



Research report

Preferences for flexible working arrangements: before, during and after COVID-19

A report to the Fair Work Commission

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The contents of this paper are the responsibility of the author and the research has been conducted without the involvement of members of the Fair Work Commission.

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List of abbreviations

| | |
|----------|--|
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| APS | Australian Public Service |
| AWRS | Australian Workplace Relations Study |
| CEPAR | Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus disease |
| CPSU | Community and Public Sector Union |
| CWW | Compressed working week |
| MWOS | Mature Workers in Organisations Survey |
| NSW | New South Wales |
| PMC | Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet |
| PSA | Public Service Association |
| UNSW | University of New South Wales |
| WFH | Work/working from home |
| WGEA | Workplace Gender Equality Agency |

1 Introduction

1.1 Objective

The objective of this report is to consolidate findings on employee preferences for flexibility, covering three periods:

- Before the COVID-19 pandemic
- During the pandemic
- Following the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report also canvasses:

- The types of flexibility employees are seeking
- The benefits associated with such arrangements
- Any potential limitations with such arrangements

Given the different understandings, attitudes, experiences and expectations of flexible working arrangements, this report considers three main types of flexible work:

- working from home (WFH);
- the compressed working week (CWW); and
- job sharing.

The existing literature for each of these types of flexible work arrangements is discussed, followed by a discussion of any of the benefits and potential limitations emerging from these flexible working arrangements.

The report discusses findings from a range of different research projects, peer-reviewed academic sources and grey literature which were conducted before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the dilemmas is that the surveys conducted during COVID-19 were not consistent in their timing, purpose, questions or samples and thus caution must be taken when comparing and synthesising results.

The data sources include:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
- Australia Institute, Centre for Future Work
- Australian Workplace Relations Study (AWRS)
- Boston Consulting Group
- Centre for Excellence in Population Ageing Research MWOS Survey
- PSA CPSU NSW Women 'What Women Want'
- Male Champions of Change
- McCrindle Research
- Roy Morgan

- Suit Tie Stroller Global Dad Survey
- Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA)
- University of Sydney Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies (Beck, Hensher and Wei 2020; Beck and Hensher 2020)
- UNSW Business School
- UNSW Canberra Public Service Research Group and CQUniversity, CPSU Survey

The experience of working from home (often now referred to by just the letters ‘WFH’) induced by COVID-19 has catalysed interest in this type of working arrangement and flexible working arrangements more broadly. Prior to COVID-19 flexibility largely focussed on daily or weekly hours of work, start and finish times, part-time work, job sharing and compressed working weeks, rather than working from home.

Based on a range of surveys conducted in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, this report finds that both employee and employer preferences for all forms of flexible working arrangements have increased but there is less agreement about flexibility preferences for the future. The main types of flexible work arrangements surveyed were:

- Working from home/remotely
- Compressed working weeks for the same pay
- Job sharing arrangements
- Forms of paid leave from work (including annual, carers and parental)
- Flexible working hours (including ability to choose hours worked and part-time options)

The key findings for post-COVID flexible work arrangements are summarised in Table 1:

Table 1: Summary of flexible working arrangement surveys post-COVID (arranged alphabetically)

| Study | Key Findings |
|--|---|
| <p>Beck, Henscher and Wei (2020) <i>Slowly coming out of COVID-19 restrictions in Australia: Implications for working from home and commuting trips by car and public transport</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey analysis on working from home and commuting data collected in two waves of study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wave 1 (30th of March to the 15th of April, based on 476 observations who work) and ○ Wave 2 (23rd of May to 15th of June, based on 705 observations who travel for work) • The samples compare favourably with the general characteristics of the Australian population, as per the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 77 per cent of respondents found that working from home improved productivity (Wave 1) • 71 per cent express a preference to be able to work from home more often in the future post-COVID (Wave 2) • Having an adequate workspace was the most influential factor in determining positive outcomes working from home |

| Study | Key Findings |
|--|--|
| <p>Boston Consulting Group (2020) <i>Personalisation for your people: How COVID-19 is reshaping the race for talent</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online workforce sentiment survey • 1002 Boston Consulting Group employees • Survey analysed respondent's sentiments to uncover experiences and attitudes to working during COVID-19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings show post-COVID preferences for greater access to working from home options • Findings show a strong preference for a combination of both in-office and working from home/remotely • Findings show employees do not want to work from home all the time |
| <p>Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research (CEPAR) Mature Workers in Organisations (2020), <i>Working from Home COVID Survey</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey of 1583 Australian mature workers (aged 45 years or older) • Survey in the field in June 2020 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings show that amongst mature workers (aged 45 and over) that there is a weaker preference for working from home • Only 28.2 per cent of respondents want more working from home/remotely in the future. |
| <p>Colley and Williamson (2020) <i>Working during the Pandemic: From resistance to revolution?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey of around 6000 Australian Public Service (APS) employee respondents, including nearly 1400 managers • Survey analysed the experiences of APS employees during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions | <p><i>Managers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly supportive of working from home • Over 90 per cent believed their teams' productivity was the same or even higher when working from home <p><i>Employees</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly two-thirds of employees felt they got more work done than when at the office • Employees enjoyed the personal benefits, including less commuting time, more time with family and for caring responsibilities <p><i>In the future</i></p> <p><i>Managers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly two-thirds of managers indicated they would be more supportive of working from home in the future <p><i>Employees</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over two-thirds wanted to continue working from home on a regular basis for some of their hours |

| Study | Key Findings |
|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main reasons for working from home preferences were due to ability to manage work and caring responsibilities |
| <p>Global Dad Survey (2020), <i>Suit Tie Stroller Report</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online survey, sent through personal, corporate and social media networks of 321 working dads to understand how the COVID-19 lockdowns impacted their father responsibilities Respondents were from 25 countries (including Australia) spread across 4 continents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fathers found caring for kids while trying to work (60 per cent) and general household distractions (59 per cent) as the most common impediments to productivity during working from home during the pandemic However, the survey found that dads thought working from home provided less noise and distractions overall, with 28 per cent identifying this as a reason for greater productivity working from home during the pandemic Survey found fathers working from home during the pandemic found the capacity to multitask between work and home activities to be an enabler of work-life balance Survey found that the inability to meet with people face-to-face (45 per cent) was a major detractor from the experience of working from home |
| <p>Nahum, D. (2020) <i>Work and Life in a Pandemic: An Update on Hours of Work and Unpaid Overtime Under COVID-19</i>, The Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workers in less secure forms of employment are less likely to expect that they will continue to work from home more following COVID-19 Only 17 per cent of casual workers, and 20 per cent of part-time workers expected to work more from home following the COVID-19 pandemic This points to a bifurcation in the labour market, with more secure workers with higher degrees of autonomy being more likely to be able to have the confidence to access flexible working arrangements |
| <p>PSA CPSU NSW Women (2020) <i>What Women Want Survey 2020</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey of more than 5000 female Australian public sector workers Mainly from the Department of Education (34.4 per cent) and Department of Communities and Justice (30.77 per cent), | <p>Most important flexible working arrangements post-COVID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to access leave when needed (82 per cent) Having flexible working hours (80 per cent) Ability to work from home (53 per cent) |

| Study | Key Findings |
|---|---|
| <p>corresponding to high number of PSA/CPSU NSW members in those areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys held during and after initial COVID-19 lockdowns in Australia | <p>Other important flexible working arrangements post-COVID included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to negotiate part-time work (37 per cent) • Opportunity to job share (21 per cent) • Having paid maternity/paternity leave (17 per cent) • Assistance with childcare (8 per cent) |
| <p>Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2020) <i>Flexible Work and Gender Segregation Research – Report for the Workplace Gender Equality Agency</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National survey conducted by Newgate Research on behalf of WGEA • Measures public perceptions about flexible work arrangements • Online survey of n=1000 Australian workers and jobseekers • Survey was in the field 11-17 June 2020 | <p><i>Understanding of and attitudes to flexible working arrangements</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most say flexible working arrangements should be available to all employees • Many workers are looking for more options of flexible working arrangements from their employer • Flexible working arrangements have many benefits mainly centred around allowing people to juggle work and their family or personal life <p><i>Employee experiences and expectations regarding flexible working arrangements</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The vast majority have accessed flexible working arrangements in the past, and the pandemic has built people's desire and confidence to ask for more once things get back to normal • Increased working from home options were perceived to boost productivity • Employees show dramatically increased preferences for all forms of flexible working arrangement post-COVID <p><i>Employer support toward flexible working arrangements</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers generally were seen to be supportive of flexible working arrangements (66 per cent workers agreed that their employer supports flexible working arrangements) • There was a strong correlation between employer support for flexible working arrangements and employee satisfaction |

2 Introduction to Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements refer to formal or informal agreements between a workplace and an employee to change the standard working arrangement, hours or place of work, usually introduced to better accommodate an employee's commitments out of work or to meet the variability in demand for an employer's goods and/or services. These flexible working arrangements may involve workplace measures that allow greater employee autonomy in the timing, location, continuity, and/or amount of work to be performed (Kossek and Michel 2011; Kossek and Thompson 2016). However, the choice to have flexible work arrangements is very different from what many people have been forced to do in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is to have been directed to work from home all day, every day, whether or not this is their preference, and whether or not they had children, other family members or household members also at home.

Prior to the onset of COVID-19 there was growing interest in flexible work arrangements, motivated by a range of contextual factors that have influenced both the demand and possibility for greater workplace flexibility. These factors have included business trends (including technological/computer advancements and the demands from the 24-7 society), and demographic trends (including rising female labour force participation, increased caregiver responsibilities, and growth in single-parent and two-income households) (Deery et al. 2016), exacerbating the competing pressures from work, family, and other non-work realms (Matos and Galinsky 2014). Younger workers are also increasingly expressing desires for greater job control and personal autonomy in their working hours and patterns, and increasingly regard work-life balance as a desirable goal in itself (Kuron et al 2015).

In the 1970s the concept of working from home was novel and referred to mainly as 'telecommuting'. Increasingly, throughout the 1980s and 1990s it was seen as a way of improving work-life balance, however, by the 2000s the concept lost support among some businesses. In 2013 Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer banned remote working for all employees, believing it impeded the company's collaboration and innovation efforts, and IBM followed suit in 2016 (Neilson 2020), while in Australia some companies vigorously promoted and supported flexible work. Increasingly, many large businesses and organisations in Australia have introduced new forms of flexibility, for example Telstra, Qantas Airways, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and the New South Wales Public Service. Telstra's approach, called "all Roles Flex", introduced in 2014, is outlined on their website in the following way:

'We've adopted a very broad definition of "flexibility", recognising it will mean different things for different people and different work types. Flexible working at Telstra always depends on the needs of employees, customers and the business. It might be part-time work, working outside normal 9-5 business hours or working from different locations. Flexibility in a scheduled work environment, such as a Telstra store, could mean the ability to express a preference for certain scheduled shifts. Flexibility in a non-scheduled work environment could mean non-traditional working hours (for example, later starts or earlier finishes), working at other locations (e.g. from home or another Telstra office), being open to hiring candidates in different locations, job-sharing or working part-time hours' (Telstra 2020).

Some major employers are advocating more flexible work practices post COVID-19, whilst being cognisant of the need to not entrench gender divisions and enable men to share in care (Male Champions of Change 2020). According to the survey of Male Champions of Change organisations, 'employee preferences are to share their time between the home and onsite

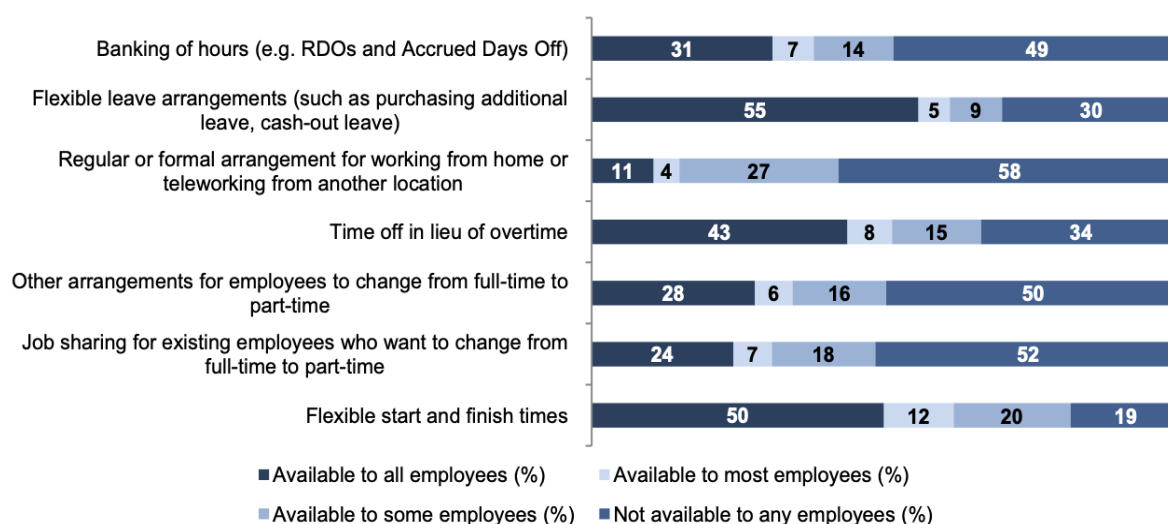
workplaces, with the majority suggesting two or three days from home or at a secondary office location would be ideal' (Male Champions of Change 2020, p.3). Amongst female public sector workers, the most commonly used flexible work arrangement was flex leave/flextime (55 per cent accessing this arrangement), almost 10 per cent having negotiated part-time work, but less than 3 per cent job share (PSA CPSU NSW Women 2020). Further, some organisations are also showing a growing interest in the four-day working week, with some individual employers and organisations looking to the four-day week as a solution for increased productivity, facilitating work-life balance, and improving gender equality in the workplace.

