



Mind the Flexible Working Gap: What Employees Really Want From Flexibility



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“Flexible work ushered in one of the biggest shifts in the modern workplace in years. Recent events brought flexible working into everyday life, and it has now become a mainstay for millions of employees across the UK.

Despite a rise in flexible working practices, the findings in this report show that not all employees feel their organisation’s policies are effective. Not only does this impact employee wellbeing, engagement and performance, but it can also have a detrimental effect on productivity gains.

However, flexible work is not just a tick-box exercise, and each business’s policies will vary. Instead of offering flexibility as a blanket perk, leaders must ensure they implement a clear and effective flexible working benefit which adheres to employees’ needs, helping build trust in leadership in the process.

It is crucial that leaders act on feedback and work with employees to address these issues and knock down any barriers to flexible work to empower their people to succeed.”

Pete Cooper

Director of People Partners & DEI, Personio



Foreword

Methodology

Our 2024 report on flexible working is based on an online survey conducted by Research Without Barriers that took place between 15th December 2023 and 5th January 2024, exploring the thoughts and sentiments of workers across the UK.

During that time, we received survey **responses from a total of 2,000 full-time salaried employees working across a range of different-sized companies and industries**, including Education, Finance, Healthcare, Manufacturing, Retail and Transport, across the whole of the UK. Respondents were gathered through random sampling methods and answered questions on their understanding, as well as their wants, needs and challenges concerning flexible working.

All participants were asked to partake in further screening before they were sent an invitation to participate in the survey. Any abnormally patterned answers were eliminated from the analysis, including those who missed questions, provided incomplete information or were subsequently screened out.

The most significant findings and what HR leaders and organisations can take from these are outlined in the following pages.



Overview

Four years on from the COVID-19 pandemic, many UK businesses are still finding their feet around flexible working. Our understanding of the concept has changed a lot since the initial days of remote-first, Work from Anywhere (WFA) and flexible hour schemes. But have actual flexible working policies kept up?

Now, there are new developments on the horizon. In April, **making a flexible working request is set to become a day-one right for employees across the UK.**¹ This people-first legislation move is set to shake things up in a big way for UK businesses while simultaneously empowering more employees to work more flexibly.

Given this, we wanted to get a snapshot of the state of flexible working in 2024 - but through the eyes of the UK employee. We surveyed over 2,000 salaried workers across the UK to get their thoughts on flexible working, posing some key questions such as:

What do they understand the concept of 'flexible working' to be?

What do they want and expect from their employers?

And most importantly, are workers happy with current flexible work arrangements, and if not, what is it they really want from these schemes?

What we found suggests there is work to be done -

83%

of those surveyed felt their company's current flexible working policy needed improvement, pointing to a flexible working 'policy gap' businesses need to address.

We hope this report helps HR leaders to better understand the flexible working needs of their employees. We also hope it gives you the insights to build better, more effective, flexible working policies. As the cultural cornerstone of every organisation, HR leaders and professionals are perfectly placed to drive real change and impact in this area as the UK continues to get more 'flexible' with flexible working.

So, grab a hot drink, take your laptop somewhere comfortable and enjoy!

There is more than just 'one way' to do flexible working

In the wake of the pandemic, remote working went from a 'nice to have' to a 'must have'.

HR teams mobilised rapidly to put in place new policies and procedures that accommodated Working from Home (WFH), quite literally, overnight.

Many existing flexible and remote working policies are a legacy from that time. But, as attitudes around flexibility have only continued to develop since then, it's essential that businesses keep pace with the changing landscape.

While some organisations are still digging their heels in, demanding a return to the traditional 9-to-5 office model, many more companies are beginning to accept the crucial importance that flexibility is likely to play in the future of work.

In particular, it's the perceptions of employees that are rapidly evolving around flexibility. And this correlates strongly with our findings. It's no longer just about 'working from home' - over half (**52%**) of respondents said flexible working was about choosing where and when they would like to work. **32%** said it was about having the freedom to fit important 'life errands' around work. And for **31%** it was about getting to choose the hours they could work.



What is flexible working?

"choosing where and when you work"

52%

"freedom to fit life errands around work"

32%

"choosing the hours you work"

31%

What ‘flexible working’ means to employees:

52%

“Choosing where I want to work and when I want to work”

33%

“Having the option to work from home”

32%

“Being able to fit important life errands around work”

31%

“Getting to choose what hours I want to work”

30%

“Working the same contracted hours, but when I choose”



For context, this is how the government now defines flexible working:

“Flexible working is a way of working that suits an employee’s needs, for example having flexible start and finish times, or working from home.”²



“Work from Anywhere is a key pillar of PayFit’s culture, grounded in mutual trust and empowerment. What is it? In addition to working from our office, PayFit provides the option to ‘Work from Anywhere’ for greater flexibility and engagement. As there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach, providing flexibility allows us to balance different employee needs, leading to increased productivity and wellbeing.

Flexible working policies remain a key strategy for HR professionals. It’s essential that these plug into their Employee Value Proposition, brand, and also support unique employee needs.”

Hein Van De Wiel

Senior Director of People Operations & Strategy,
PayFit





What does this all mean?

For one, **people have different definitions of flexible working**. And that means they might have different ideas of what they want from flexibility when they join your organisation.

People specialists, in particular, are well-placed to help educate their workforce on this idea.

