

Managing performance when working flexibly

Dilemmas are often experienced in relation to flexible working and performance:

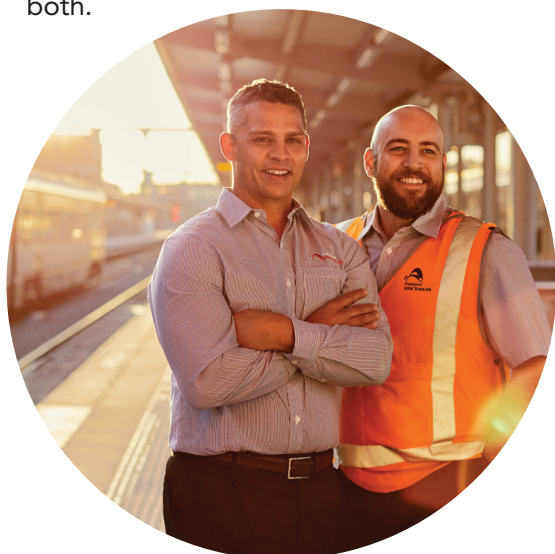
- Should flexibility only be available to high performers?
- Will flexible working result in lower levels of productivity, and staff ability to meet fluctuating work demands?
- How can flexible working improve performance?
- How will performance be monitored if there's reduced crossover between a manager and employee?
- How can effective performance agreements for flexible workers be established and maintained?

The keys to addressing these concerns are to:

- a. Distinguish between job performance and flexible work performance; and
- b. Have clear and agreed expectations about both.

Flexibility might improve performance

A previously high performing team member began coming to work late on a regular basis, and their overall performance decreased. The manager talked with them to understand what could be causing the change in their performance. It turned out that this team member needed to take their child to pre-school every morning (which had very strict hours). The manager suggested introducing some flexibility in their start and finish times, as this would have little impact on their work. After trialling it, the employee's performance improved and in turn, they are now more flexible themselves to meet business needs. The manager has also established a relationship with the employee where flexibility operates as a truly two-way street.



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Job performance

- Be realistic about what can be achieved by people working reduced hours (e.g. part-time)
- Look for opportunities to reduce direct supervision and increase trust (most who work flexibly are highly motivated to ensure flexibility works)
- Have an open conversation about what the essential results or KPIs will be. Agree on quantifiable measures of performance, e.g., projects completed, client satisfaction, team engagement, support for team goals
- Have clear agreed performance goals in place when a new flexible work arrangement is agreed to: include both performing standard job-related tasks, as well as communication with other staff and participating in training and development activities
- Determine which outputs are best achieved in different work contexts (e.g., in the office or at home) and at different times.
- Monitor performance issues on a regular basis – agree to these check points at the beginning and integrate these into the regular performance review process.
- If performance becomes an issue, ensure that you separate out performance from flexible working

Flexible work performance

- Frame flexible work performance as a skill that needs to be developed and monitored
- Openly discuss and agree on how flexible working will operate as a two-way street: how give and take will operate and how fluctuating work demands will be responded to
- Have regular one-on-one catch-ups to discuss and share your feedback on the operation of flexibility
- Consult with all staff on your team, and clients (internal and external) about the effectiveness of flexible working arrangements and the impact on performance and team effectiveness.
- Where flexibility is not working, address it early, providing examples of its impact on job or team performance.
- Consider also the possibility that better access to flexible working could increase a person's performance. This is often found to be the case.