3 Preferences for Flexible Working Arrangements Before COVID-19

The Fair Work Commission’s Australian Workplace Relations Study (AWRS) released in 2015, examined flexible working arrangements pre-COVID-19. Employers provided information about the availability of flexible working arrangements across the workforce and the range of flexible working arrangements in use at the enterprise. Employers were also asked about the receipt of requests for flexible working arrangements and formalising flexible working arrangements under the provisions of the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)* (AWRS, p. 30).

As presented in Figure 1, half of enterprises reported that they allowed for flexible start and finish times, as well as flexible leave arrangements (such as purchasing additional leave and cashing out of leave).

Figure 1: Availability of flexible work practices to employees of the enterprise (per cent of enterprises)



Source: AWRS 2014, Employee Relations Survey / Base = 3057 enterprises

However, the majority of enterprises (58 per cent) reported that a formal arrangement for working from home or teleworking from another location was not available for any employees. **Only 11 per cent of enterprises reported working from home or teleworking arrangements were available for all employees.** A majority of enterprises also did not provide for job sharing arrangements (52 per cent), with one-quarter offering job sharing to all employees (24 per cent). The survey did not make specific mention of compressed working week arrangements.

3.1 Working From Home (WFH) Before COVID-19

Pre-COVID, much of the existing literature on ‘working from home’ refers to telecommuting or teleworking (Dockery and Bawa 2018). This terminology implies the use of telecommunications technology to perform work activities, however, it does not necessarily directly imply working from home, rather merely not working at the main workplace of the organisation (Bailey and Kurland 2002; Golden 2012).

The literature before the COVID-19 pandemic pointed to several positive preferences for WFH with the flexibility from working at home (see McCrindle Research 2018), increased household relations

(see Dockery and Bawa 2018, Gajendran and Harrison 2007) and decreased commuter stress (see McCrindle Research 2018) the most salient reasons. However, research on preferences against WFH suggested personal and professional isolation (see Douglas 2005), distraction when WFH (see Houseman and Nakamura 2001), and unexpected costs working from home were the main concerns.

3.1.1 Benefits and Preferences for WFH Before COVID-19

Flexibility and Work-Life Balance

McCrindle Research (2018) in analysing the lives of 250 'work-from-home' workers, weighing up both the positives and downsides of working in a home office setting, found that 'having the flexibility to juggle other things' was the most salient response (45 per cent) followed by 'creating a work life balance to enjoy life more' (25 per cent), and 'taking care of my kids from home' (12 per cent).

Reductions in Work-Life Conflict

Dockery and Bawa (2018) find that working from home contributes to better household relationships and a more equitable division of household responsibilities between men and women with children. They go further to find that few examples of negative externalities are observed. Negative side-effects of working from home are least observed when male employees work significant hours from home.

International evidence is far from conclusive as to whether or not working from home is beneficial for family functioning or not. However, Gajendran and Harrison's meta-analysis shows that 'telecommuting is likely more good than bad for individuals' (2007, p. 1538) which is drawn from evidence that shows working from home sees a modest reduction in work-family conflict.

Decreased commuter stress

Decreased commuter stress has also been identified as a benefit enjoyed by workers when working from home. McCrindle Research (2018) finds respondents report not having to deal with travel congestion, saving travel time, and being able to use saved time to devote to chores and exercise as the main reasons for decreased commuter stress. Similarly, people preferring working from home often do so on account of lower or negligible travel costs.

3.1.2 Potential Limitations of WFH Before COVID-19

Personal and professional isolation

One of the most significant downsides of working from home for workers was a sense of both personal and professional isolation (McCrindle Research 2018). This isolation extended to not having colleagues to spontaneously bounce ideas off and being able to socialise with work friends. Furthermore, many employees may suffer from 'invisibility' when working from home, which could potentially damage professional networks (Douglas 2005).

Household Distractions

Women are also more likely to be distracted by household tasks, such as caring for children, than their male partners (Houseman and Nakamura 2001). Whilst many people working from home see heightened flexibility and a greater work-life balance, this is not the case for all people. McCrindle

Research (2018) finds that some employees found working from home makes it difficult to maintain a work-life balance (15 per cent). The most salient qualitative responses indicated that many found it difficult distinguishing between the domains of work and home (for example, responses included: '[I] can't relax because I know there is work to do. It's hard to stop' / '[There are] no boundaries between home and work life.') with many also finding it difficult to stop working and feeling like they were on call constantly ('Being on call - people seem to think you are available at any time, including your days off.').

Unexpected Costs of Working from Home

Whilst working from home offers significant personal financial benefits, through the tax deductibility of work-related expenditures and travel savings, working from home can still see significant out-of-pocket expenses. These largely include increases in expenditure on office supplies, electricity and household consumption (McCrinkle Research 2018).

3.2 Compressed Working Week (CWW) Before COVID-19

The CWW refers to an employment schedule where the full-time schedule is condensed into fewer working days and may also involve longer working hours on each day; for example, a four-day, ten-hour workweek (Arbon et al. 2012; Baltes et al. 1999; Durst 1999; Wheatley 2012). CWWs as alternative work schedules are usually viewed as a means of achieving positive outcomes for both the employers and employees (Kossek and Michel 2011). However, studies of their efficacy for employment outcomes are mixed, with a strong emphasis on employee choice in determining successful outcomes (Hyatt and Coslor 2018). CWWs are most frequently couched in the discourse of 'flexibility', and that the intended effect of these policies is to foster more desirable work-family balances and reduce tensions in reconciling work and non-work tasks which, in turn, has been shown to produce personal and organisational benefits, including job satisfaction (Matos and Galinsky 2014). CWWs are often motivated by attempts to solve mismatches in actual and preferred hours of paid work (Reynolds and Aletraris 2010).

In theory, more flexible scheduling of one's work throughout the week can be seen to benefit employees derived from the perceived control of work time and design of the job (Karasek 1979). Alternative scheduling of employment, such as CWWs, offers employees the possibility to structure their working life to better meet their non-work needs, which can include needing to pick children up from school, engage in elder care or avoid having to telecommute long distances to work. However, despite the generally positive perception toward CWWs and their public and private sector adoption (Baltes et al 1999; Julien et al 2011), much research prior to the onset of COVID-19 shows mixed effects. The literature before the COVID-19 pandemic pointed to several benefits and positive preferences for CWWs, from employers seeing increases in employee productivity, cost reductions for employers and increased work-life balance for employees. The most prominent potential limitations include diminished employee productivity, reduced job satisfaction and negative impacts on employee stress and fatigue.

3.2.1 Benefits and Preferences for CWW Before COVID-19

Productivity

Most research in the field identifies CWWs as having positive effects on employee productivity. Facer and Wadsworth (2008) found that employees in local Utah municipalities working a CWW were more productive than their counterparts working a fixed working week. A later study was able

to further validate the idea that CWW can boost employee productivity (Facer and Wadsworth 2010). Barton-Cunningham (1989) find amongst Canadian mine operatives and plant operators (mostly young married males below the age of 40), that while there was little improvement in family satisfaction, the employees showed improved productivity for their organisation and there were fewer accidents and less absenteeism.

A more recently promoted variation of the CWW concept is the four-day work week. Barnes (2020), founder of New Zealand financial services firm Perpetual Guardian argues in *The 4 Day Week* that paying employees for five days while working four, resulted in a 6 per cent increase in productivity and a 12.5 per cent increase in profitability in the year since he permanently introduced the arrangement in October 2018.

Employers preferences for increasing the accessibility of the CWW as a flexible working arrangement are likely to be driven by increases in employee productivity and employer productivity (Barnes 2020). On top of the direct benefit for employers of greater employee productivity on overall organisational performance, there are also a number of other ways in which CWWs have directly boosted productivity. Facer and Wadsworth (2010) find that CWWs reaped other savings such as lower energy costs for the organisation. Barnes (2020) also found that in implementing a four-day working week, there were no deleterious impacts on the organisation's profitability, with evidence in support of long-term support for Perpetual Guardian's underlying financial position.

Work-life Balance for Employees

A CWW has been found to improve the amount of both sleep and quality of life for police officers, although benefits did not extend to 12-hour shifts (Amendola et al. 2011). Employees generally favoured CWWs from a quality of life perspective that encompassed being able to balance work with home and personal life. Those on CWWs reported improvements including increased leisure, personal and family time as well as greater satisfaction associated with these non-work activities. There were no work performance problems that were associated with CWW schedules. Indeed, the study finds that the implementation of 10-hour shifts may be a viable alternative to traditional 8-hour schedules. Furthermore, Wadsworth et al. (2010) concluded that CWWs saw improvements in employees' sense of work-life balance by enabling them on their day off to tend to non-work activities. However, many existing studies of CWW have been unable to collect demographic information, which is an important concern, given the role that gender plays in the adoption of different employment schedules (Lewis and Humbert 2010) as well as the different impacts CWWs may have according to age and family responsibilities (Deery et al. 2016).

Barton-Cunningham (1981, 1982) find amongst police force personnel in Canada, which consisted of mostly men, time spent with their spouse, family matters and domestic chores increased amongst the groups performing a CWW. Similarly, Totterdell and Smith (1992) find that amongst British police personnel, participants in CWWs were able to find more time for family, friends, social life and were able to more easily reconcile domestic arrangements.

3.2.2 Potential Limitations of CWW Before COVID-19

Diminished Employee Productivity

Whilst CWWs are found to increase employee productivity overall, further analysis reveals that the impact on employee productivity can be diminished if the span of working hours are too long. Wadsworth et al. (2010) found that when compressed work days became very long (over 10

hours), there was a decline in employee productivity. Similarly, Wright et al. (2013) finds that compressed schedules can also have costs in terms of both employee fatigue and employee reactions. Employee productivity was also found to be impeded by having to work around the schedules of those on CWW arrangements. This included finding it more difficult to negotiate scheduling arrangements given those on CWW schedules were not available to work on regular business days.

Job Satisfaction

The implications of CWWs on employee satisfaction with work are mixed. Whilst Facer and Wadsworth (2008) were able to identify a CWW as having a positive association with higher employee productivity, they found that this was at the expense of overall job satisfaction. Similarly, whilst Wadsworth et al. (2010) found CCWs benefit employee's work-life balances, this did not translate into greater levels of employee morale. Wadsworth et al. (2010) found that this was particularly acute when the compressed working days had longer hours, with long working days leading to higher levels of employee dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, CWWs were found to have little effect on job satisfaction amongst those groups that were most likely to use them. This includes men and women in dual-income households with no children. It also found negligible impacts on those using CWWs the least (older workers). Compressed working schedules also registered negative impacts on job satisfaction for single, young men, and men in traditional household types (spouse not participating in the labour market and dependent children at home) (Saltztein et al. 2001).

Stress and Fatigue

Research finds consistent links between longer spans of working hours associated with CWWs and detrimental impacts, including fatigue (Caruso et al., 2004), emotional exhaustion (Deery et al., 2016) and work stress (Golden et al., 2011). These concerns become more salient when CWWs involve significantly longer working hours (for example 12-hour nursing shifts) (Golden 2012). In instances where employees experience fatigue, emotional exhaustion and work stress as an ongoing symptom of CWWs, can lead to progressively declining productivity rates as well (Cette et al. 2011; Golden 2012).

However, Lowden et al. (1998) find amongst chemical plant workers in Sweden comprising mostly male plant operators, that participants in CWWs found it easier to fall asleep, felt more rested when they woke up and saw improvements to their sleep quality. In the same study however, results for overall levels of fatigue during working hours saw no improvement. Contrastingly, Smith et al. (1998) found that sleep quality declined for British personnel participating in CWW. However, it must be noted that this impact disappeared when shift work was controlled for.

Hence, stress and fatigue appear to be associated with CWWs insofar as working hours per day are longer. In addition to longer working hours increasing an employee's sense of tiredness and reducing productivity, employees may develop work-arounds like longer work breaks as a way to ameliorate fatigue (D'Abate 2005). The existing research shows that productivity loss from either fatigue, stress or other negative employee behaviours would likely limit the benefits associated with CWW and longer spans of hours for both individuals and organisations.

3.3 Job Sharing Before COVID-19

Dixon, Zhang and Vassel (2020) define job sharing as an important flexible work policy that can be made available to individuals wishing to work less than an ordinary full-time load. Job sharing involves two or more part-time employees sharing responsibility for one full-time job. It can involve full or 'pure' job sharing, whereby employees share all roles and responsibilities (a 'twin' job share model). Or it can involve something closer to a job 'split' rather than share, whereby employees allocate different aspects of the workload associated with a role, and then carry out those tasks individually (an 'island' job share model), or it may be a true hybrid of these two approaches (Olmsted 1979).