The rest of the organisation looks to you for guidance and insight and to be shepherded in the right direction. But in the age of employee individualism, this looks a little different: In order to facilitate a wide range of needs you have to be willing to listen, collaborate and find different ways to make things work.

“A flexible working policy needs to be designed for and with the end users. If flexible working means “3 days in, 2 days out”... that is not flexible, it is just a rigid policy framed as flexible.

Flexible working should empower both the individual and organisation to optimally deliver key objectives whilst providing as much freedom as is practically possible to choose how, when and where work gets done. For some this will mean being free for childcare, for others having time to go to the gym, for some just being able to work during optimal zones of productivity during a 24-hour cycle rather than an 8-hour working day.

Creating “employee personas” is an excellent way of understanding the core user groups that your flexible working policy needs to address - i.e. Working Parents may be one persona group, Early Careers may be another. Their flexibility requirements are likely going to differ widely, so creating freedom to flex within clearly defined boundaries for each persona group is going to be key.”

Luke O'Mahoney

Founder, SapienX

To recap, it's crucial for leaders to understand that there's no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to flexible working. But it's even more important that HR leaders take up the mantle to champion this idea so that it becomes supported at all levels of the organisation.

But how well is flexi-working currently playing out in organisations? Are current policies effective, or are there barriers in place that make it harder for employees to get the most out of existing policies?

Let's find out...



The state of current flexible working policies: There's room for improvement

We've established that different employees have different views of what flexibility means. So how does this feed into their level of satisfaction with current flexible working arrangements?

We're already hearing rumblings in the labour market. Despite being on a rollercoaster that's taken us from the Great Resignation to the Great Re-Shuffle through to the Great Big Stay, one thing has become clear - the expectations of employees are higher than ever.

In other words, there's been a rebalancing in the talent market. In the age of individualism³ employees feel more empowered to show up to work as themselves and ask for what they truly want. Money is no longer the sole motivator, and employees are more purpose and happiness-driven, seeking out opportunities and roles that better support their wellbeing and lifestyle choices.

Given this, **are employees happy** with the existing flexible working policies and arrangements on offer?

Turns out, the answer isn't a resounding yes. **83%** of employees surveyed felt their company's current flexible working policy needed improvement.

On average, only **35%** employees surveyed claimed they were actually 'happy' with their organisation's flexible working model. Men were happier than women, with **40%** of men surveyed saying they were happy, compared to only **32%** of women.

Are employees happy with existing flexible working policies?



40%

of men are happy

32%

of women are happy

This last finding is particularly problematic - it means that current flexible working arrangements aren't meeting the needs of women as well as those of men. It's a sentiment that resonates with some of our experts, including Elizabeth Willets, Founder and Director of Investing in Women, who is calling for a true 'systemic' shift towards more equitable opportunities and sharing of responsibilities.

"The 35% satisfaction rate paints a stark picture. While progress has been made, the traditional 40-hour week, rooted in an era when women weren't workplace fixtures, fails to address the reality of today's dual-income households.

The 'invisible labour' of home and childcare often falls disproportionately on women, leading to exhaustion and underutilised talent. A true shift needs to happen on two fronts: firstly, at home, towards a more equitable sharing of responsibilities. But more importantly, organisations must adapt. Flexible working isn't just a perk; it's a necessity.

We need policies that genuinely cater to women's needs, not token gestures. Think part-time options, remote work possibilities, robust childcare support, and a culture that embraces, not penalises, flexibility. Until then, this 35% will likely remain stagnant, a missed opportunity for businesses and a missed chance for women to thrive."



Elizabeth Willets

Founder and Director, Investing in Women

Finally, there's not having access to a flexible working policy at all

Finally, there are those workers who are barred completely from working flexibly simply because their organisation doesn't offer any kind of flexible working policy. In this case, those who can't perform their jobs from home may be being under-served as well.

What does this all mean?

We strongly agree with Willets' assessment. Flexibility isn't just a token perk, it's fast becoming a necessity in a highly VUCA world⁴ (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous). And the consequences of not listening to employee needs and integrating these into policy can be costly: think burnout, high-turnover and wasted resources in the form of untapped talent and potential.

In other words, when employees are encouraged to work in a way that suits their individual needs, you can unlock unprecedented levels of value and productivity. Employees will work smarter, better, faster and stronger. But current flexible working policies (or, in some cases, the lack thereof) don't support this well enough.

Zooming out from these stats, we can see that there's a significant 'flexible working gap' to tackle. Given this, People leaders need to get radically real about where existing policies are lacking and what employees truly want. Only by truly understanding what employees want and need will People teams be able to build back up with better, more effective policy. And this all starts with reflecting on the success of current policies.

Remember, however, other leaders may not be bought into this idea of drastic improvement. Even still, some leaders may not yet fully understand that making flexible working requests is to become a day-one right and the implications of this. Given this, you might have to do a little more leg work to get certain stakeholders on board. Be sure to clearly communicate the consequences of non-compliance. At the same time, you'll want to present research that demonstrates the link between flexible working and the impact it can have on employee wellbeing, retention and efficiency

Flexibility promotes greater wellbeing and inclusivity, which ultimately leads to more productivity over the long term. Be prepared to address concerns and misconceptions that may crop up from these discussions. This should culminate in a clear plan that incorporates what employees need from flexible working while still meeting your company's needs and goals

Actions for HR leaders:



Host 'judgement-free' team 'check-ins' to better understand flexibility needs



Build part-time options and remote working arrangements into existing policy



Send out fulfilment surveys to gather feedback on existing policies and practices



Provide (real) childcare support by building a culture that normalises feeding, school pick-ups and fitting other childcare around work

Let's dive into some of these findings a little deeper- particularly around employees wanting clearer guidelines and more trust from leaders...

