

HR Manager Skills for Working Flexibly

Development Guide

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FLEXIBLE WORKING

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Flexible Working Development Guide for HR Managers

Flexible working: The role of HR Managers

The role of HR managers in flexible working is one of education, guidance, development, and system design. HR managers ensure that human resource systems maximise flexible working and that human-resource policies and practices support flexible working through being accessible, fit for purpose and easy to understand and use. HR managers monitor and evaluate the uptake of and attitudes toward flexible working, and use data to attract, retain, develop, and motivate employees.

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 HR Managers* 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.



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.



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.

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.



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:

Advise managers, leaders and employees about the benefits of flexible working, and the various types available to them

If you need to understand what flexible working means for the NSW government sector, check out the range of '[Flexible Working' resources on the PSC website](#). The site contains excellent resources and [case studies](#), so that you can better understand how to implement flexible working at your agency



Coach managers and leaders to counter misgivings related to flexible working and HR arrangements

To build awareness, knowledge, and advocacy of flexible working across your agency, check out the [PSC's 'Changing communication and awareness' guide](#). There is a page about [misgivings](#) that employees and managers have, that might help you counter the arguments or concerns you encounter.



Understand the constraints from policy and industrial arrangements and integrate them into the advice I give about flexible working

Review your own Public Service Industrial Relations Guide (PSIR) with a specific focus on flexible working. Ensure you are across all associated legislation and policies. Where you come across policies or practices you are less familiar with, spend time reviewing these and considering their application in your organisation.



Draw on flexible working approaches and case studies that have been used effectively in other sectors / departments / agencies

Where introduced, and where possible, facilitate the rollout of flexible working projects and initiatives in your agency (e.g. working groups) to broaden your experience of the ins and outs of flexible working and as an opportunity to coach your managers at the same time.



Play an active role in flexible working initiatives / programs in your agency (including those led by external bodies); encourage pilot programs where possible as an opportunity to be early adopters of flexible working. Network with other HR leads involved in the implementation of flexible working, so that you can learn from their example.

Having flexible working awareness means that you:

Refer managers, leaders and employees to relevant information and resources to solve flexible working-related problems

If you need to find relevant information and resources to solve flexible working-related problems in the NSW government sector your first port-of-call is the [PSC website](#).



WGEA also has some excellent resources to help you understand the benefits of flexible working in the workplace and take a team-based approach to flexible working. Review [WGEA's Workplace Flexibility Strategy document](#) or DCA's '[Future Flex](#)' report, and [associated material](#).

Set up a meeting / training session with leaders and people-managers to give them an overview of the types of flexible working available to employees, how they can be accessed, what the limits or boundaries are etc.



Build and maintain networks with other HR managers to share and develop knowledge around flexible working

Where possible, introduce forums (e.g. Q&A sessions) for leaders, managers and/or employees to engage in flexible working discussions and to raise any concerns. This may include setting up information tables or kiosks and inviting subject matter experts to be available at any events or showcases, to answer employee questions about flexible working.



Get in touch with other senior HR partners to understand how they approach flexible working in their organisation.

To better understand the flexible working trends within your agency, check your agency's flexible working employee data (e.g. [Flexible Working Dashboard](#), [People Matter Employee Survey](#), [Flexible Implementation Tracker](#) – find out who at your agency has responsibility for these and ask them to share the data with you). Think about how the results might affect your team, what they mean for diversity and inclusion targets, and consider discussing these with employees or other managers.



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.

Fostering inclusion means that you:

Value and account for employees' diverse characteristics and contexts with regards to their need for flexible working

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'](#). If you are interested to know more about the state of inclusion in the Australian workforce, review DCA's ['Inclusion@Work Index'](#).



To understand the five inclusive mindsets of leaders, review [DCA's 'Building Inclusion' report](#).

Redesign your workforce management practices so that they take into account unconscious bias (e.g. review career progression, performance development, and related practices for trends across demographic variables).



Work with the People Analytics team to analyse employee surveys and other data (e.g. [Flexible Working Dashboard](#), [People Matter Employee Survey](#), [Flexible Implementation Tracker](#) – find out who at your agency has responsibility for these) with a focus on diversity and inclusion. Share the trends (e.g. utilisation, attitudes, satisfaction) with other managers to develop a plan for continuous improvement.

'Sense check' unconscious bias when responding to issues or making decisions related to flexible working

For insight into the unconscious biases you may hold, take the [Harvard Implicit Association Test](#) and encourage managers in your agency to do the same, as part of an awareness-raising workshop.



