

# A Best Practice Guide for flexible and work-from-home arrangements



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# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically reshaped where we work, with working from home and flexible work practices becoming more prevalent for office-based knowledge workers. The following resources have been assembled to assist organisations and managers to calibrate their flexible work arrangements, adopting proactive structures that provide a solid foundation for employees to engage in safe, productive, flexible work.

Flexible work allows employers and employees to negotiate working conditions that suit both parties for to support workers to maintain a healthy work-life balance, whilst improving productivity and efficiency for businesses. Flexible work arrangements may look different across organisations, often shaped by the size, industry and geographical location of the organisation. Irrespective of the differences, best practice approaches to flexible work contain four key elements:

- **Customisable in nature** – flexible workers can work in alternative locations (e.g. work from home, other offices), on different schedules (e.g. particular days of the week, or a 9-day fortnight), and at different times of the day (e.g. to accommodate child care, study commitments).
- **Hybrid** – conscious and considered decisions are made to enable employees to work collectively, perhaps in the same physical locations; and also individually, in locations remote from each other. Healthy remote work arrangements ideally involve a hybrid model, with a balance of work from home or another remote location, and a traditional workplace/office.
- **Safe** – flexible workers are both physically and psychologically safe at work.
- **Inclusive** – flexible workers have different circumstances and unique needs meaning one size does not fit all. Flexible workers will include individuals from groups who may be more at risk of harm (e.g. workers with disability, workers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, workers exposed to violence at home, etc.). No employees should not be adversely affected when utilising flexible work arrangements.

## Safety in Flexible Work

Flexibility should be viewed as a change to the work context - hazards should be assessed and controlled as necessary with the most effective controls possible. This will be different for different organisations, but should be informed by tailored hazard identification, work (re) design, relevant policy framework(s) and leadership development for flexible teams.

When flexible workers are working from home, one of the main safety issues considered is workstation ergonomics; however, a range of other hazards, including psychosocial risks, can present through flexible ways of working. This can include social and physical isolation, exposure to negative behaviours online, as well as missing out on aspects of supervision, managerial support and a sense of belonging, contribution and participation.

## Resources to Help

This Guide contains a set of resources that have been assembled to assist organisations in better managing safety for flexible workers. They are provided as a Best Practice Guide and a Manager's Toolkit.

Resources	Description
Best Practice Guide for Safe, Flexible Work, and Organisational Maturity Assessment	The Guide gives an overview of the key areas in which effort should be focused to drive best practice WHS systems and processes that advance outcomes for flexible workers.
Manager's Toolkit for Advancing Psychosocial Safety for Flexible Workers	The Toolkit contains guidance material developed in response to the need for practical guidance for managers.

While there are a range of guides about flexible and remote work (e.g. Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Fair Work Ombudsman, 2020); the resources assembled here are uniquely focused on a best practice approach to Work Health and Safety (WHS) systems and processes which is inclusive of flexible workers.

## Built on a framework of evidence

The resources presented here are a culmination of a series of research studies which examined exposure to psychosocial risks for flexible workers, and how the exposure impacted across different demographic groups, including the workplace health and safety experience of flexible workers.

Title	Description
Flexible work and psychological safety - Best practice to advance psychologically safe work from alternate locations: A report on findings from a survey of New South Wales employees	Reports the findings from a large survey of a diverse sample of flexible workers concerning the nature and extent of their exposure to psychosocial risks within New South Wales organisations, and the level of exposure across different demographic groupings.
Flexible work and psychological safety - Best practice to advance psychologically safe solutions from alternate locations: A report on findings from interviews with NSW flexible employees and managers	Reports the findings from an interview-based study on the experience of NSW flexible workers and managers to understand the exposure of flexible workers to psychosocial risks, and their experiences with WHS systems.
Flexible work and psychological safety - Best practice to advance psychologically safe solutions from alternate locations: A model for best practice for NSW flexible workers within a psychologically safe work environment	This report discusses the best practice model, A systems model for effective flexible worker engagement in WHS within a psychologically safe environment, which can be used to improve WHS systems, inclusive of flexible workers, within a psychologically safe work environment.

# Best Practice Guide for Safe, Flexible Work

## Overview

Flexibility, and work-from-home in particular, should be viewed as a change to the work context that may introduce new workplace health and safety (WHS) hazards, as well as impacting the presence of existing hazards either positively or negatively. Psychosocial hazards have been identified as a particular concern for employees working from home. Psychosocial hazards should be assessed and controlled as necessary with the most effective controls possible. For organisations to create a psychologically safe working environment for flexible workers, primary preventative action must be taken. There are seven elements that combine to build a psychologically safe and productive work environment for flexible workers and support primary preventative action.

### The Seven elements of a psychologically safe and productive environment



This guide provides practical advice to enhance flexible worker wellbeing through the continual advancement of the organisation's capability to promote psychological safety. This guidance should be used in association with the capability maturity assessment appended to this guide (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, pages 22-27). Case studies are also provided which show the elements applied to real-world scenarios (Appendix 3, page 28).

Each element of a psychologically safe and productive work environment for flexible workers is explained, including descriptors for both proactive - best practice and generative - next level maturity advancement for the element. Following the descriptors, the guide sets out how to achieve maturity advancement for each element, and links to relevant resources to support best practice.

# Senior Leadership Commitment

The level of commitment by senior leaders to prioritise psychological safety at work drives the psychosocial safety culture within the organisation. Strong senior leadership towards psychological health and safety of flexible workers is prominent in organisations that are regarded as having best practice approaches to psychological safety at work.



## Proactive - best practice

Senior leadership has established initiatives to ensure psychological safety is well managed within the organisation. Messages of support for flexible workers from top management are evident. Senior managers should role model healthy flexible working.

## Generative - next level

Senior leadership lead a culture where psychological health and safety is prioritised and all staff are committed to continually improving wellbeing and psychological safety of flexible workers within the organisation.



## HOW

In order to advance flexible worker psychosocial safety maturity, senior managers:

- Demonstrate commitment to the psychological health and safety of all workers through inclusive flexible working policies.
- Clearly communicate top leadership commitment to the psychological health and safety of all workers.
- Provide clarity about flexible work arrangements, including the roles and responsibilities of flexible workers for psychologically safe work environments.
- Adapt existing safety management systems to include identification, assessment and control of hazards and risks related to flexible work.
- Role model good behaviours and raise awareness of psychological safety at work.
- Demonstrate commitment by ensuring that WHS systems are inclusive of remote working conditions in regard to psychosocial safety systems (e.g. risk assessments).
- Encourage all workers, including flexible workers, to participate in workplace health and safety (e.g. identifying and reporting psychosocial hazards; participation in WHS committees).
- Use validated surveys and online tools to collect data, and monitor wellbeing, the organisational climate, and engagement with flexible working.