Reviews of employee preferences have shown that there is a strong, unmet demand for the type of work that job sharing can entail: shorter working hours, part-time work and flexible working time (Thorntwaite 2004). However, there is a scarcity of literature particularly dealing with the preferences of employers or employees for job sharing, as opposed to flexible working arrangements more generally. WGEA (2020) finds that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability to job share was one of the least accessed or used forms of flexible leave arrangement (26 per cent).

The literature before the COVID-19 pandemic pointed to several benefits and positive preferences for job sharing for employees, including increased flexibility and work-life balance and employment stability and status. For employers the benefits were efficiency and cost reduction. The most prominent limitations of job sharing included scarcity of eligible and compatible employees, the siloing of women into job sharing partnerships, and perceptions of limited career advancement potential.

3.3.1 Benefits and Preferences for Job Sharing Before COVID-19

Flexibility and Work-Life Balance for Employees

Job sharing comes with the benefit of being able to facilitate arrangements that provide flexibility to those with significant family or non-work responsibilities. Hayman (2014) finds a direct positive relationship between the use of job-sharing work arrangements among office-based employees and three dimensions of work-life balance (work interference with personal life, personal life interference with work, and work/personal life enhancement). Largely, this is attributable to the capacity of job-sharing partners to negotiate their work schedules and change working days and hours when their weekly schedules and commitments change.

Job sharing allows employees to genuinely work part-time, as opposed to take on a part-time role with all the responsibilities of a full-time position, at the same time as manage personal work and family responsibilities (Dixon, Zhang and Vassel 2020). Hence, job sharing can reduce the likelihood of work interfering with other non-work responsibilities and achieve better work/life balances.

Employment Stability and Status

Job sharing enables workers to enjoy many of the same benefits of full-time roles, including responsibility, the security of a permanent position, as well as access to training and development opportunities, promotional opportunities and recognition within the organisation (Dixon, Zhang and Vassel 2020). However, Williamson, Cooper and Baird (2015) found that other workers were negatively impacted by those in the job-sharing positions crowding out the permanent positions,

thus creating a pool of casual employees who had less access to permanency and promotion. While job sharing theoretically can be offered to women and men, women's disproportionate share of non-work responsibilities such as child and aged care, can mean benefits to female employment rates and ensuring the retention of women in more senior roles (WGEA 2016).

Efficiency and Cost Reduction for Employers

Job sharing also provides significant benefits for employers through providing both teams and clients with ongoing coverage across a particular role throughout the workweek (Dixon, Zhang and Vassel 2020). In analysing the business case for flexible work arrangements, WGEA (2015) found that job sharing and the ensuing scheduling alignments between partners allows for organisations to save on both office space accommodation and paper usage.

3.3.2 Limitations of Job Sharing Before COVID-19

Scarcity of Eligible and Compatible Employees

A major challenge for the success, accessibility and availability of job sharing is the scarcity of eligible job sharing partners, that is, individuals who are either seeking or available to work flexibly with comparable skills and experience, as well as compatible schedules and flexibility demands (Dixon, Zhang and Vassel 2020). This limitation could be offset by increased advertising of these job opportunities from employers and putting in practices to more effectively match those interested in job sharing. Nonetheless, the efficacy of job sharing is highly contingent on ensuring that there are similar numbers of individuals in comparable levels of seniority and skill level with complementary schedules.

Siloing women

Job sharing also carries the perception of 'siloing' women into job sharing partnerships. Hence, job sharing partnerships can direct women toward a feminised 'mummy track' when opting into a job sharing arrangement. Smithson and Stokoe (2005) find that this can exacerbate perceived tensions women face in reconciling work-life balances and their subsequent opportunities for promotion. Similarly, the overrepresentation of women in job sharing roles can discourage men from pursuing an interest in them.

Perceptions of Limited Career Advancement Potential

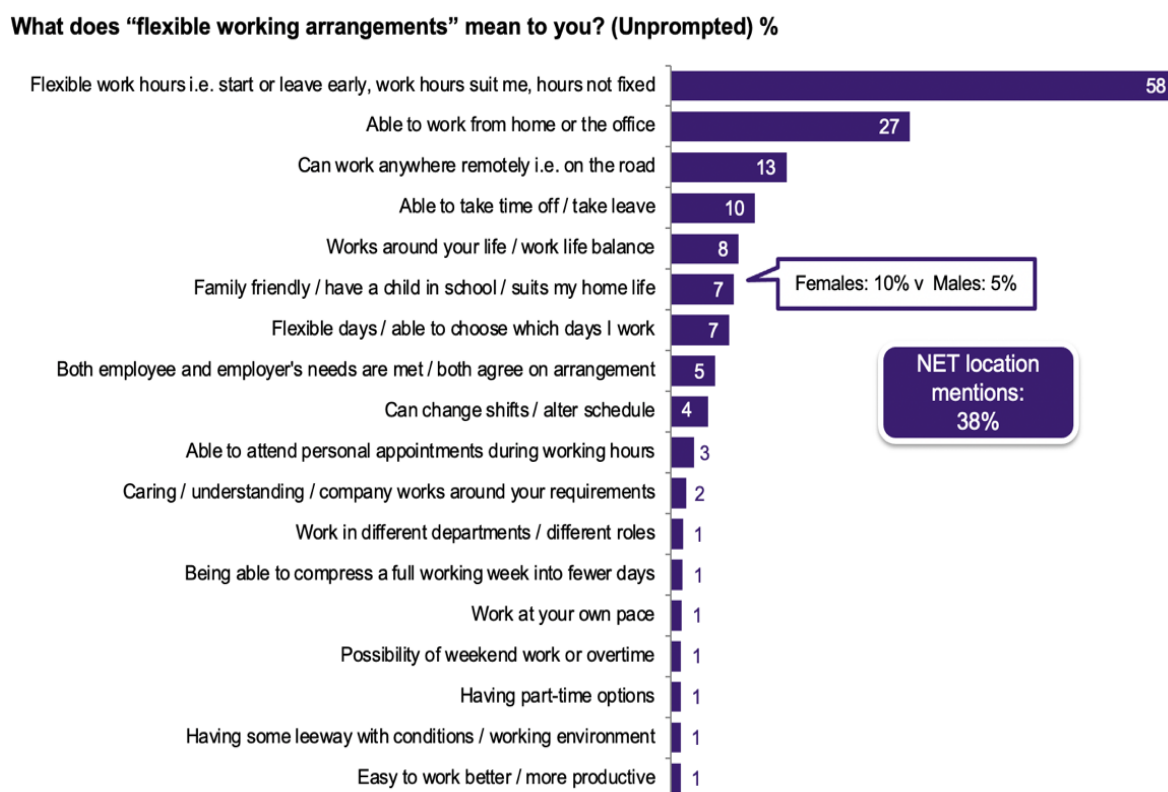
Participating in a job sharing arrangement may also be perceived as being incompatible with accessing senior positions within an organisation. These senior positions may involve expectations or requirements of a single line of judgment and risk. Therefore, potentially creating misunderstandings surrounding accountability for decision making among job partners. Given women are disproportionately represented amongst job sharing partners, this phenomenon may be particularly acute for women, especially in professional service firms (Dixon, Zhang and Vassel 2020).

4 Preferences for Flexible Working Arrangements During COVID-19

4.1 Understanding of and Attitudes to Flexible Working Arrangements During COVID-19

Newgate Research in a study prepared for WGEA involving an online survey of 1000 Australian workers and jobseeker recipients, which was in the field from 11–17 June 2020, found that respondents without being prompted, identified flexible working hours (57 per cent) and being able to work from home (27 per cent) or remotely (13 per cent) as what ‘flexible working arrangements’ were most likely to mean for people, see Figure 2 (WGEA 2020). Other options such as compressed working weeks or job sharing were very rarely mentioned by respondents. These results are mostly consistent across both men and women. However, women were more likely to think of a more diverse form of flexible working arrangements than men.

Figure 2: Respondents Understanding of Flexible Working Arrangements (June 2020)

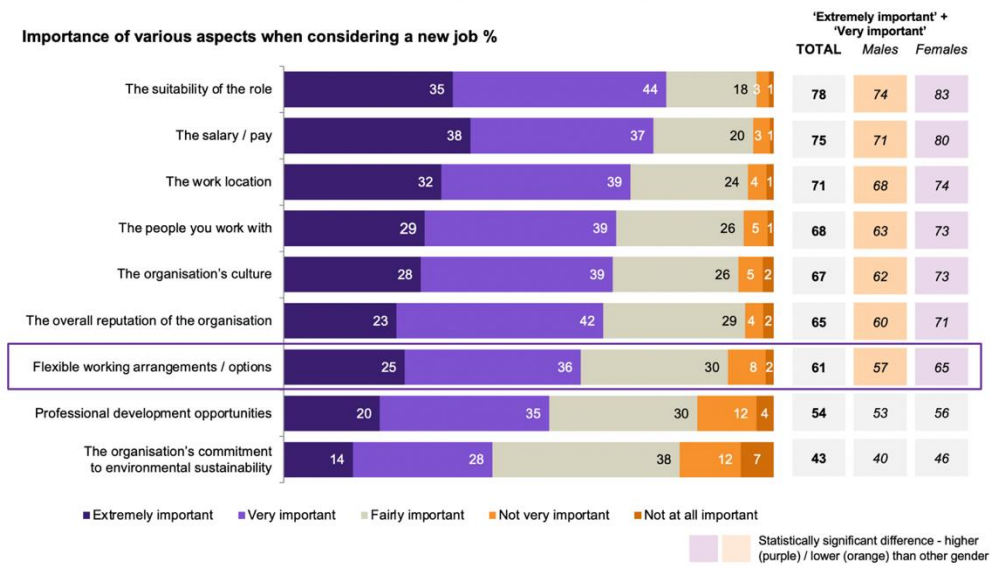


Note: Question asked: Q6. What does “flexible working arrangements” mean to you? Please list all the things you think it includes / Base: All respondents (n=1,000) Responses coded into key themes. Responses <1% have been omitted.

Source: WGEA (2020), conducted by Newgate Research, unpublished.

As illustrated in Figure 3, whilst most respondents considered the flexible working option to be important for their work when considering a new job (61 per cent), it did not rate as highly as other aspects of the new job including i) suitability for the role (78 per cent), ii) salary or pay (75 per cent) and iii) working location (71 per cent).

Figure 3: Importance of various aspects when considering a new job (per cent)



Note: Note: Question asked: Q8. Do you agree or disagree that flexible working arrangements should include the following options? / Base: All respondents (n=1,000)

Source: WGEA (2020), conducted by Newgate Research, unpublished.

Table 2 demonstrates the different options that sampled Australian employees expect to be included as part of flexible work arrangements.

Table 2: Whether flexible working arrangements should include the following options (per cent)

| Option | NET: Agree | | | NET: Disagree | | |
|---|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| | Total (n=1,000) | Males (n=480) | Females (n=520) | Total (n=1,000) | Males (n=480) | Females (n=520) |
| Ability to attend personal appointments during work hours (make up hours) | 84 | 81 | 87 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Ability to take other leave whenever you need to e.g. carer's, parental leave | 83 | 80 | 86 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Ability to choose the hours in the day which you work | 81 | 80 | 83 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Being given time off in lieu for over-time worked | 79 | 75 | 84 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Paid parental leave for females | 79 | 79 | 78 | 5 | 6 | 4 |
| Being able to 'compress' a full working week into fewer days for the same pay | 78 | 75 | 82 | 5 | 6 | 3 |
| Working from home or remotely occasionally | 78 | 76 | 80 | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| Ability to take annual leave whenever you need to | 77 | 76 | 78 | 5 | 6 | 5 |
| Working from home or remotely on some days | 77 | 74 | 80 | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| Having part-time options | 77 | 70 | 84 | 5 | 8 | 2 |
| Paid parental leave for males | 74 | 72 | 76 | 6 | 7 | 5 |
| The ability to choose your workdays | 73 | 69 | 77 | 8 | 12 | 5 |
| Purchasing additional leave if needed | 65 | 62 | 69 | 8 | 9 | 6 |
| The ability to job share | 64 | 59 | 69 | 6 | 8 | 5 |
| Working from home or remotely on all workdays | 52 | 54 | 50 | 20 | 21 | 19 |
| NET: Any working from home option | 85 | 84 | 86 | 23 | 24 | 21 |

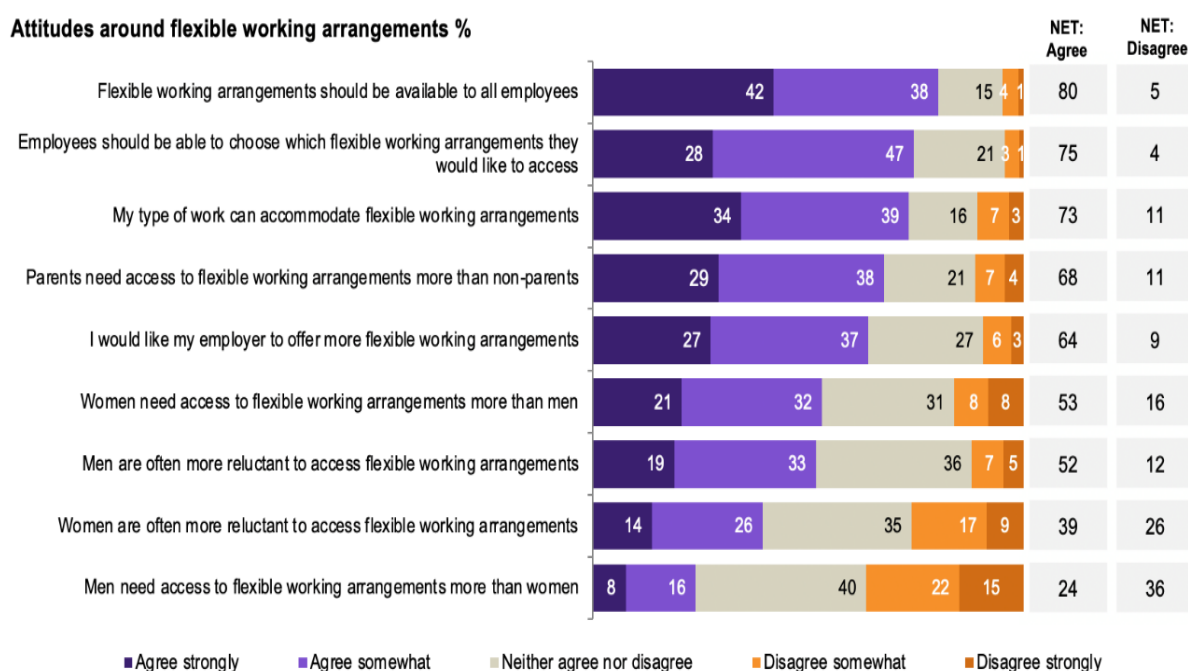
Note: Question asked: Q8. Do you agree or disagree that flexible working arrangements should include the following options? / Base: All respondents (n=1,000)

Source: WGEA (2020), conducted by Newgate Research, unpublished.

