

# Flexibility

A glimpse into the future of flexible work



CHANDLER  
MACLEOD  
GROUP

## INTRODUCTION

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, many organisations have circumstantially been required to undertake flexible work in the form of working remotely to ensure the safety of their employees in 2020. But what does “working flexibly” mean to employees and employers? And how effective has the implementation and uptake been in the eyes of both these cohorts?

We wanted to find out the effectiveness of the flexibility being offered as well as what it means to employees and businesses. To do this we surveyed a group of over 200 people, both employees and employers in white-collar industries.

We discovered some interesting insights in the following areas:

- The desire and readiness for flexible work
- The impact of flexible work on employee turnover
- Which flexible work types are most valued
- How businesses track in implementing flexibility
- Discrepancies in how employers believe they perform and how they are perceived

Furthermore, we have put forward some recommendations and predictions based on the data collected, to offer insight into what flexible work may look like in the future.







**The**

**Employee**

**Perspective**

## HOW IMPORTANT IS FLEXIBLE WORK TO EMPLOYEES?

All responses indicated that the ability to work flexibly is very important to employees.

Overall, 97% of employee responders strongly agreed that working flexibly allows for a better work-life balance, aids with productivity levels, and whilst it was an adjustment during the Covid-19 Pandemic, it was ultimately beneficial. Additionally, the employees agreed that their work ethic was not negatively impacted when working flexibly.



*64% OF EMPLOYEES ARE LIKELY TO STAY WITH AN ORGANISATION LONGER WHEN THEY OFFER FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS.*

## YES, ALL TYPES OF FLEXIBLE WORK IS IMPORTANT.

When asked what type of flexible work arrangements were important; ability to work part-time, varied work hours, remote working, compressed work weeks or a combination of remote and in-office work, both candidates and employees indicated that all items were of equal importance.

This gives us an indication that flexible work is no longer a “one size fits all” arrangement and needs to fit both the organisation and the employee individually, based on their current pressures and needs. Essentially flexible work practices will need to evolve with the employee over time.

Additionally, employees are interested in the ability to work around childcare and school hours, transitioning to full-time work from part-time or casual work, being close to home, flexible work locations, to be fully remote, and to work any time that suits.

## FLEXIBLE WORKING POSES NO ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

99% of employees indicated little to no struggle with balancing work and home life. Employees overwhelmingly agreed that the level of communication and preparation from their organisation prior to the 'forced' flexible work period due to Covid-19, was sufficient. In other words, they felt adequately prepared to step into the flexible working world.

But there could be improvements...

97% of employees seemed to struggle slightly with technology and agreed that they could work more efficiently with better ICT systems and tools that should be ready to use. There were also comments from people missing the social aspect of being in the office. However, overall, most people were pleased to be able to work when required and not have to travel into the office.



*PERHAPS WITH BETTER ICT SYSTEMS, NOT ONLY WILL FLEXIBLE WORK BE MORE ACCESSIBLE BUT TOOLS SUCH AS MICROSOFT TEAMS OR GOTO MEETING CAN HELP IMPROVE SOCIALISING BETWEEN TEAM MEMBERS TO KEEP UP MORALE.*

## DO EMPLOYEE WORKPLACES SUPPORT THEIR NEEDS?

The below table outlays the results from up to 155 employees who were surveyed.

	NEEDS A LOT OF IMPROVEMENT	NEEDS SOME IMPROVEMENT	THEY ARE DOING WELL	THEY ARE DOING GREAT
AVAILABILITY TO WORK PART TIME	21%	22%	33%	23%
VARIED WORK HOURS	20%	32%	25%	23%
REMOTE WORKING	24%	21%	30%	25%
COMPRESSED WORK WEEKS	28%	31%	26%	15%

The research indicates that more often than not, organisations (58%) need to improve in offering compressed work weeks. A slight improvement (51%) should be made around varied work hours also. However, most of the research seems to suggest that there is a fine line between companies doing well and needing improvement.