## WHY

A positive psychosocial safety climate has consistently been found to promote employee wellbeing, acting through the work environment to positively influence workers' exposure to psychosocial hazards that could negatively impact their psychological health (Dollard and Bakker, 2010)\*. At the top level, senior management have the lead role in developing a culture of psychological safety. A commitment to psychological safety must be communicated by top leadership. Positive flexible working should be role modelled and support by senior management, and prioritisation for initiatives and systems to support psychological safety should be evident. When operating at the generative level, senior management commitment creates a culture which strives to continually improve the psychological safety of flexible workers.

### **Links to Resources**

The [Code of Practice for Managing Psychosocial hazards at Work](#) is available from SafeWork NSW.

Guidance about roles and responsibilities for psychological safety at work is available from [SafeWork NSW](#).

SafeWork Australia provide a [Model Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks](#), which provides practical guidance about managing WHS risks

Resources for the organisations seeking to create psychologically healthy workplaces, such as policy templates, strategy guidance, and case studies are available from organisations such as The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance, Heads Up, and SafeWork NSW.

\* Dollard, M. F., & Bakker, A. B. 2010. Psychosocial safety climate as a precursor to conducive work environments, psychological health problems, and employee engagement. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 83:579-599.

# Communication Supporting Psychological Health and Safety

Flexible workers who are working remotely (e.g. working from home) can sometimes feel isolated and experience feelings of being excluded. Frequent organisational communication that is inclusive of flexible workers not only provides flexible workers with information, but also helps to keep them connected with the organisation, and engaged with their colleagues; all of which contributes to a psychologically safe working environment.

## Proactive

There is effective two-way communication throughout the organisation on psychological health and safety pertaining to flexible workers. Efforts are made to ensure all employees have voice and are included.

Flexible workers are encouraged to communicate any concerns related to their wellbeing to line managers.



## Generative

Top leadership regularly update and improve communication demonstrating support for psychological health and safety for flexible workers. Line managers understand the unique needs of their flexible workers and communicate with them accordingly. Flexible workers always have ready access to information resources that relate to their work.

## HOW

In order to advance flexible worker psychosocial safety maturity, all levels of management should communicate in ways that:

- Create avenues for regular feedback from flexible workers (e.g. formal meetings, informal catch-ups, surveys).
- Allow for open conversations and two-way exchanges, with managers listening to the concerns and feedback of flexible workers.
- Ensure communication is timely, consistent and factual (e.g. tell them what is known and what is uncertain).
- Create opportunities to be open, honest and to regularly check-in with flexible workers
- Consistent with good WHS practice, use a range of media as appropriate to ensure effective communication based on the needs of workers (eg. Video, audio, translated to different languages as appropriate; diagrams as well as written information).

## WHY

Regular communication from senior management is critical in reinforcing the organisation's commitment to psychological safety for flexible workers. Preventative approaches to psychological safety benefit from effective two-way communication, particularly when flexible employees are encouraged to communicate concerns about psychological health and safety.

### ***Links to Resources***

The [NSW Code of Practice for Managing Psychosocial hazards at Work](#) contains example scenarios using common psychosocial risks and hazards and provides examples about how to discuss psychosocial hazards with employees



# Accessible Line Manager Support for Flexible Workers

The working relationship between the line manager and the flexible worker is critical in keeping the lines of communication open. When flexible workers have a relationship with their line manager built on trust, openness and honesty, risks and hazards are more likely to be identified, reported and appropriate action taken. For this to occur, managers must be accessible.

## Proactive

Line managers actively check-in on their flexible workers and support them to ensure they are psychologically safe. Flexible workers know they have the trust and support of their line manager.



## Generative

Line managers understand the different needs of their flexible workers and are always trying to develop better ways to support them. Managers and staff work together to continuously improve psychological safety for flexible workers.

## HOW

In order to advance flexible worker psychosocial safety maturity, line managers:

- Role model good flexible work practices in a psychological safe work environment (e.g. demonstrate how line managers work from home regularly).
- Build trusting relationships and communicate openly and regularly with flexible workers (e.g. relationship-based leadership).
- Consider working with their teams to develop their own 'Guidelines' about the best ways to work together, inclusive of flexible workers with diverse needs.
- Demonstrate integrative and inclusive leadership, listen to flexible workers and meet their needs in healthy ways (e.g. establish a pattern for checking in with your team that is regular enough to demonstrate genuine engagement, but not so frequent as to be misinterpreted as micromanagement).

## WHY

Line managers who maintain strong trusting relationships with their team are more attuned to the different needs of their flexible worker team members. Where line managers understand the needs of their flexible workers, they display the leadership behaviours that support psychological safety at work.

### ***Links to Resources***

The [Manager flexibility Toolkit](#) is a toolkit designed for managers who directly manage flexible workers, and contains strategies that can be used with the whole team, or subgroups depending on the manager's needs:

The [People at Work Tool](#) can be used as a risk assessment tool and is available online via SafeWork NSW



# Flexible Workers' Commitment to Flexible Work and Wellbeing

While senior leadership and organisational systems to support psychological safety must be in place, flexible workers share a responsibility for their own safety at work. Flexible workers must prioritise their own wellbeing, talk to their line manager and other key personnel about any health, safety and wellbeing concerns in their flexible work environment.

## Proactive

Flexible workers take care to look after their personal wellbeing while working flexibly, including in the home environment. They proactively discuss any safety concerns with their line manager.



## Generative

Flexible workers are committed to working in a way that promotes wellbeing and psychological safety over all other considerations. Wellbeing is the first priority for flexible workers and they are actively involved in designing healthy flexible work.

## HOW

In order to advance flexible worker psychosocial safety maturity, flexible workers: Take personal responsibility for their wellbeing (as well as performance) (e.g. manage the boundaries between work and life).

- Identify and report psychological risks and hazards.
- Engage with WHS systems and processes that support psychological safety (e.g. flexible worker wellbeing/safety plans).
- Participate in WHS activities, representing and giving a voice to flexible workers (e.g. membership on organisation-wide WHS committees; contribution to new flexible work policies).

## WHY

Flexible workers must be actively involved in WHS systems because the shared responsibility for psychological health and wellbeing is at the centre of interactions and activities that support psychological safety for all flexible workers.

## ***Links to Resources***

The [Employee Flexibility Toolkit](#) provides guidance for employees in understanding how to integrate flexible working practices into existing work arrangements in healthy ways.

Heads Up contains tips on staying well.

Online tools and apps for managing your own wellbeing can be access via [The Black Dog Institute](#)



# Adequate Resourcing

The amount and type of resources that flexible workers need will differ depending on their role and the nature of the work that they will be doing when working flexibly, as well as their personal resources. Regardless of the amount of resources needed, organisations need to ensure that resourcing is adequate and tailored to the needs of flexible working.

## Proactive

Resourcing to ensure safe and productive flexible work is prioritised across the organisation. Tools and technology to support safe and effective flexible working have been provided to workers and their managers.