The ability to attend personal appointments during work hours (84 per cent), ability to take leave whenever you need to, for example for carer’s and parental leave (83 per cent), and ability to choose the hours in the day which you work (81 per cent) featured most prominently. These results were largely consistent for both men and women, with women displaying a slightly stronger preference (men=84 per cent, women=86 per cent) for greater options for what flexible working arrangements should include. Overall, the results suggest time is more important to women than men, with more women wanting time-off-in-lieu for overtime, being able to compress the working week and part-time work options.

Most workers during COVID-19 agreed that flexible working arrangements should be available to all employees, and that they themselves should be able to choose which arrangements they can access. As evident in Figure 4, almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of all respondents agreed that their type of work could accommodate flexible working arrangements, and almost two-thirds (64 per cent) agreed their employer should offer more of these. Overall, participants were much more likely to think women need access to flexible arrangements than men. The highest levels of disagreement (15 per cent strongly disagree, 22 per cent disagree somewhat) with respect to attitudes around flexible working arrangements are when respondents were asked if ‘men need access to flexible working arrangements more than women’.

Figure 4: Attitudes around Flexible Working Arrangements



Note: Question asked: Q8. And to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? / Q13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about flexible working arrangements? Base: All respondents (n=1,000)

Source: WGEA (2020), conducted by Newgate Research, unpublished.

The WGEA (2020) survey has shown (see Table 2) that the majority of respondents believe that working from home options should be available occasionally (78 per cent), or on some days (77 per

cent). However, only 52 per cent agreed that it should be available for all workdays, as was the case during some stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2 Benefits of Flexible Working Arrangements During COVID-19

As shown in Table 2, respondents also demonstrated overwhelmingly positive benefits associated with flexible working arrangements. Women were significantly more likely than men to see most of the stated benefits from flexible working arrangements—most notably ‘that it helps improve mental health’ (84 per cent of women agreed with this, compared to 75 per cent of men). However, the most strongly supported benefits related to work-life balance. The response that garnered the most agreement was ‘it helps people balance work with their family’s needs’ (87 per cent), followed by ‘it makes life easier for people with children living at home’ (85 per cent) and ‘it helps improve work-life balance’ (85 per cent).

Table 3: Benefits of Flexible Working Arrangements (per cent)

| Benefits of flexible working arrangements % | NET: Agree | | | NET: Disagree | | |
|---|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| | Total (n=1,000) | Males (n=480) | Females (n=520) | Total (n=1,000) | Males (n=480) | Females (n=520) |
| It helps people balance work with their family's needs | 87 | 84 | 90 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| It makes life easier for people with children living at home | 85 | 85 | 85 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| It allows people to complete their work at a time that suits them, while still meeting employer needs | 85 | 83 | 87 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| It helps improve work-life balance | 85 | 82 | 88 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| It saves people travelling time (e.g. if they can work from home or remotely) | 85 | 81 | 88 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| They allow people to spend more time with family or friends | 83 | 82 | 84 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| It helps improve people's feelings about their job and employer | 82 | 78 | 85 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| It gives people more personal time to do the things they enjoy e.g. exercising, crafts, hobbies etc. | 80 | 77 | 84 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| It helps improve people's mental health | 79 | 75 | 84 | 5 | 7 | 2 |
| Allows staff to focus better and improve their quality of work | 77 | 74 | 80 | 4 | 6 | 2 |
| It helps improve productivity at work | 77 | 73 | 81 | 5 | 6 | 3 |
| It allows employers access to a broader range of suitably qualified staff | 75 | 73 | 77 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| It means people don't have to live close to a specific workplace | 74 | 70 | 78 | 5 | 6 | 3 |
| It saves people money | 73 | 72 | 75 | 4 | 6 | 2 |

Statistically significant difference - higher (purple) / lower (orange) than other gender

Note: Question asked: Q13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about flexible working arrangements? Base: All respondents (n=1,000)

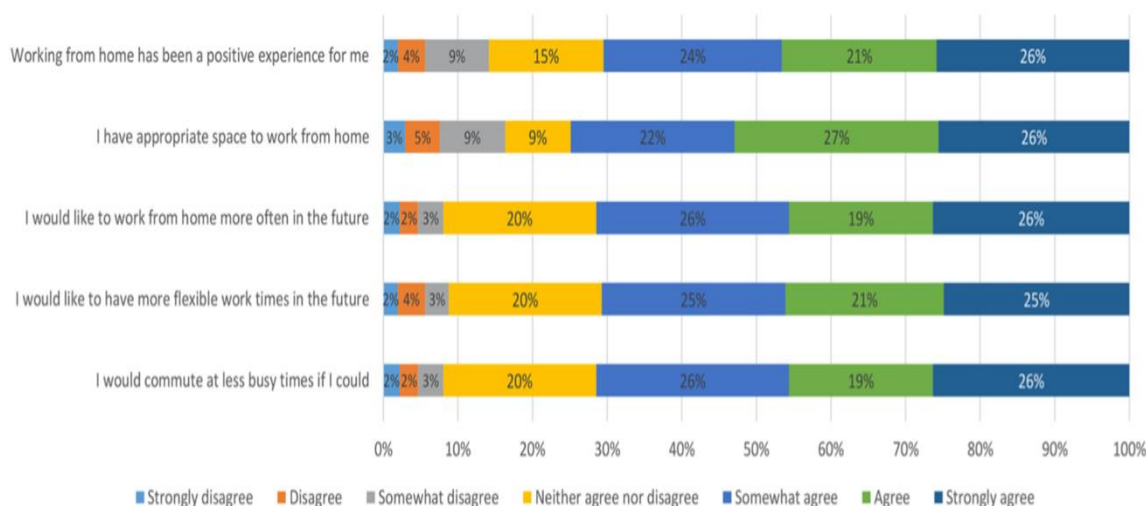
Source: WGEA (2020), conducted by Newgate Research, unpublished.

The strong attitude that flexible working arrangements during COVID-19 benefit people’s work-life balances, as seen in the WGEA survey, is something that has featured prominently in literature prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, working from home has in many instances become mandatory, imposed by firms and governments. Before COVID-19, flexible work which was forced upon employees to meet the needs of the employer rather than the employee was termed ‘bad flexibility’, in contrast to ‘good flexibility’ that refers to working conditions that suit the schedules and choices of employees (Allen and Eby 2016).

Beck, Henscher and Wei (2020) present analysis on working from home and commuting data collected in two waves of study: Wave 1 (30th of March to the 15th of April, based on 476 observations who work) and Wave 2 (23rd of May to 15th of June, based on 705 observations who

travel for work). The samples compare favourably with the general characteristics of the Australian population, as per the ABS census data. As evident in Figure 5, using data from Wave 2, Beck, Hensher and Wei (2020) also find that people’s experiences toward working from home during COVID-19 to be largely positive. Importantly, 71 per cent of respondents expressed a preference for being able to work from home more often in the future.

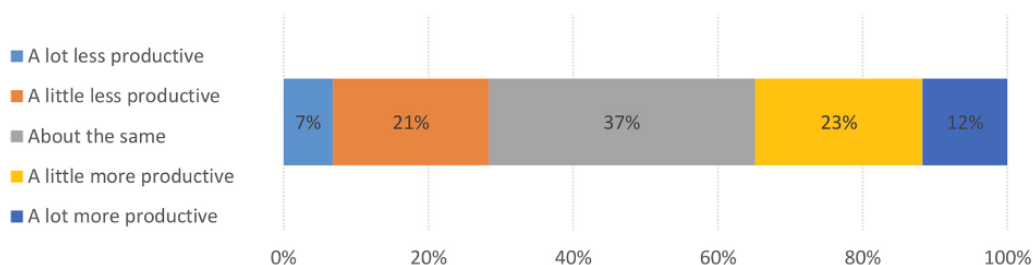
Figure 5: Attitudes Toward Working From Home



Source: Beck, Hensher and Wei (2020)

The WGEA survey shows that flexible working arrangements during COVID-19, mainly WFH, helped improved productivity, with 77 per cent of respondents agreeing with the statement ‘it helps improve productivity at work’. Beck, Hensher and Wei (2020) corroborate this through a study of Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic and find that on the whole, workers mainly found no impact on their productivity (37 per cent of total respondents found ‘about the same’). Of those that did, they were more likely to view their productivity as having increased, as evident in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Productivity of Working from Home compared to ‘Normal’

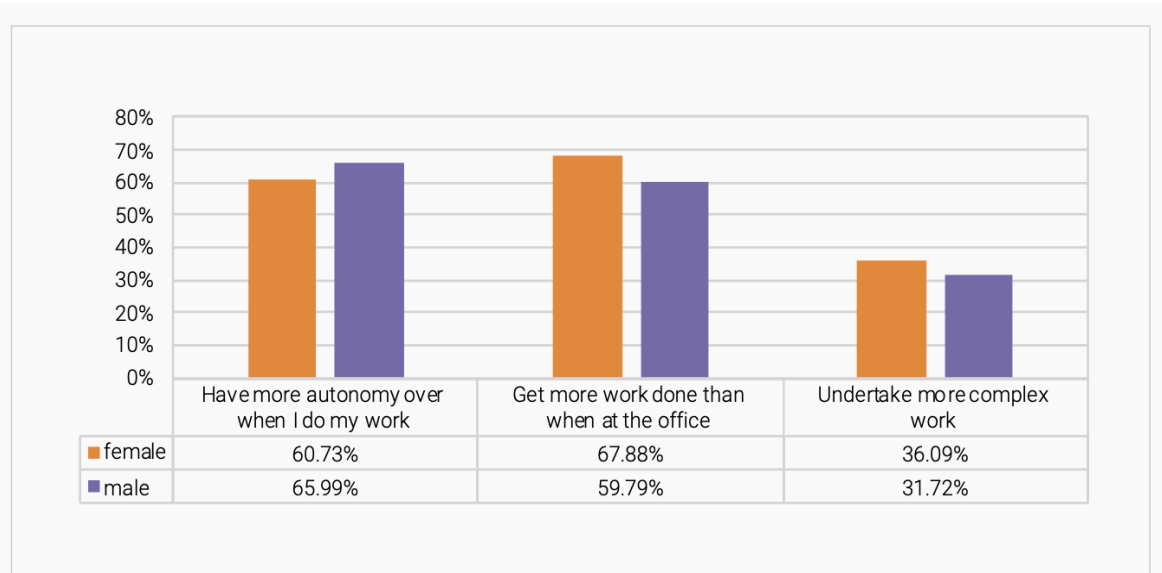


Source: Beck, Hensher and Wei (2020)

Colley and Williamson (2020) survey around 6000 Australian Public Service (APS) employee respondents, including nearly 1400 managers. The survey analysed the experience of APS employees during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Similarly to the Beck, Hensher and Wei and WGEA surveys, Colley and Williamson (2020) find nearly two-thirds of employees saying that they got more work done at home than when at the office. About a third of respondents also

indicated that they were able to undertake more complex work. Women were more likely to perceive getting more work done and undertaking more complex work than men, as evident in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Productivity of Working from Home compared to ‘Normal’

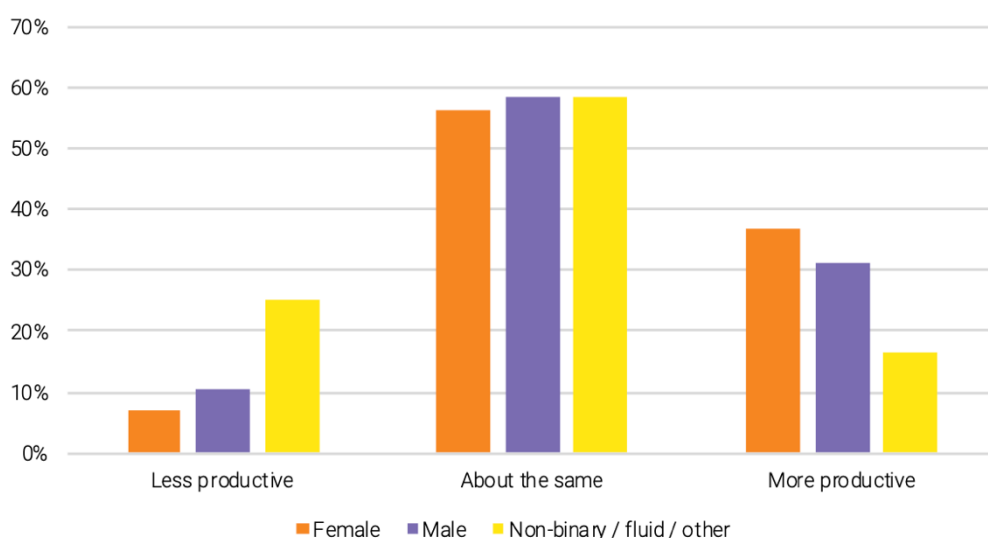


Source: Colley and Williamson (2020)

In the same study of APS workers, approximately one-third of managers perceived their teams to be more productive, as evident in Figure 8.

