very high, and the business might not be in a position to accept them all.’



- Problematic policy and fairness:** policies can impose restrictions when implementing flexible working (for example laptops being at the employee's expense or commuting time being discounted as working hours): 'Sometimes the policy around remote working is rather inflexible in terms of supporting the breadth of flexible working arrangements.' It can be challenging to achieve fairness for colleagues who give discretionary effort (for example unpaid overtime) and for those in roles with fewer options for flexibility, and there is a risk that a minority may take advantage of flexible working policies: 'Some employees may work discretionary overtime and feel that only workers who are contractually working flexibly leave on time; this can cause frictions and may make others wary about flexible working.'
- Problems with job role suitability and job design:** the feasibility and suitability of flexible working arrangements depends on the job roles and industry: sometimes this is purely a perception that certain roles cannot be made flexible or are more difficult to flex (for example customer-facing roles), in other cases there are genuine barriers. There is also a risk of workers trying to do a full-time role in part-time hours: 'We are a large organisation with very varied roles, so what works for one area wouldn't necessarily work for another area.'
- Flexible learning being detrimental to organisational needs:** some flexible working arrangements may not be possible because they do not fit with the organisation's or team's needs, or because there have been increases on operational pressures and other business demands (for example client needs). Changing organisational needs may require workers to move departments if their flexible working schedule can no longer be accommodated in their current department: 'When considering flexible working requests, it is important to consider the needs of the business.' An example from a school: 'Some people say "children need consistency" and argue that job-share and part-time roles disrupt this.'

### Organisational facilitators

#### A focus on retention

For an NHS trust, the journey started with recognising that, to have a good workforce, the organisation needed to focus on retention as well as recruitment: 'Exit interview data showed that lack of flexibility was the number one reason for people leaving and that, although we thought we had flexibility at policy level, at ward level there was resistance.' The organisation has invested in a head nurse, who takes the lead on workforce planning and, as well as overseeing development for nurses, also interviews everyone who hands in their notice; so, if someone is planning to leave because their line manager is not allowing them to work flexibly, an arrangement can be put in place and the individual can be discouraged from leaving (Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust).

#### Universal availability

The schools trust believes that flexible working should be for everyone – men/women, parents/not, old/young. 'It's not just about mums with young children, but anyone who wants some kind of flexibility.' The organisation is open to looking at any role to see how it could be made flexible, and to exploring all forms of flexible working (GLF Schools).

#### A toolkit for line managers

United Living created a practical toolkit for line managers, helping them to facilitate flexible working and empower teams to reach their own agreements relating to scheduling (United Living).

**(c) Gain manager buy-in**

The research suggested that the themes listed under 'Set the organisational context' are an important first step in order to gain manager buy-in. It also provided pointers on a number of approaches to gaining manager buy-in, some of which were about communication and sharing information, while others are about support and education:

- **Communicate benefits:** organisations found that signposting the potential benefits of implementing flexible working was a way of gaining their buy-in. The benefits set out in section 4(a) can all be used, but the research suggested that the focus for manager buy-in was best put on:
  - **Recruitment and retention benefits:** showing how flexible working can support recruitment and retention and widen the talent pool, particularly when there is a skills shortage in specific sectors or roles
  - **Financial benefits:** national statistics and measures within the organisation can be used to build the business case for implementing flexible working. Flexible working can also be positioned as a way of ensuring budgets are used more efficiently and staffing is in line with the organisation's needs: 'Flexible working can also help contain budgets as it allows organisations to employ the capacity they need and not over-recruit within functions.'
- **Share successes:** participants talked about how they shared examples from those who have successfully implemented flexible working in order to gain buy-in from managers; some mentioned that this was particularly important for those who have had a previous negative experience of flexible working:
  - **Flexible learning success stories from within the organisation:** case studies and examples of where flexible working has been successful and had benefit to the organisation and to the individual: 'Where flexible working works well, talk about the success stories to show that it does work, and build on those to encourage others to implement flexible working too'
  - **National examples of flexible working:** gathering and sharing examples of best practice through networking with peers across different organisations within the same sector can help: 'it can be helpful to have industry-specific hooks to help sell the value of flexible working'.
- **Provide specific support for line managers:** the research suggested that some managers may need additional support to begin successfully implementing flexible working into their teams and business areas:
  - **Help managers learn from other cases of flexible working:** ensure that learning is captured and transferred from the implementation of flexible working elsewhere in the organisation (and beyond), both what has worked well and what has not worked so well and why, so that managers learn from previous successes and mistakes.
  - **Support managers with job design:** help managers think through what flexibility can be provided in jobs/roles that appear harder to make flexible; explore the range of types of flexibility (hours, location, timing of work); make sure people are not asked to do full-time jobs in part-time hours.
  - **Support managers with the perceived 'additional' load of managing flexible workers:** help managers think through how best to manage the team when they have flexible workers (for example if they have more workers because the team is made up of people working part-time, help them consider delegating some of the people management responsibilities).

- **Improve knowledge and awareness:** the research also pointed to ways in which managers can be supported to gain the knowledge and awareness they need in order to implement flexible working in their team:
  - **Make resources and training/coaching available:** resources for managers and employees can support the implementation of flexible working. In some organisations, this took the form of practical toolkits (as mentioned under ‘organisational facilitators’ above); training and coaching was also mentioned as a way to help managers understand what flexible working is about and how to make it work in their team.
  - **Provide guidance to managers around flexible working in particular business areas:** there may be some areas of the business which have roles that are seen as harder to make flexible, in which case, the research suggests that specific guidance and training for managers in these areas can help to support them when thinking about transitioning into more flexible ways of working.

### Examples of organisations supporting line managers

#### Offering practical support to overcome line managers’ fears

The NHS trust has found that having additional people, rather than a smaller, full-time team, can seem like more work for managers. However, the organisation is aiming to lessen the load by supporting managers to delegate people management tasks, making performance appraisals really simple (more about the conversation than the bureaucratic process), and providing mandatory training online so the onus is not on the manager to provide or monitor training. It is also helping managers see the benefits of having more people available to work. For example, if you have people on part-time hours, when you need additional resource, they can flex up and fill the gap (Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust).

#### Education and partnership with line managers

PRA provides conscious and unconscious bias training and general education for line managers to overcome any biases or barriers to flexible working. They are also keen to genuinely partner with line managers rather than be directive (Pharmaceutical Research Associates).

### (d) Consider manager facilitators and barriers

Managers themselves can facilitate flexible working or present barriers through their attitudes and approaches. Several key facilitators and barriers should be considered.

