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FLEXIBLE WORKING IN THE AUSTRALIAN

1 Executive summary

Flexible working can enhance productivity, work life balance, knowledge sharing and collaboration. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated adoption of flexible working among office workers, and most employees now want to work from home at least some of the time. The Australian Capital Territory Public Service (ACTPS) has positioned flexible working as central to their vision to be the most progressive Australian jurisdiction for workplace practices (ACT Government, 2021) and an employer of choice for employees seeking flexibility. Like many organisations looking to develop optimal ways of managing a flexible workforce, the ACTPS has sought to better understand employee preferences and patterns of work, as well as key risks to equitable and effective flexibility.

This research was established to help identify how the ACTPS can better support effective flexible working, focused on the role of technology, communication tools and the built environment. The research focused on knowledge workers, whose work is generally available for flexible working as they work autonomously to undertake knowledge-intensive tasks. It was also focused on the perceptions of middle managers and employees, to inform the ACTPS of how to improve support for effective flexible working.

The project was undertaken as a partnership between ACTPS, the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) and the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Canberra.

The research adopted a mixed methods approach gathering qualitative data from ACTPS Flexible Work Working Group meetings and focus group discussions with human resource (HR) managers and general staff. It also involved the secondary analysis of existing data (e.g., ACTPS 2021 Census and 2021 Pulse data).

orientation to working, managers closely monitoring staff working from home, or broader cultural or workload management issue (i.e., unrealistic expectations regarding availability).

In this report, we identify four essential elements of effective flexible working that should help address many of the issues identified in this report:

- A need for an outcomes-oriented approach to working: our findings highlight that the effectiveness of flexible working is heavily reliant on individual teams and managers. For more effective flexible working, an outcomes orientation needs to be culturally embedded across the ACTPS. We refer to an outcomes orientation as cultural value placed on results, with a focus on the effective achievement of tasks rather than time spent undertaking those tasks, leading to achievement of broader outcomes. We outline suggestions for embedding an outcomes orientation, including a clear articulation regarding what an outcomes orientation looks like in the ACTPS, why it is needed to achieve its purpose, and what is expected to be different if it was created and embedded in organisational culture.
- A need for a purposeful approach to working from the office: there is a need for teams within ACTPS Directorates to clearly establish when and why teams should work from the office. This may include identifying specific activities that require face-to-face interaction to realise improved outcomes, as well as clarifying sociocultural benefits, such as social learning through modelling or the transfer of tacit knowledge regarding how the organisation works. A purposeful approach to hybrid working could encourage employees to see themselves as part of an organisational

greater work-life balance (Bentley et al., 2016; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Shuck & Reio, 2014), 2 employee well-being (Hall & Atkinson, 2006; Noblet et al., 2005) and productivity (Bloom et al., 2014; Colley & Williamson, 2020). However, if not well supported and carefully managed, some types of flexibility, such as working from home, can exacerbate work-family conflict and spill-over,

3.1 Benefits of flexible working

There are a range of benefits associated with flexible working. These include higher levels of employee well-being due to enabling employees to balance or integrate work and personal demands (Casey & Grzywacz, 2008; Sánchez-Vidal et al., 2012; Sut et al., 2013; ter Hoeven & van Zoonen, 2015). Such benefits are largely attributed to employees being able to exercise greater control over when and where they work (Bentley et al., 2016; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Kelly et al., 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Employees having control over working time and location is important for their well-being (Hall & Atkinson, 2006; Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Noblet et al., 2005) as they can then regulate other aspects of their life, having the ability to reschedule work activities to address caring responsibilities (Hall & Atkinson, 2006; Lapierre & Allen, 2006). This enables higher levels of job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction (Hammer et al., 2009; Oishi et al., 1999; Wheatley, 2017a, 2017b). Specifically, teleworking (including working from home), has been found to increase motivation, engagement and job satisfaction (Bai & Kim, 2016; Callier et al., 2012; Lee & Kim, 2018; Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018). Callier et al. (2012) attribute this to employees having greater autonomy, which has been found to be an antecedent to job satisfaction.

productive, or have been reported being more productive, when working from home. A 2020 survey of 12,000 professionals in the US, India and Germany found that 75% of employees felt they had maintained or improved productivity in the first months of the pandemic while working from home (Dahik et al., 2020). By the end of 2020, surveys of employees and managers globally were consistently revealing self-reported increases to productivity while working from home. Data from a global survey found that 68% of respondents reported increased productivity (Iometrics, 2020). In Australia, 82% of workers reported being as productive, or more productive, when they worked from home (NSWIPC, 2020). These surveys support research that has found that both managers and employees report higher levels of productivity when working from home than when working in their usual workplace (Bloom et al., 2014; Colley & Williamson, 2020).