The data show that when respondents were asked how their teams performed when working from home compared to their usual place of work (notwithstanding COVID-19 related factors such as having to home-school), only 7 per cent of female managers and 11 per cent of male managers reported their teams as being ‘less productive’. Almost 60 per cent of both female and male managers viewed team performance as being ‘about the same’. Whereas 36 per cent of female managers and 32 per cent of male managers viewed their teams as being ‘more productive’. Colley and Williamson (2020) find that this is in line with comparable market research (see Global Workforce Analytics 2020) in the private sector that finds 70 per cent of managers believed that performance was the same or better from team members working from home.

Figure 8: Manager Perceptions of Team Performance from Home



Source: Colley and Williamson (2020)

The WGEA survey found 73 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that flexible working arrangements save money. Greater preferences for working from home may in part be due to the personal financial benefit conferred to workers. Australian workers are permitted to claim deductions for expenses incurred relating to work which can include additional running expenses (e.g. electricity, decline in the value of equipment, phone and internet expenses). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Taxation Office (2020) implemented a one-off 'short-cut method' of calculating tax deductibility, allowing employees working from home during the pandemic to claim 80 cents per hour for each hour worked from home. ABS (2020) preliminary Retail trade data for September 2020 has shown a 12 per cent jump in home office products.

4.3 Limitations of Flexible Working Arrangements During COVID-19

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many individuals found that working from home can lead to distractions from non-work activities such as household tasks. Colley and Williamson (2020) found that of public sector employees who preferred to keep working at their usual place of work, they did so as a reprieve from the constant distractions of their household, associated household tasks or family. Fathers also found caring for kids while trying to work (60 per cent) and general household distractions (59 per cent) as the most common impediments to productivity during working from home during the pandemic (Global Dad Survey 2020). Similarly, Roy Morgan (2020) polling during the COVID-19 lockdowns found many (54 per cent of respondents working from home) reporting it 'difficult to switch off from work'. However, the Global Dad Survey (2020) found that respondents thought working from home provided less noise and distractions overall, with 28 per cent identifying this as a reason for greater productivity while working from home during the pandemic.

The Global Dad Survey (2020) also found fathers working from home during the pandemic found the capacity to multitask between work and home activities to be an enabler of work-life balance. Other research found that employees worked longer hours when working from home during the pandemic, ranging from 48 minutes to three hours per day (DeFilippis et al. 2020; Business

Facilities 2020). Beck, Hensher and Wei (2020) also find before the onset of COVID-19, working from home workers identified being able to 'work undistracted' (15 per cent) as something boosting their own productivity.

4.3.1 Occupational differences

Some occupational classes have preferences toward working from home that are constrained by the nature of the work performed, some of which may require a greater degree of in-person interaction or 'in the office' presence. Beck, Hensher and Wei (2020) found that when lockdown restrictions began to ease, on average, people worked from home on 2.19 days per week. However, Machine operators and drivers (0.7 days), Labourers (1.07 days per week) and Community and personal service workers (0.76 days per week) were less likely to work from home, reflecting characteristics of those occupations that require in-person or in-office presence.

Similarly, Pennington and Stanford (2020) estimate that around 30 per cent of the Australian workforce could feasibly work from home. However, the proportion of workers that are able to conceivably work from home (after taking into consideration necessary time for adjustments) differs according to occupation. As evident in Figure 9, just over half of Clerical and administrative workers, Professionals and Managers could potentially work from home. This corresponds to these forms of work that can be performed mostly on computers and via telecommunication technology. Few other forms of work can be performed largely at home. A relatively small proportion of Sales workers could do their jobs from home (in tele-sales and other location-flexible functions), and an even smaller percentage of technical and trades jobs (largely in computer, information technology and information specialisations). The nature of work in occupations such as Machinery operators and drivers, Labourers and Community and personal service workers is limited in the capacity to work from home. Effectively no Machine operators and drivers, and Labourers can work from home, virtually by definition.

Figure 9: Potential Capacity to Work at Home by Occupation



Source: Pennington and Stanford (2020), Centre for Future Work estimate from ABS Catalogue 6291.0.55.003, Table EQ08

Reasons for not working from home may extend beyond the nature of work. Colley and Williamson (2020) find that of the respondents that did not work from home during the pandemic, who were not living in states/territories that had stay-at-home directives in place, around one-third identified reasons relating to ‘not letting the team down’ and concerns about their impacts on their career trajectory. The Global Dad Survey (2020) found that the inability to meet with people face-to-face (45 per cent) was a major detractor from the experience of working from home.

However, the WGEA survey also showed benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic were saving ‘people travelling time’ (85 per cent) and ‘it means people don’t have to live close to a specific workplace’ (74 per cent). Similarly, Beck and Hensher (2020) find that working from home during COVID-19 has significantly reduced car use, decreasing road congestion and pollution from vehicle use. The reduction in car use was significantly linked to the increase in the number of people working from home, with the reduction being widespread across all demographics. Statistical significance associated with being able to do work from home, being directed to work from home by the employer, and where the car was the main mode of transport prior to COVID-19 were most salient in influencing the extent of the reduction in car use. This builds upon trends that have been identified prior to COVID-19 that have found that stress, time and the expense of commuting, as drivers of preferences toward WFH.

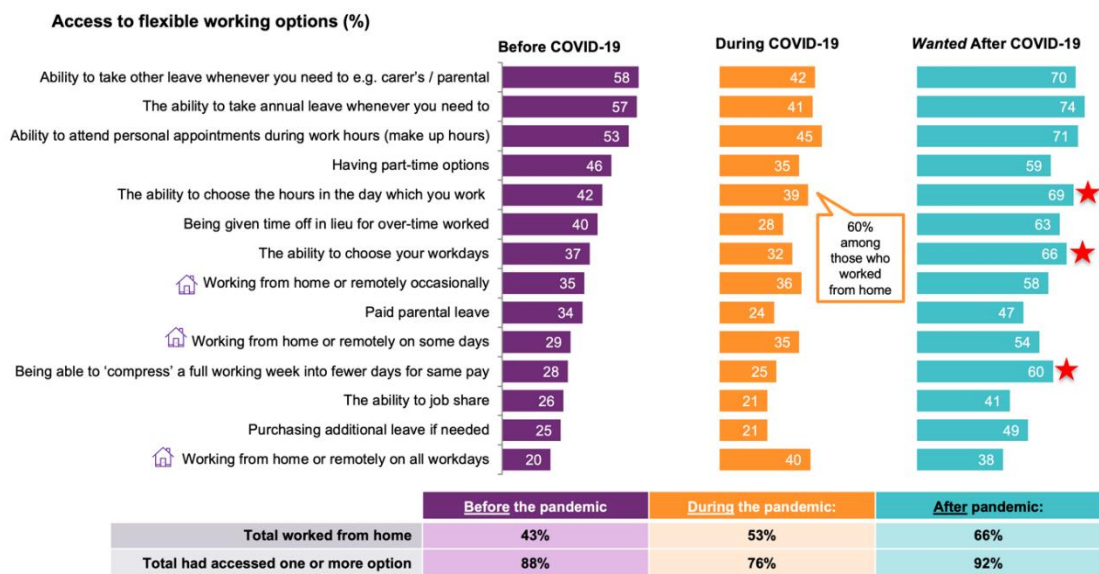
5 Preferences for Flexible Working Arrangements After the COVID-19 Pandemic

5.1 Understanding Preferences for Flexible Working Arrangements After COVID-19

WGEA (2020) surveyed people according to their preferences before, during and after COVID-19, with stated preferences bringing into sharper relief what demands for flexible working arrangements might be after COVID-19. The total proportion of respondents that had access to or used working from home to some extent before the pandemic was 43 per cent.

Prior to COVID-19, preferences for compressed working weeks, captured in the survey as ‘being able to ‘compress’ a full working week into fewer days for the same pay’, featured less prominently amongst respondents’ demands (29 per cent). The ability to job share was even lower (26 per cent) (WGEA 2020). However, preferences have changed markedly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as displayed in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Access to Flexible Working Options: Before, During and After the COVID-19 pandemic, per cent



Note: Question asked: Q9/Q10. Before/during the COVID-19 pandemic, which of the following flexible workplace arrangements had you accessed or used while employed at your most recent or current organisation? Q11. Which of the following flexible workplace arrangements do you want to have access to once COVID-19 restrictions are eased and things generally get back to normal? / Base: All respondents not self-employed (n=820)

Source: WGEA (2020), conducted by Newgate Research, unpublished.

Interestingly, during COVID-19, people have reported having less access to flexible working options than before the onset of the pandemic, with the exception of working from home or remotely on some days (35 per cent) or working from home or remotely on all workdays (40 per cent). It is likely that this in large part reflected government social distancing mandates that saw many workplaces transition to mainly working from home. The total number of respondents having access or using working from home increased from 43 per cent of respondents to 53 per cent.

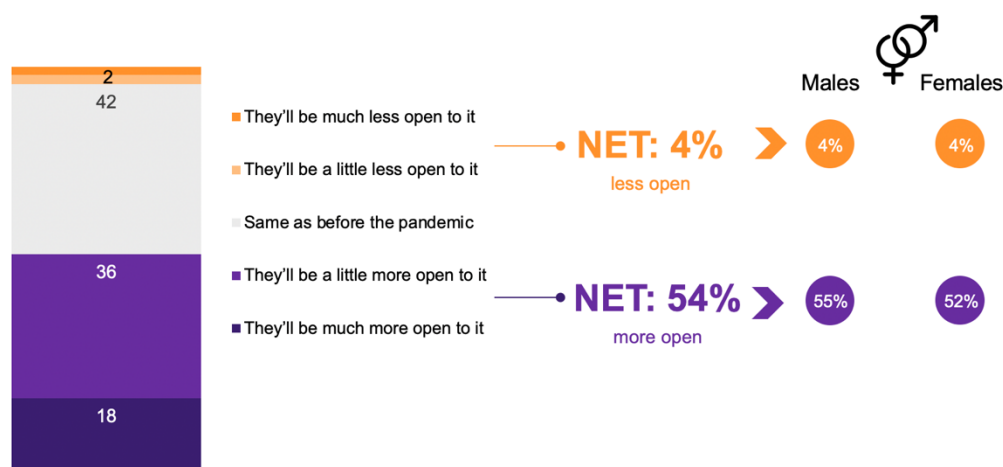
However, post COVID-19, respondents express significantly increased desires to either have access to or to use flexible working arrangements. Colley and Williamson (2020) find similar preferences amongst Australian Public Service workers, with over two-thirds wanting to continue working from home on a regular basis for some of their hours. Almost two-thirds of managers in the Colley and Williamson survey also indicated they would be supportive of working from home in the future.

The largest gaps between pre-pandemic and desired arrangements after the pandemic were for preferences for a compressed working week (60 per cent, compared with 28 per cent before COVID-19), as well as being able to choose your workdays (66 per cent, compared to 37 per cent before COVID-19) and the hours in the day you work (69 per cent, compared with 42 per cent prior to COVID-19).

Desires for the ability to job share also increased from 26 per cent before COVID-19 to 41 per cent wanted after COVID-19. The total number of respondents that wanted to have access to or use working from home options increased by 23 per cent (based on 'total work from home') from before the pandemic until after the pandemic.

As shown in Figure 11, just over half of workers (54 per cent) in the WGEA survey also felt their employer will be 'more open' to flexible working arrangements once COVID-19 restrictions are eased.