#### Manager facilitators

- **Manager–employee relationship and trust:** strong professional relationships between the employee and their line manager were seen as facilitating flexible working implementation. Trust between an employee and line manager, and the manager trusting in the employee’s performance rather than expecting visibility in the workplace, were particularly mentioned: ‘Trust ... has definitely been a key ingredient in my view where I’ve seen flexible working work well.’ ‘It is vital to have a trusting relationship for flexible working to be successful.’ Good communication was also vital.
- **Manager perceptions and attitudes:** managers’ positive perceptions and attitudes towards flexible working were also reported as being important facilitators. For example, having a manager who is open to flexible working, allows informal flexibility (where possible), and considers the impact of flexible working when planning work and activities (for example co-ordinating meetings to be inclusive of flexible workers,

and setting core hours); and attitudes that lead the manager to provide support for an individual working flexibly: ‘Having a supportive line manager is vital. It is all about having a supportive leader who values flexible working and doesn’t see it as a barrier.’

- **Good management practices:** good management practices are a key facilitator, including:
  - being inclusive of flexible workers
  - reviewing whether flexible working is going well for both the individual and team: ‘understand from the individual whether it is working for them and what is not working as well; and recognising when it’s not working well, whether that is something that needs addressing or it is something that just needs accepting because the benefits outweigh the challenges’
  - having regular conversations both informally and through the appraisal/performance review system
  - encouraging and recording training sessions and continuing professional development so that flexible workers can catch up on it later
  - ensuring ongoing access to development and career conversations for flexible workers
  - implementing flexible working fairly.

#### Manager barriers

- **Manager resistance:** managers can create barriers when implementing flexible working because of fears and concerns about managing a flexible worker and lack of control (for example when employees are not present in the office). This may include discouraging flexible working uptake, and resistance to cultural change around flexible working: ‘Managers deciding what will and won’t work when it comes to flexible working rather than following the policy advice and guidance.’ It may also mean that the manager does not support flexible workers or the organisation’s flexible working policy.
- **Performance management:** managers may put up barriers to flexible working because they lack the capability to ‘measure’ work and output (and therefore take visibility in the office as indicative of performance) or have concerns around managing performance of flexible workers, or because of underlying performance issues prior to a request for flexible working: ‘Sometimes the reluctance to give flexible working is not really about the flexibility, but an underlying performance issue or other concern about the person who has requested flexible working.’

#### Examples of manager facilitation

##### Making every effort to implement flexible working

Transport for London reported how managers often go ‘above and beyond’ to try and accommodate flexible working wherever possible. They do this by: using business networks throughout the organisation (for example roster support network); collaborating with HR for additional support and guidance; and gathering details about other areas of the business that may be able to accommodate the employee’s request (Transport for London).

#### (e) Consider team facilitators and barriers

Apart from organisational and managerial considerations, successful flexible working implementation will also hinge on supporting teams in facilitating flexible working and helping them overcome team barriers.

**Colleague/team facilitators**

- **Team positive perceptions:** positive attitudes and perceptions from colleagues around flexible working that enable trust and support for a flexible worker were reported to facilitate flexible working at the team level: ‘There also has to be trust and understanding between the flexible worker and their team. I answer emails promptly, my staff can get hold of me whenever they need me.’
- **Collaboration and team involvement:** involving flexible workers in work activities, collaboration amongst colleagues, and team networks providing support facilitated success for flexible working arrangements.
- **Team skills and flexibility:** having a variety of skills in the team and up-skilling team members to support flexible working arrangements facilitated flexible working implementation: ‘Having a team of multi-skilled workers within the department means flexible working can be accommodated more easily, because employees can be flexible according to the business needs and skills required for the job.’

**Colleague/team barriers**

- **Team negative perceptions:** team barriers included the perception that flexible working is only for certain types of employees, frictions and resentment between flexible workers and non-flexible workers, and team resistance to flexible working: ‘There can come a critical point where, if you have too many people working flexibly, it can become very inflexible for those that haven’t got a flexible working agreement.’
- **Lack of team relationships and networking:** flexible working may contribute to a lack of colleague interaction and team connections, which was found to lead to flexible workers feeling isolated. Difficulties building trust and relationships between colleagues without compromising flexible working arrangements was also reported: ‘The challenge is for flexible workers to still spend time building relationships and networking with colleagues.’
- **Difficulties with navigating flexible working in a team:** difficulties in ensuring that team members are aware of individuals’ flexible working arrangements, the impact of flexible working on the team, keeping track of the various flexible working schedules across the team and ensuring that enough team members are present during working hours were also reported as barriers to flexible working: ‘I would want everyone to work flexibly if they needed to or wanted to, but then it is always thinking about, do we have enough cover in the office? Am I in the office the same days as all my team members?’

**Examples of team facilitation****A multi-skilled team to enable flexibility**

A manufacturing organisation found that having a team of multi-skilled workers within the department meant flexible working could be accommodated more easily, because employees could be flexible according to the business needs and skills required. The organisation aims to develop skills in employees who are on formal flexible working arrangements, so that they are able to work in a range of roles, making it easier to be flexible: ‘People that have had to request formal flexible working arrangements, we work with them to develop their skills when they are coming back into the workplace, so they can fill various roles, not just a single role’ (Schneider Electric).

**(f) Consider individual facilitators and barriers**

Individual facilitators and barriers also need to be taken into account by individuals wanting to work flexibly, their manager and their employer.

**Individual facilitators**

- **Altering flexible working pattern where necessary:** participants reported how important it was for flexible workers to show some flexibility around their flexible working arrangements (for example to meet customer/business needs): ‘Flexibility on both sides helps it along in lots of ways.’ Conversely, flexible workers being inflexible and unwilling to respond to the evolving needs of the team, organisation or customers was identified as a barrier: ‘Sometimes, flexible workers do not recognise that the arrangement needs to be reviewed annually as part of an ongoing conversation about whether it is working or not.’
- **Creating boundaries:** while recognising the need to be flexible when necessary, flexible workers also said that sometimes they needed to be firm and consistent with the flexible working arrangement so that colleagues work around flexible working arrangements when possible: ‘Saying no is actually okay.’
- **Role-modelling:** being an employee who is a visible role model for working flexibly and advocating flexible working can facilitate a flexible worker’s own flexible working arrangements and also empower others to work flexibly.

**Individual barriers**

- **Difficulties managing workload, meetings and work-life balance:** some research participants reported difficulties relating to having to fit team meetings around flexible working schedules, particularly when the meetings an employee needs to attend impacts their ability to work flexibly or vice versa: ‘There are times where I have felt really uncomfortable having to walk out of a meeting full of senior managers and that’s unfair.’ It can also feel difficult to say ‘no’ to additional work in order to manage workload within the flexible working arrangements; some flexible workers reported doing work in non-work time (for example staying up late to complete work assignments).
- **Challenges of changing mindset and feelings of guilt:** having to get used to working a shorter week/day and still manage workload appropriately can be challenging: ‘It changes your way of working because the end of the day feels a bit more like a deadline.’ Also, having to adapt mindsets to a different way of working, feeling guilty on non-work days and having to hand over work that is half-finished and leave on time because of other commitments can feel uncomfortable.
- **Concerns over career progression:** concerns over flexible working affecting an employee’s career or chance of being promoted, and few senior jobs being advertised as flexible at recruitment stage, can act as a barrier to flexible working: ‘Sometimes more senior roles aren’t advertised as flexible and there is a perception that they may require more visibility. This could affect my ability to be promoted or influence my decision to avoid applying for more senior roles.’