## Generative

The organisation continually monitors the resource needs for safe and productive flexible working across the organisation, and ensures resources are applied in a timely way. Flexible workers collaborate with managers in developing tools to support flexible working.

## HOW

In order to advance flexible worker psychosocial safety maturity, senior management:

- Develop workplace flexibility strategies ensuring that flexible working is adequately resourced (e.g. relevant software and hardware).
- Ensure that flexible workers have training and the tools they need work in a psychologically safe environment (e.g. workflow management tools).
- Remove barriers to flexibility by adequately resourcing collaborative technologies to support managers and flexible workers (e.g. provide training and support as well as access to the new software).
- Enabling flexibility in use of software and tools to accommodate various circumstances e.g. Internet access, privacy).

## WHY

By ensuring that appropriate and adequate resourcing is available for flexible working, senior management are demonstrating their commitment to the psychological safety of flexible workers. Furthermore, inadequate technical resources are a major source of stress for flexible workers.

## ***Links to Resources***

[Building a workplace flexibility Strategy](#) is a toolkit for building an organisation-wide approach to implementing and managing workplace flexibility

[Flex for Success: Five Practices That Build a Flexible Workforce](#) provides guidance, case studies and a tool for organisations to gauge where they are on their flexibility journey (inclusive of resourcing and training needs) as they transition out of COVID-19 crisis mode into a hybrid model where teams are distributed and work flexibly.



# Adaptive Training and Development

Training and development need to be inclusive for flexible workers and line managers if they are to develop the necessary competencies required for providing a psychologically safe working environment. This may include adapting existing training programs so that they are accessible to flexible workers, and adapting training to ensure that it includes health and safety aspects for flexible working, such as identifying risks in remote flexible workplaces.

## Proactive

Training and development to ensure safe and productive flexible work is prioritised across the organisation. Line managers and flexible workers have good competencies to support safe and productive flexible working.



## Generative

Training needs for managers and flexible workers are continually assessed in light of new knowledge. Line managers are taught competencies in providing relational leadership. Flexible workers have competencies in understanding their wellbeing needs and those of others. Flexible workers and their managers know how to get the best from working collaboratively in both a face-to-face and online environment.



## HOW

In order to advance flexible worker psychosocial safety maturity, training should focus on:

- Interpersonal skills development for managers and flexible workers (e.g. self-awareness, empathy, emotional intelligence).
- The competencies needed to developing trust-based working relationships which are important in creating psychologically safe work environments for flexible workers.
- Providing training for flexible workers about how to create healthy boundaries between work, home and life.
- Providing training in how to identify psychological risks and hazards with flexible workers (e.g. guidance on what to look for and how to have a safe conversation about a concern).
- Providing training in how to monitor and proactively manage an identified psychological risk with a flexible worker (e.g. workers who may be more at risk of harm, safety for flexible workers if potential domestic violence is indicated). The training should focus on being proactive not reactive and finding solutions to provide a psychologically safe work environment for the flexible worker.

- Providing training in work re-design, team re-building and workflow management as appropriate.

## WHY

Regardless of whether flexible working is mandated or whether it is a mutually agreed working arrangement, there is a need for training in the competencies likely to achieve the most out of a flexible working arrangement in a psychologically safe working environment.

### ***Links to Resources***

Training and development for competencies in supporting flexible working should be integrated into the organisation's training and development strategy if a psychological safety is to be achieved.

Introductory level programs for recognising how to observe actions and behaviours that may be early signs of poor mental health, can create awareness for managers, teams and flexible workers and build confidence and competence in controlling at the source rather than responding in a crisis. [Heads Up](#) provides workplace resources for employers, employees, managers and small businesses such as [How to start a conversation](#) and [Tips for managers](#) around minimising workplace risks.

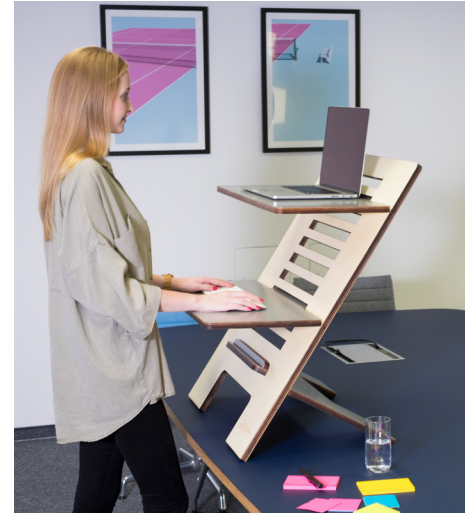
Proactive strategies need to be part of WHS systems, and organisation should prescribe principles for how to incorporate these into your safety system. Guidance about identifying and managing risks for flexible workers at risk from domestic violence, such as creating safety plans and safety apps are available via [SafeWork Australia](#) and [1800RESPECT](#)

# Tailored Work Design for Flexible Working

Best practice models must include organisational approaches that design work in ways that reduce risks and hazards for flexible workers. This includes involving flexible workers and line managers when organisations are designing work in ways that do not create the type of working conditions that lead to the development of an environment that cultivates poor psychological health and safety (e.g. high workloads, high levels of social isolation; low autonomy; role ambiguity).

## Proactive

Good work design principles are applied to the design of flexible work, ensuring flexible workers have an input to decisions about the design and scheduling of their work. Managers monitor physical and psychosocial hazards associated with flexible working. Flexible workers are not over or under-loaded and do not operate under high pressure or other job demands. Jobs are designed to ensure social isolation is minimised, ideally through a hybrid flexible working model.



## Generative

The organisation continually strives to promote healthy and sustainable work, and managers take pride in providing a meaningful, varied, and motivating work experience for all staff, including flexible workers. There is genuine collaboration between managers and flexible workers in work design/re-design and scheduling.

## HOW

In order to advance flexible worker psychosocial safety maturity, all levels of management need to:

- Work collaboratively with flexible workers to establish psychological safe flexible work practices (e.g. work-tasks, hours of work, and ways of working).
- Measure aspects of organisational performance that nurture psychological safety (e.g. KPIs for flexible worker engagement with WHS, psychosocial health).
- Analyse existing data available on work roles, responsibilities and activities to assess whether they are conducive to good psychological health for flexible workers, and commence collaborative re-design as necessary.
- Integrate good work design steps into WHS systems inclusive of flexible workers.
- Use the 'principles of good work design' to review the context and systems of work, how it is performed by flexible workers.
- Review and make necessary adjustments to work design if task duration, frequency and complexity (including overwork or under-work) is a psychological hazard for flexible workers.

## WHY

Where good work design principles are applied to the design and redesign of work, psychosocial risks can be eliminated or minimised. Work that is designed with the psychological safety of flexible workers in mind is healthier and promotes wellbeing and performance.

