Bridging the Gap

HP

How to Understand Your Workforce Better and Help Them Thrive

Executive Summary

Flexible working works. But only when your team is properly set up for success.

Once they have everything they need, flexible workers are more satisfied in their jobs, more creative, and ultimately more productive. Yet despite the vast majority of employees wanting flexible working, most of those who have it say they are not thriving. Why?

Our research shows a disconnect between leaders and employees. Not only do their views on working conditions and priorities diverge, but leaders are also failing to understand what their employees need to work effectively. Seamless flexibility is required, where work can be done equally well in both in-office and out-of-office locations. But workplace environments – and work experiences as a whole – are not being set up to achieve it.

This is damaging. We surveyed 2,970 workers and decision-makers across the US, UK, France, and Japan, and found that only a fifth of them are truly satisfied with their flexible working experience, despite 75% of them saying it was their ideal working scenario.[1]

The situation for businesses is stark. Employees demand flexible working – in-fact research shows that as many as two thirds of people globally would look for a new job if required to come back to the office full time.[2] If organizations deliver it in a way that suits their employees, they can optimize their performance. The most satisfied people are more productive, more creative, and more likely to remain in their jobs. But the considerable benefits of flexible working can easily be lost if it is not being delivered effectively.

So what does the ideal look like? What can organizations do to build a thriving, flexible workforce? The key is to abandon the notion of the workplace itself. Instead of equipping employees for specific locations – whether in the office, at home, or on the move – leaders should instead focus on the overall employee experience and optimizing performance wherever they are.

Four Key Takeaways

75% of workers favor hybrid for their work location preference

compared with 20% who desire to be fully remote

and 5% who want to work solely from an office.[1]
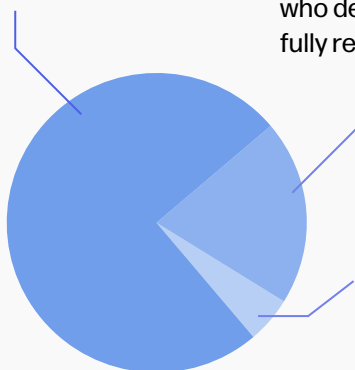
A healthy work/life balance is key to happiness.

A lack of leadership understanding on flexible working is fueling underperformance.

An effective work set-up, built for seamless work experiences, is a key success driver for flexible working.

Seamless Flexible Working: Bridging the Gaps

A disconnect exists between leaders and employees regarding flexible working.

Not only are there differences in opinion on its worth, but there's also a lack of understanding among managers of how to get the best out of their flexible workforces. We believe this is leading to missed potential and below-par performance.

What's clear is that flexible working has become ingrained in the expectations of workers. Our research shows that 75% of employees want to work flexibly across locations.[1] A further 20% want to be fully remote all the time, while just 5% want to be based in the office full time.

Yet business leaders often take a different view. Our research shows several areas where IT decision-makers (ITDMs) have a more negative view of flexible working than other workers:

This divergence is leading to missed opportunities to enhance workforce performance. Despite most employees wanting flexible working, only 22% are thriving at it.[1]
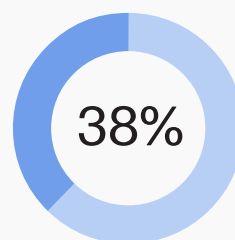
It's incumbent on businesses to close this gap. Business leaders should design workplace models designed for the new era of flexible working, with more control handed to employees and the focus placed on seamless experiences rather than specific locations.
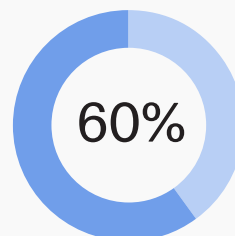
60% say it creates more work.[1]
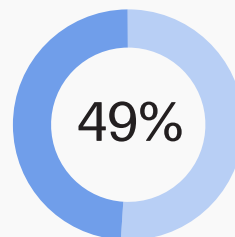
49% say it creates more complexity or challenges around using technology.[1]

38% say it creates stress on personal wellness.[1]

The Building Blocks of a Flourishing Workforce

Surprisingly, satisfaction with flexible working is not about age, gender (although females slightly prefer it), income, family situation, or the size of company people work for. It's about the culture that's built, the workplace model that's developed, and how business processes are redesigned to support it.