Figure 11: Employer's Openness to Flexible Working Arrangements post-COVID



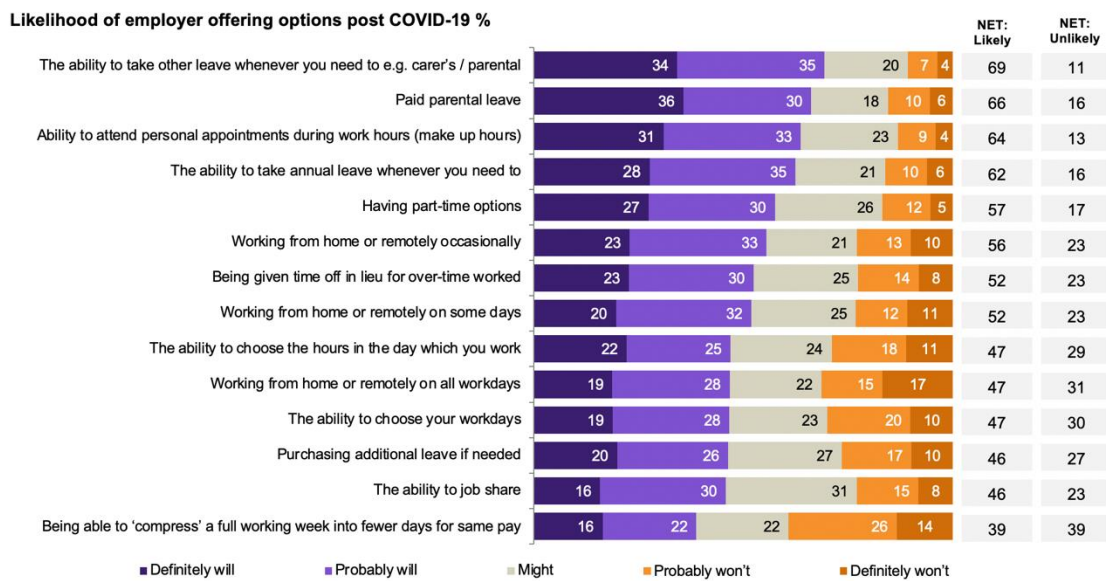
Note: Q15. Do you think your employer's views on flexible working arrangements will be different in the future, once COVID-19 restrictions ease? Base: All respondents not self-employed (n=820)

Source: WGEA (2020), conducted by Newgate, unpublished.

However, 42 per cent expect no change to their employer's openness to flexible working arrangements. Of note, only 2 per cent of workers felt that their employers will be a 'little less' or 'much less open' to flexible working arrangements post-COVID. People aged under 35 (63 per cent), those living in metro areas (58 per cent), those earning \$60k or more (59 per cent), and those employed full time (58 per cent) were more likely to say their employer would be more open to flexible working arrangements after COVID-19 (WGEA 2020).

Participants in the WGEA survey were also asked about the likelihood of their employers offering various flexible working arrangements. As shown in Figure 12, of the three main types of arrangements canvassed (WFH, CWW and job sharing) the most likely flexible arrangement was ‘working from home or remotely occasionally’ (66 per cent). The ability to job share (46 per cent) and being able to compress a full working week into fewer days for the same pay (38 per cent) were the least likely to be seen to be offered post-COVID.

Figure 12: Likelihood of employer offering options post-COVID

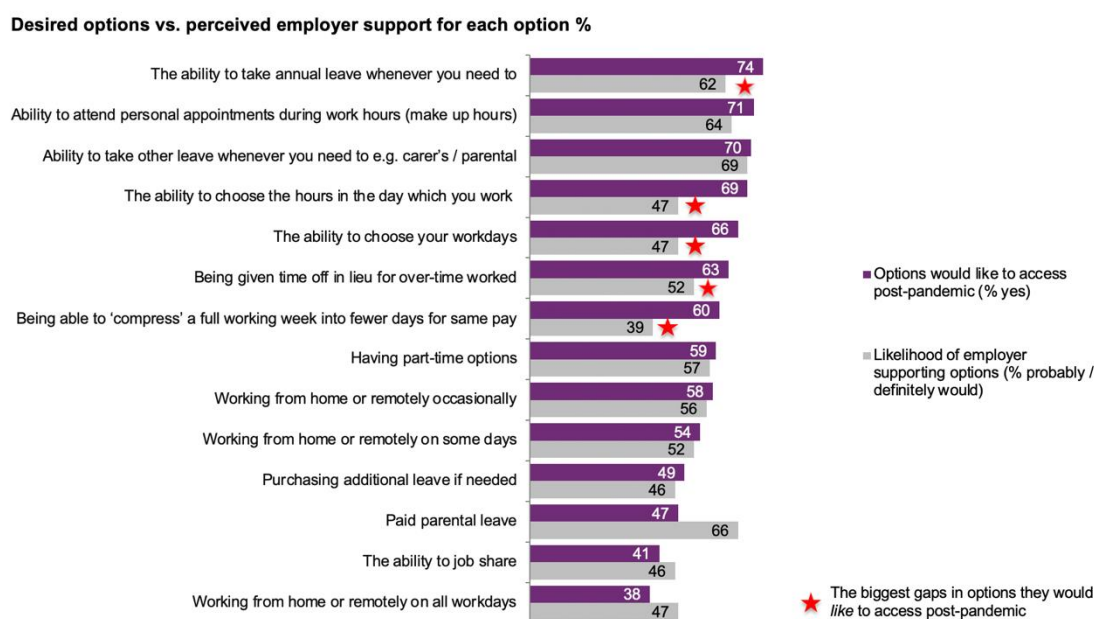


Note: Q12. And how likely do you think it is that your employer will actually offer you these options? Base: All respondents who desire access to option in future (n=302 – 608)

Source: WGEA (2020), conducted by Newgate, unpublished.

Despite the CWW being seen as a flexible working arrangement that is the least likely to be offered by employers in a post-COVID context, this ‘option’ presents one of the largest gaps between the ‘likelihood’ of their employer supporting that arrangement and the respondents’ desire to access a CWW. As evident in Figure 13, 60 per cent of respondents would like to compress a full working week into fewer days for the same pay, whilst only 39 per cent view that it is likely that their employer will support a CWW post-COVID.

Figure 13: Desired vs perceived employer support for each option, per cent



Note: Q11. Which of the following flexible workplace arrangements do you want to have access to once COVID-19 restrictions are eased and things generally get back to normal? Base: All respondents not self-employed (n=820) / Q12. And how likely do you think it is that your employer will actually offer you these options? Base: All respondents who desire access to option in future (n=302 – 608)

Source: WGEA (2020), conducted by Newgate, unpublished.

5.2 Paid Leave and Flexible Working Hours After COVID-19

The findings of the WGEA survey indicate that the most popular preferences for flexible working arrangements post-COVID were for more conventional/traditional forms. This includes various forms of leave (including annual and parental leave) as well as flexible working hours. Whilst these forms of flexible working arrangements did not see the highest *increases* in support comparing responses before and after the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 13), they remained the most popular both before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 10). As discussed above, the results suggest that workers are increasingly looking for a more diverse array of flexible working arrangements (including less 'conventional' forms such as the CWW, job sharing and working from home/remotely), whilst also expressing an even greater desire to access more conventional forms.

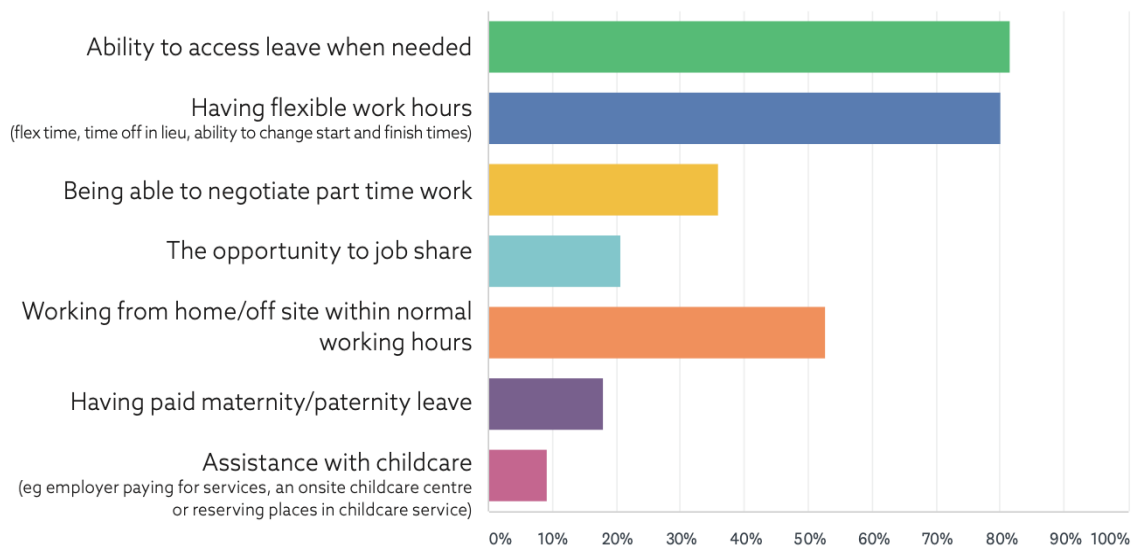
Overall, different forms of paid leave from work remain the most popular forms of flexible working arrangements. As shown in Figure 10, the 'ability to take annual leave whenever you need to' has merged as the most popular flexible working arrangements that respondents wanted in the WGEA survey (74 per cent, up from 57 per cent prior to COVID-19). This is followed closely by 'the ability to take other leave whenever you need to e.g., carer's / parental' (70 per cent, up from 58 per cent prior to COVID-19). The preferences for different forms of paid leave after the COVID-19 pandemic are a continuation of trends that exist prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic: various forms of paid leave remain the main form of flexible working arrangement preferred by workers.

Similarly, the second more popular overall form of flexible working arrangement in the WGEA survey appears to be flexible working hours. For example, preferences for the 'ability to attend personal appointments during work hours (make up hours)' was 71 per cent for what respondents

wanted in the future, up from 53 per cent prior to COVID-19. Strong preferences for flexible working hours were also reflected in respondents' preferences for both the 'ability to choose the hours in the day which you work' (69 per cent, up from 42 per cent prior to COVID-19) and the 'ability to choose your workdays' (66 per cent, up from 37 per cent prior to COVID-19).

The results of the PSA CPSU NSW Women (2020) inaugural 'What Women Want' survey of more than 5000 female members also demonstrates a desire for greater flexibilities following COVID-19. The results may indicate greater support for having access to leave when needed amongst female workers. As shown in Figure 14, the ability to access leave when needed (81 per cent) and having flexible work hours (80 per cent) emerge as the most important forms of flexible working arrangements for women. These findings are consistent with the WGEA post-COVID preference survey that show that the two flexible working arrangements most important to respondents, are the ability to access leave when needed and the ability to opt into flexible working hours arrangements.

Figure 14: Important flexible working arrangements post-COVID



Source: PSA CPSU NSW Women (2020)

The findings of the PSA CPSU NSW Women (2020) survey are consistent with existing research that finds that women are at least more than twice as likely to access flexible working arrangements, especially paid leave, than men (WGEA n.d.). Although many Australian men want to take up flexible working arrangement opportunities, they are almost twice as likely as women to have their requests for flexible work declined (PMC 2020). Many women in the PSA CPSU NSW Women survey responded that often their demands for flexible working arrangements (especially paid leave and flexible work hours) were driven by their male partner's requests for leave and flexible working hours being declined. For example, one survey respondent simply reported 'my partner's place of work refused to allow him to take leave'. The results in the PSA CPSU NSW Women survey indicate that women post-COVID are more likely to demand flexible working arrangements in order to have sustainable careers that balance the pressures of both work and non-work responsibilities, especially family. As one survey respondent noted: 'the ability to access flexible work arrangements (and having a manager who supports me doing so) has meant I haven't had to reduce my work time and inevitably be the one to 'sacrifice' my career'.

However, the PSA CPSU NSW Women survey also demonstrates a majority of the respondents (54 per cent) expressed the importance of being able to work from home or work off site within normal working hours. It also found only a small number of respondents (20.5 per cent) expressed the importance in being able to work as part of a job-sharing partnership. These findings are consistent with the WGEA survey. Hence, it is important to consider the emergence of stronger preferences for working from home, on top of more traditional forms of flexible working arrangements, such as paid leave and flexible working arrangements, as will now be discussed.

5.3 Working from Home Preferences After COVID-19

The WGEA survey highlights that one of the most significant increases in support for flexible working arrangements has been for 'working from home or remotely occasionally' (increasing from 35 per cent before the pandemic, to 58 per cent after the pandemic – see Figure 10). The findings of the WGEA survey are corroborated by Beck, Hensher and Wei (2020) who find that in Australia there is a growing expectation and preference for working more days from home. Overall, working from home has been a largely positive experience for most Australians, and 71 per cent agree with the statement 'they would like to work from home more often' in the Beck, Hensher and Wei survey. As evident in Figure 15, before COVID-19, over 70 per cent of respondents in the survey did not work home any days during the working week. However, surveyed future preferences show a marked shift: a majority of workers want to work at least one day a week, with two days a week working from home (17 per cent) being the most likely response.

Despite strong agreement for the concept of working from home for some days, preferences are not dramatically in favour of working from home most of the time. There are a number of reasons that may explain this and relating directly to the COVID-19 experience: working from home was a necessity imposed by government social distancing mandates, rather than a personal choice; the onset of lockdowns and other pandemic restrictions were also sudden which left people under prepared, making the experience less comfortable or effective; and working from home for many people was also at the same time that schools were closed.

