

6.9 Flexible Work Practices

Flexible work practices are those non-traditional arrangements or patterns of work that allow staff to balance their work responsibilities and life commitments and enable you to develop and grow your business more effectively.

The main types of work practices are:

- Part year employment
- Working from home
- Part-time work agreements or part time work
- Job sharing
- Flexible working hours

The Queensland Government – Industrial Relations website provides small business with information about dispelling the myths about work, family and lifestyle balance. Below is an extract and link to the site for further information:

“Work-life balance policies and practices only benefit employees with young children

Work-life balance policies and practices help people meet the needs of their work life and personal life more effectively. The policies and practices can assist all people, not just those with young children. They assist people who are responsible for the care of elderly parents, people who have study commitments, those older employees who simply want to ease themselves into retirement or people with other personal and lifestyle commitments.

Our work and personal lives change across the life span with associated responsibilities, and thus the need for work-life balance policies, changing all the time. One thing that an increasing number of people might have in common in the future is their caring responsibilities for the elderly (e.g. parents and spouse) with the ageing of the population.

Give workers an inch and they'll take a mile

A high degree of trust and cooperation between management and employees is crucial to the success of work-life balance policies and will lead to improved staff morale, commitment and increased productivity. Increasingly, employers are finding that an open and cooperative approach to work-life balance can give them a competitive edge.

In a presentation at a Hudson Highland forum, Ms Avril Henry, a leading human resources consultant, said that technology is a great enabler of flexible work arrangements. She said that "employers are going to have to trust people in the future", and that her longstanding experience in human resources had demonstrated that "if you trust people they won't let you down". Ms Henry stressed that to maintain their talent in the future, employers would have to offer flexible work arrangements.

Working long hours is an indication of high productivity

Supervisors and co-workers who equate the number of hours spent in the workplace with productivity might penalise efficient workers who complete tasks in a shorter time. Performance should be assessed on the nature and quality of the work, not just timeserving.

*The research paper from the Centre for Sleep Research, [Extended Working Hours in Australia: Counting the Costs](#) (PDF, 960 KB), presents compelling evidence for the negative impact of longer working hours on the health and safety of employees and their productivity in the workplace. Studies cited in *Extended Working Hours in Australia: Counting the Costs* indicate that employee productivity per hour for 10 -12 hour shifts is significantly lower than for an eight hour shift. One study found workers on 10 hour shifts reported significant performance impairments for alertness, memory and attention compared to eight hour shifts.*

Work-life balance policies and practices give some workers an advantage over others

Some employees may feel left out of the work-life debate as they perceive work-life balance policies are not applicable or available to them. Others may feel that they are disadvantaged when co-workers use certain policies, such as carer's leave or emergency leave, because they may have to cover for the person on leave.

However, work-life balance is an issue for all people with the need for relevant policies fluctuating across the life cycle. People's family and lifestyle commitments will vary in form and degree over time and certain policies may suddenly become a necessity for employees where they haven't been before. With the ageing of the population, more employees are likely to have caring responsibilities in the future.

To obtain similar levels of work-life balance, different people will have to make more or less use of work-life balance policies depending on what life stage they are in. For example, employees with young children may have to use flexible work hours to ensure that they have sufficient time to get their children to school or childcare, so they can come to work more relaxed knowing that their children are in capable and safe hands. Allowing such flexibility ensures that people can fulfil all their obligations in a more sufficient manner.

Balancing work and lifestyle is for workers only

Very long working hours are most common in occupations involving high levels of personal responsibility and accountability, relatively high earnings and in jobs with no standard working hours, which are all characteristics of managerial jobs. Work-life balance policies may be particularly important for managers because their job characteristics make them more vulnerable to burn-out and stress which may have a negative impact on their work performance and personal life.

Organisations should support and encourage managers to use work-life balance policies and practices, both to accommodate their own work-life balance needs and promote work-life balance among their employees by being role models.

This is just a women's issue

Since the 1970s there have been major changes in community views about parenting and the roles of fathers and mothers. There has been an increasing expectation that fathers will be more involved in parenting than has been traditionally the case and an acceptance that parenting is an important role for both parents.

International research has shown that the most important influence on a father's relationship with his children is his working pattern and that both fathers and their children benefit from work arrangements that allow them more time together. As fathers are increasingly encouraged to become more involved with their children, the issue of balancing work and family responsibilities has become more of a concern to both male and female workers.

In 2001, the Australian Institute of Family Studies conducted research using information from interviews with 47 families about work and family life. Many of the interviewed fathers saw their work as having an important impact on the time they spent with their children. There were a number of specific aspects of their work that they felt impacted on their ability to spend time with their children, including the lack of support of their workplace and/or working conditions for their family commitments. Some fathers felt they were expected to make a choice between their work and family lives."

Follow the links below for more information and resources on this topic:

[NSW Government - Work and Family \(Workplace Flexibility Brochure\)](#)

[NSW Government - Work and Family](#)

[QLD Government - Industrial Relations - Workplace Flexibility](#)

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