*WHAT WE NEED TO SEE TRANSFORM HERE, IS FOR THERE TO BE A HEAVY WEIGHTING FOR COMPANIES DOING WELL AND DOING GREAT INSTEAD OF SUCH AN ALMOST EVEN SPLIT.*

## **OVERALL, ORGANISATIONS ARE DOING WELL WITH FLEXIBILITY IMPLEMENTATION**

95% of employees agreed that they were aided with information to help with their work-life balance, that there was enough communication with employees and that they were sufficiently prepared to work flexibly. Employee's felt okay about the IT systems in place, but as earlier mentioned, this also seemed to be the most challenging aspect of working from home. This indicates that whilst flexible work is overall quite accessible there can be some refinement around ICT systems.

Very few responses indicated that there was no option to work flexibly, and another response told us that there was an approval process required to work flexibly.

Overall, it seems most workplaces at this point in time implement flexible work successfully... but as you can see there is always room for improvement.



# The

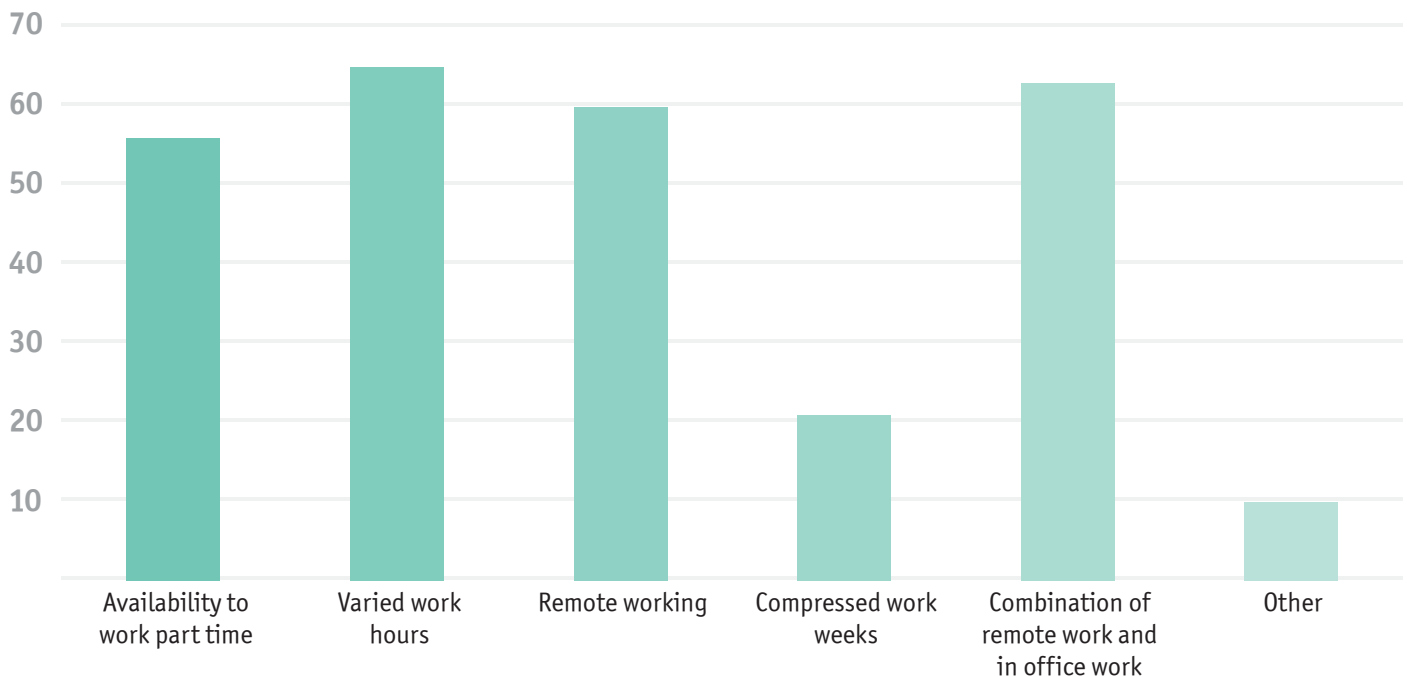
# Employer

# Perspective

WE'VE SEEN SOME POSITIVE RESULTS FROM OUR EMPLOYEE'S WITHIN ORGANISATIONS, BUT WHAT ARE LEADERS SAYING ABOUT THEIR OWN FLEXIBLE POLICIES?