Employees want clearer guidelines around flexible working

The pandemic brought about a lot of progress in the workplace. But it also caused confusion and disruption.

As we touched on briefly before, businesses had to adapt quickly to develop policies that not only made sense for that moment in time but also aligned with a rapidly shifting landscape of workplace wants and desires. Given this, many employees now feel there's a lack of clarity around what they can and cannot do when working flexibly.

Our survey revealed the extent of this dysfunction and confusion. **34%** of employees shared they wanted clearer guidelines around flexible working. They also expressed that they didn't feel comfortable requesting more flexible working arrangements from their manager(s). This is problematic given that new flexible working legislation is only a few weeks away from becoming law.



Of the employees who wanted clearer guidelines, **73% worked at medium to larger-sized companies** (with a 50-250 headcount). Is this because of the additional 'red tape' and layers of approval these employees face for these types of requests? Or does this point to gaps in policy that HR leaders need to better fill at larger organisations?

What's even more intriguing is that the **majority of responses here came from younger workers (18-34 year-olds)**. Younger workers have been some of the staunchest champions of flexible working and of having ultimate flexibility around how, where and when they work. So it's slightly contradictory, as Annie Rosencrans, Director of People & Culture at HiBob pointed out, that they are also asking for clearer guidelines and more structure.

"It's ironic because we're talking about work flexibility, moving far away from micromanagement and being able to decide when, how, and where to do your work, but what these employees are asking for are clearer-cut rules and policies. It can all seem a bit contradictory.

I often find employees want more clarity and consistency on what they can and cannot do. So, HR has to walk a fine line.

We have to design guidelines that are fair, appropriate, and motivating while also providing enough clarity and structure so that employees know how to use the policies, but not so much that they feel restricted."



Annie Rosencrans

Director of People & Culture, HiBob

The fact that autonomy has cropped up in and amongst these responses is also worth noting. Of all the employees we surveyed, **20% shared that they wanted more autonomy** around personalising work arrangements. And this makes sense. Increasingly, employees are expressing the desire to have more control over all aspects of their work life. In other words, they want greater freedom, choice, and accountability especially when it comes to decision-making and how they are supervised. Given this, it makes sense that employees would crave more autonomy in tailoring flexible working arrangements.

But what does this all mean?

Striking the right balance between developing working arrangements that are flexible but also structured enough isn't a simple task. But it's essential in order for People leaders to deliver the clearer guidelines that employees are demanding.

As O'Mahoney described earlier, it's about defining the 'non-negotiables' for your business on what can and can't be done flexibly. And from there, it's about pinpointing what measures will be most impactful for your core group of employees. Your company policy should cover the types of flexible working arrangements that are permitted, how to book appropriate time off as well as the process for submitting requests. Policies should be written in plain English and avoid jargon so all employees can understand them.

But it's not just about conveying the right information. It's about showing empathy, too. After all, it's leaders and their approach that sets the tone in any working environment. If managers aren't trained to discuss these guidelines with their direct reports in a way that's compassionate and understanding, then HR teams need to step in and provide this sensitivity training. The goal is to have a workplace where people feel psychologically safe to engage in open and honest communication.

At the same time, it's important that this conversation be a two-way street. While employees are to enjoy more rights and freedoms around flexible working, there still needs to be a mutual understanding of how performance will be evaluated and what's expected as part of their working contract.

It's about ensuring employees have the resources, tools, and support they need to continue performing while working flexibly. That could include managers scheduling mid-week stand-ups to promote accountability and discuss progress on deliverables. Even the simple act of being available to jump on a quick call can make a big difference. Likewise, calling out small successes and knowing when to step in and course correct working arrangements where needed can help managers and employees find the right balance with flexible working.





“A good example of where balance is so important in flexible working is a ‘Work from Anywhere’ policy. When HiBob’s was first implemented, it was rather undefined. You could go away for 2 months and work from anywhere in the world, no questions asked.

However, as employees started to put it into practice, we realised we needed to create more structure and establish clearer ‘rules of play’ for the policy.

For example, an employee must commit to working the hours of their home time zone, and just one month is approved at a time. All parties involved provided feedback and helped us build a much more effective policy that still delivered on our original objective of flexible work.”

Annie Rosencrans

Director of People & Culture, HiBob



Actions for HR leaders:



Set clear expectations for how performance will be reviewed and where employees need to be more accountable



Train managers to balance efficiency with empathy when handling requests



Create opportunities for empathetic and open discussion between leaders and employees



Inform employees about policies and guidelines right from onboarding

Employees want more trust from management

In all employee-employer relationships, trust is a critical ingredient. Without it, employees can't and won't thrive.

But trust is also a key part of the flexible working equation - it's what gives employees the autonomy they truly need to define how best they work.

When it comes to existing flexi-working practices, trust is lacking. Specifically, **25% of our respondents said they would like more trust from management when choosing how, where and when to work**. But, there are other indicators that point to fractures in employee-employer relations around the topic of flexible work.

