

Flexi-work to a greater work-life balance

Having flexible working arrangements can help you balance work and life beyond the office better



A well-balanced employee is a happy one

The 21st century workforce is expected to work harder, faster, and perhaps even longer, to stay competitive in today's knowledge-driven economy. In an online poll conducted by The GMP Group, 27% of respondents said that flexible schedules were benefits employees valued most. But finding a way to balance work and personal life can be a daunting task to many.

Studies have shown that flexible work (flexi-work) schedules have a positive impact on a company's performance. Apart from an improved bottom line and reduced attrition, employees are more engaged and are

more inclined to stay. An increasing number of employers are reconsidering traditional job arrangements in order to retain good employees.

However, both employees and employers must keep in mind that there are several conditions that determine the suitability of flexible work arrangements. It should not interfere with the effectiveness of work relationships and employers need to ensure staff can cope with such flexibility.

Examples of flexible work arrangements

There are several kinds of flexible work arrangements. And depending on the individual and organisation, some may work better than others.

Flextime. It is the most manageable work option which offers flexibility in starting and ending work times with a designated core period during the day where all staff are present. Flextime does not alter the total number of hours worked in a week.

Part-time. Part-time means working fewer than 35 hours a week (in Singapore). Wages are either set by market forces or pro-rated for the actual number of hours worked. Eligibility for benefits, vacation and sick leave may be affected.

Compressed work week. Some industry sectors, especially engineering and manufacturing, often practice compressed work week. This option gives employees to work the required number of hours in a week in fewer days. For example, employees can choose to work four 10-hour days instead of the usual 8-hour days in a 5-day work week.

Job sharing. Job sharing is an arrangement where two people work part-time and share job responsibilities of a full-time job.

Telecommuting. Employees enjoy greater flexibility in working location and hours with telecommuting as it does not require them to be physically in the office. However, this work arrangement requires strict discipline in order to be fully productive.

Is flexi-work for me?

You should first weigh the benefits and challenges of such alternative work arrangements to both yourself and the company. Also, you would need to consider if your job function would allow alternative work arrangements. For example, does your job require constant use of physical files and folders in the office?

You would also need to do an honest assessment of your ability to self-motivate and work independently with limited face-to-face interaction as well. Such work arrangements often entails less supervision from managers. In addition, you would need to bear in mind the extent of employer support available when it comes to telecommunications and network infrastructure. There might be times where you would have to handle troubleshooting of technical issues on your own.

Thus, while it may be an ideal arrangement for most, not every person, job role or industry would qualify for flexi-work.

Negotiating flexi-work

While more companies are embracing flexible work arrangements, not all of them have formally implemented such practices.

Before approaching your manager, consider all options available for flexible work arrangements and assess which arrangements would be appropriate and reasonable for both you and your employer. Do more research by asking friends or relatives who have had experience negotiating or organising flexi-work - it would give you a broad perspective on the pros and cons of flexi-work.

When discussing this with your manager, be sure to assert important facts and justify the need for alternative work arrangements. It would be helpful if you are able to highlight some benefits of flexi-work. Also consider implementing flexible work arrangements over a trial period to 'test drive' how the arrangement works in practice.