**Individual facilitator****Role-modelling**

It’s important to have role models at all levels in the organisation who talk openly about their flexible working pattern and help to make it a normal part of the organisation culture.

## 6 Measuring and evaluating the impact of flexible working

Measuring and evaluating the impact of flexible working must be considered right from the start when implementing flexible working initiatives. These should be linked to the reasons for implementing flexible working.

Participants in both our case studies and action learning events/diaries mentioned the challenges in finding tangible ways of measuring the direct impact of flexible working, especially when considering more informal flexible working arrangements. For example: ‘I don’t know how I can demonstrate it; if I had to put metrics to flexible working, I would find it very difficult.’ However, some insight can be gleaned from what participants have done or are planning to do to measure the impact flexible working has on their organisations, teams and individuals. These have been grouped as:

- (a) quantitative measures
- (b) qualitative measures
- (c) other processes for evaluation.

Table 2 provides an overview of the measures and processes, and more detail on each is provided below.

**Table 2: Overview of measures and processes for evaluation**

Quantitative measures	Qualitative measures	Other processes
Employee surveys	Performance reviews	Initial discussions and follow-up check-ins
HR and performance metrics	Continued project/team productivity	Capture learning through a trial period
Pre- and post-evaluation using flexible working data and other metrics	Formal feedback from the individual, line manager, team and clients	Case studies
	Ask about impact on culture	Steering group

### (a) Quantitative measures

Numerical information routinely collected throughout the year could be used for evaluation purposes; data could also be gathered specifically to evaluate flexible working.

- **Employee surveys:** annual/bi-annual employee surveys can be used to measure the impact of flexible working and also to look at areas such as well-being to see whether flexible working influences these outcomes. Questions might include asking about: views on flexible working, work-life balance, well-being, engagement, and diversity and inclusion. Comparisons to explore the impact of flexible working could include:
  - comparing flexible workers with those not working flexibly
  - comparing data from before and after implementation of flexible working to understand the impact and employee/manager opinion. ‘It [bi-annual survey] allows me as a manager to know where to focus on the team...’

### Example survey

#### Annual engagement survey

At Transport for London, the Equality & Inclusion (E & I) team are working on metrics around engagement and flexible working. The data is collected via the annual survey, which includes an equality and inclusion index and well-being index, both of which relate to flexible working arrangements. The survey is a new initiative since last year and results will be fed back by the E & I team (Transport for London).

- **HR and performance metrics:** measures such as recruitment, staff turnover, sickness absence data, health and safety metrics, KPIs (for example revenue and deliverables), mental and physical well-being, and exit interview data, can be used to compare employees who are working flexibly with those who are not. In addition, measuring travel time saved and expenses saved can be useful to calculate, as well as other strategic measures (for example whether flexible working is making a difference to the gender pay gap). Organisations can also look at how well teams meet their project timetables and financial targets.

### HR and performance metrics examples

#### Employee turnover and leavers

The NHS trust was able to quote very specific metrics around leavers and staff turnover:

- In the year to August 2016, 244 nurses left the organisation; whereas in the year to August 2018, there were only 120 leavers.
- Employee turnover has gone from 13.55% to 7.55% in two years.
- In the most recent quarter, for the first time, the organisation had more people start than leave.

‘We are doing a lot of stuff [around flexible working] and it is hard to say what has the biggest impact, but we do know that the number one reason for leaving was lack of flexibility ... and, while the reasons for leaving haven’t changed, the number of leavers has halved, so it is not a massive leap of faith to say that that is because of the flexibility’ (Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust).

The schools trust plans to analyse employee turnover for those working flexibly and compare it with that for those not working flexibly, to see whether they are retaining staff in flexible working roles better than those who are not (GLF Schools).

#### Sickness and absence

Sickness absence went down from 5.16% to 4.12% in two years and it is now below 4% (Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust).

Planning to compare absence rates for flexible workers and non-flexible workers, to see whether flexible working employees take less time off (GLF Schools).

#### Recruitment

Planning to explore whether the organisation is filling vacancies more quickly and/or have fewer vacancies as a result of recruiting flexibly (GLF Schools).



### Other metrics

United Living is collecting data to identify emerging trends in:

- diversity in recruitment and promotions (applications, shortlist and successful candidates)
- travel time saved
- overall expenses saved (United Living).

- **Pre- and post-evaluation using flexible working data and other metrics:** collect baseline and post-intervention data on flexible working and other measures to understand how implementation of a flexible working initiative or pilot influences the uptake of flexible working (across different areas of the business) and whether it leads to changes in other outcomes, such as retention and absence rates. For example:
  - before and after measures relating to whether teams were meeting organisational/business needs and targets and monitoring behaviour changes through their IT system (that is, the number of emails sent/received, and so on)
  - diversity in recruitment and promotions (that is, applications, shortlist and successful candidates) before and after flexible working can be explored
  - snap surveys run before and after a flexible working pilot or initiative can help gather data specifically about it and can be used to seek the views of important stakeholders, such as clients as well as team members and employees.

### Use of pilots and pre-post metrics

Lendlease is conducting a pilot of flexible working on two construction sites and two control sites for comparison. The aim of this pilot is to explore the impact of flexible working, with a view to rolling out flexible working practices more widely.

The objectives are threefold:

- (1) work with managers to raise awareness of the benefits of flexible working and gather information about managers' views and concerns to be addressed at the implementation stage
- (2) conduct pre- and post-evaluations of flexible working to examine the impact on health and well-being, performance and productivity
- (3) conduct a series of interviews with site managers and staff to explore how flexible working is being put into place, and identify any barriers and facilitators that may influence the outcome (Lendlease).

United Living is running a snap survey before and after its flexible working pilot, asking teams and important stakeholders, such as clients, to help evaluate the project. They will also be evaluating how well teams are meeting their project timetables and financial targets for the pilots (United Living).

**(b) Qualitative measures**

Various types of qualitative data could be used for evaluation. Again, some of these were data that would be gathered routinely, others might be gathered specifically for flexible working evaluation.

- **Performance reviews:** using performance reviews can be a way of agreeing objectives for work output and reviewing these across time, so that they become a continuous evaluation process. Performance reviews were seen as a way for both parties to reflect and talk through whether flexible working was working well and whether any changes needed to be implemented: ‘Everybody has appraisals and objectives, so you could say: during the pilot, are the appraisal objectives being met? And, if not, is this because flexible working is not being as efficient as it should be?’

**Performance reviews**

PRA has changed its performance reviews to create a continuous evaluation process, called performance pathways. The organisation provides flexible tools that people can use to track their own progress and outputs from their work projects. This can also provide a good measure and evaluation of the impact of flexible working (Pharmaceutical Research Associates).

