Employee Skills for Working Flexibly

Development Guide

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Works for me.

Works for NSW.

FLEXIBLE WORKING

NSW GOVERNMENT

Contents

Flexible Working Development Guide for Employees

Flexible working: The role of employees

To work flexibly, you need to know what types of flexible working are available and be able to match the right type(s) to your role. To succeed you will be able to self-manage your workload and continue to perform in your role; you will negotiate flexible work arrangements with your manager and collaborate with your team so that it works for everyone, and you will be able to monitor how it is working over time and make adjustments to continuously improve.

The following set of skills have been articulated by the NSW Public Service Commission to help you clearly understand the skills you need to work flexibly.

How to use this guide

Your *Flexible Working Self-Assessment Tool for Employees* results should have identified three focus areas for skill development. The resources, tools, activities, and ideas found in the guide can assist you in building up these skills.

People learn in different ways, so it is important that you scan through the resources listed and identify those that are most useful to you. The self-assessment can also be re-used to track your progress in developing flexible working skills over time.

This is a sector-wide tool, so learning activities will also need to be adapted to your agency and what it has available. If you are unsure how best to navigate this, see your HR team for guidance.

Improving flexible working skills

Education

The formal components of learning that range from higher education through to face-to-face training programs and self-study.

The Four E's Approach to Learning

The Four Es of learning* encompasses the different ingredients that comprise learning experiences and is the framework from which the capability development activities in this guide are built. The Four E's model includes both formal and informal learning experiences.

Environment

The infrastructure that support learning is the final component. It can include all the technology that surrounds or supports learning, but it can also include institutional infrastructure like capability frameworks.

Exposure

The learning that comes from working with or observing others. This can be individual or one-on-one, including coaching and mentoring, or it can be institutions such as networking, communities of practice, or involvement with professional associations.

Experience

The informal but nonetheless structured learning situations that one finds on the job, including secondments, job rotations, and assignments.

*Adapted from Bersin research (2016)

Having flexible working awareness means that you:

Use various types of flexible working where available;	If you need to understand what flexible working means for the government sector, check out the range of 'Flexible Working' resources on the PSC website. You can learn about the types and benefits of flexible working and also access checklists and other tools to help you make decisions about your flexible working arrangement.
Promote the benefits of flexible working to others (e.g. your colleagues);	Where introduced, and where possible, get involved in flexible working projects and initiatives being rolled out in your organisation (e.g. involvement in working groups, or a job share pilot). Use blogs or other internal social media to promote the benefits so that your colleagues can learn from your experience and also get involved.
	Make sure you complete any employee surveys or other forms of data collection related to flexible working (e.g. People Matter Employee Survey) so your agency can capture and consider employee perceptions of flexible working and manager support for it. Follow up on this by accessing survey results – this will provide you with insight into your organisation's uptake of, and attitudes toward, flexible working.
Believe that flexible working is not limiting to your career;	If you prefer to learn by talking to others, set up a meeting with your HR contact to understand the various types of flexible working available to you, as well as the ways in which they can be accessed, and the limits and boundaries of flexible working arrangements for your role and agency. Ask for an explanation of how your organisation supports you to work flexibly and at the same time, supports you to progress in your career.
	To explore how flexible working has been implemented in other public- and private-sector organisations, read through some of the flexible working case studies provided by the PSC. The results of the 2017 People Matter Employee Survey are worth taking the time to read through, as they reveal a number of insights about flexible working in the NSW government sector.
	WGEA's Workplace Flexibility Strategy and the Employee Toolkit are also excellent resources.

Awareness

Having flexible working awareness means that you:

Seek out information / advice to make the best flexible working choices.

Engage in discussions with your team members to understand how they use flexible working. See if your whole team can coordinate with each other's needs and wishes, yet still deliver on KPIs, so everyone can use flexible working of some kind.

If your agency has any lunch n' learn sessions, workshops or presentations on flexible working, join in and raise any concerns you might have. If not, check the PSC website – there are a number of webinars and a 'misgivings' section addressing many of the common concerns.

Diversity & inclusion

Inclusion in the workplace means that all people, no matter what their gender, race, age, religious beliefs, disability, or personal commitments, feel safe to genuinely participate and contribute because they have no fear of being discriminated against due to their difference.