### ***Links to Resources***

The [NSW Code of Practice for Managing Psychosocial hazards at Work](#) contains example scenarios using common psychosocial risks and hazards providing example controls and approaches to manage risks

[The Principles of good work design: A work health and safety handbook](#) by SafeWork Australia contains ten principles of good work design which can be applied to flexible working

[Protecting Mental Wellbeing at Work](#) is a guide to help CEOs and organisations design work in a way that protects employees and contractors from psychological risks at work

# Manager's Toolkit for psychosocial safety in flexible work

## Why is this guide necessary?

As flexible working and work from home becomes more prevalent as a mode of working, it is important that we understand how best to lead flexible workers and work teams to promote positive wellbeing and performance outcomes. Indeed, new ways of working require new ways of leading. This Manager's guide provides some suggestions as to how to better manage the wellbeing of flexible work teams as well as how managers can maintain their own wellbeing and mental health.

The rapid uptake of flexible working in New South Wales significantly changed the role of line managers, with research undertaken during the COVID restrictions highlighting the need for a stronger emphasis on relational and inclusive forms of leadership. Beyond the pandemic, many workers will continue to work remotely at least some of their working week. Research has clearly demonstrated the need for enhanced relational and inclusive leadership to support flexible workers and enable positive mental health outcomes.

- Relational managers are trusting, empathic, and regularly engage with their flexible work teams.
- Inclusive leaders are open, flexible, and available to help their flexible workers satisfy their need for belongingness and uniqueness.

## Why are new ways of leading important?

New ways of leading are needed for new ways of working, including working from home. Managers and workers face new demands associated with flexible and remote working that threaten their wellbeing and can negatively impact performance at work. These additional demands may be exacerbated during extended periods of enforced working from home due to COVID-19 pandemic's restrictions or where people work from home for long periods without face-to-face interaction with co-workers.

Managers face a number of additional demands when leading flexible and remote work teams. These include relational aspects of leadership, increased coordination effort, workload, and technological issues.

Demand Type	Details
Relational	Relational aspect of managing distributed work teams
Emotional	Dealing with team's personal and emotional issues
Coordination	Additional coordination in managing distributed teams
Communication	Additional communication demands
Workload	Increase in work hours, work intensity, work task complexity
Work-family	Work-family/ family-work conflict
Supervision	Switch to less familiar outcomes-based approaches
Workspace	Personal sub-optimal work environment conditions
Technological	Increased use of online meeting platforms; reduced technological bandwidth and technology support

In addition, flexible workers face additional demands when working remotely. These include:

Demand type	Details
Isolation	Loss of in-person contact with manager and co-workers
Coordination	Additional coordination in managing distributed teams
Communication	Additional communication demands
Workload	Increase in work hour, work intensity, work task complexity
Work-family	Work-family/family-work conflict
Vulnerability	Added demands for employees living alone, with disabilities and care responsibilities
Interpersonal	Higher perceived levels of ill treatment, including bullying
Workspace	Personal sub-optimal work environment conditions
Technological	Increased use of online meeting platforms; etc.

# How can managers address the additional demands?

Managing these additional job demands and leading remote work teams effectively to minimise the pressures on manager and team member wellbeing and performance require attention to the following elements:

- Connecting with and supporting team members
- Navigating personal and emotional issues associated with wellbeing and psychological health and safety of flexible workers
- Managing an increased workload due to additional coordination effort and communication demands
- Using outcomes-based approaches for performance management

## Connecting and supporting team members

Flexible workers have reduced informal in-person interactions with colleagues, such as the incidental conversations by the lift or printer, when they are working remotely. This can lead to negative emotions such as feeling isolated, alienated or lonely and can increase their worry and anxiety about being excluded. When managing a team that includes flexible workers, managers need to ensure that flexible workers feel connected and supported.

### Points for Reflection

- How do I connect and engage with my flexible workers?
- Where can I access information about how to support employees who may be more at risk of harm when they are working from home?
- How can I build trust with flexible workers in an online environment?
- What can I do as a manager to be more inclusive of the flexible workers in my team?
- How can I better use technology to communicate with my flexible workers?

### Actions

- Visibly commit to the wellbeing of your work team and communicate this commitment and support frequently
- Develop multi-channel two-way communication and high-levels of transparency in communications with your work team
- Adopt an inclusive approach with employees – collaboratively develop flexible working arrangements that fit with the unique needs of your work team
- Check in regularly with flexible workers
- Ask flexible workers about their needs for regular connection (e.g. frequency, online or telephone)
- Use technology to build relationships with flexible workers
- Seek out creative ways to support casual communication and collaboration
- Know your team and their unique needs – is flexible working working for them, do they live alone or have major care responsibilities, do they have a disability?
- Learn how to recognise when flexible workers in your team need additional support
- Assist flexible workers to access Employee Assistance Program services if they need support
- Role model healthy flexible working and psychological self-care

# Navigating personal and emotional issues associated with wellbeing and the psychological health and safety of flexible workers

When managing flexible workers, it can be difficult to detect the personal and emotional issues associated with wellbeing and psychological health and safety, especially when you do not have regular person-to-person contact. Conversely, when checking-in with team members who work from home or meeting through the medium of video communication platforms, managers of flexible workers can become aware of challenging personal and emotional issues being faced by members of their team, including domestic violence or abuse, marital and family problems and health concerns. Managers need competencies to identify subtle cues in the online environment and about how to have conversations with flexible workers within the boundaries of their managerial duties.

## Points for Reflection

- How can I support a flexible worker in managing feelings of isolation?
- How can I manage negative behaviours (e.g. bullying, gossip) targeted at flexible workers?
- Do I know how to recognise potential psychological hazards for flexible workers?
- How can I start a conversation about self-care and personal wellbeing with flexible workers?
- Do I have the necessary relational skills to deal with personal and emotional issues concerning members of my work team?
- Are there resources or tools that I can use to assist my flexible workers to better manage work-life boundaries?
- Where can I get support to manage a flexible worker where psychological safety risks and hazards exist in the home or alternative work location?

## Actions

- Check in regularly with flexible workers
- Seek out creative ways to support casual communication
- Know your team and their unique needs – is flexible working working for them, do they live alone or have major care responsibilities, do they have additional requirements that may make working from home difficult?
- Learn how to recognise when flexible workers in your team need additional support
- Conduct a risk assessment with the flexible worker
- Support the flexible worker to develop a work plan that sets clear work-life boundaries
- Ensure the flexible worker is aware of support services available to them (e.g. EAP)
- Gather resources and tools to assist in managing flexible workers
- Seek out training and development opportunities for developing people skills and competencies around team relationship building, support and trust
- Ensure that you have a good support network of your own

## Managing an increased workload, and additional coordination effort and communication demands

When managing teams that include flexible workers, the increased workload from the additional coordination effort and communication demands can impact the wellbeing and psychological health and safety of managers, particular when managers are carrying a full workload of their own. It is essential that adequate resourcing is available to support managers so that they can meet the additional relational, communication and coordination demands, ensure optimal productivity, and continue to provide support to flexible workers.