3.4 The future of work is hybrid

As public health restrictions have eased, there has been considerable discussion about how to optimise hybrid working. Hybrid working is a form of flexible working when employees split their time between working at home and at employer sites (Graham, 2022; Halford, 2005). It provides the opportunity for senior leaders, managers and employees working from different locations, including home, corporate offices, activity-based working spaces, and remote working hubs, facilitated by supportive information and communication technology (ICT) (see McKinsey Global Institute, 2021; Nenonen & Sankari, 2022; Williamson & Colley, 2022; Williamson et al., 2021). Many have claimed that hybrid working is the 'new normal' or future way of working (see Gratton, 2021; NSWIPC, 2020; PWC, 2021; Williamson & Colley, 2022), as it is the preferred and expected model of working for many employees due to increasing choice regarding when to undertake work that requires greater concentration and communication (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022; Graham, 2022). However, debates are emerging on how to optimise the balance between office and home-based working, with executives preferring employees to work from the office at least three days per week and employees preferring to work from home three days per week (PwC, 2021). Organisations are also considering whether employees should choose their days in the workplace, or whether this should be mandated by leaders and managers (Bloom, 2021).

Although hybrid working is the preferred model of many workers, it must be managed strategically and purposefully to ensure desired outcomes, such as enhanced productivity and work-life balance. Thus, attention needs to be devoted to how hybrid working is designed and managed; this requires intentionality to carefully balance the benefits and downsides of each location (Gratton, 2021). For example, the productivity of employees working at home can be impeded if employees experience social or professional isolation, which also lowers employee commitment (Choi, 2018). This highlights the central role of managers in not only supporting flexible working, but in actively managing flexible working arrangements within their teams (see also MacNeil, 2003; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Williamson et al., 2022), particularly to optimise the benefits and minimise the risks and disadvantages, associated with flexible working.

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Overall, research into flexible working demonstrates that it can result in both positive and negative impacts for employees, highlighting the need for employers to establish mechanisms to optimise value gained from flexible working, while minimising its negative impacts.

4 Study details

To identify how the ACT Public Service (ACTPS) can better support effective flexible working, and address the research questions, we adopted a mixed method research design, drawing on the following data sources:

- ACTPS Flexible Work Working Group Meetings: focused on experiences with flexible working across all ACTPS directorates and emergent themes to ensure broader applicability of the findings.
- Human resource manager focus groups: Nine focus groups were undertaken with 31 senior and middle human resource (HR) managers from the eight ACTPS directorates. The groups enabled an exploration of broader perceptions regarding flexible working in the ACTPS to gain a contextual understanding of potential differences across Directorates. In the report, quotes from these focus groups are represented as HR FG and the focus group number; for example, HR FG 1.
- General employee focus groups: 15 focus groups were undertaken with 53 participants to establish an in-depth understanding of flexible working within three Directorates: Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development (CMTEDD), Community Services (CSD) and Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development (EPSDD). Overall, these focus groups explored the experiences of 35 Senior Office Grade (SOG) level staff (31 staff over age 50, four staff under age 30) and 18 Administrative Service Officer (ASO) level staff (nine staff over age 50, nine staff younger than age 30). These age groups were selected as focus groups with HR managers identified them as having unique experiences of flexible working. In the report, quotes from these focus groups are represented as Directorate number, level and age; for example, D2 SOG 50+.
- Secondary Use of Existing Datasets: we accessed aggregated, de-identified data from the following:
    - ACTPS Employee Census: summary statistics of responses to ACTPS wide survey on working experiences and attitudes
    - Microsoft 365 data report: summary data visualisations developed by an external consultant of the ACTPS using 365 data
    - Turnstile data: building entry and exit events
    - Wayfinding data: meeting room bookings
- ACTPS policy and administrative documents: we accessed relevant policy and administrative documents such as the ACTPS flexible working policy, interstate working policy, the ACTPS submission to the Future of the Working Week Inquiry (Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality), ACTPS Survey Insights papers

The agreed upon sample of the research was office-based knowledge workers located in either of the two activity-based working buildings (in London Circuit, Canberra city and Dickson). In this study, we adopt the definition of knowledge workers by Reinhardt et al. (2011) who define it as:

> … the execution of knowledge-intensive tasks (e.g., decision-making, knowledge-production scenarios, and monitoring organizational performance), with IT support. In this domain, knowledge work essentially consists of the organization of information artifacts, their creation, consideration, and transformation. The work process is dominated by communication, data production, and consumption actions: sending and processing mails, web browsing, working on documents, or doing calculations (p.153).