Key anxieties around flexible working

25%

felt a lack of trust from management

18%

worried about how they might be perceived by colleagues

15%

believed it meant being expected to work longer hours

Key Anxieties Around Flexible Working



- Trust from management
- Perception from colleagues
- Expected to work longer

For one, there's pressure that comes from 'how things look'. **18% of respondents expressed that they were hesitant to engage with their organisation's flexible working policy because of how their colleagues might perceive them.** Again, younger workers expressed more worry here - almost half of these respondents were workers in the 18-24 year range.

This suggests that optics still play a pervasive role in organisations and that this is stalling transformation. Policy can be a powerful tool to help mitigate this, giving HR leaders the platform to communicate that it's 'OK' and 'acceptable' to work flexibly and embed this more in company culture.

Another **15% were scared they'd become 'irrelevant' or 'replaceable'** if they engaged with flexible working policies. Again, younger workers featured heavily in responses here.

A further **15% of respondents have chosen to disengage with flexible working altogether because they believe it comes with the expectation of working longer hours.**

The perception of flexible working equating to longer working hours is certainly a throwback to the Pandemic. But since then, our cultural expectations have evolved significantly. It's down to employers to debunk this idea of working extra hours and disassociate the idea of flexible working from this.



"Allowing employees to have ownership over their work, flexibility in their hours, and the ability to work from home can help improve work-life balance and increase productivity. Manager enablement is a big part of this. Good managers will build psychological safety, implement robust goal-setting that focuses on outcomes rather than hours or location of work, and encourage open communication and expectation-setting around availability and deliverables. Over time, this transparency builds trust, helping both managers and employees adapt to and benefit from flexible and sustainable working habits."

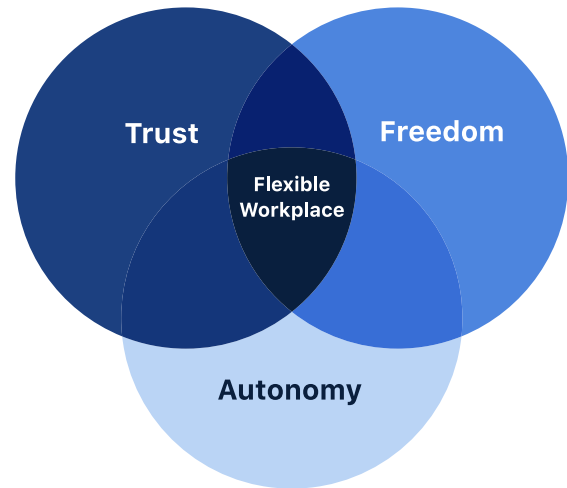
Luck Dookchitra

VP People, Leapsome





What makes a truly flexible workplace?



Employees also see culture as playing a key role in establishing trust. **Over 30%** of our respondents said they want to **work for a company where the culture embraces and encourages flexibility**.

And this makes a lot of sense. As we were beginning to touch on, **a workplace isn't truly flexible until trust, freedom and autonomy become ingrained into company culture**. The act of adapting workdays more seamlessly around our lives is something that has to be adopted at all levels of an organisation before it's accepted as the norm.

Of course, this acceptance of flexibility should be inherent from the start. In other words, employees should be encouraged from day one to voice their opinions and concerns about flexible working arrangements, and HR leaders should provide the appropriate channels for this.

But what does this all mean?

Trust isn't built in a day. It takes conscious effort and a desire, at all levels of an organisation, to not just talk your talk, but walk your walk. Not only do you need to marry the right purpose with the right behaviour, you also need to be honest about what your organisation is doing well and where things could be better. It takes courage, but employees ultimately respect transparency over hollow actions and promises.

You can apply the same thinking in developing your flexible working models. It may not be realistic to draft the perfect policy overnight, and you may not have your employee's trust from day one. But by taking consistent action every day, in the form of listening to your employees and implementing their feedback you'll begin to move the needle in the right direction.

Ultimately, you want to get to a place where trust around flexible working isn't just a line of policy, but an inherent part of your company's very culture.



“Trusting staff comes down to believing that your teams are working at optimal productivity to deliver on the company and team objectives. Leaders should give managers more autonomy to ensure that their teams are doing what is required to deliver on objectives. They can be held accountable for this. I think it's important to distinguish between permission and courtesy. Communication is very important in the workplace. Communicating if you are working different hours, or in a different place of work from the norm, is beneficial for a good working relationship.”



Sophie Matthews

Head of People, Floww

Actions for HR leaders:



Refocus performance management on the quality and impact of work, and less on office-based attendance



Embed flexible working practices within company values, culture and expected behaviours so these become 'the norm' for employees at all levels



Discuss flexible working arrangements as part of employee onboarding processes from day one. Establish what both employees and managers want from the get-go



Instil a culture of open and honest feedback throughout your business
- be sure to celebrate the smallest of successes and speak up if things could be improved

Younger workers need a bit more guidance when working flexibly

It's no secret that flexible working has become a key job preference among younger workers.

Younger talent is simply no longer interested in the traditional 9-to-5. But one theme that kept cropping up throughout our data is of younger generations needing more care and attention when working flexibly.

Younger workers (spanning the age groups of 18-24) have faced challenges in making use of flexible working models. More specifically, they feel they're not supported enough and feel threatened by more traditional organisational attitudes that prize 'optics' and 'visibility' above everything else.