### Points for Reflection

- How do I build relationships, monitor productivity and have sensitive conversations with flexible workers online?
- How can I integrate the additional coordination effort needed in managing flexible workers into my current workload?
- How do I monitor flexible workers and ensure safe work environments?
- Am I taking responsibility for my own psychological safety at work?

### Actions

- Monitor the workloads of flexible workers and managers of flexible workers
- Seek relief from time-consuming administrative tasks and non-essential aspects of the manager's role during extended periods of WFH to provide greater time for team coordination and person-focused management.
- Create a self-care plan for my own wellbeing and psychological safety

## Using outcomes-based approaches for managing performance

Flexible working arrangements often fail or cause additional stress on managers and flexible workers where line-managers continue to favour outmoded, input-focused approaches such as relying on face-to-face monitoring of workers. Outcomes-based approaches to performance management, and productivity measures based on KPIs compatible with flexible working, are better aligned with the intention of flexible working and are consistent with psychologically safe ways of managing workers. This should involve setting goals in participation with your work team and providing feedback.

### Points for Reflection

- How do I have difficult conversations about performance when it is not possible to meet with flexible worker in person?
- How do I create realistic performance targets for my team, inclusive of flexible workers?
- How can I adapt my leadership style to include outcomes-based approaches which are more compatible with flexible working?

### Actions

- Develop an outcomes and trust-based culture within your work team – empower employees and provide greater autonomy.
- Be open and transparent about expectations and performance requirements for flexible workers
- Ensure that work is designed with realistic targets for flexible workers and managers of flexible workers.
- Set goals for performance in participation with your team and give timely feedback on performance

# Organisational resources for managers of flexible workers

Organisations offer a range of resources and training programs which can provide information and help manager's to develop the skills needed to be relational and inclusive leaders of flexible workers. A summary of the type of organisational resources that can typically provide information and guidance of policies and processes for managing flexible workers in psychologically safe ways includes:

## Policies, systems and processes

- Organisational policies on workloads and monitoring productivity.
- WHS systems that support the effective monitoring and managing of psychological hazards.
- Work is designed to account for increased workloads and work intensity when managing flexible workers.
- Organisational policies and risk assessments for flexible working that support work-life balance and psychologically safe work environments.
- Organisation policies and systems that monitor productivity.
- Organisational policies that support employees who may be more at risk of harm when they are working from home (e.g. alternative options are available for workers requiring additional support).

## Training

- Foundational management skills training (e.g. empathy, emotional intelligence).
- Awareness training for managers about the professional assistance services provided by the organisation (e.g. EAP).
- Training and resources to support collaboration and supervision practices to more effectively monitor productivity in psychologically healthy ways.
- Organisational resources, guides and training for using new technologies to communicate and collaborate online.

## Resources

- Resources are available, and accessible, to all employees and managers about how to manage psychological health and safety concerns at work.
- Awareness, resourcing and frequent communication about how to manage work-life boundaries, with HR policies to support healthy ways of managing work-life conflicts.

# Typical challenges for flexible workers who are working from home

When flexible workers are working in alternative locations (e.g. working from home), there are challenges that managers need to be able to manage effectively to create a psychologically safe work environment. These can be categorised as being related to the: work task, physical work environment, technology, family-life commitments and circumstances, organisational factors, and psychosocial factors.

Work task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working longer hours because there is no commuting time, and it is easy to log in from home</li> <li>• Increased workloads and role ambiguity (exacerbated by distance)</li> <li>• Overwork which can be a result of working too many additional hours. Flexible workers may feel that they must show that they are available so that those in the office will think that they are working.</li> <li>• Work intensification (e.g. unrealistic timelines, workloads increased due to additional requirements of flexible working)</li> <li>• Interrupted work focus</li> </ul>
Physical work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor physical workstation set-up (e.g. working at the kitchen table)</li> <li>• Lack of usual interactions with colleagues, incidental conversations no longer happen (e.g. bumping into people at the water cooler)</li> <li>• Isolation (e.g. those living alone many feel isolated from others, reduced knowledge sharing and collaboration)</li> <li>• Feeling excluded (e.g. not included in meetings if not in the office)</li> </ul>
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Techno-stress (e.g. multiple systems, information overload, and, technical problems and frequent upgrades)</li> <li>• Application multitasking (e.g. switching in and out of Teams/ Zoom)</li> <li>• Lack of control over information flow</li> </ul>
Family-life commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work-home interface (e.g. managing work-life boundaries)</li> <li>• Work-life balance conflicts, and interruptions to home life</li> <li>• Wellbeing concerns (personal and family)</li> <li>• Caring responsibilities</li> </ul>
Organisational factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Autonomy paradox’ (e.g. control over hours when working from home, but reachable all the time, so not really in control of their hours)</li> <li>• Concerns over level of autonomy, and trust (e.g. some managers need to ‘see’ workers to know that they are working)</li> <li>• Communication and access to information when off-site, communication with line manager</li> </ul>
Psychosocial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative emotional responses to changes in income, job insecurity and social relationships associated with flexible working</li> <li>• Where there is a psychological unsafe working environment, flexible workers may experience burnout, fatigue, mental stress from the isolation and psychological distress</li> </ul>

# Appendix 1: Safe, Flexible Work - Organisational Maturity Assessment

The seven elements that combine to build a psychologically safe and productive work environments for flexible workers have been used in the Safe, Flexible Work - Organisational Maturity Assessment to help organisations to self-assess the maturity (strengths and weaknesses) of their psychological health and safety culture as it relates to flexible working against current and future objectives. The seven elements are based on key findings from recent research in NSW on developing psychologically safe flexible working.

This assessment can be used to increase awareness about how the organisation is tracking in relation to its level of capability for psychological health and safety for flexible workers. The seven different elements of flexible worker psychosocial safety can mature at different rates, meaning that more progress may have been made in some areas over others. Regardless, the goal is to take action that moves the organisation to the next rung on the capability maturity ladder for each element.

*The Safe, Flexible Work - Organisational Maturity Assessment* should be used as follows:

- Key personnel should be selected to complete the self-assessment (e.g. HR, WHS, managers).
- Individually, key personnel rate the organisation on each of the seven elements of psychological safety. This is done with reference to the descriptors for each element.
- Aggregate all of the assessments and calculate an overall maturity level for the organisation/division/department (whichever unit of analysis being assessed). This can be done by using the maturity level most frequently selected for each of the seven elements of flexible worker psychosocial safety.