At the heart of the NSW government sector's policy commitment of 'all roles flex' is inclusion: everyone can request flexible working no matter what the reason; and making flexible work available to diverse groups will foster a more inclusive government sector, as individuals perhaps previously excluded can now participate.

Having skills in diversity & inclusion means that you:

Believe everyone should have equal access to flexible working, regardless of their personal situation or context;

If you want to know how the government sector is taking action to be more inclusive, take a look through the PSC's 'Diversity and Inclusion page'. To learn about the benefits of inclusion in the Australian workforce more generally, review DCA's 'Inclusion@Work Index'.

For insight into how to foster workplace inclusion through language in the workplace, read DCA's article 'WordsAtWork: Building inclusion through the power of language'.

Enquire about or review your agency's approach to diversity and inclusion. What evidence do you see of D&I initiatives being encouraged and supported at work? Consider your role in contributing to and promoting them. If you feel confident, develop and commit to one personal action aimed at increasing diversity and inclusion in your agency. If you can link the initiative with flexible working, even better.

Make sure you complete any employee surveys or other forms of data collection related to flexible working (e.g. People Matter Employee Survey) so your agency can capture and consider employee perceptions of flexible working and manager support for it. Follow up on this by accessing survey results – this will provide you with insight into your organisation's uptake of, and attitudes toward, flexible working and D&I issues more broadly.

Diversity & inclusion

Having skills in diversity & inclusion means that you:

Avoid judging how others use flexible working – what matters most is that the work gets done;

In relation to flexible working, it may be the case that you are unconsciously judging how 'deserving' of flexible working some people in your workplace are – more than others. The aim is to be neutral about why people wish to work flexibly, and to instead focus on the outcomes of their work. If you notice yourself doing this, talk about it with someone you trust to help you 'sense check' the misconception and adjust your attitude to be more inclusive.

'Sense check' any personal bias that might influence how you relate to colleagues;

You can learn about personal bias through feedback from your peers, manager or supervisor or by taking the Harvard Implicit Association Test to uncover what your unconscious biases may be.

Take the time to examine your workplace assumptions (e.g. think about why you gravitate toward certain co-workers over others, who you have and haven't tried to connect with, who might need your support etc.); engage with your team to raise awareness around fair and equitable flexible working arrangements.

Appreciate how flexible working needs can change over time.

To understand how flexible working needs can change over time, talk to colleagues in your agency who are using flexible work for different reasons to you – they may have carer responsibilities, they may be ageing and approaching retirement, they may have a disability and need a workplace adjustment, or they may be a young person or entrepreneur who has set up their own business and wants to work part-time so they can devote other days in the week to their pursuit. These are only a few of the varied reasons for working flexibly. Your HR contact might be able to connect you up with people who are different to you so you can learn from their individual experience of working flexibly.

Courageous conversations

Having courageous conversations means that you:

Feel comfortable talking to your manager about your flexible working arrangement (e.g. making a request);

The PSC has created an Employee Conversation guide to help you navigate your way through initiating a request to work flexibly. You can find it on the PSC website along with an employee checklist to help you prepare for the conversation.

You could also review WGEA's 'Employee Flexibility Toolkit', particularly Section 2 around 'requesting flexibility' to understand how best to engage your manager in a conversations about flexible working.

Seek's article 'How to negotiate flexible working hours' provides some practical suggestions as well.

If you want to better understand what the Fair Work Act says about flexible working, read the Fair Work Ombudsmen's article and related resources to understand your rights when it comes to flexible working arrangements. Not all NSW Government employees are covered by the Fair Work Act however, so check with your HR contact first.

Feel comfortable to talk to your colleagues about their flexible working arrangement (if it affects you or the team), or about your arrangement (if it affects them);

Where you have reservations about a flexible working conversation with your manager or team mate, consider role-modelling / practicing this conversation with a trusted colleague. Ask for feedback on your approach. Or you could ask your manager to facilitate a team-based discussion about flexible working to make it a collective conversation instead of a one-on-one. This might be helpful if the issue you want to resolve affects everyone in the team.