So to get the most out of employees, getting their flexible work experience right is imperative. And the key to doing that is to first understand their needs.
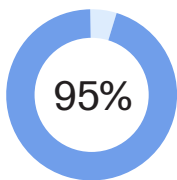
We've identified several characteristics of those who are most satisfied with their flexible-working situation. They ladder up to three main factors that businesses need to put in place:
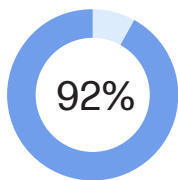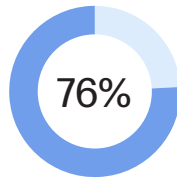
A Healthy Work/Life Balance

This is the most important criteria and brings people more happiness at work than any other measure.

95%

say that hybrid working has given them a better work/life balance.[1]

92%

say it has granted them the freedom to work more autonomously.[1]

76%

say it allows for more creativity and experimentation.[1]
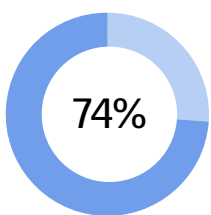
Flexibility Over Hours and Location

The most satisfied workers enjoy greater influence over when or where they work, and are more likely to say they have high control. This breaks down as high control over the number of days they work and where they work.
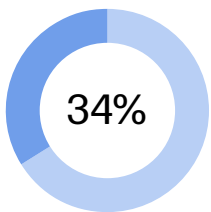
# An Effective, Secure Work Set-Up with the Right Technology

One of the strongest characteristics among the most satisfied workers is the fact that they are happy with their work set-up.

This indicates that the key to success is less about where they work and more around the fact that they have everything they need to enjoy seamless work experiences anywhere they want.

That's supported by 90% of the most satisfied flexible workers agreeing that they have all the technology and tools they need to get their job done away from the office. In contrast, only 36% of the least satisfied say the same.[1] But with 26% of workers worried about security when working on the go – and 15% when working from home – this is an area that shouldn't be neglected.

74% of them state they have the right set-up, compared to

34% of the least satisfied.[1] They don't all have a dedicated office space, however - in fact
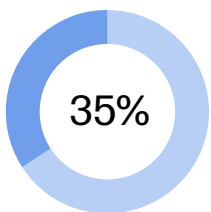
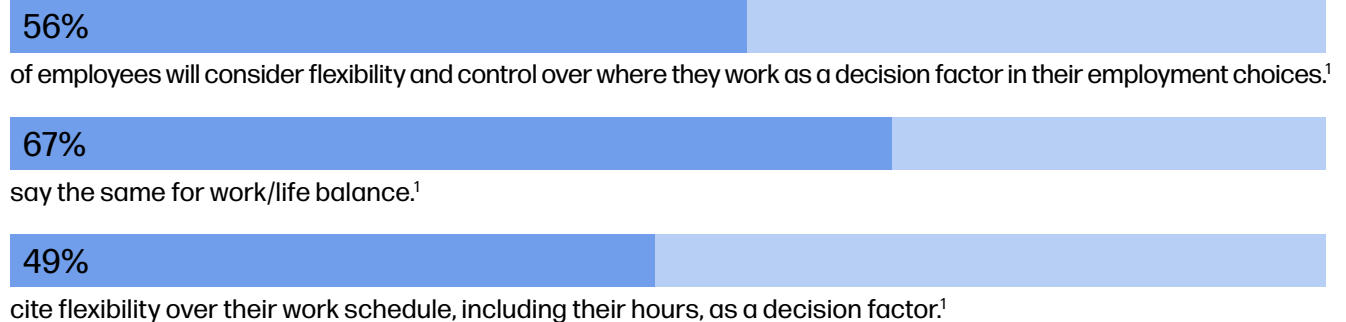**35%** of thriving workers don't have one.[1]

Sharpening the Competitive Edge

Building a content, highly satisfied workforce engaged in seamless work experiences should be a key company objective. The potential business benefits demand it. Two essential reasons are:

Talent Retention and Acquisition

In short, workers are choosing the best work experiences for them. Businesses need to offer them if they want to attract the best people.