Figure 15: Aggregate Days Employees would like to WFH in the future

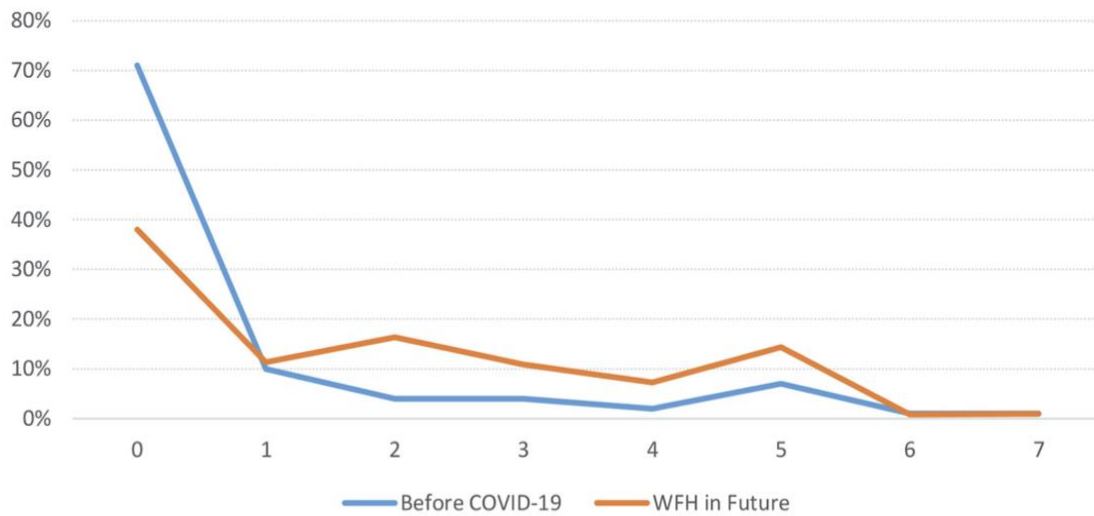
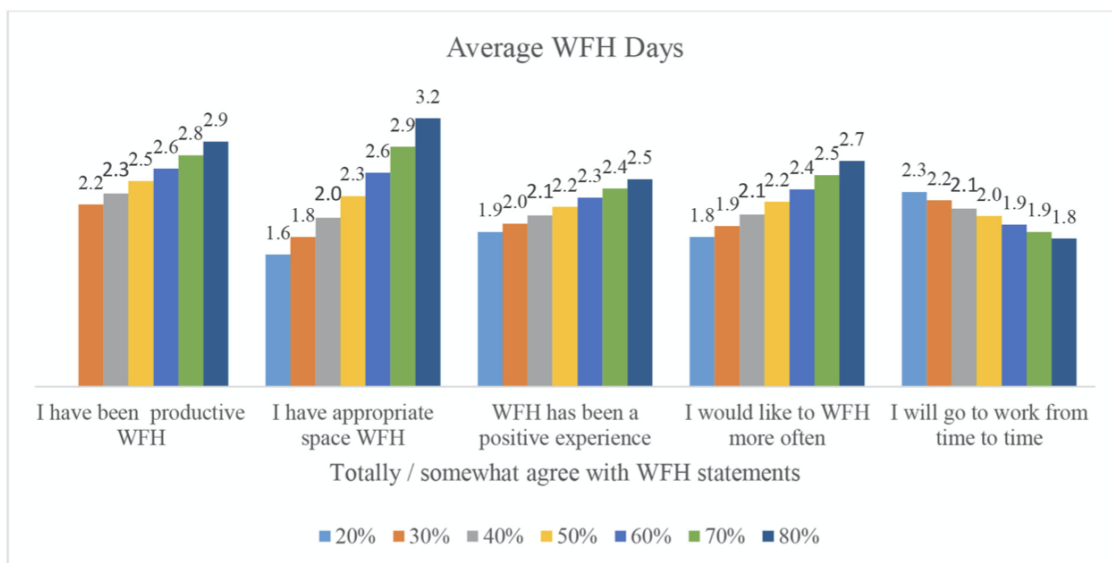


Fig. 8. Aggregate Days like to WFH in the Future.

Source: Beck, Hensher and Wei (2020)

With respect to the individual factors motivating WFH, as evident in Figure 16, the Beck, Hensher and Wei models show that the most influential factor regarding WFH choice is having adequate workspace at home. The more a respondent agrees to this statement, the more likely they are willing to spend more days WFH. Conversely, low levels of agreement result in the lowest uptake of WFH days (1.6 days compared to all other statements if there was only 20 per cent of agreement). In contrast, having a positive experience with WFH has a relatively small role in increasing the average WFH days compared to having appropriate space and being productive. The results also show that more workers would like to WFH more often into the future.

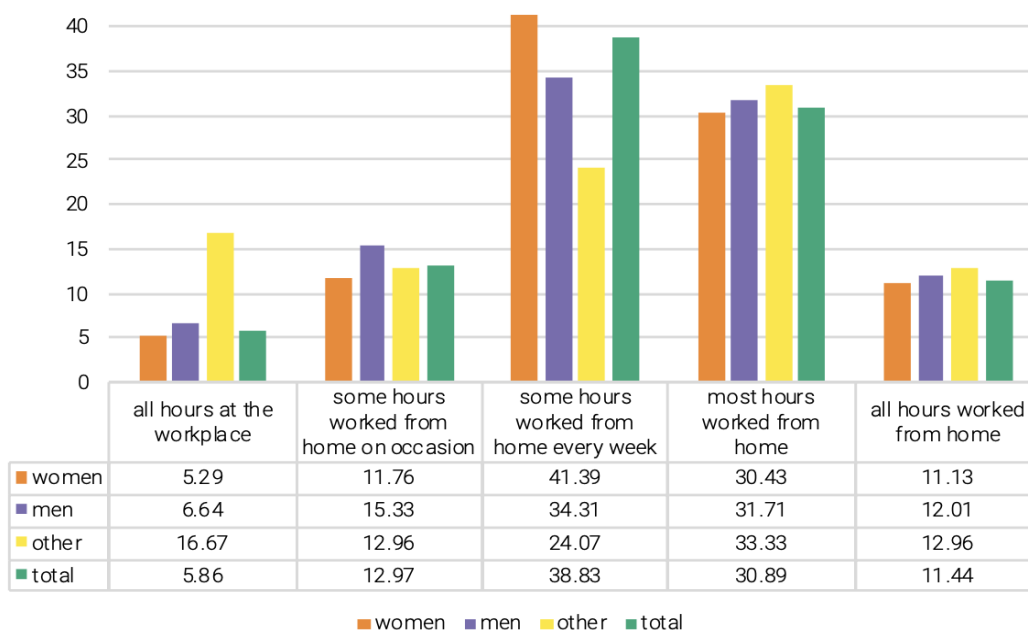
Figure 16: Impact of Agreement Levels on Average Days WFH



Source: Beck, Hensher and Wei (2020)

Similarly, Colley and Williamson (2020) find the key reasons amongst survey respondents to want to continue working from home included the ability to manage work and caring responsibilities, and time for themselves and family. However, respondents still wanted to keep in touch with colleagues. When asked about future preferences, respondents demonstrated a strong preference for a mix of both office time and working from home, evident in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Preferred Mix of Office Time and WFH in the Future

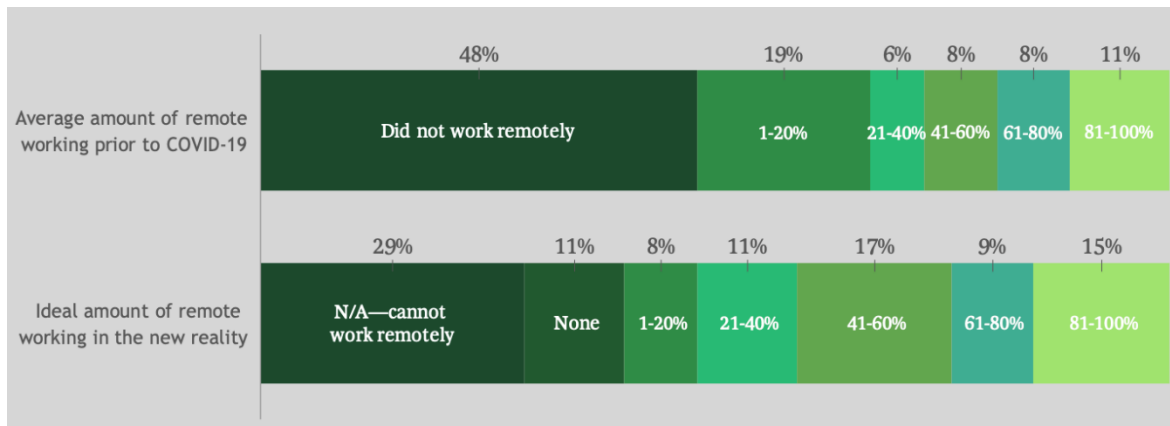


Source: Colley and Williamson (2020)

Boston Consulting Group (2020) also conducted an online workforce sentiment survey of 1002 people to uncover experiences and attitudes to working during COVID-19. The findings concur with observations and preference desires reflected in other research and surveys: employees that can work remotely want to keep doing so, but not every day, confirming that office work still has a role to play.

As shown in Figure 18, the Boston Consulting Group survey finds prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an almost even split between people who worked exclusively on-site (48 per cent) and people who incorporated some degree of remote working into their routines (52 per cent). Overall, the survey shows that there has been an increase in preferences for working from home. However, when asked about the ideal amount of remote working in the new reality, most preferred a mix of both in-person office work and working from home, rather than working home all the time. These findings from the Boston Consulting Group survey map onto the above findings from Colley and Williamson (2020).

Figure 18: Working models pre- and post- COVID-19

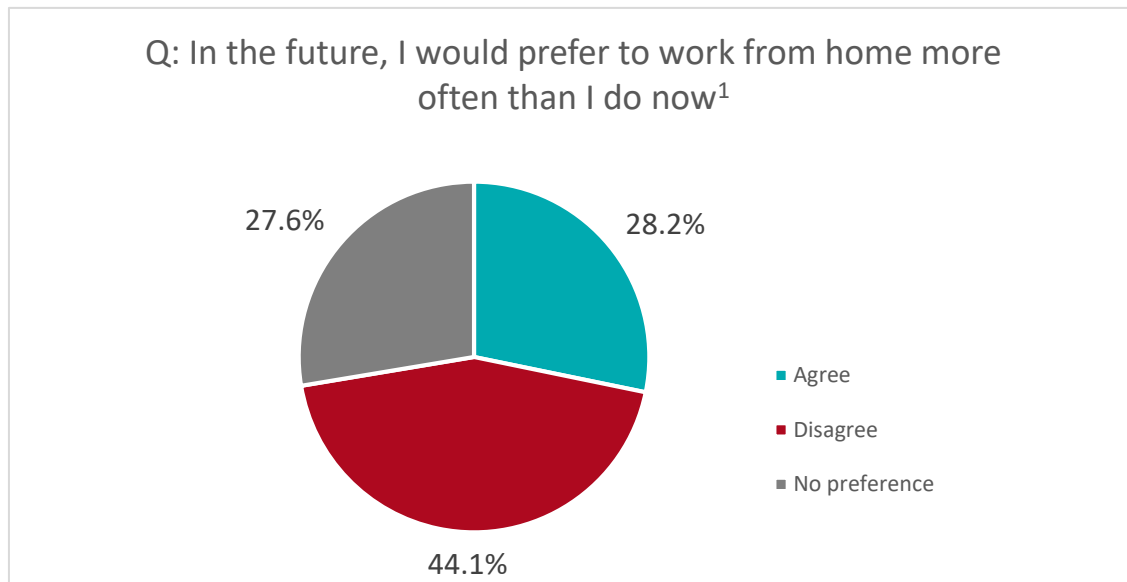


Source: Boston Consulting Group (2020)

The findings of Boston Consulting Group (2020) are further backed up by a LinkedIn survey attracting over 150,000 responses asking, ‘What environment would you prefer to work in going forward?’. Fifty-five per cent said a combination of home and office, 38 per cent said work from home only and 8 per cent said work from the office only (LinkedIn 2020).

However, mature workers are less enthused about working from home. The Mature Workers in Organisations (MWOS) COVID surveyed 1583 Australian mature workers (aged 45 years or older), in June 2020, with only 28.2 per cent of respondents wanting to WFH more into the future, shown in Figure 19. This is in contrast to 44 per cent expressing a preference to not work from home more in the future.

