



The Works Search

## A Guide To Flexible Working For Corporate Communications Professionals



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In our Annual Salary Guide 2017/18, a staggering 80% of respondents said they consider flexibility in the workplace either important or extremely important when they consider taking on a role. If you are running a Corporate Communications consultancy or team that remains committed to employees working at their desk, you could be missing a trick.

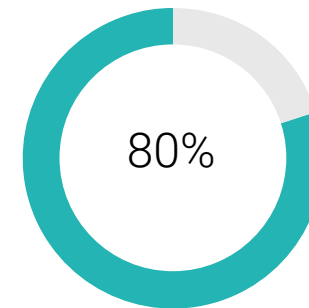
There are many forms of flexible working and the business benefits are becoming more apparent throughout the UK. Advances in technology have enabled employees to share files, communicate with colleagues and collaborate on projects, without the added burden of a rush hour commute or distractions at work. In short, it's no longer the case that every employee needs to be in the office all the time, working long hours to be productive.

We hope that this guide will provide you with some useful tips on how to create a more flexible working environment – and make it a success for employers and employees alike.

[Flexible working is about improving your company's biggest asset – its employees.](#)

### The changing concept of flexible working – a few thoughts...

- From work/life balance to workplace – no longer simply a symbol of work/life balance as it's now a strategic tool, enabling alignment of personal and company goals
- From benefit to beneficial – no longer an arbitrary benefit for a lucky few senior individuals, it's now seen as beneficial on both sides of the employee-employer equation
- From static policy to dynamic adaption – flexible working should evolve with the changing demands on both sides of the employee-employer equation; it's never an entitlement – an arrangement may be ended when the business needs to evolve



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# WHY YOUR BUSINESS MAY WANT TO ENTERTAIN FLEXIBILITY

Flexible working can include part-time or flexi-time work, job sharing, working from home or remotely, compressed hours, term-time work or other arrangements.

This can actually improve productivity and morale, and should lead to a better work-life balance. Plus, it should lead to reduced overheads and increased loyalty for the company. In fact, there are a number of reasons why it is time to start thinking about introducing (if you haven't already) or highlighting flexible working as an offering within your organisation.

## Business benefits

- Enhances recruitment and retention
- Increases staff motivation by providing a greater sense of control
- Reduces stress, fatigue and lack of focus in employees, through the ability to better balance work and personal responsibilities
- Increases employee satisfaction and morale
- Improves commitment and productivity resulting from support for personal work style preferences
- Reduces absences and tardiness
- Improves coverage and scheduling for the business
- Improves transportation and parking options
- Promotes health and wellness for employees
- Positive company culture, good PR for the organisation

## Financial benefits

- Helps retain staff (and cuts down on training costs associated with the settling in period for new employees)
- Reduces overheads – it may be possible in some instances to double up on facilities, e.g. desk sharing
- Working hours can be matched with peaks and troughs of the business to maximise productivity and cut costs
- Inexpensive benefit to implement; provides a quick return on investment
- Reduces costs in relation to absenteeism, sick leave and tardiness

While the drive for more flexibility in the workplace is undeniably strong, it is important to bear in mind that it is not without its flaws; what works for one organisation won't work as well for another. As you start to formulate a plan for implementing more flexibility into your work environment, and consider all the benefits it can bring, it is also wise to weigh them up against the hidden drawbacks.

### Potential downsides of flexible working

- Unpredictability
- Deviations from group expectations around core hours, performance, responsiveness and standards of conduct
- Unfair shifting of work onto colleagues
- Substandard of practices, e.g. holding virtual meetings without adequate preparation for the use of the appropriate technology, such as Skype
- Unbounded productivity expectation and overwork, i.e. working non-standard hours doesn't mean working from everywhere or working all 24 hours

### Think (and talk) before you begin!

Before you start on your flexible hours journey, find out what your team wants and needs to help them work more efficiently.

Set up a survey and work with the results to determine the ways your office set-up can be improved.

This may involve flexible start/finish times, flexible breaks, flexible locations thus cutting down commute times, or flexible total hours worked.

If your business demands contact with international colleagues, it may serve your company well to have someone working from home from 8-11 pm.

Ultimately, flexible working arrangements will need to fit into your organisation's strategic workforce plan. Considering the talent and the ongoing pressure to attract and retain millennials, while retaining the knowledge and expertise of more experienced workers, flexible working arrangements will be critical to your workforce strategy now and for the future.