We focused on knowledge workers due to their work primarily being computer-based, and, therefore, theoretically more conducive to flexible working. We also focused on middle managers and employees due to the ACTPS seeking to remain an employer of choice and therefore being interested in how to improve support and the effectiveness of flexible working from that perspective.

Our study sought to capture insights into the composition and diversity of the ACTPS via the Working Group and human resource manager focus groups across all Directorates, but employee focus groups sampled only office-based knowledge workers. There is a large proportion of ACTPS employees who have very limited access to working from home; these employees are in service delivery and operational roles. Ways to support these employees to achieve some level of flexibility requires further investigation as this was beyond the scope of our research.

The study received ethics approval from the UNSW ethics committee (approval number HC210666). To protect participants' privacy, quotes are attributed to the age and staff level of the participant but include no other potentially identifying characteristics.

5 Findings

As outlined above, the scope of this project was knowledge workers in the two ACTPS activity-based working buildings (in Canberra city and Dickson). Given the investment in technology and the built environment, as well as widespread working from home prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the research questions focus on the experiences of ACTPS employees in working from different locations, flexibility in timing and how they have used technology and communication tools while working flexibly. We were also interested in knowing if patterns of use differed across occupational and demographic groups, and the linkages between technology and desired behaviours and outcomes, such as knowledge sharing, collaboration and productivity.

5.1 Context

Data was collected between December 2021 and June 2022. At this time, the ACTPS was emerging from extended COVID-19 induced public health restrictions and the majority of knowledge workers had been predominantly working from home over the past two years. While focus groups with human resource managers were conducted in March/April 2022, many staff were within the first weeks of returning to the office since March 2020. In addition to this research occurring during a

- There are some concerns that working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the expectation employees will work through personal or family illness.
- Concerns were also raised by some staff regarding unreasonable expectations for presenteeism availability and responsiveness, with perceptions that some managers expect staff to be showing they are online and working.

Technology

- Most staff have basic technology needs and were satisfied with the technology available.
- Unequal quality in home working environments resulting from personal domestic and financial circumstances has meant that some staff are required to be in the office more

undercount. It should also be noted that the Canberra city building has individual desk space capacity to accommodate approximately 60% of its workforce.

Figure 1. Percentage of the workforce accessing building at least once per week by Directorate

As office utilisation rates intersect with capacity, it is important to also look at frequency of use. As shown in Figure 2, staff in CSD attend the office more regularly than other Directorates in the Canberra city building, with 43% of staff attending the office 3-5 times per week, compared with 21% of CMTEDD. This finding was supported in focus group data where CSD participants reported that higheroffice attendance reflects the larger proportion of the workforce with public facing duties (e.g., child and youth protection officers). As such, the CSD sample captures more than knowledge workers (which was the focus of this study). CMTEDD participants, conversely, reported having a designated 1-2 days for their team to attend the office. This designation was reported as being determined by COVID-19 restrictions and Directorate level executive management decisions.

Figure 2. Number of days of office attendance per week by Directorate

There was variation, both within and across Directorates as to whether office attendance was perceived to be optional or mandatory. This was evident in discussions with focus group participants who expressed different perspectives as to whether they had

team day(s). Although most research participants reported enjoying the social aspects of periodic office attendance, there was resistance to mandatory weekly attendance or arbitrarily assigned days, with many questioning the value or purpose of attending the office when working productively at home. This was particularly when office days primarily consist of independent, desk-based working; the type of work perceived to be more suitable when working from home. As one participant noted:

> I'm … a bit resistant to arbitrary days … If I'm just sitting behind a computer and a lot of my work is computer based, it makes no sense for me to be in an office nine to five … I just don't see the logic anymore (D2 SOG 50+).

In addition to general resistance to mandatory weekly attendance, focus group participants expressed a strong negative attitude towards activity-based working, primarily due to the design and configuration of the buildings. This was reported to discourage people working in the office. Key points of complaint include inefficiencies in setting desk space up and packing down, difficulty finding people in rotational desks, and high levels of noise due to lack of sound barriers in desks or around informal meeting areas including kitchens. As one focus group participant explained:

> … noise from the kitchen kind of goes straight into the desk areas, everyone's trying to be quiet in the kitchen space, which is a pity, because it's a beautiful space, it's just not necessarily practical in that sense. Whereas my previous area had like a huge kitchen with shared seating areas, but with closed doors all the time, so there was that sound barrier. And so yeah, incidental conversations haven't happened all that much at [London Cct] in that respect (D2 ASO <30).