- **Continued project/team productivity:** having a continued level of productivity on particular projects or in particular business areas following the implementation of flexible working can be a way of showing that the impact on business outcomes is minimal or positive. In some organisations this could include tangible sales measures/targets or customer service reports; in others it may be more subjective measures of productivity (for example project outcomes remaining stable).

**Productivity and prioritising quality of work**

Lendlease talked about making sure that targets are being met and project-level productivity is unchanged or better. Quality of work is important rather than being present in the office space: ‘Are you achieving your goals and the organisation goals? And are the goals not only being met, but are you delivering above and beyond? For example, delivering quality reports where the customer is really pleased with them’ (Lendlease).

- **Formal feedback from the individual, line manager, team and clients:** gathering employee and manager feedback following a flexible working pilot or initiative is important to understand the impact and learning gained. Gathering feedback from the flexible worker’s team and peer group can help managers and those implementing flexible working to understand whether the flexible working arrangement is impacting on the individual’s output or their team: ‘If there are concerns about performance and flexible working arrangements, managers can seek formal feedback from the team, anonymously.’ Gaining client feedback is another potential measure of impact of flexible working arrangements.

### Feedback as a success indicator

#### Customer service feedback

Customer service is the core performance metric for business insight at Enterprise. The company can immediately see where flexible working could be impacting customer service scores. Sometimes scores are improved as people that enjoy their work provide better customer service (Enterprise Rent-A-Car).

#### Performance and engagement feedback

Recently, the NHS trust received a CQC ‘good’ rating: ‘It’s a nicer place to work and, if people are happy and can have a good balance, it makes them a more productive and engaged workforce’ (Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust).

- **Ask about impact on culture:** the positive impacts that result from a flexible working initiative may be culture shifts, such as reducing the stigma around requesting flexible working and encouraging the uptake of flexible working: ‘people feel like they can ask for it [flexible working].’ These may be gathered through opinion surveys or more ad hoc feedback.

#### (c) Other processes for evaluation

Other processes may also be adopted to evaluate the success of, and capture learning from, flexible working implementation.

- **Initial discussions and follow-up check-ins:** having discussions early on and check-ins after flexible working has been implemented allows the line manager and employee to create shared understanding of the flexible working arrangements and what the impact is likely to be, and then monitor progress/impact over time. Additionally, ongoing check-ins allow line managers and employees to talk through any impact that flexible working might be having on the employee’s workload and performance: ‘having check-ins with their line manager to discuss any issues.’

### Ongoing check-ins with line managers

The publishing organisation encourages ongoing check-ins with line managers to talk through the impact flexible working is having on the employee’s workload and performance. A flexible worker gave an example of having check-ins with their line manager to discuss any issues: ‘We have regular catch-ups and flexible working is often something that comes up in those meetings. It’s always part of the discussion. I think if either of us or the team felt it wasn’t working, then we would look at how we could change things’ (Hachette).

- **Capture learning through a trial period:** a trial period can allow both parties to consider whether flexible working is working, what has gone well, and what hasn’t gone well, in order to capture learning: ‘Have a go – have a conversation and challenge things. This can bring benefit to not just the individual, but also the manager, the team and the whole organisation.’ If there are concerns that flexible working may have a negative impact, a trial gives the flexible worker a chance to find ways to mitigate this.

- **Case studies:** gathering case studies of best and worst examples of flexible working can highlight the successes, learning, risks and benefits: 'We know about the successes anecdotally.' While the evaluation that case studies provide is largely anecdotal, they can show the need for further systematic evaluation and support decisions on measures to be used.
- **Steering group:** having a steering group that meets regularly during flexible working initiatives/pilots can help monitor progress as well as enable ownership and explore learning. It can also support conducting a more systematic evaluation.

## 7 Conclusions and recommendations

The widespread demand for flexible working and the significant policy drivers to improve flexible working and increase its use have underscored the need for real-life, evidence-based guidance to support flexible working implementation. This guide sets out to achieve this by bringing together knowledge and learning about what works in flexible working from a variety of organisational sectors and industries, as well as from different organisational viewpoints (HR professionals, line managers and employees that were working flexibly).

By examining and adapting as appropriate the creative flexible working practices seen at senior levels and in roles and areas that are not traditionally seen as suitable for flexible working, organisations and HR professionals can derive solutions that can help them to successfully enable flexible working whatever stage they are at on that journey.

### Ten ways to successfully implement flexible working

#### 1 Clarify the benefits of flexible working

- To promote uptake of flexible working, champions need to highlight the potential benefits of flexible working to the organisation and to individuals. The CIPD/Flexible Working Taskforce [business case](#) can inform this.
- The benefits expected from implementing flexible working within a particular organisation can be used to determine what is measured to evaluate whether flexible working is successful.

#### 2 Find the compelling hook or business imperative

- In addition to identifying the benefits, it may be helpful to consider specific hooks or business imperatives that will gain particular traction in the organisation. This may be about recruitment, retention, the gender pay gap or other current concerns.

#### 3 Communicate to dispel myths, share successes and build communities

- Communication is vital for promoting uptake of flexible working and needs to happen in varied ways, both formal (for example, newsletters, videos, campaigns) and informal (for example, conversations in the corridor). These communications may need to include myth-busting. Share success stories of where flexible working has worked well.
- Creating networks of champions across the organisation, a flexible working steering group and/or a community for flexible workers can all help facilitate communication and build momentum for flexible working.

#### 4 Find creative ways to encourage flexible working

- Successfully implementing flexible working may involve some creativity and innovation. The case studies gathered for this guide reveal a range of creative and innovative ways of implementing and maintaining momentum around flexible working and can be used to inspire and stimulate ideas.
- While flexible working arrangements may vary across different sectors and job roles, it is possible to consider some form of flexible working arrangement in almost all roles – even in roles that are traditionally seen as being difficult for flexible working, including senior or customer-facing roles, and in sectors like manufacturing.

#### 5 Aim to hire flexibly and design jobs to suit the flexible pattern

- When recruiting, consider including the tagline, ‘happy to talk flexible working’. Offering a job on a flexible basis increases the talent pool, helps retain staff and saves on sickness absence. Use the CIPD/Flexible Working Taskforce’s [flexible hiring guidance](#) to think through how a role can be done flexibly from the start.
- Ensure that job requirements are properly aligned to the flexible working pattern and vice versa. You might want to assess:
  - **Time** – How many hours are needed to carry out the job: is this a full-time role, a more than full-time role or a part-time one?
  - **Location** – Where do the activities need to be carried out?
  - **When** – What activities have to be done when?

Also consider the role’s dependencies.

#### 6 Ensure ongoing access to development and career conversations for flexible workers

Good management practices are a key facilitator of flexible working and should include:

- being inclusive of flexible workers
- reviewing whether flexible working is going well for both the individual and team
- having regular conversations both informally and through the appraisal/performance review system
- ensuring ongoing access to development and career conversations for flexible workers
- encouraging and recording training sessions and continuing professional development so that flexible workers can catch up on it later
- implementing flexible working fairly.