Our research found that:

84%



Over three-quarters of respondents who want clearer flexible working guidelines are between the ages of 18 and 34.

50%



The percentage of responses worried about the 'optics' of flexible working came from the 18-24 year-olds bracket.

48%



Nearly half of the workers who are worried about becoming 'irrelevant' and 'replaceable' are in younger age groups

But it goes deeper than this. Many younger workers are in their first or second jobs. They are still developing a professional 'sense of self' and coming to terms with what's expected of them in the workforce. In some cases, this can mean they have a harder time working effectively outside of a traditional office and/or schedule. In fact, our research found younger workers were twice as likely to be distracted when working flexibly.

18-24 year-olds are

2x

more likely to be distracted when working flexibly

But what does this all mean?

There's a perception in certain business circles that younger workers are lazy.⁵ We think this is reductive and far from explains the real problems at play here.

It's more likely that younger workers **don't yet receive the kind of support and guidance they need from management** in order to make effective use of flexible working policies.

Put differently, to grow and develop the talent of the future, HR leaders should think about how they can **build flexible working models that better engage younger workers.**

It's not about 'carrot and stick', but about empowering younger workers and finding more compelling 'triggers' for motivation.

Younger workers have the potential to be some of the most autonomous, engaged and passionate players in your company.. As a relatively young and engaged workforce here at PayFit, we've experienced this directly. Younger workers have all the ability to be autonomous, proactive and to become top contributors - it's just about finding the right keys to unlock this kind of potential.

One of those keys is making accountability a stronger part of your workplace culture. And if you've not already made accountability one of your core organisational tenets, we'd highly recommend it.

This is a skill younger workers can struggle with, in particular, but it can be strengthened just like any muscle. As we explored earlier, ensuring young workers are confident in taking ownership of their performance goals and practicing self-accountability are a couple ways of achieving this.

Mentorship is another route that can provide missing guidance and allow younger generations to learn good working habits from more seasoned professionals. Keeping the conversation away from blame and more focused on what's working, what isn't, and where they need more support can help younger workers feel more confident, comfortable and eventually more autonomous.

In short, becoming more accountable can help younger workers take more of the reins so they can better juggle their workload while working more flexibly.



"It appears to be that younger workers are more vocal in their demands for flexible working than older colleagues, and flexibility seems to be highly regarded among the younger generation. If effective performance management systems are in place, businesses can have more focus on impact and output rather than the location or visibility of their employees. And this is especially true of younger workers. So it's all about implementing performance management processes that place both trust and accountability in younger staff, whilst regularly assessing the effectiveness of flexible working arrangements."



Sophie Matthews

Head of People, Floww

Actions for HR leaders:



Focus on deadlines and task completion rates being met, rather than a set number of working hours



Make accountability a core value for your organisation so younger workers better understand its importance



Encourage senior leaders to lead by example and demonstrate what personal accountability looks like for younger workers



Encourage younger workers to be open and honest about what they can and can't accomplish, as well as how they work best (whether that's in their own home, in the office, etc.)

Of all the benefits of flexible working – saving money is one of the most attractive

When we asked employees what they liked most about working flexibly, we were both surprised (and not surprised!) to see saving money come out on top.

Of course, the Cost of Living Crisis has featured firmly in the minds of employees over the past couple of years. In fact, a study by Censuswide revealed that almost a third of employees felt their productivity was affected at work due to money issues.⁶

To combat this, some companies have begun to put financial wellbeing initiatives and guidance in place to better support

employees through these challenges. But what our survey reveals is that flexible working could have a key role to play.

It turns out **getting to save money** is one of the biggest benefits of flexible working. **45%** of employees we surveyed said the thing they liked most about flexible working is the fact that it allows them to save their dosh.

Of these, **28%** said that flexible working arrangements have allowed them to spend less on commuting and another **17%** expressed that they've been able to save money on food costs.

What's working with flexible working

45%

"I can save money on food and commuting costs"

28%

"I am a parent and want to spend more time with my children"

18%

"I just think it should be a right for employees"

17%

"I need time to recharge from my high-performing role"

14%

"It gives me more freedom around retirement"

11%

"I get to work from a different country"

But what does this all mean?

Given the need for organisations to better support the financial wellbeing of their employees, it's very much in the interest of companies to empower flexible working arrangements that can support this.

This also points to something bigger - the idea that flexible working doesn't have to stand on its own in the minds of employees and organisations. It's one of a few key puzzle pieces - think mental health, financial



wellbeing and engagement - that all fit into the greater systemic 'people-first' picture of how companies can continue to improve their employee relations. And it's a vital one at that.

