

INSPIRE GROUP

Leading a flexible workplace



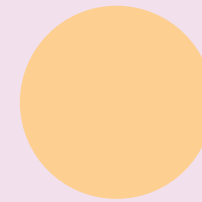
What you'll get out of this eBook

Flexible working means different things for different people. It's important that your team all have a mutually agreeable way of working that still contributes to the overall goals of the organisation while achieving an optimum work-life balance for the individuals.

You may need to adapt your leadership style so that you continue to lead and support your team in an inclusive way; whether they are in the office, at home or working from a remote location.

Unlike office-based, 9 to 5 jobs, flexible working is becoming the norm. It's important to understand how to adapt your leadership style for this new way of working. To help you on this journey, this eBook covers:

- **What a flexible workplace looks like**
- **Tips for leading a flexible team**
- **Benefits of flexible working**
- **Steps to creating a flexible workplan**
- **Embracing diversity in a flexible workplace**
- **Your role as a flexible leader**



What a flexible workplace looks like

Different generations have different expectations about how and where they work and what they work on.

What recent times have shown us is that the future of work is all about flexibility. Everything can change at any minute. Here are some examples:



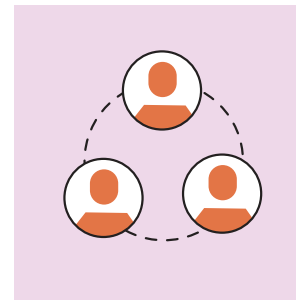
Technology

New developments (e.g. Had you used Zoom or Microsoft Teams as much as you do now prior to the recent pandemic?)



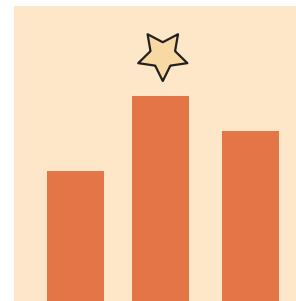
Place of work

People working from home, work-station set-up, hazards outside the usual workplace



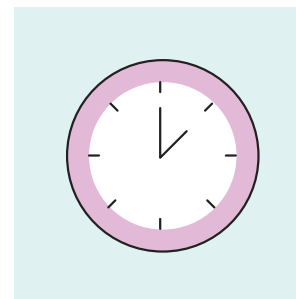
Team structure

Restructures and delivering a variety of projects with a mix of teams in different locations



Type of work

Increased competition, changes in market demand



Method of work

We are always working to budget and time constraints, but in a flexible workplace there may be demand to work in a more agile way

Ready for more? Check out this website:

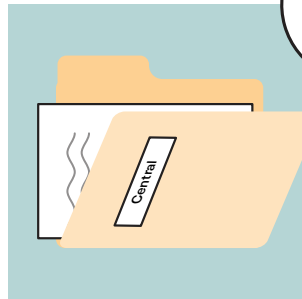
[Flexible working arrangements – Employment New Zealand](#)

Tips on leading your team remotely



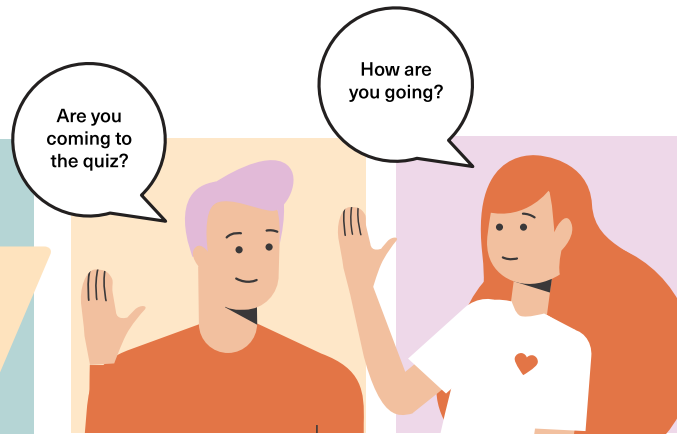
Communicate clearly.

Reassure and inform your team with daily or weekly messages to keep them on task and in touch.



Stay organised.

Have a central place to save documents, plan the weeks and share information.



Stay connected.

Have daily or weekly rituals and water cooler moments (e.g. at Inspire Group we all do the quiz daily at 2pm to maintain human connection rather than being just work/target focused).

Stay compassionate.

Check in regularly with team members on how they are going and dealing with change. A genuine pulse check from their leader is invaluable.

When remote working is mandatory

During the Covid-19 pandemic we saw a huge shift with many people working from home in various stages of isolation. It turned whole businesses into a remote teams with all meetings, chats, sharing and collaborating happening online from the comfort of home (with distractions!).

Everyone adjusts differently and that is ok. As a leader you can help your team navigate and adapt.

Ready for more? Check out this website:

[Flexible working arrangements guide – Employment New Zealand](#)

Employees who feel respected in a flexible and inclusive workplace are more loyal, make a bigger effort for the organisation and tend to be more productive.