## WHAT ARE ORGANISATIONS OFFERING THEIR STAFF?

Currently, what flexible work options are available at your organisation?



*EVERYONE, EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES ALIKE, AGREE THAT COMPRESSED WORK WEEKS ARE NOT A STRONG POINT WHEN IT COMES TO FLEXIBILITY OFFERINGS.*

Whilst organisations seem to have more confidence in what they offer their employee's, the employee research indicates there is an almost 50/50 split with what organisations need to improve on and what they need do well in.



*THERE MAY BE A LACK OF COMMUNICATION AROUND WHAT OFFERINGS ARE AVAILABLE AND ALSO NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION AROUND WHAT FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS STAFF MEMBERS ARE TAKING UP. LATER WE WILL RECOMMEND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO AVOID THESE DISCREPANCIES, SUCH AS CONDUCTING SURVEYS.*

After all, the more people in your organisation utilising flexible work options, the more people will know about what you offer.

Very few comments suggested that flexibility can depend on the manager or that flexibility isn't offered.

# ORGANISATIONS CAN DO MORE TO SUPPORT A FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE

100% of responders in the 'leader' cohort agreed that their organisation offers an adequate range of flexible work arrangements and that flexibility is a highly valued part of their organisational culture.

Yet, they all also indicated that they would like to see their organisation offer more in terms of flexible work arrangements.

What does this show? It may seem like we are satisfied with what is offered to our employees right now, and know that we are ticking the flexibility boxes, but is that enough? 100% of leaders strongly agreed to the fact that organisations could do more, therefore, organisations should be doing more.

Clearly organisations can do more to support flexible working practices, and the conflicting answers in this section support this. Perhaps this just indicates that what was considered 'supporting flexible work' pre-Covid-19 has been shown to be insufficient to meet the growing needs of the workforce. During this time, when many white-collar organisations were forced (and quickly at that) into providing flexible work options for the safety of their staff, will mean a broader offering of what businesses offer their employees in the future.

## WHAT COULD 'DOING MORE' LOOK LIKE?

- Supporting home office set up
- Assistance with home OHS checks
- Home office equipment allowance
- Formal IT set up sessions and check-ins
- Relative and frequent surveys
- Accessible content around survey results to assist with any employee challenges

## ARE BUSINESSES IMPLEMENTING FLEXIBLE WORK SUCCESSFULLY?

The below table shows how 50 leaders feel their organisation is performing around flexible work.

	N/A – MY ORGANISATION DOES NOT HAVE FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS	MY ORGANISATION NEEDS A LOT OF IMPROVEMENT	MY ORGANISATION NEEDS SOME IMPROVEMENT	MY ORGANISATION IS OKAY	MY ORGANISATION IS DOING WELL	MY ORGANISATION IS DOING GREAT
MY ORGANISATION COMMUNICATES FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS TO ALL EMPLOYEES	2%	16%	16%	32%	22%	10%
THE BUSINESS EXTENDS RESOURCES TO HELP WITH PRODUCTIVITY WHEN WORKING FLEXIBLY	4%	13%	21%	38%	15%	10%
THE BUSINESS HAS STRONG IT PROCESSES IN PLACE FOR FLEXIBLE WORKERS	2%	13%	10%	23%	40%	13%
MY ORGANISATION OFFERS SUPPORT FOR FLEXIBLE WORKERS WITH FAMILIES	2%	13%	15%	19%	38%	15%

### *What do these results indicate?*

Organisations felt they performed best with regards to their IT systems supporting flexible work, but didn't necessarily provide the support to maintain productivity in a flexible environment.



Without deep-diving on those responses it is difficult to say what the specific issues may be, but some areas where productivity can be enhanced or supported away from the standard IT system set up could be:

- Providing access to collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams, ASANA, Slack or other tools
- Communicating where additional supports are needed
- Providing support (even if temporary) with regard to equipment such as computer screens/towers or laptops
- Providing conferencing tools for remote meetings (GoTo Meeting, conference call facilities)

What was clear, is that there is a disparity between what organisations think they offer employees and what employees perceive is on offer.