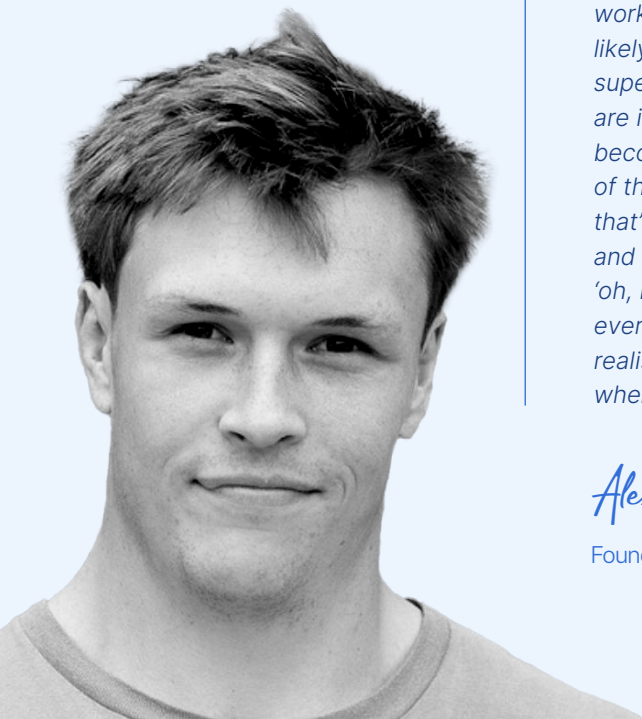
In addition to the above, on the next page there are some more actions HR leaders can do to help employees continue to save money while working flexibly.



"We all know that across 2023 we've seen loads of companies, big and small, enforcing a return to office working, and although I hope it won't be the case, it's very likely to continue this year. So the working landscape is super churned up right now - some people are remote, some are in the office, some are working hybrid. The problem then becomes: 'How do you look after your people equally in all of these different places?' The truth is that many don't. And that's due to change. I think over the next few years, more and more businesses are going to have that realisation of 'oh, my employees do have a life outside of work and that everyone has different needs and preferences'. Once they realise that (and many places are already starting to), that's where flexibility becomes the solution."

Alex Hind

Founder, Heka



Actions for HR leaders:



Re-evaluate compensation & benefits strategies to see where you can provide additional financial support to staff. This could come in the form of WFH stipends, fruit & veg box deliveries, travel subsidies, health insurance, gym memberships or a Cycle to Work scheme, among other perks



Host lunch & learns or e-coffees with an external speaker, to give employees useful tips and tools for becoming more money confident

What else is working with flexible working?

Money saving was only one of many other benefits we uncovered that HR leaders can take note of to better cater to flexible needs.

Supporting parents/ family life

28% of employees surveyed said that flexible working has **allowed them to spend more time with their children**, as well as their families in general.

Again, there's a bigger systemic picture at play here - when employees feel happier and less stressed about family matters, they perform better and are more engaged at work.

Unsurprisingly, the **35-44 age bracket saw the biggest benefit here**, with more women (**31% vs 25%** of male respondents) listing 'supporting family life' as one of their top reasons for enjoying flexible working.

By actively making clear that the policies you've designed can support everyone with caring responsibilities, you'll be able to retain more working parents and carers. This could take the form of providing no-questions-asked 'duvet days' and birthday days off, time off for appointments, school plays and sports days. New parents might also struggle with time to cook - so meal kit vouchers or parental stipends for baby food, clothes and toys may also be helpful.

Percentage of

35-44

year-olds who said 'Supporting Family Life' is the biggest benefit of flexible working



25%

31%

"We have seen a significant increase in the demand for flexible working since the pandemic at RDT Ltd and we have responded. We recognise that flexibility is a key element of the way we work now and have a range of different arrangements with our people, all of our people. Flexibility at RDT works both ways; if we need to swarm a problem, or need experts to form a discovery team and work to innovate, we believe being together in person is valuable. Other periods during a project don't require this and we can work separately, connected by technology.

The gender playing field is levelling – everyone works flexibly, and men are now asking for the kind of flexibility that was previously dominated by women. Flex is becoming less of a gender issue, and long term this will be good for everyone."



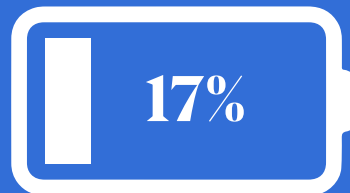
Fiona Mason

Chief Human Resources Officer, RDT

Coping with high work demands

Interestingly, **17%** of respondents said that flexible working gave them time to recharge from the pressures of a high-performing role. This is an important one for leaders and managers alike to recognise.

Downtime, rest and recuperation are essential for maintaining high-performance standards, where burnout only leads to more mistakes and time off due to stress and sickness. Fortunately, flexible working can help provide more balance in a high-intensity work environment.



"Flexible working gives me time to recharge"

Early finish times on Friday and wellbeing initiatives such as meditation, walking or movement breaks scheduled throughout the day can support this.

Adjusting work around and before retirement



We've already spoken about the needs of younger workers. But what about those approaching retirement?

14% of workers we surveyed shared that what they liked best about flexible working was the **freedom it gave them in and around retirement.**

We can take a couple of things from this, for example that flexible working has benefits for all employees at every stage of life. But also, that our working patterns can change and evolve as we grow older, so perhaps our jobs should too.



Offering more flexible hours or part-time/part-week options can help your organisation better support older, more experienced hires into their golden years, while still giving them the opportunity to play a valuable part in your company.



Support older employees by offering part-time/part-week options.



11%

"I get to work from a different country"

Being able to work from a different country

This is probably one of our favourite benefits here at PayFit, given our Work From Anywhere policy. Working remotely doesn't have to be limited to working from home.

11% of respondents shared that being able to work from a different country was one of their favourite aspects of flexible working. This should encourage HR leaders to think more seriously about WFA policies and how they might deserve a bigger place amongst existing flexible working models.

Getting to work from different locations can provide employees with a much-needed change of scenery while allowing them to fit work into the bigger picture of their overall life goals and aspirations



"Our people have really valued clear guidelines, e.g. a clear 'working abroad' policy. What's worked well though is trust – ultimately starting from a position of 'yes'. Because we have that behaviour embedded in our culture, our experience with flexible working is a positive one.