When introducing a flexible working strategy, make sure that it is given the time and thought associated with implementing any new strategy into the organisation.

Planning should include members of the management team, from the top down.

**Remember:** it is a fundamental principle of flexible working that the needs of the business are met.

# HOW DO YOU INTRODUCE IT?

Guidelines are required to make common sense decisions, and flexible working is no different in that respect. In order to introduce it successfully, there are legal requirements that need to be met.

## Addressing the formalities

- Every employee in the UK has the statutory right to request flexible working after 26 weeks of employment
- Requests should be in writing, stating the date of the request and whether any previous application has been made and the date of that application
- Requests and appeals must be considered and decided upon within three months of the receipt of the request
- Managers should consider all formal proposals fairly; they are not obliged to grant approval
- Employers must have a sound business reason for rejecting any request
- Flexible working may not be suitable for every job, e.g. a receptionist may need to be present all day to receive visitors at the office
- Employees can only make one request in any 12-month period
- Arrangements should be reviewed and updated as the needs change, at least annually

# TYPES OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Find the one(s) that suits your organisation and its employees. It could be one of the following, or a hybrid of a couple or more of them.

## Working from home

Modern technology means we can collaborate with our colleagues no matter where in the world we are. Plus, not every business actually needs to have employees physically 'there' in order to do their job. So, if commuting to the office every day is causing strain on an employee's schedule, then offering a work-from-home arrangement could be the perfect answer

## Compressed hours

This simply involves doing fewer shifts that last longer – for example, instead of doing eight hours a day for 5 days a week, an employee might prefer ten hours a day with a three-day weekend

## Flexi-time

Flexi-time allows your employees to start and finish at whatever time suits them best.

Common rules that companies apply to flexi-time are that employees must complete a set number of hours per day/week/month/year, and that they must be at work during business critical 'core hours'. Many offer a start time anytime between 7am and 10am

## Staggered hours

Staggered hours are very simple arrangements that essentially allow an employee to work to different start/break/finish times than other employees

## Job sharing

Some companies use 'job sharing' as a flexible working arrangement. This involves giving one job to two people, and then having them split the hours/tasks between themselves. Some employers find it best that both employees have at least one day in common, so they can share information and brief each other on current tasks and issues

## Occasional flexibility

This responds to one-time or intermittent circumstances, e.g. a house repair-person will arrive between 8am and 6pm; a tube strike or a car/train breakdown; writing a pitch proposal.

It generally will not require a formal proposal but establishing parameters in writing encourages 'ground rules' at any level of frequency

# FIVE THINGS TO CONSIDER TO ENSURE FLEXIBLE WORKING IS RIGHT FOR YOUR BUSINESS

## 1. Agree a narrative in writing (bullet points work too) that includes

- Where, when and how the job requirements and performance objectives will be accomplished
- Goals and essential duties
- Participation in meetings and activities
- Accessibility
- Redefinition of workload and job requirements if reducing hours

## 2. Discuss potential challenges and proposed solutions

- Participation at networking events, teamwork, meeting attendance, technology required, responsiveness, meeting client needs, brainstorming time, staying informed with line managers, direct reports, etc
- Team and co-workers, managers and direct reports

## 3. Qualitative/quantitative measurements

- Specific timelines and deliverables for each project/retainer
- Adjust these to align with business needs

## 4. Effect on the social matrix of the workplace

- Staying informed
- Participation in spontaneous collaboration

## 5. The what, when and who of the review process

- Feedback on deliverables, effects on work, colleagues and stakeholders/clients
- Trial period, annual reviews
- Candid conversation about what's going well and what's not quite right



# THE UPSHOT...

Commuting into London isn't easy and the demand for flexibility is strong. Just think, by taking steps to offer some flexibility across your business now, you will stand out from the crowd. It's one of the best ways to attract and retain staff, and these people are your greatest asset. It's possible to work more smartly and efficiently and not be confined by traditional principles. It's time to listen to your staff and tackle it head on.

Sometimes trust is the issue. Sometimes brave conversations are the solution.

# ABOUT THE WORKS SEARCH

The Works Search specialises in finding industry best talent at board and senior level in corporate and financial communications. As executive search consultants we enjoy nothing more than discovering those 'high calibre' gems.

For more advice, or if you think we can help you with a search, please get in touch.

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