#### 7 Set the organisational context and consider organisational facilitators and barriers

- Set an appropriate context, including: creating a supportive organisational culture, having support from leaders, and providing HR support.
- Consider organisational facilitators and barriers such as: integration of flexible working with other strategies and policies, planning and trialling flexible working, technology, job role suitability and job design, dealing with the volume of applications, and costs.

#### 8 Gain manager buy-in

- Gain buy-in from those who have the power to influence change around flexible working and encourage take-up (namely, senior leaders and line managers). Establishing the appropriate organisational culture and context are key, along with communicating benefits and sharing success stories.
- Give line managers support and guidance to help them feel confident in dealing with flexible working requests and managing flexible workers.

## 9 Consider the facilitators and barriers at manager, team and individual levels

- **At the manager level**

- HR professionals can provide support and advice to managers and encourage them to think about flexible working on a case-by-case basis; they can also encourage managers to consider the facilitators and barriers that they themselves present to flexible working, and the facilitators and barriers team members may present (see below). Managers may need additional time and technical resources to help them manage flexible working in their team.
- Manager facilitators include: the manager–employee relationship, positive manager perceptions and attitudes, and good management practices. Barriers at a manager level when implementing flexible working can include manager resistance to flexible working policy and practice and the performance management of flexible workers.

- **At the team level**

- HR professionals and line managers can provide opportunities for teams to foster a climate that supports flexible working, and review ways of working to optimise team performance, relationships and flexible working opportunities.
- Team facilitators include: positive perceptions, collaboration and team involvement, team skills and flexibility. Team-level barriers that can hinder include negative team perceptions of flexible working, lack of relationships, and networking and communication difficulties around flexible working.

- **At the individual flexible worker level**

- Help individuals understand what flexible working opportunities would be appropriate and available, provide support and advice and encourage them to look at the facilitators and barriers that they themselves present to flexible working, and to consider the potential impact of flexible working on themselves, their team and their organisation.
- Individual facilitators include: altering flexible working when necessary, creating boundaries, and role-modelling flexible working to others. The barriers include: difficulties in managing workload and meetings, difficulties saying ‘no’, challenges around shifting mindset, and career progression concerns.

## 10 Measure and evaluate flexible working and learn from trials

- Build measurement and evaluation into your flexible working implementation from the start and link them to the reasons for implementing flexible working. For example, taking baseline measures before flexible working is implemented and follow-up measures at appropriate intervals thereafter.
- Trial or pilot flexible working. As well as using trials/pilots to evaluate the impact of flexible working, organisations can capture the learning generated and use it to refine their flexible working approach. Consider examples from our case study organisations.

## 8 Appendices

### Appendix 1 – flexible working facilitators and barriers reviewed from literature

#### Overview of the facilitators and barriers from the literature

Type of factor	Facilitators	Barriers
<b>Individual</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender differences</li> </ul>
<b>Colleague/team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colleague support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colleagues' negative perceptions</li> </ul>
<b>Manager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager support</li> <li>• Strong manager–employee relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager resistance</li> <li>• Managers' negative perceptions of flexible workers and flexible working policy</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universalism</li> <li>• Organisational culture conducive to flexible working</li> <li>• Flexible working alignment to business needs</li> <li>• Skills shortage as a driver</li> <li>• Supportive HR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type of job role affecting implementation</li> <li>• Poor technology and IT infrastructure</li> <li>• Lack of career development/promotion opportunities (if senior positions are seen as less flexible)</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational (these factors can be both facilitators or barriers)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisational sector (for example public sector more likely to have flexible working initiatives)</li> <li>• Organisational size (for example larger organisations more likely to provide formal flexible working)</li> </ul>	

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## Appendix 2 – Action learning digest

### Synthesis from the Flexible Hiring Champion action learning sessions and reflection diaries

Two action learning events were held in September 2018 and January 2019. At both events, champions participated in a range of discussions; some of these were in pairs and some in larger groups. The data from all the discussions was recorded and analysed using a thematic analysis process. The themes derived from this analysis, in addition to four champion reflection diaries, are described below. A blank reflection diary was sent to champions ahead of both action learning events to support them to reflect on their experience on the flexible hiring journey, both to help them prepare for the events and to provide additional data for the research. Specific questions were asked that helped them to identify: key achievements, key levers of change, barriers to implementing flexible working, overcoming barriers, benefits, how they have measured impact, main learnings, and how to build on their success and embed flexibility into the wider culture of their organisation.

#### What has been implemented so far?

Champions from a range of organisations attended the events and they varied in their stages of implementation of flexible working. Sectors represented at the events included: accountancy, education, healthcare, construction, recruitment, transport, and publishing. Some organisations were still preparing for flexible working, for example, planning an event and analysing what is currently in place within the organisation. Others already had a variety of flexible working arrangements in place. These included: flexible working hours, remote working, part-time working hours for all areas of the business, compressed hours, working from home, term-time only, job-share, non-standard start and end times, agile working, ad hoc flexibility. Some organisations were specifically focusing on implementing flexible working at the point of hiring, so they had run interview training to include questions on flexibility and had agreed wording to use on advertisements. Other organisations had generated flexible working success stories and were sharing these throughout the organisation, while also communicating the relevant policies on the careers site.

#### What have been your key achievements?

Key achievements included: raising awareness of flexible working both within the organisation and in the industry; getting senior buy-in, for example an executive sponsor and/or approval for a flexible working trial; and persevering with their pursuit of flexible working. For some champions their key achievement was having flexible working options

included on job adverts for all areas of the organisation to encourage conversations about flexible working at the hiring point. For another champion, a key achievement was aligning with IT as a digital enabler of flexible working.

### **What works when it comes to flexible working?**

Senior leadership involvement was a key theme throughout all these discussions. Buy-in from senior managers and line managers had been achieved through a range of approaches, for example: understanding what the hook is for managers; engaging key stakeholders; linking flexible working to other issues and strategies, for example the gender pay gap; attracting a wider talent pool; and employee well-being. Raising awareness by providing information was another way of getting buy-in; this could include myth-busting or creating a buzz around different types of flexibility. Providing different types of flexible working, such as compressed hours and adjusted start and end times, also works well. When implementing flexible working, having a culture and infrastructure that support flexible working is very important.

During the process of an employee requesting flexible working, organisations have found that it is helpful to encourage employees to think about the impact of their flexible working requests on the business. Coaching managers and providing support through the request process is also important, as is communicating successes such as case studies and role models, for example role-modelling of flexible working at the senior level as well as the operational level. It can also be helpful to have champions within the organisation. Finally, another element that works when it comes to flexible working is showing the benefits of flexible working, for example more engaged employees and higher retention.