Figure 19: MWOS Survey on WFH Preferences

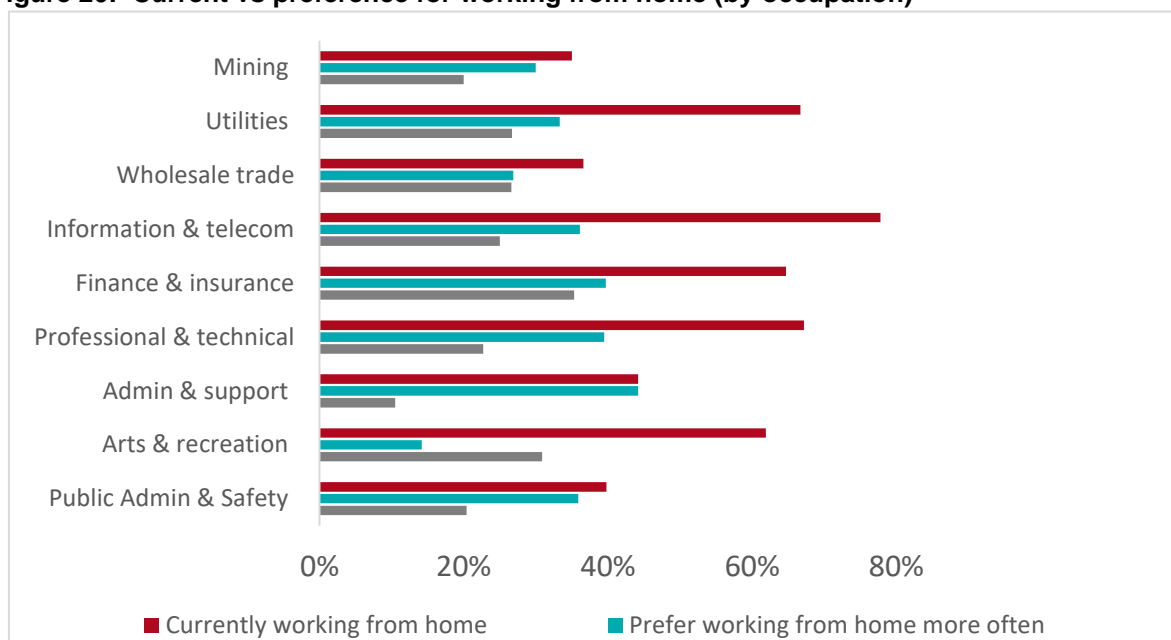


Source: CEPAR Mature Workers in Organisations (2020)

Further, the MWOS COVID survey showed that variation in current preferences relative to preferences to work from home more into the future is different across industries. As shown in Figure 20, mature workers in Admin and support, Professional and technical support, Finance and insurance roles were most likely to preference working from home most often after COVID-19. In

contrast, workers in Arts and recreation are least likely to demonstrate a preference for working from home into the future.

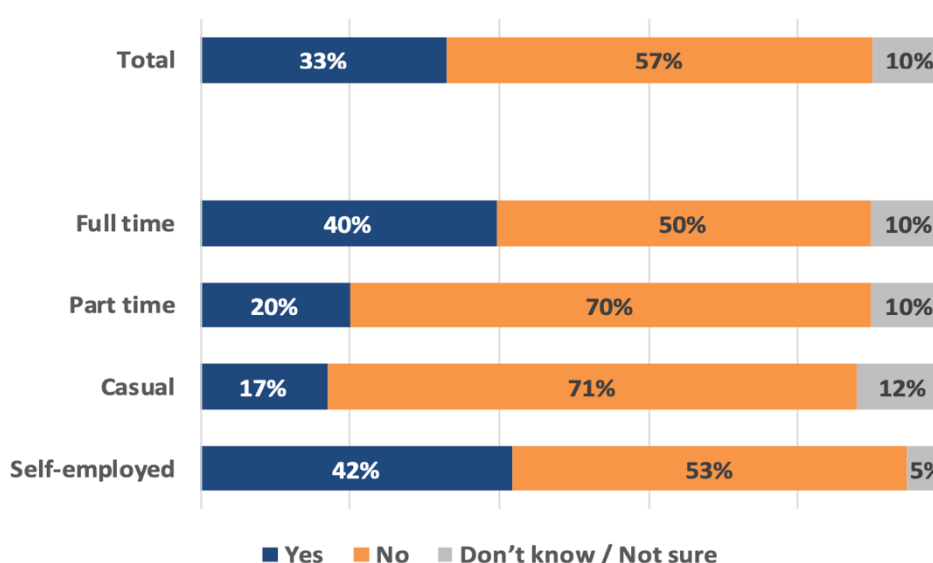
Figure 20: Current vs preference for working from home (by occupation)



Source: CEPAR Mature Workers in Organisations (2020)

As well as occupational differences in preferences, the Australian Institute (2020) *Work and Life in a Pandemic* survey of 1602 Australians finds that full-time workers and those who were self-employed are more likely to expect to continue to work from home following COVID-19 (40 per cent of full-time respondents and 42 per cent of self-employed), as shown in Figure 21.

Figure 21: Workers Doing Home-based Work, Who Expect That They Will Continue to Work from Home More Following COVID-19



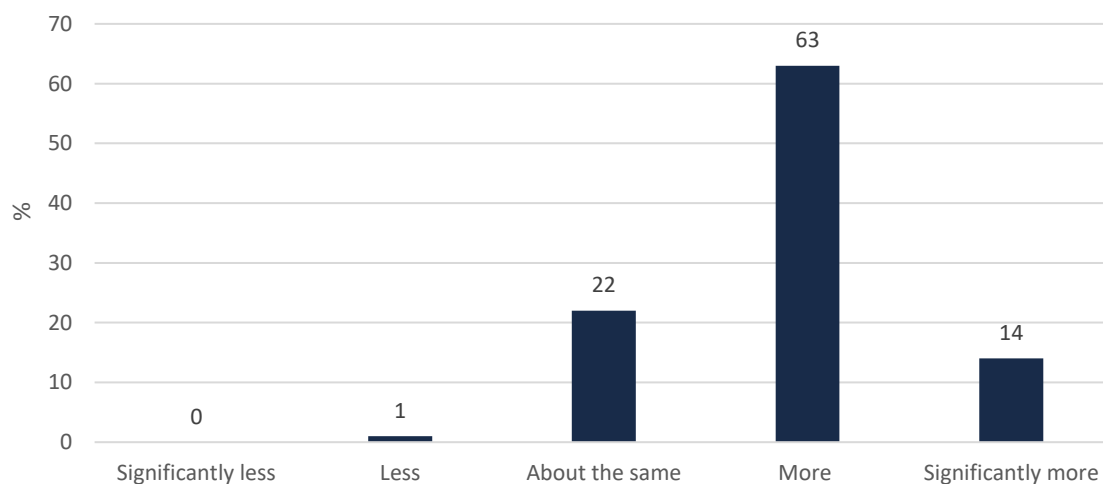
Source: Nahum (2020)

In contrast, those workers in less secure forms of employment are less likely to expect that they will continue to work from home more following COVID-19. Only 17 per cent of casual workers, and 20 per cent of part-time workers expected to work more from home following the COVID-19 pandemic. This points to a bifurcation in the labour market, with more secure workers with higher degrees of autonomy being more likely to be able to have the confidence to access flexible working arrangements (Nahum 2020).

5.3.1 Employer Preferences for Working from Home After COVID-19

Increases in worker’s preferences for more days working from home are matched by more positive management perspectives on the future of working from home. Managerial preferences regarding flexible working arrangements are especially important given that they are often the decision-makers when it comes to addressing requests for forms of workplace flexibility. As evident in Figure 22, the WorkFLEX study showed that 63 per cent of managers believe that their employees will be ‘more’ likely to work from home, with 14 per cent believing working from home will be ‘significantly more’ likely. Only 1 per cent of employers believed workers will be ‘less’ likely to engage in working from home.

Figure 22: Managerial Perspectives and Predictions on the Future of WFH



Source: WorkFLEX, Swinburne University of Technology (May 2020).

In a qualitative study of 29 Australian employers from various industries and their response to COVID-19 (Baird, Hamilton, Gulesserian and Williams, 2020), 8 employers predicted that the changes they had made to the way work is done would remain in place after COVID. Some were unequivocal that they did not want to go back to the way things were. For example, one employer commented that ‘we’re being proactive around what we want to learn, positively, from COVID that is going to take us through to a better working world, going forward’ (Professional services, large company, interviewee 2).

The most commonly expressed change was a working week that involved a combination of working at the office and at home: ‘We would envisage that going forward the majority of people worked two to three days a week at home and two to three days a week in the office. That won’t be practical for all roles, but we would definitely anticipate more people seeking flexibility than prior to this [COVID]’ (Retail, large company). Some employers were willing to contemplate their employees never returning to the office: ‘some people, particularly in the IT area, will probably work from home for

the rest of their working lives because it just doesn't seem necessary that they need to be in the office' (Legal services, large company).

Employers described several hybrid WFH models such as complete flexibility of working hours and days (e.g. office is open, but attendance is voluntary) and rostered attendance (e.g. 2-week shift with one week in the office, one at home, but the option to be in the office if desired). Employers also remarked that they now had systems in place to facilitate WFH, which they didn't have in the past.

Several employers clearly linked the move to flexible working to improved business outcomes, for example that 'flexible working is actually really good for the business and has a lot more benefits than we kind of anticipated' (Utilities, medium size company). However, employers also raised potential problems with the majority of their workforce continuing to WFH, including lack of team cohesion, lack of information-sharing, lack of communication, lack of the right skill mix in the workplace, workers' resistance to being in the office at all, and managers resisting WFH as they tried to retain control.

With the move to more WFH, some employers reflected on rethinking the workspace, with offices now being perceived as spaces for social gathering, not working, with a concomitant reduction in the space required. In order for their employees to return however, one employer described the need to 'create a welcoming environment' (Local government, medium size) with few social distancing restrictions that would create a positive space. Employers also appeared sensitive to the mental health needs of their employees expressing an awareness that WFH was not appropriate to all workers.

6 Summary and Conclusion

This report consolidates findings on employee and employer preferences, and the benefits and limitations associated with different types of flexible working arrangements. The three main types of flexibility covered include: i) working from home, ii) compressed working hours, and iii) job sharing.

Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a moderate number of workers wanted access to working from home (35 per cent) as a form of flexible working arrangement (WGEA 2020). This was despite a number of benefits and personal preferences toward working from home that is canvassed in the pre-COVID literature. These include increased flexibility, work-life balance, reductions in household conflict and decreased commuter stress. However, pre-COVID research also suggested that personal and professional isolation, distractions from family or non-work activities when working from home, and unexpected costs of working from home were the main reasons for not wanting working from home as a flexible work arrangement.

Prior to COVID-19, being able to 'compress a full working week into fewer days for the same pay' was rated as one of the least accessed forms of flexible working arrangements (WGEA 2020). Research prior to COVID-19 shows mixed effects of compressed working weeks. Several benefits and preferences for compressed working weeks emerged from employers seeing increases in productivity and cost reductions and increases in work-life balance for employees. The most prominent limitations include diminished employee productivity, reduced job satisfaction and negative impacts on employee stress and fatigue. Whilst CWWs are found to increase employee productivity overall, the impact on employee productivity can be diminished if the span of working hours is too long, with long working days leading to higher levels of employee dissatisfaction.

Job sharing was also a relatively poorly accessed form of flexible working arrangement prior to COVID-19. The literature before the COVID-19 pandemic pointed to several benefits and positive preferences for job sharing, including increased flexibility and work-life balance for employees, employment stability and status, and efficiency and cost reduction for employers. The most common negatives of job sharing included scarcity of eligible and compatible employees, the siloing of women into job sharing partnerships, and perceptions of limited career advancement potential.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people in Australia were forced by government social distancing regulations and employer requirements to work from home. Understandably therefore, the focus of attention shifted to working from home as the main form of flexibility, rather than the compressed working week or job sharing. A number of surveys undertaken during COVID-19 have shown that working from home for most people who were doing that, was a positive experience, with some variation for women and men. Both employee and employer surveys demonstrate that working from home during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia reported increases in productivity. The limitations associated with working from home during COVID-19 continued pre-COVID trends, including concerns about distractions from family and non-work activities as well as working longer hours and blurring of work and family boundaries.

The opportunity to work from home was not available to all occupations, a point also recognised by some employers. For instance, care workers, labourers, machinery operators and drivers were unable to work from home during this time, due to the nature of the work performed. Such bifurcation in the labour market leads to inequities in access to flexible work arrangements.

Looking to the future, there have been notable shifts in both employees' and employers' preferences for the scope and extent of flexible working arrangements, with 58 per cent of workers wanting to work from home occasionally in the future (WGEA 2020), compared to 35 per cent prior to COVID (WGEA 2020). For women, access to flexible leaves also ranked as important. Preferences to work from home for more days per week has also increased (Beck, Hensher and Wei 2010), however, workers show a strong preference for a mix of both in-person office time and working from home (Colley and Williamson 2020). These results also mean that a significant proportion of the workforce still want to go to a workplace some days per week, which potentially raises the need for a right to not work from home.

There is no doubt that the experience of COVID-19 in Australia has impacted both employee preferences for, and employer experiences of, flexibility. Overall, the evidence points to a preference among employees for more flexibility post COVID-19, specifically to have the option to work from home for some days per week and to be able to access various forms of leave (including annual, personal and parental leave).

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has seen the majority of attention placed on working from home, being able to compress a full working week for the same pay saw a dramatic increase in support (from 28 per cent prior to the pandemic to 60 per cent in the future, WGEA 2020). Positive preferences toward accessing job sharing as a form of flexible working arrangement have also increased, from 20 per cent prior to the pandemic to 41 per cent after the pandemic (WGEA 2020).

Research shows that benefits of compressed working weeks accrue when there is employee autonomy and control over times and when the span of hours is not excessive. Furthermore, the evidence shows that caution needs to be taken when considering impacts on women of increasing working from home arrangements as there is potential for a gendered take up with more men not working from home, and increased potential to see further gendering of flexibility use and the division of tasks at home.

COVID-19 shifted the flexible work pendulum and community discussion further than it had ever been before. The results of surveys undertaken during the pandemic point to increased worker preference for flexibility and employer acceptance of the feasibility and efficacy of flexibility for a wider range of employees, but caution must be exercised in drawing definitive conclusions as the purpose, timing, questions and samples of these surveys varied significantly. Further and very targeted research on preferences amongst workers, disaggregated by sex, age, occupation and industry would be ideal to reliably understand Australian worker and employer preferences for flexible work arrangements post-COVID-19.

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