<b>Flexible working psychosocial maturity element</b>	<b>Flexible worker Psychosocial Safety Maturity Descriptor</b>	<b>Your maturity level rating</b> <i>Circle the maturity level which best reflects your view for your organisation's level of advancement</i>
<i>Senior management prioritisation of psychological health and safety of flexible workers</i>	Top leadership leads a culture that is only concerned with performance, regardless of the consequences for flexible workers.	Pathological
	While top leadership are principally concerned with productivity, they will promote the importance of psychological health and safety and physical safety of flexible workers in the event of a problem impacting the mental health of flexible workers or where performance is deemed to be negatively affected.	Reactive
	Top leadership delegates responsibility to WHS personnel to ensure the organisation meets its duty of care towards flexible workers. Psychological health and safety is prioritised by WHS personnel.	Calculative
	Top leadership has established procedures to ensure psychological safety is well-managed within the organisation. Messages of support for flexible workers from top management are evident. Senior managers role model healthy flexible working.	Proactive - best practice
	Top management lead a culture where psychological health and safety is prioritised and all staff are committed to continually improving wellbeing and psychological safety of flexible workers within the organisation.	Generative – next practice
<i>Communication regarding psychological health and safety across the organisation</i>	There is no communication regarding psychological safety and wellbeing associated with flexible working within this organisation.	Pathological
	WHS personnel communicate with flexible workers about psychological safety whenever there is an incident or they are required to by senior management. Communication is always top-down.	Reactive
	WHS personnel communicate with flexible workers about their physical and psychological safety in order to meet their duty of care, although this is largely one-way.	Calculative
	There is effective two-way communication throughout the organisation on psychological health and safety pertaining to flexible workers. Efforts are made to ensure all employees have voice and are included. Flexible workers are encouraged to communicate any concerns related to their wellbeing to line managers.	Proactive - best practice
	Top leadership communicate their support for flexible working. Communication on psychological health and safety when working flexibly is regularly updated and improved. Line managers understand the unique needs of their flexible workers and communicate with them accordingly. Flexible workers always have ready access to information resources that relate to their work.	Generative – next practice

**Continued..**

<i>Line manager support</i>	Line managers take an 'out of sight, out of mind' approach to staff who are working away from the office/at home. There is an absence of trust of staff working remotely	Pathological
	Line managers will try and support flexible workers only where a major problem arises or a request for help is made. There is little in the way of proactive support. Managers rely on surveillance and monitoring of flexible workers' output.	Reactive
	Line managers follow the organisational policy on flexible working to ensure staff working remotely are safe and productive. Care to the work team is provided on a general bases rather than understanding the unique needs of individual flexible workers.	Calculative
	Line managers actively check-in on their flexible workers and support them to ensure they are psychologically safe. Flexible workers know they have the trust and support of their line manager.	Proactive - best practice
	Line managers understand the different needs of their flexible workers and are always trying to develop better ways to support them. Managers and staff work together to continuously improve psychological safety for flexible workers.	Generative - next practice
<i>Flexible worker responsibility</i>	Flexible workers are uninterested in taking personal responsibility for their flexible working and personal psychological safety.	Pathological
	Flexible workers are interested in their psychological safety only where they experience stress or burnout, or workloads increase to an unmanageable level. They report psychosocial hazards only when they are impacting their health and wellbeing.	Reactive
	Flexible workers look after their personal wellbeing and report hazards to their psychological safety as a matter of compliance with their line management directives.	Calculative
	Flexible workers take care to look after their personal wellbeing while working flexibly. They proactively discuss any psychological safety concerns with their line manager.	Proactive - best practice
	Flexible workers are committed to working in a way that promotes wellbeing and psychological safety over all other considerations. Wellbeing is the first priority for flexible workers and they are actively involved in designing healthy flexible work.	Generative - next practice

**Continued..**

<i>Resources for flexible working</i>	There is no specific resourcing of flexible work within this organisation. Flexible workers may lack the tools to do their work effectively and safely.	Pathological
	Attention to the resourcing of flexible work occurs only where it is clear that productivity will be impacted without doing so. There is no specific resourcing consideration for flexible work, unless a problem arises.	Reactive
	Flexible work is resourced to ensure workers have the necessary equipment and tools to do their work effectively. The organisation ensures flexible workers receive resources equitably in relation to office-based employees.	Calculative
	Resourcing to ensure safe and productive flexible work is prioritized across the organisation. Tools to support safe and effective flexible working have been provided to workers and their managers.	Proactive - best practice
	The organisation continually monitors the resource needs for safe and productive flexible working across the organisation, and ensures resources are applied in a timely way. Flexible workers collaborate with managers in developing tools to support flexible working.	Generative - next practice
<i>Training and development for competencies in supporting flexible working</i>	Flexible working is implemented without training or development support for managers or flexible workers.	Pathological
	Training and information for flexible workers is provided only where there has been problems or where it is clear that productivity is being impacted.	Reactive
	Training is provided for flexible workers, as for all employees, in accordance with HRM and WHS requirements. Content does not purposely relate to healthy and effective flexible work.	Calculative
	Training and development to ensure safe and productive flexible work is prioritised across the organisation. Line managers and flexible workers have good competencies to support safe and productive flexible working.	Proactive - best practice
	Training needs for managers and flexible workers are continually assessed in light of new knowledge. Line managers are taught competencies in providing relational leadership. Flexible workers have competencies in understanding their wellbeing needs and those of others. Flexible workers and their managers	Generative - next practice

**Continued..**

<i>Work design for flexible working</i>	Flexible working is implemented without training or development support for managers or flexible workers.	Pathological
	Workers is provided only where there has been problems or where it is clear that productivity is being impacted.	Reactive
	Training is provided for flexible workers, as for all employees, in accordance with HRM and WHS requirements. Content does not purposely relate to healthy and effective flexible work.	Calculative
	Training and development to ensure safe and productive flexible work is prioritised across the organisation. Line managers and flexible workers have good competencies to support safe and productive flexible working.	Proactive - best practice
	Training needs for managers and flexible workers are continually assessed in light of new knowledge. Line manages are taught competencies in providing relational leadership. Flexible workers have competencies in understanding their wellbeing needs and those of others. Flexible workers and their managers know how to get the best from working collaboratively in both a face-to-face and on-line environment.	Generative - next practice

# Appendix 2: The psychosocial safety capability maturity action planner

The psychosocial safety capability maturity action planner is used for recording strategy, actions responsibilities and measures.

Flexible working psychosocial maturity	Where are we now?	What is needed to advance?	Where do we want to be?	Measures of advancement
Senior management prioritisation of psychological health and safety of flexible workers				
Communication regarding psychological health and safety across the organisation				
Line manager support				
Flexible worker responsibility				
Resources for flexible working				
Training and development for competencies in supporting flexible working				
Work design for flexible working				

# Appendix 3: Best Practice Case Studies

This section contains five case studies, each describing a different scenario in which flexible work is undertaken, an issue that is typical of those faced by managers of flexible workers and a good practice response by the manager. Each case study concludes with a brief analysis of the case – the issue and response.