Set up an informal meeting with a colleague who you know has recently requested a new or modified flexible working arrangement and been successful. How did they find it? Was there anything they missed in their preparation that might have been helpful? What sort of questions are you likely to be asked?

Courageous conversations

Having courageous conversations means that you:

Are patient and resilient in finding alternative flexible working arrangements, if you find your current arrangement is no longer working or something has changed;	If at any time the arrangement is no longer mutually beneficial, managers and employees should meet to discuss what has changed and to negotiate an alternate arrangement that continues to meet both the needs of the employee and the business needs. If you find yourself in this situation, where you (or your work) need the formal flexible working arrangement to change, follow the same steps as when you initially negotiated the arrangement, to have the new formal arrangement approved.
Can speak up, and work to resolve, negative attitudes toward flexible working if you notice it in colleagues.	Use the Situation Behaviour Impact (SBI) Feedback Tool to practice how best to deliver feedback and engage in potentially challenging conversations. The tool helps you to deliver more effective feedback. It focuses your comments on specific situations and behaviors, and then outlines the impact that these behaviors have on others. The tool also helps you to avoid making assumptions that could upset the other person and damage your relationship with him or her.
	Explore your organisation's processes, practices, and policies around flexible working; this information is likely to provide you with insight into the most common ways to approach flexible working conversations with your manager, as well as help you frame how you would challenge negative attitudes you witness in colleagues, towards flexible working. Instead of challenging a colleague personally, you can quote from a flexible working policy, or reference statistics about working flexibly, to address any misconceptions they may have.
	The PSC has also developed resources to help you address any employee and manager misgivings about flexible working, as well as checklists and conversation guides to assist you to have these courageous conversations about flexible working, found on the PSC website.

Collaboration

Collaboration means how well you:

Work collaboratively to foster flexible working arrangements at a team-level, for all;

To improve your collaboration skills, engage in team planning sessions regarding flexible working.

Where you or other team members are not physically in the office (e.g. working offsite or working from home), find ways to stay connected and keep communicating about the projects you are working on. This will help you deliver on expectations, as well as combat isolation. Online chat tools like Skype can be a replacement for the regular quick conversations we have at work, and project management tools like Smartsheet and Trello can help you work together on projects by openly tracking tasks and timeframes. WhatsApp can be great for non office-based, dispersed teams, for staying in touch.

Using collaboration tools will help teams even when team members are not working flexibly and having them in place is likely to pave the way to normalise flexible working for everyone.

Develop effective handover processes when working on shared projects or if you are job sharing (i.e. updating job-share partner on progress on tasks / outstanding tasks etc). The Employee Guide to Job Share on the PSC website contains many great suggestions for how you can do this.

Set up a meeting with your IT or HR team to build your skills in the use of systems you may be less familiar with. See if your team can use tools such as videoconferencing / collaborative work platforms to meet and collaborate with team members working offsite.

Collaboration

Collaboration means how well you:

Negotiate with other colleagues about flexible working when you need to.

As a team, discuss and agree on a set of 'flexible working principles' (e.g. one day of the week when all team members are in the office, how you will let each other know where you are, or how you will swap shifts) and try to stick to them as much as you can.

Discuss your work schedule and flexible working arrangements (where relevant) with your colleagues and seek to understand their schedules. Identify any conflicts in flexible working arrangements, and brainstorm ways of overcoming these together (e.g. resourcing, meeting stakeholder / client needs etc).

Discussions with your team may also include:

• Scheduling time to talk through concerns that any team members may have, to address these and come up with solutions. During this session, respectfully challenge those who do not support it and establish if their concerns can be resolved through planning or team protocols.

• How performance targets will be agreed and maintained so that everyone clearly understands their role in relation to the team;

• How you will minimise impact on stakeholders and communicate expectations to stakeholders.

• How the arrangement(s) will be monitored and evaluated over time.

Attend any team-based flexible working sessions offered in your agency to become more experienced with working in this collaborative way.

For ideas on how flexible working can be approached, and function, from a team perspective, review DCA's 'Employee toolkit', particularly the team-related sections in Section 3, 'Making flexibility work'.

Your HR contact should also have some helpful advice about negotiating as a team when deciding on how everyone's flexible working arrangements will best work together.

