Flexible Work Practices
Is the 9 to 5 workplace becoming obsolete?
In the age of the Industrial Revolution, it was common for people to work long hours. Then one day the revolutionary Robert Owen decided to change the system and coined the slogan “Eight hours labour, Eight hours recreation, Eight hours rest”. Of course we all remember the infamous Mr Ford who implemented the 8-hour working day at Ford Motor. So basically, our daily routine is based on a century long practice created for factory employees. Not very relevant nowadays is it?

The DNA of our workforce today is made up of five generations working alongside each other for the first time with Gen Z employees joining the working world this year. There is a shared desire by all to have a flexible working arrangement be this remote working, job-sharing, freelancing, part-time or compressed working week. And thanks to technology, the workplace culture of the future is almost here. Technology is empowering people in Australia to move from structured to flexible workplaces, promising connectivity like never before.

Battling with global skills shortages, organisations are under pressure to attract and retain the best talent. Giving employees what they want in terms of flexibility is proving to be a winning strategy.

Sweden has introduced a six hour working day, 1.5 hours less than the Australian average, in a bid to increase productivity and make people happier. France on the other hand took a stance to ensure that all ‘digital working time’ would now need to be included in the 35 hour working week. The UK introduced the flexi or zero hour contracts where the employee does not have specified hours of work, offering flexibility on both the side of the employer and employee. Legislation was also passed in California to allow employers to adopt alternative working schedules for their employees.

What are we doing in Australia? According to the Morgan McKinley Flexible Work Practices Survey 2016, more than three-quarters of Australian employees (76%) have the option to work flexibly, with 54% working between 1 to 8 hours away from the office. An overwhelming 97% felt that working flexibly has a positive impact on productivity!
HIGHLIGHTS

- 76% of employees have the option to work flexibly, with 65% of organisations focused on driving flexibility

- 8 out of 10 Australian professionals have the option to work from home and/or have a flexible start/finish

- 50% of employees work remotely occasionally while 42% do it regularly, with 84% provided with the necessary tools

- 63% of employees felt obligated to work in excess of their contractual/office hours

- 37% of employees felt that working flexibly limits their career progression, with 35% feeling it is not the same for males and females, with males at a disadvantage

- 94% of employees felt that the option to work flexibly helps attract and retain talent

- An overwhelming 97% felt that working flexibly has a positive impact on productivity
CURRENT WORK HOURS AUSTRALIA

WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT CONTRACTED HOURS PER WEEK?

A majority of respondents 66% had contracted working hours in the range of 38-42 hours per week. A further 15% are in the range of 33-37 hours, with 8% working 24-32 hours and 7% working 43 hours and above.

WHAT ACTUAL HOURS DO YOU WORK PER WEEK?

Over three-quarters (77%) of respondents said that they worked beyond their contracted hours. Just 2% of respondents surveyed work fewer than their contracted hours. And the remaining 21% work the same hours as contracted.
CURRENT WORK HOURS AUSTRALIA

HOW OBLIGATED DO YOU FEEL TO WORK IN EXCESS OF YOUR CONTRACTED HOURS?

Combined 63% of respondents felt obligated or very obligated to work in excess of their working hours whereas 32% felt not at all obligated.

DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE MORE PRODUCTIVE IN NON-CONTRACTED HOURS?

59% of respondents felt that they were more productive in non-contracted hours whereas 41% stated they were not.
CURRENT WORK HOURS AUSTRALIA

WHY DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE MORE PRODUCTIVE DURING THOSE EXTRA HOURS?

84% of respondents stated they were more productive because of less distractions, 55% said the workplace is quieter outside of core hours and 54% said that it was due to a better level of concentration.
WORKING FLEXIBLY

WHAT WORKING OPTIONS ARE YOU AWARE OF BEING AVAILABLE?

Currently more than three-quarters (76%) of Australian employees have the option to work flexibly. For the 6% who said they were not sure they cited reasons such as it’s not encouraged, it requires management’s approval or it’s not formalised.

79% said they have the option of flexible start and finish times and 78% said working from home was a possibility. Time off in lieu, reduced hours and job share are less frequently offered working options.
DOES YOUR EMPLOYER ALLOW YOU TO WORK REMOTELY?

92% of employers allow their employees to work remotely, with 42% doing it regularly and 50% doing it occasionally. 84% of employees said they were provided with the necessary tools to work remotely, the majority citing a laptop.

HOW FOCUSED IS YOUR ORGANISATION WHEN IT COMES TO DRIVING FLEXIBILITY?

With a large number of respondents seeing the positive impact flexibility can have on a business it is interesting that only 65% of organisations are perceived to be focused on driving flexibility.
Organisations recognise offering flexibility can be an excellent attraction and retention tool, and 97% of our respondents agreed that flexible work practices had a positive impact on productivity. There is however, still some work to be done in this area to make people feel comfortable with 37% of respondents concerned that working flexibly would adversely affect their career progression. Interestingly there did seem to be some differences in perception depending on whether it was men or women taking up flexible work options with 35% feeling that it was perceived differently for men.

Whilst flexibility has traditionally been an arrangement between an employer and an individual, a new team based approach where the team is empowered to consider what flexibility options would work to meet both individuals needs and the team as a whole is delivering some great results. New insights in this area have demonstrated that even in some of the more challenging work environments such as the high pressure, highly dominated construction industry, flexible work practices can be achieved and improve outcomes. When we asked “Do you feel you have an increased workload when your colleagues are working flexibly?” Only 20% of employees felt their workload had increased. This team based approach to flexibility again has the potential to further reduce this 20% and drive higher productivity as the whole team pulls together to make this model work.
CONCLUSION / SUMMARY

It would seem that whilst people are still working a long week and for the most part feel obligated to work more than their contractual hours, increased flexible work practices are empowering people more than ever to create the work life blend that is right for them.

Whilst our respondents were clear on the benefits flexibility can deliver, rigid internal structures and negative perceptions are potentially limiting the positive outcomes and commercial gains a truly flexible workforce can deliver.

It is evident from our results that there are still many organisations who are either slow to respond or who are grappling with the value of flexible work practices but as organisations continue to compete for talent globally and look for competitive advantage it seems that flexibility is well on its way to becoming a business imperative. Organisations that are agile, and view flexibility through a broad and inclusive lense will be the ones best positioned to succeed.