## Senior Leader Case

### **Kathryn Peters – Deputy Director, medium-sized public sector organisation**

Kathryn built her career on being responsive to change. Prior to taking on the role of Deputy Director of a medium-sized public sector organisation five years ago, Kathryn worked in senior project roles across several community and disability service organisations. Kathryn's organisation is located in Parramatta; and while it services the whole state, the vast majority of work conducted outside of the metropolitan area is undertaken by contractors.

As a member of a number of professional organisations over the last decade, Kathryn remained well-informed about the demographic and workforce-expectation changes that were shifting norms regarding 'how we work best'. In 2018, she was instrumental in setting-up a working party to develop a flexible work policy for her organisation.

Having consulted with a number of stakeholders in order to calibrate the flexible work policy to achieve collective gain and a balance of needs, in 2019 the policy was implemented. The policy that Kathryn championed was hybrid in design; meaning that different divisions within the organisation would determine a set of days, during the working week, where staff would be together in the office; with the remaining days open for staff to choose to work from home, in the office, or from another alternative location.

To monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the flexible work policy, Kathryn set up a reoccurring bi-monthly evaluation committee meeting with more junior managers across the business, and also with a representative group of employees, Work Health and Safety (WHS) operators, and Human Resources (HR) personnel. Within the first few months, those who took up the opportunity to work remotely for a portion of the week were limited to staff with caring responsibilities, particularly those with young children. The feedback from the evaluation committee was that there was a fear, on the part of many employees, that they would be perceived as 'slacking off' if they weren't in the office. To counter this negative perception, Kathryn requested that all junior and senior managers take up the practice of regularly working from home as long as it was safe to do. Kathryn role-modelled this also by working from home two days a week, and by conducting at least one staff meeting a week using a remote communication platform.

Over the subsequent months, the number of subscribers to the flexible policy grew to 60% of the entire staff. While some staff members preferred to continue working in the office, there was a general sentiment that the flexible work policy was giving autonomy to employees to decide how to structure their working week – getting the most from collaborative time in the office, and then focused time from home.

While the organisation had a flexible work policy in place, when the first COVID-19 associated lockdown hit in early 2020, it wasn't 'completely smooth sailing.' Line managers were reporting that some staff, particularly those with children at home (who could not attend school) were really struggling to undertake work in 'normal' work hours. Also, there were complaints from several staff who had preferred to work completely in the office – they were somewhat unfamiliar with the online technology that was in place.

Kathryn called an online meeting with all of the line managers across the business. She encouraged them to conduct regular, online 'check-ins' with their staff – in most instances this could be done as a group 'teams/online' meeting, but in some cases, it would require one-on-one online meetings to discuss individual circumstances. Knowing that this 'person-centred' approach would create additional workload for line managers, Kathryn took time to schedule a meeting with each of the staff who reported to her, to discuss and reprioritise work goals. She requested that this same process of reprioritisation be passed down the line from senior to junior managers, to alleviate managerial stress during the shift to online.

Over the coming weeks, staff adapted to new ways of completely online work. In the middle of the year, senior managers met to discuss the impact of the lockdown on productivity. There was general consensus that the lockdown created a 'blip' where productivity dipped for a brief period, but this was more than made up by increases in productivity over the subsequent months.

## **Analysis**

The case presents Kathryn as advancing a generative approach to senior managers' prioritisation of psychological health and safety of flexible workers. To this end, Kathryn championed a flexible work policy that is hybrid in design, but also enabled different work groups to have autonomy to determine which days in the week staff would work together in the office. She undertook regular monitoring of the effectiveness of the program, and put in place subsequent actions to encourage a higher take up of the policy, and discourage a culture of untrustworthiness. When the effects of the Pandemic hit, she was quick to role model a person-centred approach to staff management.

In the case, Kathryn also adopted a generative approach to communication regarding psychological health and safety across the organisation. In this way, she set up regular meetings with an evaluation committee comprised of an adequate cross-section of the organisation.

## Line Manager Case

### Max Baros – Team Leader, Information Technology company

Max (41) graduated from his MBA three years ago, and landed a junior-management position in a multinational information technology (IT) company that had its national headquarters in North Sydney. Having previously worked as a software programmer, and then in software technical support for high-value clients, Max knew the value of being able to communicate effectively between groups of highly skilled technicians, and with those who were not.

When the first lockdown hit in 2020, Max's team were quick to navigate the technological challenges of working from home. That said, several members of his programming team were reliant on having large, curved computer monitors that were (at the time) locked away within the office. While the internal all-of-staff memos communicated that staff should have all they need in the form of a company-provided laptop, Max knew that his programmers really relied on their curved monitors for their productivity, as well as for their eye-health.

To address the need of his programmers having access to their curved monitors, Max organised a meeting with his direct manager, who subsequently referred him to the Senior Operations Manager. Max outlined his case, and received permission for his programming staff to access the work site, and collect their necessary materials (this was organised so that only one person would be on site at a time, and 24 hours would pass before the next person had access). After the week passed, all seven members of his programming team had collected their curved screens. The staff felt supported as a result of Max's actions – and they were able to work comfortably and productively from home.

## Analysis

The case presents Max as advancing a generative approach to line management of flexible workers. Max understood the different needs of his staff, and particularly the programming team. Working with other stakeholders across the business, Max devised solutions that prioritised the wellbeing of his staff.

The case also evidences a generative approach to resourcing for flexible workers. The resource needs of the programming staff who were working from home were identified; to avail the staff of their equipment needs, Max championed a solution involving considerable consultation with other organisational stakeholders.

## Flexible Worker Case

### Josephine Andretti –Administrator, South Coast Local Health District

Josephine had grown up on the Central Coast of New South Wales, and after completing her Bachelor of Business, studying mostly online, she was happy to get her first job working as an administrator for the South Coast Local Health District (hypothetical) in 2019. She moved south in 2019, and found share house accommodation located within walking distance of work, the beach, and the main stretch. The two people that she shared the house with worked for a local tourism operator, and while things were amicable in the house, social interactions between all members were irregular because of the different hours worked.

At times during 2019, Josephine felt isolated from her family, but was buoyed by the positive relationships she was forming at work. When the lockdown hit in early 2020, Josephine received an email from her employer, instructing her to work from home. She received that email on the Friday, and by Wednesday the following week, she had converted her bedroom in the share house, into a make-shift workspace, and was comfortably undertaking her duties.

Josephine's supervisor was proactive, and a true 'people person.' Her supervisor made a point of 'checking-in' on her, at least once a week – this was done in the form of a 15-20 minute phone call, usually on Mondays. Her supervisor also organised 'tea and chat' sessions, that would occur each week on a Friday, and enabled all staff within Josephine's team to connect socially – and let 'others into their lives.'

Notwithstanding these positive actions, Josephine was really struggling with the isolation she was feeling. Moreover, the two people that she shared the house with had lost their employment as a result of the pandemic, and were stuck at home. The social environment in the house was deteriorating, with one member of the household becoming increasingly irritated, and occasionally lashing out verbally to Josephine and the other member of the house.