### **What has facilitated implementation of flexible working?**

#### **Business needs and competition with other organisations**

For some organisations, attraction and retention are key issues, and flexible working is an important part of their attraction and retention strategy, especially if flexible working is something that competitors are offering. The world of work is changing, and flexible working is needed to keep pace. Some organisations needed to implement flexible working because they were reducing their office space. For organisations that are client-led, some of the clients are starting to expect flexible working and greater diversity:

*'It's about image, reputation, and it's having that competitive edge over other organisations ... do you want to stand out from the crowd?'*

#### **Culture of the organisation**

Some champions described how organisations that are generally friendly, supportive and non-hierarchical are more likely to want to meet flexible working requests. Additionally, organisations that recognise that people can be productive in different ways may be more willing to implement flexible working:

*'Culture of the organisation – people have been receptive towards the change.'*  
*'Open-mindedness about the positive impact from many senior staff.'*

#### **Employee demand**

Some of the champions discussed how there are different generational expectations: millennials are more likely to expect flexible working. Therefore, in order to become an 'employer of choice' and to retain younger people, flexible working needs to be introduced. There was also a recognition that if an organisation has enough employees who have previously worked in a different organisation where they have seen flexible working, this can help to shift the mindset. Additionally, some employees are starting to move away

from London but still wanting to stay with a particular organisation, working remotely, therefore in order to retain them flexible working has been needed:

‘We wanted to become an employer of choice.’

### **Use of relevant information and publicity in the media**

Champions discussed how publicity of flexible working in the media has facilitated its implementation. Diversity and the gender pay gap have been in the public eye a lot, so public awareness can be harnessed and used to advantage in their organisations. The drive for flexible working has partly been because it is seen as a way to respond to the gender pay gap and to improve diversity. To facilitate implementing flexible working, it can be helpful to have industry-specific hooks to help sell the value of flexible working, for example commercial value. One champion discussed using statistical data to support success stories in order to influence key stakeholders and managers. In some organisations, it may be useful to demonstrate the link between flexible working and attraction and retention:

‘These are the numbers ... these are the savings you might make because retention and all that ... then they get it.’

### **What have been the challenges/barriers?**

#### **Attitudes/perceptions**

In some organisations it can be hard to challenge the status quo and change mindsets around flexible working. Some managers believe that flexible working will get in the way of delivering goals. Managers may also perceive that they do not have enough time to review flexible working requests, so they assume that flexible working cannot happen. There can also be a fear of change and a lack of trust. Managers fear that employees will take advantage if they are given flexible working, for example if an employee is working 8:00–4:00, will they turn up at 8:45 because no one else will be in until 9:00? There may also be old-fashioned mindsets in some organisations, for example, some people believe that if they cannot physically see someone, they do not know whether they are working. Other champions discussed how some people take flexibility for themselves, but do not think about the impact of that on the demands and expectations of others, or they set rules for other people but do not apply them to themselves. Another talked about difficulties in trying to get managers to understand that there are various different types of flexible working. There were also comments about difficulties in trying to create a joined-up approach across the organisation:

‘Probably one of our biggest challenges is always going to be that: “this is how we’ve always done it.”’

#### **Technology**

It can be hard to provide appropriate technology to enable everyone to have the option of working from home. It is costly to provide this technology and to ensure that everyone is GDPR-compliant. Costs include buying laptops and also software licences; and there can be difficulties in ensuring there is a secure network for remote access. Another barrier to flexible working is the lack of websites to advertise job-shares:

‘It’s almost seen as a privilege.’

### **Opportunities available for flexible working vary depending on seniority and there are differences in roles and preferences**

In some organisations there can be different access to flexible working at different levels;

for example, flexible working may be more available to senior managers than it is to junior employees. Junior employees in some organisations may be part of graduate programmes where they need to be visible, present and learning. For some roles it can be hard to accommodate flexible working, for example a site manager or receptionist. There may also be differences in preferences: one champion discussed how they learned from their pilot that some people would not want to work flexibly, so employees need to be provided with a choice. It can be harder to make flexible working work in some sectors, for example education, than others:

‘In certain roles it’s more difficult to actually accommodate.’

‘How can we bring in more flex into the trainee position?’

### **Cost and difficulty with risk assessments**

One of the costs associated with flexible working is that it requires a different way of rostering and timetabling. There is a cost of resource in terms of covering flexibility, and for management to think through flexible working requests. Job-share involves a handover day, and this is an extra cost for any organisation. Additionally, there is a cost and difficulty with risk-assessing the work environment for those not working in a central location, for example at home or in a coffee shop. Champions talked about the importance of setting parameters to avoid potential abuse of the system:

‘How do we timetable in a different way?’

### **Measuring success**

From the discussions it was clear that measurement is challenging. For example, how do you count flexible working if it is arranged informally and so is not in a contract? It is therefore important to encourage managers to record when they have received an informal request and how they have responded. This will help to measure achievement of targets such as increase in requests:

‘One of our targets is to increase acceptance of flexible requests but actually we can’t really measure that, so that’s a challenge.’

### **Business needs and volume of requests**

When considering flexible working requests, it is important to consider the needs of the business. In some organisations the volume of requests can be very high, and the business might not be in a position to accept them all. Similarly, it may be hard to find employees who are willing to job-share with an employee who is requesting a job-share. If organisations are highly dependent on contractors and locums, there may not be the budget or enough consistency or structure to implement flexible working.

### **Fairness**

Some of the champions discussed how they are trying to be fair, but it can be difficult. They described how they talk about ‘flexible working for everyone’, but in reality, in some roles it is very hard to introduce flexible working. However, it was concluded that, just because it does not look the same in different parts of the business, that does not mean you are not being unfair:

‘No one has complained about it but I do feel sorry for them because we’re kind of talking the big talk about things like working from home and it’s not going to happen for them. It’s not the only thing we’re talking about in terms of flexibility, but it does present a tension ... well I can’t do it can I, it’s not really fair.’

## How have you overcome challenges/barriers?

### Technology and networks

One way of overcoming the technology barrier is to pool laptops, so that more access is provided for those who would like to work from home. Internal job-sharing websites may also be useful for employees looking to job-share, and placing adverts on specialised websites such as Timewise and Mumsnet is another method of overcoming barriers. Another option is for people to use their own laptop:

‘The easiest hurdles and barriers to overcome are very much ones that are technology or purchasing, trialling a product, a system, etc.’

### Implementing flexible working gradually/pilot schemes

Pilots can be a useful way of overcoming barriers as they are temporary and can be reviewed after implementation. One organisation was in the process of implementing a two-week pilot scheme. Another was in the process of running a number of pilots across the business. The benefit of running pilots is that you can evaluate them, provide feedback and tweak future plans based on the results, and find ways to overcome barriers that are identified prior to further implementation. Other champions described how they convince managers to try flexible working options on a trial basis to see if it works for their area:

‘Just try it, just test it; maybe it will be fine.’

### Taking a flexible approach to flexible working

One way of overcoming challenges is to think about alternative options, for example flexing around the edges and exploring job-shares. In some roles where it may be harder to accommodate flexible working, it is possible to consider ways to provide at least some flexibility. One suggestion is to enable employees to engage in team-based/self-rostering:

‘What flexibility would they appreciate?’