Seek out and engage in current or future immersive experiences, projects or assignments within your agency (e.g. working in cross-functional / cross-national teams engaging with specific diversity or social groups) to broaden your experience working with diverse groups.



Fostering inclusion means that you:

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'Sense check' unconscious bias when responding to issues or making decisions related to flexible working

If you need to learn how to support diversity in your agency and be aware of your own unconscious bias in the way you manage recruitment, selection and promotion of employees, review [DPC's 'Behavioural approaches to increasing workforce diversity' guide](#).



Provide employees with the support needed to foster a culture of inclusivity (e.g. education, training, skill development)

Consider [membership with the DCA](#) to gain access to content, research, and events relating to diversity and inclusion, or a subscription with the [Workplace Gender Equality Agency \(WGEA\)](#) to gain access to a variety of resources relating to gender equality. The [Male Champions of Change](#) website also contains useful reports and resources.



Consider which evidence-based activities, training sessions, and / or development opportunities can be offered to leaders / managers / employees to enhance diversity and inclusion (e.g. mentoring programs, established and immersive diversity- and inclusion-based training programs).



Ensure flexible working tools and resources are applicable and accessible to all

Ensure resources related to flexible working (i.e. policies, practices, systems, technology) are easily accessible to all employees, irrespective of their context, characteristics, or working arrangements (e.g. review the language used in key flexible working-related documents to ensure it is accessible to those whose first language is not English, or those who are hearing or vision impaired). A part of this is using plain English in all publications, so that all employees can clearly understand the materials. Discourage making employees jump through too many 'hoops'.



The Continuous improvement skillset is about how HR managers:

Seek to continually improve flexible working policies and practices in their agency

Find the person responsible for the '[Flex Implementation Tracker](#)' (FIT) assessment to discover whether your agency has progressed, stalled or gone backwards in your implementation of flexible working, or you can use the FIT questions as a conversation starter within your team / branch / division.



The [PSC Flexible Working Change Management Guides](#) assist agencies to implement flexible working across 5 key areas within the context of the NSW government sector. The change guides are a first port of call for any HR managers tasked with the responsibility of implementing flexible working across their agency.

If you would like to understand what continuous improvement means for your agency, read Deloitte's paper, '[Building a culture of continuous improvement in an age of disruption](#)', and if you want to know how to model continuous learning in your agency, find and read a copy of Senge's book on the learning organisation: Senge, P. M. (2014). *The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organization*. Crown Business.

If you need suggestions on running focus groups with employees that are specific to the issue of flexible working, [WGEA has developed a helpful guide](#). Facilitate flexible working focus groups or targeted interviews with employees at all levels of your organisation to uncover myths or misconceptions; and so that everyone can take ownership of the agency's continuous improvement efforts.

Ensure formal trial periods are a feature of your organisation's approach to flexible working; coach managers in how / when to set up trial periods with members of their team requesting new or modified flexible working arrangements (e.g. regular check-ins over a 3-month period).



Utilise employee surveys and related tools to understand flexible working practices in your organisation; document and share any implications with leaders and managers to guide flexible working discussions and practices within their teams and to set improvement goals.



The Continuous improvement skillset is about how HR managers:

Maintain up-to-date knowledge of relevant industrial and legislative changes that impact on flexible working.

Government sector industrial relations and legislation should be monitored for any changes that are likely to affect flexible working. It may also be possible for you to have regular correspondence with union representatives to stay up-to-date with union negotiations and their implications for flexible working.



Building a network of senior HR partners across different agencies to understand what approaches to flexible working have been most successful will help you with your own agency's implementation efforts. Use this network as a 'sounding board' and a place to share your own learning.



Attraction, selection, and orientation is particular to how you:

Promote an employee-value proposition (EVP) that clearly supports flexible working

If you need some help with developing an employee value proposition that features flexible working, review Insync's guide – [‘How to create a compelling employee value proposition’](#). Check if flexible working is a feature of your organisation's employee value proposition (EVP). If it is not, consider updating your EVP to incorporate it.



For an overview of how to communicate flexible working opportunities in job advertisements, review Timewise's guide [‘Getting your flex message right in job adverts’](#) and develop wording for use in your agency's job advertisements.

Emphasise the importance of flexible working, and related skills and mindsets, during the recruitment process

Integrate flexible working questions into your organisation's recruitment process and discuss your organisation's support for flexible working during candidate interviews. These sorts of simple changes will assist in making flexible working 'business as usual' in your agency.



To understand how to eliminate gender bias from the recruitment process, review Catalyst's research tool [‘Break the Cycle – HR Experts’](#).