We've seen some differences between age groups. It's widely understood that the younger generations have different expectations of an employer and their workplace experience.

Gen Y and Gen Z appear to view their career journey as less of a 'straight line' than older generations, and also typically have more in the way of extra-curricular activities outside of work. We've also seen an increased desire to work from abroad. However, this is shifting – we're seeing older generations have a desire to do this now too, so this disparity is diminishing."

Helen Tomlinson

Head of People, Laka



Still, not everything about flexible working is plain sailing...

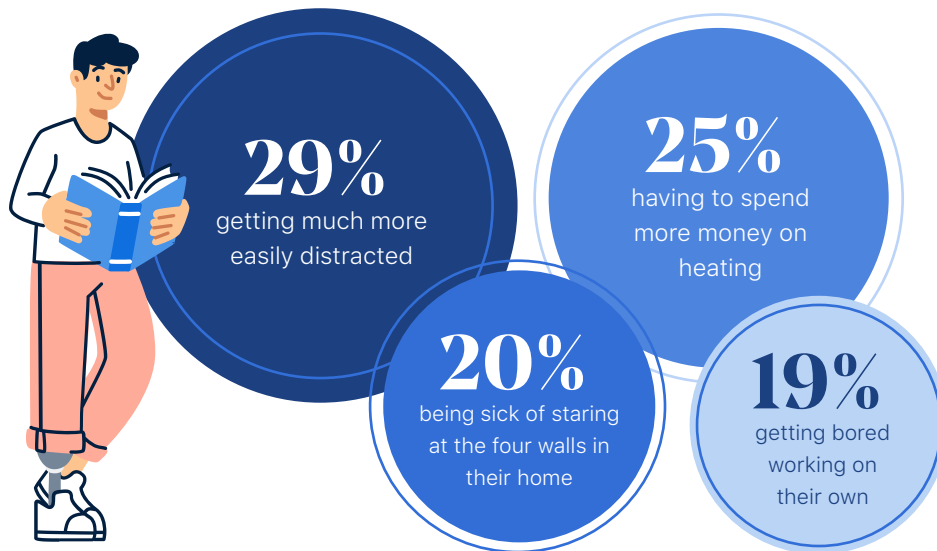
Yes, flexible working has been a revolutionary concept bringing about positive changes for millions of people across the UK workforce. But that doesn't mean it's perfect. And this is important for HR leaders to acknowledge.

Flexible working practices can, and indeed have, downsides and pitfalls, particularly if they're not supported by clear guidance from management. For instance, **29%** of the employees we surveyed disclosed that they get more easily distracted when working flexibly from home.

That's nearly a third of the workforce admitting to potentially sliding in and out of activities like online shopping, gaming or streaming when they should be working.

It's also worth noting not all employees will be keen on the idea of working different hours or from a different location - some of these employees will continue to thrive in the traditional 9-5 in-office setting.

Respondents' concerns with working flexibly from home



When confronted by this reality, the response, especially from senior leadership, can often be 'knee-jerk'. They might even go as far as to label flexible working as an 'experiment' that simply didn't work and call for a return to the office. But the point that's being missed is this:

True flexibility is about discovering optimal ways of working

Whether it's working from an office from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday so you can connect with other colleagues over coffee; or working remotely from a beautiful location, starting and finishing your day a little later; or re-jigging your work day slightly so you can take time to pick up and drop off the kids from school.

As we explored at the very beginning of this whitepaper, everyone has their own definition of what flexibility means to them. Given this, everyone has their own optimal way of working that suits them best.

Behaviours like distraction and disengagement are rarely the result of flexible working itself - more often than not,

they're an indication that something deeper is going on.

To get to the bottom of this, employers first need to show understanding and empathy before jumping to conclusions, while being clear from day one about what they expect in terms of output.

Here, continuous performance management, feedback, and regular 1-2-1s can be your friends. Giving managers an open forum to discuss distraction and disengagement with employees and what changes they need to better support their productivity can work wonders. It's about adjusting and 'tweaking' rather than a blanket removal of flexible working privileges altogether.



"I am convinced that there should not be any turning back from flexible working, but I have also experienced that it is not a magic formula. I strongly believe that flexible working approaches have to be embedded in companies' culture and identity, and not used as a tactical tool to attract talent or reduce office costs. At PayFit, where Work for Anywhere is deeply rooted in our ways of working, we regularly ask ourselves 'What does flexible working mean to us? How does it contribute to enhancing my company culture and building the future of work for our teams?'. My advice: to not be afraid to admit that it is complex to manage, and that it is a living process. Ask for feedback. Be honest about what won't change and what might evolve in time."

Marie Alice Tantardini

Head of People, PayFit



Actions for HR leaders:



Implement e-Coffees and informal catch-ups for teams to break up the monotony of the day and so everyone feels more connected



Organise activities like meditation, desk yoga or 5-minute breathing and calm sessions



Face distraction head on by organising workshops on how to work 'distraction free'; alternatively managers can coach employees to help them discover what they could do to limit distraction



Organise time in-office with a specific purpose: e.g. to swarm around a problem, or hold strategy or innovation sessions. Figure out when it's best for teams to 'connect' and when to 'separate'

Finally, employees wouldn't necessarily pick money over flexibility

This wouldn't be a workplace discussion if we didn't address the issue of pay.