Flexible working does not necessarily work for everyone, so it needs to be a choice. It is also important to be realistic about the extent of flexible working:

‘We’ve all got things that are easier to do – and for the business it’s more beneficial for you to do – in an office with other people. We don’t need to be complete radicals and shut every office we’ve ever had and never meet with someone in person ever again.’

### Linking to strategic benefits

Another way of overcoming challenges is to explain the potential of flexible working and how it links to strategic objectives, for example attraction, retention and well-being, then inform colleagues across the organisation of the links:

‘Find your hook and how it’s going to help your organisation.’

### Allow time for culture change

Culture change does not happen overnight. Champions are a key part of achieving culture change and they discussed the importance of having champions who are not just from HR; having people from outside HR push flexible working forward provides ‘drips’ of change:

‘Culture change is key, some areas will “get it” and just get on with it, others will need more support and guidance.’

### Compromising and setting clear boundaries

Setting parameters helps to stop abuse of the system; one way of doing this is to agree expectations at the beginning, and if the employee does not meet these, performance

measures need to be put in place. Flexible working requires two-way flexibility; in some organisations, employees are required to think through potential barriers when they put in their flexible working request:

‘When we had an application come in, we asked them what they wanted and then the next section was, “what are the potential barriers to implementation?” so automatically before they came in, they’d thought of all the pitfalls ... reverse psychology a little bit I suppose.’

### **Communication – understand the needs of stakeholders and share success stories**

It is important to think about what is worrying managers and how flexible working can help overcome those worries (for example not being able to recruit employees, employees being sick) and also to clearly communicate the benefits of flexible working. Another way of overcoming challenges/barriers is communication through workshops and presentations. Sharing case studies, both within the business and within the sector from a wide range of individuals and roles, is a good way of helping to change mindsets and overcoming resistance. Champions discussed the importance of having both role models and data:

‘At the end of this pilot the best way we’re going to cement this as a roaring success is by going, “here is the data that backs it up”.’

### **Coaching and supporting managers**

Acknowledging that thinking about making a job flexible is not straightforward for managers is the first step, and then supporting managers who are working through flexible working requests. Additionally, talking to managers about opportunities for informal flexibility, ad hoc, that they might be able to provide to more junior employees is another way of overcoming the challenges/barriers.

### **Acknowledging flexible working does not always look the same**

Flexible working looks different for different people. It is not always possible to provide everyone with flexible working, so it is important for organisations to be aware of this and how they manage it. There is the potential for employees to feel that there is an ‘us and them’ divide:

‘What does fairness look like, and how do you overcome that challenge?’

### **Using job design and succession planning**

When a job role makes it harder to create flexibility, one solution is to break down roles into the different tasks and to consider what can be done flexibly. As part of this, organisations can identify when an employee has to be physically present and when there might be someone else who could take on part of the role as a development opportunity. One organisation described how they had used this as a succession planning opportunity and to upskill employees:

‘Are there tasks that could be done from home? Which bits can be flexed and which can’t?’

### **Benefits seen so far**

#### **Raising awareness, building momentum and creating a buzz**

Champions commented that the flexible working they provide had created a buzz around the brand. There have also been fringe benefits identified, for example savings from office overheads. Organisations have recognised how flexible working can help in achieving the needs of the business. Champions talked about how employees in their organisation were aware of the breadth and depth of what flexible working means and now know it is not just about part-time working:

‘People used to see it as part-time and working from home – very narrow and siloed. Now they see it as a lot broader. Understanding of what flexible working is has improved and the impact it can have on very diverse groups other than women/carers/parents.’

Additionally, champions commented that momentum was partly gained from being part of a national project and the recent media coverage of this topic:

‘Working in conjunction with the CIPD and TimeWise, it does give that level of credibility from a professional perspective, which is always good.’

### **Reaching a broader talent pool/retention and reputation**

Champions discussed how flexible working is helping to reach a broader talent pool, such as returners. Additionally, it has helped in retaining employees and is associated with recruitment of good-quality employees. One champion also discussed how they have had higher levels of applications to job adverts. Champions also discussed becoming an employer of choice and that flexible working has resulted in them getting publicity because of what they’re doing.

### **Willingness to run a trial**

Champions discussed how there is an appetite to try flexible working and there is more open-mindedness.

### **Positive work outcomes**

During their three-month flexible working trial, one organisation saw a 30% increase in productivity and a 60% decrease in sickness absence. There was also an acknowledgement from the champions that it is nice for those in HR to be working on something innovative. Champions also described some employees talking about better work-life balance and some reports of employees feeling more valued and happier.

### **How do you measure impact?**

#### **Establish baselines and aims at the start to guide measurement**

When measuring impact, it is important to have baseline data that you can use for comparison and to measure change over time. It was agreed that it is very important when choosing appropriate tools and metrics to be clear about the purpose of flexible working and to identify what the organisation is seeking to achieve:

‘What is it that is important to measure? What is it that is our clarity of purpose behind why we’re introducing flexible working? We might have very different reasons for different businesses.’

#### **Performance metrics**

These could include outputs such as revenue, placements and KPIs. One organisation, which does not have such data, will be reviewing its IT data, for example email traffic and databases, to see if the flexible working pilot has any impact on these. One organisation described how they track productivity: the employee and manager regularly input productivity outputs into an online system. Deliverables for each role can be developed and these can then be monitored to measure success. Client feedback/satisfaction is also another measure that can be used. In one organisation, the flexible working steering group meet monthly and as part of their pilot they have chosen their own measures to enable them to have ownership:

‘Everybody has appraisals and objectives, so you could say: during the pilot are the appraisal objectives being met; and, if not, is this because flexible working is not being as efficient as it should be?’

### **HR metrics**

These could include attraction, retention, sickness absence data, health and safety metrics, mental and physical well-being, and exit interview data. Another metric is the number of flexible working requests.

### **Employee opinion metrics**

These can be measured using the employee opinion/engagement survey. Internal pre- and post-pilot satisfaction surveys were also discussed; however, the importance of employees not getting survey fatigue was noted. A focus group could also be run to gather employee opinions.

### **Case studies and anecdotes**

Case studies of best and worst examples of flexible working can be a really useful tool for learning. They may highlight a potential risk area or be used to explore the benefits.

### **Overall lessons learned**

#### **Support and train managers**

There was an acknowledgment that managers have to manage differently in a flexible working context, so organisations need to train managers how to do this, which may include encouraging them to empower teams to come up with solutions. Unconscious and conscious bias training that includes flexible working was also discussed as champions have learned that some employees assume that flexible working is for females. Managers also need coaching to differentiate between employees working from home versus employees who are ‘working from home’ because they are not feeling well: there needs to be a clear distinction between these two and managers may need to be coached on how to manage it:

‘Measuring output rather than presence – train managers to be able to do that.’

#### **Effective job design and avoiding job overload**

Part-timers often work extra hours and can take on more work than is appropriate because they do not want to be perceived as not delivering. It is therefore important to have the infrastructure in place to support part-time workers and to consider whether a role is really part-time; and, when implementing flexible working, effective job design is critical in order to avoid overloading part-time roles.