Advise hiring managers to consider experience in managing flexible working teams, when recruiting prospective managers

Review your process and tools for recruiting prospective managers. Assist hiring managers to test for flexible working management skills by using scenarios in interviews; focus on the relative importance placed on outcomes vs. inputs – ensure outcomes, rather than the ways in which they are achieved, are central to a prospective manager's understanding of the link between flexible working and achieving results.



Work with managers to integrate flexible working in role requirements and design (e.g. language, workforce management processes, mobility and career disruption)

If you need insight into how to drive change in workforce management processes to better support flexible working in your agency, review PSC's [‘Workforce management’ change guide](#).



Attraction, selection, and orientation is particular to how you:

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Work with managers to integrate flexible working in role requirements and design (e.g. language, workforce management processes, mobility and career disruption)

Find the person responsible for the [‘Flex Implementation Tracker’](#) (FIT) assessment to discover whether your agency has progressed, stalled or gone backwards in your implementation of flexible working, or you can use the FIT questions as a conversation starter within your team / branch / division.



Incorporate questions about flexible working arrangements into exit interviews with leavers; this will provide you with insight into possible sources of dissatisfaction and potentially lead to an improvement in your retention of employees.

Work with a change team to build a workplace flexibility strategy for implementing flexible working across your agency

WGEA has some excellent resources for how to [build a flexible working strategy](#). This document was a foundational influence in the PSC’s development of the [PSC Flexible Working Change Management Guides](#) and the Flex Implementation Tracker, to assist agencies to implement flexible working across 5 key areas within the context of the NSW government sector. The change guides are a first port of call for any HR managers tasked with the responsibility of implementing flexible working across their agency.



Integrate information around flexible working (e.g. organisational support for flexible working, flexible working policies / processes / practices) into the induction and orientation process

Review your organisation’s orientation and onboarding process; ensure new starters are made aware of flexible working options available to them and how they can initiate a conversation about their flexible working preferences.



Ask new starters about their perceptions of flexible working in your organisation (i.e. first impressions, ease of access to flexible working arrangements etc.) so that you can refine the experience for this cohort setting up their flexible working arrangements at the start of their employment.



Workforce development and management involves:

Offering flexible working training and development opportunities for employees

Review flexible working [case studies](#) provided by the PSC to explore how other public- and private-sector organisations have successfully implemented flexible working, and use these as a means of developing employees' working knowledge of flexible working.



If you need suggestions on running focus groups with employees that are specific to the issue of flexible working, [WGEA has developed a helpful guide](#). Facilitate flexible working focus groups or targeted interviews with employees at all levels of your organisation to uncover myths or misconceptions; and so that everyone can take ownership of the agency's continuous improvement efforts.

Using flexible work as a workforce management tool to encourage mobility, adaptability and career progression

If you need insight into how to drive change in workforce management processes to better support flexible working in your agency, review [PSC's 'Workforce management' change guide](#).



If you need to gain some insight into the essential elements and guidelines for managing employee performance, read [PSC's performance development framework and relevant guide\(s\)](#).

Ensuring performance management processes are outcomes-focused and that managers and leaders evaluate performance accordingly

Review your performance management system / practices; focus on the relative importance placed on outcomes vs. inputs – ensure outcomes, rather than the ways in which they are achieved, are central to performance management conversations (i.e. results-based performance).



Schedule meetings / training sessions with senior leaders and managers to provide them with insight into implementing flexible working within your agency. Key components of workshops or training sessions could include, for example:



- understanding the concept of 'All roles flex',
- managing requests for flexible working arrangements,
- dealing with challenging situations,
- skills practice,
- role-modelling,
- case-study scenarios,
- maintaining performance.

Workforce development and management involves:

Ensuring advice, tools, and support related to workforce management (e.g. job and work design, workforce planning) are available to leaders and managers

Engage with senior leaders in discussions about workforce development to understand your organisational approach to this and how flexible working can assist you to respond to changing business needs. Identify how HR practices might embrace or complement this vision.



Ensure the advice, tools, and support needed for managers and leaders to use flexible working in (for example) workforce development, workforce planning, and job design is readily available and easily accessible, and that they are fit for purpose and effective. You could ask a sample group of leaders and managers to review the resources for you periodically and provide you with feedback.



Human resource practice is about the extent to which an HR Manager:

Adjusts to and executes new human resource practices in line with changing business and flexible working needs

To understand how flexible working can be applied to human resource management practices, review the article '[Functional Flexibility in HRM Systems](#)'.



How quickly are adaptations and applications made to HR practices in your organisation, when required? How could this be improved on? What steps in the change process are necessary and which could be abandoned or minimised?



Keep up-to-date with the latest developments in HR systems across the industry so you can draw on these as potential solutions to HR practice inefficiencies.