Another strong point for organisations is the support they offer working families which is in line with the employees responses when it comes to how they feel about work-life balance.

Of those employers surveyed, it is heartening to see that support offered to working families appears to be good and in line with employee responses. It should be noted however, that we did not divide the research responses by gender – which would be an interesting distinction to see.

Organisations seem to be tracking only okay when it comes to communicating flexible options to their employees and offering resources to help with productivity from home. It is interesting that only 33% of leaders who responded to this survey felt their organisation was communicating well or very well, as this points to a lack of adequate communication. Therefore, it appears some improvement can be made in this area.

In FlexCareers Annual Flexibility Report from 2019, “less than 5%” of employers had set targets for engagement in flexible work by their employees, and “nearly 20% of people working at firms with flexible policies do not know what is fully on offer.” So whilst more businesses at this time were offering flexible options, they were not always explaining them adequately to their employees.

Whilst it appears this still seems to be a significant issue for employers, the employee survey results indicate that perhaps organisations are not doing as badly as they think they are and that there has been some improvement in this area.

# ORGANISATIONS AND EMPLOYEES AGREE THAT FLEXIBLE WORK IS ESSENTIAL AND VALUABLE

We asked 50 leaders whether or not they agreed to the following statements.

Providing flexibility helps our staff be more effective in their job	★★★★★☆☆
Offering flexible work arrangements increases staff satisfaction	★★★★★☆☆
Our staff are more likely to stay with the organisation because of the flexible work arrangements we offer	★★★★★☆☆
We have found little to no effect on productivity by offering flexible work arrangement	★★★★☆☆☆☆

*1= Strongly disagree, 6= Strongly agree*

These are great results for flexible work. 99% of leaders who responded strongly agree that flexibility helps staff to be more effective and increases staff satisfaction.

Leaders within organisations also believe that staff are more likely to stay with the organisation because of the flexible work arrangements they offer. (They're right!) 64% of employee's surveyed said they would likely stay with a business where they were able to work flexibly. On top of this, FlexCareer's Annual Flexibility Report demonstrates several of their clients experiencing a reduction of voluntary turnover after implementing flexibility in their organisation.

Most leaders agree that the productivity of the business was not negatively or positively impacted by increases in flexible work. This indicates that business as usual was able to take place and there is no negative effect when implementing flexibility.



# **Predictions / Recommendations**

## **MORE FLEXIBLE OPTIONS AND BETTER ADVERTISING OF LESSER KNOWN OFFERINGS**

Some recommendations from organisations as part of our research indicated the desire for different flexible work options including:

- Ability to swap employees RDO's around
- Implementation of transition to retirement schedules
- Parental leave transitional hours
- Job sharing

On top of this, businesses may want to focus on improving flexible work options, such as compressed work weeks that they offer but do not have the up-take in. Although the research suggests that many flexible work options are equally as important as the other which means advertising all flexible policies is valuable, it can still be helpful to shine light on lesser known or discussed options that are clearly less established within organisations.

## **BUSINESSES SHOULD ASK FOR FEEDBACK**

Due to a slight discrepancy in employee perception and employer perception of IT implementation and supportive correspondence, it can be helpful to open a line of transparent communication between the business and employees. This can be done via more frequent surveys or by hosting a suggestion box on your intranet and communicating the desire for feedback.

Since Covid-19 hit and most of our employees started working from home, our business leaders host a monthly virtual town hall to communicate any updates and answer any questions that come through in a public forum. After the town hall our HR team sends out a survey to check in with our staff and see if anything could be better.

Mark Graham, our Chief People Officer, has shared that we've found it's important to support our leaders and help them understand just how our people feel about flexibility along with what they want from their work and the organisation. It may be different for certain individuals and overall, you can cater flexible arrangements on an individual basis if it works for everyone. We've had excellent feedback around our employee surveys and virtual town hall events and will continue to do them so that we can hear from our people directly and keep up to date with what they want.

## **KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK**

And of course, we congratulate all businesses who are successfully offering support for their staff who are all quite satisfied by their execution of flexible work. We implore all businesses to maintain the offering of resources and support that they currently do, whilst also trying to improve. Whilst a new level of flexibility is becoming widely accepted and normalised in white collar workforces, there was a very strong indication that perhaps more could be done. This leads us to our predictions for the future of flexible work.

