

## Flex work: Good for the employees, Good for the business

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Several changes occur in the workplace due to potent forces like technology, changing consumers' needs and preferences, and employee requirements, resulting in the employers altering the traditional 8 to 4 workday. In this interconnected world, where digital tools like chatbots, social media, messenger, etc., customers are demanding rapid responses in real-time and at any hour of the day. Therefore, working hours need to be changed or altered to suit the changing consumer needs. The need to strike a work-life balance makes flexible working hours favourable to employees. The availability of virtual software makes it possible for employees to work from anywhere, thus allowing them to execute some of their duties out of the office.

Several forms of flex work exist, and employers choose that which fits their business model and business operations. Therefore, it is vital for organisations to first examine their condition and circumstances before settling on any Flexi-work.

### **Flexible working types include:**

- Telecommuting
- Job sharing
- Condensed workweek
- Customised work hours
- Part-time work
- Remote working

True to their form of open-mindedness, nordic countries have led the way in embracing agile working hours. In the UK, application for flexible working is a statutory right after an employee serves 26 weeks in a row. However, in the Southern Africa region, the concept is yet to gain a foothold. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that employees could work from anywhere; therefore, it's plausible to assume that more and more countries shall adopt Flexi-work.

### **The business benefits**

Like any other new thing, implementing flexible working is a bit difficult at first because of the need to align and orient the entire system to the new ways of Flexi work. Flexible working is associated with

vague boundaries, which is a problem that needs to be figured out before the organisation embarks on the program. If adequately implemented, flexible working can transform the organisation in extraordinary ways. It is likely to engender an increase in productivity and high employee engagement.

In this age of growing customer empowerment, the business requires a 360-degree approach to customer service. Customers have become more demanding and expect rapid service at any time of the day. They expect a response to a message on social media or any other digital platform, regardless of the time that inquiry or query is sent. Flexitime enables employees to be active at non-conventional hours, like early in the morning or late at night, at their convenience. Employees who take up duty at such hours can help the organisation serve and satisfy customers and ensure their continued patronage.

However, flexitime does not translate into giving employees free rein, whereby they impose their will and wishes on how the organisation is to be operated. For the good implementation of flexible working, organisations must set strong boundaries and ensure that rules are being followed. For example, the rule can be that everyone must be in at 10 am, and no one leaves before 2 pm, or an employee must be in the office at least three times a week. Changing demographics and population ageing in the developed world are exerting much pressure on the employees. With the need to take care of old relatives and little children, flexitime comes in handy to ameliorate the worsening situation of strained workers.

Other business advantages of flexible working time are:

- Creating a better work-life balance helps in ensuring good employee wellbeing, satisfaction, and subsequently motivation.
- Reducing employee stress and allowing workers to work at times of their convenience is a good way to reduce personal stress.
- Making work more enjoyable, this is due to employees working at the time of their convenience.
- More productivity is because of the link between employee motivation and productivity.
- Employees are likely to be more loyal to the organisation that factors their needs when organising work.
- People are likely to come to work in the right state of mind to be more engaged and more productive.
- Flexi work is a good selling point that recruiters can use to attract top-performing employees.

### **Remote working can help culture and collaboration**

Culture is an invisible force that guides employee actions and interactions in the workplace. For businesses embarking on flex work, the organisation needs to identify drivers of culture in the organisation. Cultural drivers include elements like beliefs, values, etc. Protection of the drivers of

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culture is essential for the organisation to thrive with flex work. Several digital technologies are enabling employees to collaborate remotely.

Flex-work has an inherent flexibility that improves cohesion and collaboration throughout the entire company. For example, employees can work in other branches, depots, or offices other than their usual and native offices. An employee can work at an office closer to his/her home twice a week or at a branch in another country during a visit or vacation. The overall effect of that enhances the collaboration of employees throughout the business and the creation of synergies within the business.

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