Benefits of flexible working

Mostly people choose flexible working to enable them to cope with the demands of parenting or caring for elderly parents, or to improve their own health, wellbeing and quality of life. Flexible work employees generally have a better work-life balance and tend to:

- **manage their time better and put in more effort (completing work quicker)**
- **enjoy greater job satisfaction (talking about the workplace positively)**
- **be more loyal to the organisation (tending to stay longer).**

Of course flexible working doesn't suit every business, person or role but the key is making sure the way we work is beneficial for all parties involved. And we know that this can work.

Adapted from source: 'Flexible working arrangements' – Employment New Zealand

Pros of a virtual office

- Time saved – no commuting and travelling to and from meetings.
- There's always a meeting room (because it's virtual).
- In virtual meetings you can easily:
 - record all meetings and take notes
 - review any documents
 - share links, and share screens.

Steps to creating your flexible work plan

Mutual agreement and review is key

Check the rules

As a leader, how do you set up your flexible teams for success? In New Zealand, employers have a legal obligation under the Employment Relations Amendment Act (2014) to have a process in place for any employee who asks for a flexible working arrangement.



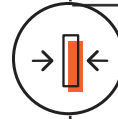
Check your policy

Do you have a flexible work policy in place that complies with your organisation's legal obligations?



Get a clear request

Get your employee requests for flexible work in writing. Get clarity on what they propose in hours, time and place of work, whether it is temporary or permanent, what the impact on the business, team and employee might be, how you will measure quality/outcomes/success and what kind of support the employee needs.



Find a middle ground

Collaborate with the employee to find a middle ground for both parties, communicate with the wider team about implications, and perhaps agree an initial trial period with clear and measurable outcomes and escalation points.



Set boundaries and goals

Communicate accurately and in writing, and in a timely manner. If a flexible work agreement is not possible be explicit with the reasons why.



Refine

Communicate frequently with your flexible workers, and put everything in writing if you are planning to alter the mutual agreement. Also communicate to the wider team so that everyone is on the same page and aware of the benefits, challenges and implications involved.

Adapted from source: 'Flexible working arrangements guide' – Employment New Zealand, 2015

Embracing diversity in a flexible workplace

Diverse, adaptable and agile

To stay resilient in times of extreme change, organisations and their staff need to:

- embrace **diversity** of their people and clients
- be **adaptable** (not just responding to change, but also being able to change themselves)
- be **agile** in their ways of working; quickly and easily finding alternative methods to deliver.

Diversifying as a leader

It's hard to complete work without a team – bringing out the best in everyone and keeping a high-performing team together is key in a dispersed workforce.

As a leader, it's important to recognise that each individual is unique. A truly inclusive workplace has a team with leaders who appreciate each other and move beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

Top tips for embracing diversity



Work outside your comfort zone.



Leave assumptions outside the door.



Find opportunities to learn from those with similar skill sets in different working environments.



Talk to different people for ideas, advice or feedback.



Talk about something other than work, with someone you don't know that well.



Celebrate the differences of your team members.

Your role as a flexible leader

As a leader, you can enable your team to be experimental, curious and bold, even if it leads to healthy conflict. Your role is to guide your team in the right direction without dampening their spirit. It means being adaptable in how you lead, dealing with any bias (unconscious or otherwise) you may have towards your co-workers, and empowering your team to do the same to cultivate a place of respect.

When you have a diverse, remote, or flexible working team it is important to think ahead.

Planning, communication and taking action are key.



To summarise

To stay resilient in times of change, your organisation needs to embrace diversity, be adaptable and stay agile. This means being ready to deal with a flexible workplace and having a policy on how to fairly negotiate mutually beneficial agreements and refine them.

Employees who feel respected in a flexible and inclusive workplace are more loyal, make a bigger effort for the organisation and tend to be more productive.

In times when remote working is necessary, everyone responds differently and that's ok. To guide your team through this process it helps to:

- be organised
- communicate clearly and compassionately
- stay connected to keep delivering as required.

Reflection questions

- What flexible work legal obligations do you have to fulfill for the employees in your organisation?
- How well is your business set up for a remote workplace (IT infrastructure, privacy/security, common virtual workspace like MS Teams, business laptops/cell phones and data)?
- What needs to improve to make your remote team stronger?
- What action are you going to take to enable flexible working for your team?
- What communication channels, techniques and approaches do you currently use to interact and communicate well with your whole team, virtually or in person?
- What needs to improve for your organisation to embrace diversity and be fully inclusive?
- What would you like to improve on to make sure that flexible working doesn't erode your organisation's/team's culture?



Ready for more?

Inspiring to lead

The content from this eBook has been inspired by our Diversifying to lead programme.

The seven programmes that make up Inspiring to lead are available as a single or multiple-programme solution. Each programme is contextualised to your organisation, uses current challenges and enables your leaders to grow their individual leadership style.

These programmes are available right now and can be delivered either face to face, virtually or as a blend of the two.

Learn more about Inspiring to lead

Our Inspiring to lead module takes you through our programmes, the thinking behind them and the approach we've taken.

Download our pathways

Download the Inspiring to lead pathways to discover the why and how of our seven thought-provoking programmes.