## **WILL FLEXIBLE WORK BECOME THE NEW NORMAL, AND IN-OFFICE, 9-5 HOURS, BECOME THE WAY IT 'USED TO BE'?**

We believe it will.

Whilst many have gotten a taste for how flexible work can help them and how it positively impacts their employee's, it is going to become less of a 'topic' and more a way of life. Employee's will expect flexible work options and employer's who refuse to offer them will find themselves lacking the ability to obtain top talent who will have many opposing options as other organisations have risen up, now offering flexibility. Without this offering, many organisations will fall behind and reduce the overall satisfaction of their workforce. This is the first domino to fall and will negatively impact many other areas of their organisation.

We do believe many employees and leaders will prefer to get into the office environment, yet, it seems there is evidence that most people will prefer some type of flexibility and that those in office will likely want flexible hours at the least.



*"WITH THE SUCCESS OF REMOTE WORKING AND WHAT WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO MEASURE SO FAR IN TERMS OF PRODUCTIVITY, I SEE WE'LL NEED LESS SPACE IN OFFICES... NOT JUST AT CHANDLER MACLEOD, BUT ORGANISATIONS GENERALLY."  
PETER ACHESON, CEO CHANDLER MACLEOD GROUP*

## **THERE WILL BE MORE FOCUS ON STAFF ENGAGEMENT**

For businesses that are cleverly implementing flexibility staff engagement and a focus on transparent communication is key. The lack of daily in-person interaction increases the need to socialise and build relationships with our peers and leaders in order to create trust, motivation and engagement. This is possible through more frequent video meetings, social only catch ups, transparent updates from leaders within organisations, more face time, and other means of direct contact with employee's – perhaps even more meaningful interactions than those had in a previous working world.

## **IMPROVED IT SYSTEMS CAN EMERGE**

In line with keeping up employee engagement and the results from our survey, we recommend evaluating IT systems and support. Perhaps organisations can survey employees on what they specifically require or struggle with. Better IT systems relieve unnecessary stress on employees and can aid in ease of communication between teams and across departments.



# Conclusion

The background image shows a modern, dimly lit interior space, likely a cafe or office lounge. In the foreground, a man in a plaid shirt and jeans walks towards the camera, holding several sheets of paper. To his right, a woman is seated at a table, working on a laptop. In the background, another person is seated at a table near a window. The ceiling features exposed concrete, track lighting, and several hanging light bulbs. A red banner with the word "Conclusion" in white text is overlaid across the middle of the image.

It is clear that flexible work options are becoming normalised, and that many organisations have had to implement additional flexible working options for all of their employees where they may have otherwise not had to. We believe that flexibility in the white collar sector will ultimately become a completely normal occurrence in our everyday lives and that the recent required work-from-home experiences were an excellent means to removing the stigma around flexible work, specifically, remote work.

It has become apparent that many employees' can successfully work outside of the regular work hours and environment; and numerous CEO's and leaders can successfully lead this way too.

The future of flexible work is the future of all our work-lives in general and will transform the climate of white-collar working societies from a constant need to prove productivity to a mentality that values the balance we have between working and living. Flexible work is the door-way to a new way of working which will create a more cohesive and manageable blend of work and home life overall contributing to a healthier and happier working society.

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a large crowd of people walking on a paved plaza. The plaza is marked with a complex, geometric grid of dark lines that create a pattern of irregular polygons. The people are scattered across the plaza, some walking in groups, some alone, and some sitting on the ground. The overall scene is busy and dynamic, with a sense of movement and social interaction. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day, and the colors of the people's clothing are varied, adding to the visual complexity of the scene.

**About the**

**Chandler Macleod Group**

Chandler Macleod Group provides a suite of talent solutions services. We offer these through a number of operating brands across various industries and throughout the Asia Pacific region. These services include casual and permanent recruitment, managed services, recruitment process outsourcing, management and organisational development, recruitment and human resource consulting, career transition, psychometric assessment, training and executive coaching.

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