Collaborates with leaders, managers, and employees when introducing new policies and practices for flexible working

Seek regular feedback from managers and employees to understand what they need from human resources to support flexible working.



Participate (or find out what was discussed) in key strategy and operational meetings to ensure you remain up-to-date with the needs of the business and use these to guide future approaches to flexible working arrangements.

Maintain contacts throughout the organisation at all levels, who you can quickly test ideas with when required (e.g. to test new changes or emergent issues about flexible working).

Look for opportunities to trial a team-based design pilot or job-share pilot. A pilot can expedite approval and reduce risk. Complete a trial in one area of the organisation or with a subsection of employees prior to a full rollout to gather feedback and test changes. Talk to the Public Service Commission if you need help with running a pilot.



The HR-related advice skillset is about how you:

Provide accurate advice to employees, leaders and managers on the legal and industrial implications of flexible working

Review your own Public Service Industrial Relations Guide (PSIR) with a specific focus on flexible working. Ensure you are across all associated legislation and policies. Where you come across policies or practices you are less familiar with, spend time reviewing these and considering their application in your organisation.



Schedule in bi-annual meetings with leaders and managers to provide them with an overview of the types of flexible working available to employees, how they can be accessed, and any limits or boundaries. This will ensure that they remain up to date with changes to flexible working policies and are aware of what sits behind them.



To better understand the flexible working trends within your agency, check your agency's flexible working employee data (e.g. [Flexible Working Dashboard](#), [People Matter Employee Survey](#), [Flexible Implementation Tracker](#) – find out who at your agency has responsibility for these and ask them to share the data with you). This will ensure that decision-making around flexible working accounts for the formal, legislative aspects of flexible working, as well as more qualitative data.



Ensure employees have access to information about the agency's flexible working policies, practices, and processes and can make flexible working decisions that align with business needs

The [PSC has provided policy guidance and supporting documents](#) to assist government sector agencies in their implementation of flexible working. You can use the guidance (and examples) to review or develop your agency's policies and practices around flexible working and adapt it to your business context and industrial arrangements.



Refresh your organisation's human resource practices and policies around flexible working; if not already in place, consider developing and making available a 'quick guide' to ensure that the advice you give / provide is accurate and easily accessible.



Introduce training in negotiation skills and facilitating conversations with employees regarding new or modified flexible working arrangements. You could use the PSC Conversation guides and other skill sets to design the training content, found on the [PSC website](#).



The HR-related advice skillset is about how you:

Encourage a “can do” or “if not, then why not” attitude around flexible working

Approach employee requests for a flexible working arrangement with an open, “if not, why not” attitude; encourage other leaders and managers to do the same. Troubleshoot with individual managers who have concerns about allowing their teams to work flexibly.



Build a flexible working change team to plan for change across the five key areas of flexible working implementation at your agency. The [PSC change guides](#) will guide your planning.

Monitoring and evaluation requires you to:

Incorporate issues related to flexible working into employee surveys or when collecting workforce data (e.g. culture, mindsets)

To understand how best to monitor any change efforts relating to the implementation of flexible working, review PSC's range of [Flexible Working Change Management Guides](#) and use the [Flexible Implementation Tracker](#) (FIT). Use the [PSC pulse surveys](#) regularly to track changes.



To improve how you 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.

Develop a training session for managers and leaders to assist them in understanding how best to conduct trial periods for new or modified flexible working arrangements (i.e. frequency of check-ins, indicators of success/failure).



Provides regular updates (i.e. reporting) on flexible working uptake and attitudes

Review employee data about flexible working (e.g. [Flexible Working Dashboard](#), [People Matter Employee Survey](#), [Flexible Implementation Tracker](#) – find out who at your agency has responsibility for these and ask them to share the data with you); analyse the trends, utilisation, satisfaction and make summary reports available to leaders, managers, and employees at regular intervals throughout the year (e.g. bi-annually).



Schedule in a regular time to meet with employees who are experiencing challenges associated with their flexible working arrangements, or whose flexible working arrangements are not working. Discuss how they could change their work practices to make flexible working a success. Try to distil 'lessons learnt' and share them with members of your organisation (e.g. leaders, managers, other employees).



Incorporate questions related to flexible working into exit interviews and documents

For guidance on developing exit interviews (including those that incorporate flexible working), review [PSC's 'Guide to developing exit interviews'](#).



Refresh your exit procedure(s) to ensure flexible working questions are included in exit surveys and interviews, to test satisfaction with access, if it was a reason to leave. Develop and provide regular reports on key trends to monitor improvement.



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.