Josephine was beginning to feel depressed, constantly tired, and sorely missing positive social interaction. Moreover, she was feeling unsafe in her house, particularly during the long days that she was working in her room. At her weekly 'check-in' session with her supervisor, Josephine was open and honest about the way she was feeling. Josephine's supervisor (with Josephine's permission) took notes from the session, and set in train a number of actions to help alleviate the strain. The supervisor did this, knowing full well that if nothing was done, it would ultimately have a dramatic negative impact on Josephine's ability to maintain her high standard of workplace performance.

Immediately after the 'check-in' session, Josephine's manager emailed her the Employee Assistance Package (EAP) details, and highlighted the counselling service that is freely available to all staff. Josephine promptly took advantage of this service. The supervisor also realised that the office space where Josephine would typically work from was completely unoccupied. Realising that if Josephine occupied this space while completing her work, she would not be in breach of the lockdown procedure; hence Josephine's supervisor contacted the site manager, and received permission for Josephine to work from the office instead of working from home. This proactive action meant that Josephine could work away from the destructive home environment that surrounded her, and her wellbeing and productivity began to improve as a result.

When the lockdown lifted, Josephine found alternative accommodation. Moreover, she was happy to have interaction with other people in the office, albeit at a reduced capacity at first.

## **Analysis**

The case highlights Josephine adopting a generative approach to flexible worker responsibility. While facing significant emotional hardship, Josephine was courageous in expressing her concerns to her line manager. As a result, the psychological hazard that she was facing by working at home was identified, an appropriate solution was enacted by her supervisor.

The case also presents Josephine's supervisor as adopting a generative approach to her line management role. In this regard, Josephine and her line manager forged a relationship that was focused on the continuous improvement of Josephine's work environment.

## WHS Manager Case

### Mark Benelli – Work Health & Safety Manager, Metro West Call Centre

For the last ten years Mark had been watching public debate regarding workplace psychological injuries, and psychosocial hazards, with keen interest. While still at the middle stage of his career, he had certainly observed significant shifts (and some changes in legislation) about how workplaces manage with both physical and mental health hazards over the last fifteen years.

In 2017, Mark noted that there were four staff that submitted stress-related workers compensation claims to his organisation. In 2018, that number had tripled. It was clear that the majority of claims were coming from a particular division within the call centre, but unable to confirm the possibility of root cause from the existing documentation, he coordinated a significant hazard identification process.

Mark undertook an analysis of physical and psychosocial climate present within the physical location of the specific division where the majority of stress claims came from. He observed (all) staff working in a dimly-lit room; their rostering duties required them to be at their desk for seven and a half hours a day (not including short breaks), but many would stay behind for two or three hours more to meet their call quotas. What's more, the location of the office was only accessible by car, and he noted that most people did not live within fifteen kilometres of the office. This meant that staff were spending a lot of time in their cars, commuting to work, and then were essentially sitting for the rest of the day (and beyond) to undertake their work. He did further analysis and found that most staff rose early from sleep in order to get to work on time (and fight the traffic), and factoring in the late hours, many were having suboptimal hours of sleep, and were tired through the day. There was also a climate of conflict between colleagues in the office, and Mark felt that it was necessarily one person to blame, but rather a cultural issue that had emerged as staff had little ability to undertake their work (i.e. calling people) without encroaching on the space of other colleagues. Owing to the dim lighting, people were often disturbed by people tripping over their other's chairs when trying to access common area for a break.

It was abundantly clear that the physical environment was not suitable, and was manifesting a number of physical and psychosocial hazards. Mark knew that there was little likelihood of sourcing another space large enough, with the required access to the number of telecommunications ports necessary to do the work; and yet, he knew that the organisations was legally responsible for mitigating the risk to workers.

In partnership with the HR Manager, Mark set about investigating the feasibility of allowing staff to work remotely. At the start of 2019, Mark's company had implemented a 'fully-flex' model of working, that allowed all staff to work remotely; except for three scheduled days each month where group meetings, training and collaborative work took place. One of the meetings that was scheduled for these 'together times' was a Work Health and Safety (WHS) hazard identification session that occurred with all staff.

Nearly 90% of the staff in the division where stress related compensate claims were pronounced, opted in to work in the 'fully-flex' model. The reduction in time spent commuting, meant that staff were generally more rested as they worked. As a result of this, they were more alert and productive during the day, and there was a reduction in 'day stretching' (working beyond you allocated hours in order to meet demands).

In March 2020, when the pandemic hit, Mark's staff were fully prepared to work remotely, and productivity did not suffer at all. The three days of collaborative work was moved into an online platform, and people 'zoomed' into the meetings. Mark maintained the regularity of the WHS meetings (monthly) - however, the number of hazards identified dropped greatly as a result of the change of work environment.

## **Analysis**

Mark identified that the current work environment was prone to a series of related physical and psychosocial hazards. By implementing a remote working policy, the hazards were largely mitigated and as a result, staff morale and productivity increased. Mark maintained mechanisms to keep all staff (including those working remotely) involved in WHS hazard identification and management processes, including during the COVID lockdown.

## HR Manager Case

### Helen Smith – HR Director, Vinwood Aged Care, Nambucca Heads

Helen moved from Sydney to Nambucca to take on the HR Director role at Vinwood in 2015. Vinwood's central offices were located in Nambucca, where there was a team of nearly 30 administrative and support staff. However, Vinwood has a number of sites spread out across the mid-north coast, and all up, her workforce included 600 front-line personal carers, 60 administrative staff, and 100 managers.

As the National Broadband Network (NBN) infrastructure was being progressively rolled out across the regions, staff, particularly those with office-based and desk-bound duties, had requested the company consider a flexible work policy. In the main, the requests were from staff who were trying to balance care duties (of younger children, and older parents and relatives) themselves.

Helen worked with her team to develop and champion a flexible work policy. However, she was conscious that with so many of her front-line staff (personal carers) requiring to be onsite as part of their job, it was going to be challenging to come up with a solution that was fair to her entire workforce. The result was a flexible work policy that enabled administrative staff the ability to work from home, one day a week. They also had the ability to vary their work hours so that they could build their schedule around any carer duties. For equity, the 600 front-line staff were given the option to leave any shift longer than six hours, half an hour early, with the ability to complete any computer-based paperwork or administrative duties from home (or another location).

All staff were appreciative of the efforts to accommodate the needs of different staff types in the policy; and while marginal, the front-line personal care staff of the ability to complete paperwork from home (and thereby leave early).

### Analysis

Helen was confronted with a need to generate a flexible work policy that would allow staff to take address their carer responsibilities; but also remain fair to the larger portion of staff that needed to work on-site. With all staff given at least some provision to do focussed, individual and computer-based work from home, Helen had generated a system whereby productivity was maintained (or advanced), but the needs of staff were addressed.

