Flexible Work Arrangements – Fact Sheets

WHAT IS MEANT BY 'FLEXIBLE WORK'?

Simply put, flexible work arrangements are alternate arrangements or schedules from the traditional working day and week. Employees may choose a different work schedule to meet personal or family needs. Alternatively, employers may initiate various schedules to meet their customer needs.

WHY SHOULD A BUSINESS CONSIDER OFFERING FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS?

Many benefits have been reported by various studies. Common findings include:

- Increased ability to attract, retain and motivate high-performing and experienced employees.
- Reduced absenteeism and presenteeism.
- Helps employees manage their responsibilities outside of work.
- Increased job satisfaction, energy, creativity, and ability to handle stress.
- Increased diversity and inclusivity.
- Lower office overhead costs.
- Positive impact on the climate.

WHAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN DESIGNING A FLEXIBLE WORK POLICY?

No matter which program or how many options are available, the duties, expectations, and deadlines should be clearly outlined by the supervisor and agreed upon by both the supervisor and the employee. Supportive organizational culture, clear communication, teamwork and reciprocal support between management and employees will help ensure the success of these initiatives.

Other issues that should be considered include:

- Initial start-up costs and additional administrative duties or time.
- How to schedule meetings and training courses so most employees can attend.
- Workload management.
- Meeting customer demands.
- Impact the employee's absence will have on the group or the organization.
- Impact on terms and conditions of employment (e.g., leave benefits may be pro-rated).
- Meeting health and safety regulatory obligations.

Unionized workplaces may have flexible work provisions in collective agreements.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS?

Whether formally written into company policy or an agreement between the employee and employer, common arrangements include:

Flex time

Flex time is an arrangement where employees work a full day but they can vary their working hours. These arrangements may include specific guidelines so that a “core” working day exists. Flex time is usually arranged in advance with the employee and employer or supervisor and a set range of start and finish times are established. The total hours of work are not usually affected by this arrangement.

For example, the employee may choose to start between 7:30 and 9:30 AM, and finish between 3:30 and 5:30 PM. This arrangement establishes that core hours are between 9:30 AM and 3:30 PM when all employees will be at work. Lunch periods are usually required by law and for a set length (30 minutes or more). Employees may wish to maintain their start/finish times so that a routine is established and co-workers can become accustomed to each others’ schedules.

Reduced hours/Part-time

Employees may choose to work fewer than the standard 37.5 or 40 hours work week. These arrangements may be on a temporary or permanent basis depending on individual circumstances. It may also be considered in some cases for employees with health problems or disabilities. Work hours may be negotiated, or they may be chosen to coincide with peak workload hours depending on the type of business. However, employee benefits and qualification for government programs (such as employment insurance or pension plans) may be affected, and should be examined thoroughly before starting a reduced hour or part-time arrangement.

Compressed work week

Compressed work week occurs when an employee works for longer periods of time per day or shift in exchange for a day off. Employees may start earlier or finish later than the normal work day. Compressed work weeks are often initiated by the employee, but sometimes the employer may initiate the option to improve operational efficiency, to maximize production (lower daily start up costs) or to establish longer business hours which can enhance customer service.

Common arrangements for a 40 hours work week are working 10 hours per day, 4 days a week; working an extra hour a day with 1 day off every 2 weeks; or working an extra half hour a day and having one day every 3 or 4 weeks off.

Telework/Working Remotely/Telecommuting

Telework or working remotely occurs when people do at least some of their regular work from home instead of going into the office or work at a different location. Details such as hours of work, and how communications between the teleworker/remote worker, co-workers and customers need to be outlined.

Job sharing

Job sharing occurs when two or more employees share one or more positions or set of duties. It should be clear before starting how these arrangements affect pay, benefits, and holidays. It is very important that those in a job sharing arrangement work effectively as a team, and communicate well. Job sharing may be an option when few part-time positions are available within the company.

Banking of Hours/ Annualized hours

This arrangement allows employees to choose, within negotiated boundaries, their days and hours of work to the maximum for a set period of time. This period of time may be weekly, monthly or yearly. Such arrangements are often a combination of flex time and compressed work week and can help reduce the amount of overtime hours required. These arrangements may be suited to fields where there is variation in demands such as peak hours or seasonal peaks.

Gradual Retirement

Gradual retirement allows employees to reduce their working hours or reduce their workload over a period of time rather than switching from full time employment to retirement abruptly. This phased period can be used to train the replacement employee, help others adjust to restructuring within the organization, or to adjust for the redistribution of tasks among the remaining employees.

Leaves and Sabbaticals

Leaves and sabbaticals are authorized periods of time away from work without loss of employment rights. Paid or unpaid leaves are usually granted for family, health care, education or leisure reasons. Sabbaticals are usually paid (or partially funded) and occur on a regular basis in addition to vacation time. In some cases, self-funded leaves may be possible where a portion of the employee’s salary is withheld and returned to the employee ‘as pay’ during the time away from work.