56%

of employees will consider flexibility and control over where they work as a decision factor in their employment choices.[1]

67%

say the same for work/life balance.[1]

49%

cite flexibility over their work schedule, including their hours, as a decision factor.[1]
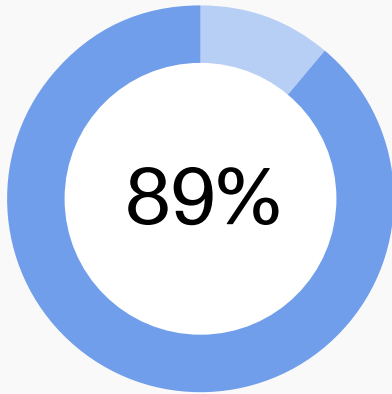
Productivity

89% of the most satisfied employees say they have increased their productivity as a result of flexible working.[1]

In contrast, those who are unsatisfied with hybrid working don't feel their productivity has increased, and say they don't have the tech and tools they need to get their jobs done effectively.

So there are clear negative implications of not prioritizing an effective hybrid set-up. Not only could it be making it hard to attract – and keep – the best talent, but employees are also potentially underperforming. This could have a negative impact on business growth, competitiveness, and the bottom line.

Flexible Working: Your Six-Point Action Plan

Flexible working is here to stay, with employees working across multiple locations and demanding the same seamless experience across each.

The fact that is not working as well as it could be is a wake-up call for some businesses. For others, it's confirmation of what they already know. For everyone, we've identified a six-point action plan to deliver the necessary change.

1 Realign Priorities by Employee Needs

To create the most effective workforce, you need to focus on the policies and priorities that best work for them. That's hard when leaders and workers think differently about flexible working, so take the time to understand what your employees really need across key areas that matter to them.

2 Tailor the Work Experience to Drive Productivity

Focusing on the flexible-working experience can enhance workforce performance. That's because the happier employees are, the more productive they are. Helping them feel more secure and enhancing collaboration are key areas. So prioritizing happiness should be a key objective, and one that's delivered as part of a corporate strategy coming from the top.

3 Equip the Worker not the Workspace

Flexible working doesn't mean working from home. The modern workspace is fluid. So while you need to address remote-working effectiveness – and 90% of the most satisfied flexible workers say they have all the technology and tools they need to get their job done away from the office, compared to 36% of the least – employees want a seamless working experience when they are in the office too. You need to give them tools that work just as effectively no matter where they are.

4 Don't Let Technology Drag Down Performance

It's clear there needs to be a sharper focus on delivering the right equipment for the right workers. A quarter of them say technology holds them back from efficiently achieving all they need to when working remotely. But you should also help them cope with everyday IT challenges. Only 37% are very comfortable troubleshooting or resolving issues when working remotely[1] – being able to do so would lighten their load.

5 Develop a Workplace Culture that Secures Talent

People are making employment decisions on the strength of an organization's flexible-working policies. So focus on what will make the best workers want to join and remain. Flexibility and control over location, hours, and the work/life balance they can achieve are key elements that employees are looking for.

6 Improve Lines of Communication

The disconnect between leaders and employees that's outlined in this report needs to be bridged. Building better ways of communicating will help to do that, allowing greater empathy from leadership and encouraging workers to speak up about challenges. It will also strengthen the future. The flexible-working evolution will continue, and it's essential to maintain awareness as needs shift and demands change.

As work becomes less centralized, and employees are looking for more autonomy and flexibility, it's essential to deliver an experience that delivers on what's important to them. The ability to work effectively whether they are in or out of the office. Understanding from their employers about the needs and challenges they are facing. And the technology, tools, and security that enable them to perform at their best.

Methodology

1. HP and Intel commissioned Hypothesis to survey 2,970 workers and ITDMs in the US, UK, France, and Japan between October 14 – November 4, 2022. Workers were aged 18-54, not employed in a sensitive industry, and worked at least one day per week or 20% of their time away from the office. ITDMs were aged 18-54 and in charge of making IT decisions for their company.