After all, money still talks; compensation has always been an important factor for employees and continues to be a topic people take seriously. But how does compensation relate to flexibility? And would employees necessarily choose a juicier paycheck over flexible working?

Maybe not. **46% of respondents said they would reject a 15% raise, if the new job didn't come with flexibility.** This shows that flexibility is a significant consideration

for talent, even when it's stacked up against compensation.

Of course, flexibility should never be used as a substitute for fair and competitive compensation. And as we explored before, flexibility is more than a basic job 'perk'. Flexibility is something that benefits both employers and their employees in that it can contribute to a healthier and more productive work environment.





“We live in a society where companies have to be flexible and to offer more than just good pay (which is still one of the top priorities). Based on research by McKinsey, most people leave a company because they are lacking a sense of connection.

Now more than ever companies have to find a balance to accommodate individual needs, which includes allowing people to choose the right working pattern for them, as well as increasing productivity.

Here at Nomo Fintech we stand with every person assessing their needs and business requirements, and help people to shape the perfect balance that activates their full potential and boosts company productivity.”

Kate Seaborne

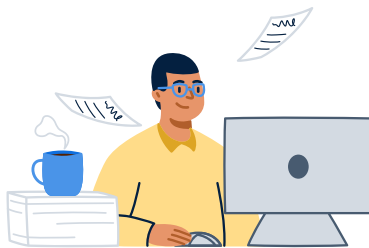
HR Business Partner, Nomo Fintech



Pulling it all together

We've peered into the world of flexible working from the POV of the employee, discovering their wants, needs, challenges and desires along the way. But ultimately, what can HR leaders take away from this?

To start, flexible working means different things to different people, and this is something HR leaders need to educate other leaders on. And this is important given that most employees don't feel like existing flexible working policies are stacking up to meet their needs. More specifically, employees want clearer guidelines so they can fully take advantage of flexible working.



They also want more trust from management and, generally, within working cultures around flexibility. Younger workers, in particular, need more guidance when personalising working arrangements and support from managers to work effectively while still gleaming the advantages from this model.





Equally, we explored some of the things employees enjoy most about working flexibly; saving money, getting to spend more time with family and getting to adjust work around retirement are a few of these. Employees also value having time to recharge from high-performance roles and getting to travel while working.

And while not everything is perfect about flexible working there's this sense that flexibility is ultimately about getting the best of what you need so you can do your best work - whether that is spending more or less time in the office.





All of this should spur HR leaders to reassess where we've got to since the Pandemic, and where we go next with flexible working. It's about finding the balance between meeting that wide range of needs and still putting together policies that are clear and well-structured for your organisation. It's also about taking an active role in reshaping culture to better support flexibility. More than anything, it comes down to giving employees a platform to personalise their work life in a way that allows them to do their best work and thrive while delivering their best value for your company: the ultimate win-win of flexible working.

**We hope you found this whitepaper informative,
engaging and above all actionable.**





The state of current flexible working policies

-  Host 'judgement-free' team 'check-ins' to better understand flexibility needs
-  Build part-time options and remote working arrangements into existing policies
-  Send out fulfilment surveys to gather feedback on existing policies and practices
-  Provide (real) childcare support by building a culture that normalises feeding, school pick-ups and fitting other childcare around work





Clearer guidelines around flexible working

-  Set clear expectations for how performance will be reviewed and where employees need to be more accountable
-  Train managers to balance efficiency with empathy when handling requests
-  Create opportunities for empathetic and open discussion between leaders and employees
-  Inform employees about policies and guidelines right from onboarding



Employees want more trust from management

-  Refocus performance management on the quality and impact of work, and less on office-based attendance
-  Embed flexible working practices within company values, culture and expected behaviours so these become 'the norm' for employees at all levels
-  Discuss flexible working arrangements as part of employee onboarding processes from day one. Establish what both employees and managers want from the get-go
-  Instil a culture of open and honest feedback throughout your business - be sure to celebrate the smallest of successes and speak up if things could be improved.





Younger workers need more guidance

-  Focus on deadlines and task completion rates being met, rather than a set number of working hours
-  Make accountability a core value for your organisation so younger workers better understand its importance
-  Encourage senior leaders to lead by example and demonstrate what personal accountability looks like for younger workers
-  Encourage younger workers to be open and honest about what they can and can't accomplish, as well as how they work best

Saving money is the most attractive benefit

-  Re-evaluate compensation & benefits strategies to see where you can provide additional financial support to staff. This could come in the form of WFH stipends, fruit & veg box deliveries, travel subsidies, health insurance, gym memberships or a Cycle to Work scheme, among other perks
-  Host lunch & learns or e-coffees with an external speaker, to give employees useful tips and tools for becoming more money confident

What else is working?

-  Implement e-Coffees and informal catch-ups for teams to break up the monotony of the day and so everyone feels more connected
-  Implement e-Coffees and informal catch-ups for teams to break up the monotony of the day and so everyone feels more connected
-  Face distraction head on by organising workshops on how to work 'distraction free'; alternatively managers can coach employees to help them discover what they could do to limit distraction
-  Organise time in-office with a specific purpose: e.g. to swarm around a problem, or hold strategy or innovation sessions. Figure out when it's best for teams to 'connect' and when to 'separate'

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