#### **Communication is key**

Employees’ expectations can be different from what a business might consider normal and some employees might take liberties. Therefore, organisations should be explicit about the boundaries of flexible working and about their purpose for introducing it. Organisations can be creative in their communication around flexible working, for example case studies, blogs, videos. Another lesson learned is, when employees make flexible working requests, ask them to outline the benefit to the organisation and to think about the potential challenges. It is also important to engage with employees prior to implementing flexible working, in order to understand the different perspectives within the organisation and to engage stakeholders in considering what success looks like for them. Consulting employees makes it more likely that they will champion flexible working.

‘Explain and link the benefit to the organisation ... managers often think the benefit is only for the individual.’

#### **Don’t make assumptions about what will and won’t work**

Not every employee will like flexible working, so it is worth trying things and seeing what works.

‘We thought everybody would like it, but when we got the data not everybody liked the freedom, some liked to have structure.’



### **Culture change takes time**

It is likely that implementing flexible working will require culture change, which takes time and effort. Champions are likely to help in maintaining momentum. Other factors that are likely to help in implementing it are continuous messaging at all levels, and perseverance:

‘You can’t implement it overnight and there are lots of things you have to think about and overcome.’

‘It’s a culture change and it’s not going to be a quick fix. It’s not writing a policy and hoping people do it.’

### **Have an agile mindset**

When approaching flexible working, it is important to approach it with an open mind and acknowledge that it is possible you might make mistakes. Ensure that you review how flexible working is working and be willing to make changes as part of that process:

‘It might not work and that’s okay.’

‘Be flexible with flexible working.’

### **Maturity levels of flexible working will vary**

The maturity level of flexible working could be different across different areas of the organisation. One size does not fit all:

‘Although some business types/departments may struggle to adopt all flexible working options, there will always be a form of flexible working that will work. There are various options for flexible working and the main thing to do is find out which options work for your business.’

### **Changing the default assumption**

The aim is to change the default assumption so that it becomes ‘flexible working is possible in this role’; then, unless the hiring manager provides a justification of why a job could not be done flexibly, assume that if someone asks for flexible working, it should not be a problem:

‘Is the job description reflective of what the person is actually going to do in the role?’

### **Investing time up front is invaluable**

Invest time at the start to make flexible working work. By providing guidance and proper toolkits for people to follow, there is greater likelihood of success. Although it might take longer initially, it will benefit the project in the long run.

### **Employer of choice**

Champions discussed how flexible working can differentiate you in the market by strengthening the corporate brand. Offering flexible working can help you to become an employer of choice.

### **Think about the hook for buy-in that is relevant to your organisation**

To achieve senior management buy-in it is important to know what the hook is for your organisation. For example, is it the gender pay gap or a skills shortage or a retention issue?

### **How will you build on the success achieved and maintain momentum?**

#### **Integrate it into activities and strategy**

Think about the points in the year and during the employee cycle/employee experience at which it is appropriate to talk about flexible working. Look at all initiatives and the broader strategy; and integrate flexible working into the equality, diversity and inclusion strategy:

‘Where can we promote it, make it obvious, when during the year do we want to do communications about it? What are the events that we want to link it to? For example, recruitment and performance reviews.’

### **Reviewing pilots**

Champions talked about how they will review their pilot flexible working initiatives and, depending on the success of these, they will roll out flexible working and embed it across the organisation.

### **Take actions to continue to change perceptions**

Champions discussed the need to combat the stigma surrounding flexible working and negative perceptions. For example, there may be a perception that if someone works flexibly there are not as many progression opportunities. Suggestions for how to change these perceptions were education, manager training, and visibly rewarding teams or managers who are role-modelling flexible working and support for flexible working: for example, making it okay for part-time workers to leave during meetings if that is part of their work schedule, rather than it being frowned upon:

‘We would like there to be behaviours that people seek to emulate.’

### **Training**

Suggestions for training included making flexible working part of the unconscious bias training and considering how different ways of working can be perceived. This training could then be built into general management development programmes and equality, diversity and inclusion programmes.

### **Reflecting, reviewing and sharing learning**

Constantly reflect on how far you’ve come and review what you’ve done. Review, learn, make changes and talk about these!

### **How do you/will you engage and retain flexible workers?**

Communication is key; ultimately flexible working is good management and organisations should be inclusive. As part of this, trust needs to be established between managers and employees, especially when employees are working from home. One champion said that they will focus on the development and progression of flexible workers. Another talked about the importance of job design and ensuring that part-time roles are really part-time.

### **How will you embed a wider culture of flexibility in your organisation?**

One organisation is reviewing their flexible working policy and removing the 26-week (government legislation) eligibility requirement. They explained how, if organisations are discussing flexible working at the point of hire, this legislation becomes less relevant. Another organisation described how they will be monitoring and measuring outcomes to ensure that flexible working is embedded; however, they acknowledged the need to communicate to employees why and how they are monitoring. Another champion described how they will continuously communicate successes.

### **Next steps**

The next steps discussed by champions varied as the champions were at different stages of implementing flexible working.

### **Examining measurement**

Some of the champions wanted to focus more on measurement, for example the measurement of non-contractual flexibility and the measurement of role deliverables pre and post their flexible working pilot. Champions discussed how they want to consider the best type of metrics so that they can really show the impact of flexible working.

### **Communication**

One champion described how she was not sure that they had sold the benefits of flexible working to employees, as they had been very focused on selling the benefits to the senior team. Another discussed promoting the successes of flexible hiring and flexible working to other organisations. Another wanted to (1) define how teaching roles can be flexible and (2) communicate this through advertising, explaining the type of flexibility at hiring. Another talked about running workshops to develop the principles of agile/flexible working.

### **Strategy**

Next steps for one champion involved trying to link everything to the overall strategy.

They discussed how powerful it would be to bring everything (including career pages, video clips, diversity and inclusion, well-being, and so on) together.

### **Flexible working at the point of hire**

A couple of champions want to start offering flexible working at the point of hire and that will be their next step as they feel there is a great business case for it.

### **Deciding on the terminology**

There were discussions around the perceptions associated with the term 'flexible working', mainly that for most people this refers to 'a mum who wants to work part-time'. Branding and terminology can help in gaining buy-in from the business and building excitement.

### **Involving other colleagues and reviewing how to support managers**

Managers play a key role in flexible working. Discussions considered how to support managers in implementing flexible working. It is important to create a safe environment in which managers can ask questions and to help them consider how they manage and measure employee performance. The importance of involving trade union colleagues was also discussed.

### **Implementing relevant policies and processes**

Some of the champions were planning to create flexible hiring statements to roll out with the job descriptions on their website, and considering how best to communicate about their trial. Another champion is planning to implement job-sharing.

### **Reviewing data, plans and ideas**

Champions discussed reviewing their project data and action plans. Some champions were interested in implementing ideas they had heard about in the discussions at these events.



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