Continuous improvement, and monitoring & evaluation means that you:

Take action if your flexible working arrangements are not working effectively, and make adjustments;	Continuously review how well your flexible work arrangement is functioning during a trial period. Schedule in regular time for quick reflection and note down any challenges you might be facing, as well as aspects of your arrangement that are working well. Be prepared to share these with your manager during check-ins, or with colleagues where useful, as they may have suggestions that will help you to improve on how you are working.
	To understand how to contribute to continuous improvement in your organisation, find and read a copy of Senge's book on the learning organisation: Senge, P. M. (2006). The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization. Doubleday.
Monitor your flexible working arrangements to maintain or improve your performance as well as your service delivery responsibilities, without intensifying your workload.	Develop your own KPIs related to flexible working and think about how these could be discussed with your manager and built into performance plans / development goals etc.
	If you need to gain deeper insight into the essential elements and guidelines linked to employee performance, read PSC's performance development framework and employee reference guide.
	If you are concerned about work intensification, you could monitor your workload and flexible working arrangements over time (e.g. greater number of hours of work, greater work effort during work hours). Do this by tracking your work activity in your calendar / diary and comparing it to what it was like before you started working flexibly. Meet with your manager to talk through possible remedies (including team-based solutions) if you are experiencing work intensification.
	Draw clear boundaries that help you separate work from non-work time (i.e. when you are vs. are not available) and record in your calendar / diary what helps you stick to these boundaries, or what causes you to break your boundaries.
	Consider removing work email access from your phone if you are finding it particularly hard to switch off when you are not at work, on weekends or when on leave. Where possible, create a dedicated space if working at home to help you focus on your work, and switch off when your work is complete.

Continuous improvement / Monitoring & Evaluation

Continuous improvement, and monitoring & evaluation means that you:

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Monitor your flexible working arrangements to maintain or improve your performance as well as your service delivery responsibilities, without intensifying your workload.

Share your insights about working flexibly with your colleagues through company blogs or team meetings, etc. More colleagues working flexibly will make it a normal way of working across your agency, and lead to continuous improvement at the agency level, especially where there are dedicated HR partners focused on implementing flexible working who you can direct your feedback to.

Place a priority on responding to organisational surveys and other forms of data collection relating to flexible working (e.g. People Matter Employee Survey, pulse surveys), as such data is likely to feed into continuous improvement at an organisational-level.

Service delivery means you can:

Consider the needs of customers / members of the community when planning your flexible working arrangements;	To understand key factors affecting customer experience, access and review client feedback reports and testimonies to check that your flexible working arrangements will not negatively impact these factors.
	Particularly in front-facing roles, work with your team to consider the likely impact(s) of your flexible working arrangements and ensure sufficient coverage and continuity.
Be open with customers / members of the community about your flexible working arrangements where these are likely to trigger a change in how we work.	Where it is possible that your flexible working arrangements might conflict with client or customer needs, organise a time to discuss this with your manager, and if appropriate, the client or customer. It is important that you understand their needs and come prepared with solutions (e.g. support from team members / knowledge transfer). Seek regular feedback from clients and customers about the impact (if any) of your potential flexible working arrangements on their service experience.
	Where comfortable, use communication platforms and systems (e.g. email, voicemail) to communicate your flexible working arrangements to clients and customers (e.g. include a brief sentence in your email signature / auto-replies that outlines your flexible working arrangements, including 'in' and 'out of office' days, working hours, leave periods etc).

Self management

Self-management means you can:

Use your initiative / judgement to set individual goals for completing my work, no matter when, where or how the work is done (e.g. hours of work, location);	Discussing your performance plan with your manager regularly will help you know what is expected of you, but you can set your own tactics for how you will go about getting tasks done. You will know what works best for you in terms of motivation and work-style, but you can always run these past your manager or ask a team mate what works for them if you need.	
	Another option could be the possibility of being mentored (e.g. another manager, a leader, another employee with extensive experience in flexible working). This informal accountability could help you fine-tune your technique and keep up with the demands of your role. Use your existing networks to find someone you look up to and could learn from; ask them if they can meet with you for an hour every 6 – 8 weeks to share their approach.	
Manage your time effectively;	If you need some tips for managing your time when working flexibly, read WGEA's 'Flexibility Employee Toolkit', particularly Section 3 around 'managing yourself'.	
	Allocate enough time and effort to plan your work and to decide how you will get it done, particularly if you are telecommuting, travelling etc.	
Notice when you are feeling guilty about working flexibly and like you need to prove yourself or work harder to 'earn' the arrangement;	Having a mentor to talk with could also act as a sounding board for when you are feeling guilty about working flexibly and like you need to work harder to 'earn' the arrangement. A quick 'sense check' with this trusted mentor will help you adjust your mindset to realise that your flexible working arrangement is welcomed and supported by your agency leaders.	
	Take some time to reflect on any changes you are experiencing that could be a negative result of working flexibly (e.g. differences in team dynamics, feelings of isolation, mistakes, frustration). Seek to resolve any issues with your manager / team members and if necessary, develop a new plan for your flexible working arrangement to discuss and re-negotiate with your manager.	
Focus more on outcomes / outputs rather than how you achieved them.	Celebrate the wins and tell others that you have achieved your outcomes, even if the when, where and how may be different to the norm. This kind of awareness-raising will help others in your agency to know that the same is possible for them too, which eventually creates a new culture of flexible working across your agency.	

Tech savvy

Being Tech-savvy means that you can:

Use technology to help you work flexibly - e.g. to support self-management, team collaboration etc;	Arrange a meeting with your HR and / or IT contact to discuss the various forms of technology available that will help you and your colleagues work flexibly (e.g. systems for working remotely).
	Seek feedback from your manager or other colleagues around your use of new systems / technology in your organisation so that you can fine tune your techniques.
	If you need to learn how to host or participate in a virtual meeting, Slack has put together a helpful 'ultimate guide to remote meetings'. The Google 'Distributed work playbook' is also a helpful guide for teams working remotely, to assist with collaboration.
	Take up the opportunity to participate in any technology-related workshops or training sessions if offered in your workplace (i.e. functionality-based training).
	Find out which of your colleagues is tech-savvy and arrange to meet with them to learn from their experience of how they use technology to support flexible working.
Actively seek 'workarounds' where technology solutions are unavailable and share what you have learnt.	Continuously scan your workplace environment for technology / system improvements that might enhance flexible working (e.g. bringing your own 'device' to work to be linked to the corporate IT network); where you can see that improvements still need to be made to better support flexible working, address this with IT / HR. Where possible, host your own remote meetings to enable flexible working for other co-workers.
	If implemented / offered, volunteer yourself for 'hot desking' in your workplace, where you rotate across desks rather than having your own, permanent desk space. It can be hard to change the way you work but being willing to give it a try is an opportunity to identify what works well and what needs to improve, so that you can share this with your IT team.
	To better understand how technology and workplace systems can support flexible working, read through the PSC 'Changing Technology and Systems' guide.

Throughout this guide, and in addition to materials produced by the PSC, reference is made to resources provided by several impactful agencies.

It is recommended that you regularly access the websites of the below agencies for reports, data, and other resources that might be relevant in your development of flexible working skills into the future:

- **Diversity Council of Australia (DCA):** peak body leading diversity and inclusion in the workplace; provides unique research, events and programs, curated resources and expert advice across all diversity dimensions (https://www.dca.org.au/).

- **Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA):** Australian Government statutory agency created by the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012; responsible for promoting and improving gender equality in Australian workplaces (https://www.wgea.gov.au/).

- **PSC data sources related to flexible working:** The Flexible Working Dashboard App contains 2018 People Matter Employee Survey and workforce profile data. It will enable your agencies to more deeply analyse flexible work use, satisfaction and manager support in your agencies by a range of demographic or geographic factors, and to benchmark some of these scores against other agencies in your cluster, sector, and of a similar size. For the first time, agencies will be able to see correlational data between the employee survey and workforce profile data sets; specifically, the relationship between flexible working use and satisfaction, and paid unscheduled absence.

In the first half of 2019, this app will also be updated to include the results of the Flex Implementation Tracker (FIT) which was endorsed by the sector-wide flexible working implementation committee for launch in February. Similar to the employee data, the FIT will help agencies to compare the progress they have made in implementing flexible working relative to their peers, cluster and sector. Speak to your HR team, who typically have analytics access.