Participants discussed how the activity-based working buildings are configured around 'neighbourhoods', which are clusters of desks where teams are allocated a joint space to work. However, some expressed concerns about being restricted to neighbourhoods that centre around teams. This configuration was argued to restrict cross-team interactions, as well as enhance social isolation for employees whose team members are not frequently working from the office. This was due to being the only one working in their designated team space.

Participants also reported that being restricted to neighbourhoods perpetuates issues with lack of guaranteed desk space, which is particularly an issue for groups with high levels of office-based working and large teams. Participants in large teams reported that COVID-19 imposed restrictions and lack of building space meant that all team members could not be physically present in the office at the same time. Many teams negotiated office attendance and worked together to accommodate team members in a designated work area; for example, through establishing rosters so half or a third of the team (depending on team size) can work from the office on each designated day. However, the lack of guaranteed and sufficient desk space presents an impediment to free choice in location of work due to restricting the days individuals can work from the office. Furthermore, multiple participants reported territorialism over space, with some teams occupying and claiming space on their non-designated days.

> There's another team that seem to be all there all the time, and they put post-it notes saying that this is their desk. So, we can't actually get a desk in that area. So, we've moved to a different area that's we're not meant to be in (D3 ASO 50+).

These findings demonstrate that many ACTPS employees have been able to work from home, and participants reported this was conducive to productivity and work

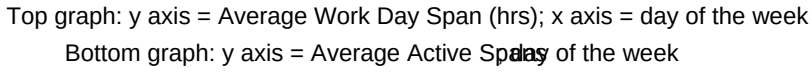
commitment. The need for ongoing availability updates, and frequent reference to the traffic light system denoting individual availability in Microsoft Teams, appeared to influence how freely some individuals engaged with flexibility in timing of work. This was largely due to concerns that others would perceive employees to be not working if they were not visible online or responsive, contributing to the perceived need to "always be online" (D1 SOG <30). In part, these concerns appeared to stem from an ongoing focus on presenteeism. As one focus group participant commented:

> I do definitely want to not let my computer go to sleep or something if I'm sitting here for a while, reading something on my computer blanks out. I'm like, 'oh, crap … I'm gonna appear offline' … I do see that … other people … expect a level of responsiveness from us that I don't necessarily hold for other people" (D3 SOG under 30).

Microsoft 365 data

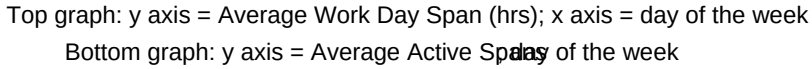
Meta-data collected from the Microsoft 365 platform was used as an indicator of digital work behaviour for CMTEDD, including but not limited to email-2.4a4Dc5 (n)4.7 (o)-(o)-0.6 (m)-1.4 (p)-5.1 ()-0.7 (

Figure 4. Digitally active hours by time and day 2021 (Source: ACTPS report)



Highly active hours in 2019 (presented in Figure 5) shows a similar pattern of early work (bar graph, bottom of figure), suggesting that flexibility in work scheduling was widely utilised prior to the pandemic. However, 2019 is characterised by a shorter span of digitally active hours (line graph, top of figure) and a slightly lower quantity of digitally active hours per day (bar graph, bottom of figure).

Figure 5. Digitally active hours by time and day 2019 (Source: ACTPS report)



In both 2019 and 2021, the peak 8am period contained the longest span of highly active digital activity. In 2019 the 8am

interdependence and service support delivery. For example, individuals in coordination / liaison, administrative support and information points (e.g., internal call centres) are more likely to have a high quantity of Teams interactions that may not reflect the quality of connections developed via those interactions.

Communication within teams

Our focus group data suggest there is potential for existing team dynamics to be accentuated in an online environment. For example, in teams where regular communication, inclusive practices and supportive behaviours were already evident, these practices were transferred to the online environment utilising the tools available to facilitate communication and purposeful social interactions. However, in teams that were not inclusive or cohesive, negative behaviours were heightened due to less frequent engagement and/or active disengagement, such as individuals not turning up for team meetings or events. Less frequent team engagement appeared to be associated with social isolation and dysfunctional team cultures, which were characterised by disengaged staff, lack of motivation and lack of social connections.

Communicating online may be associated with more risk of unacceptable behaviour. This may be due to a lack of face-to-face interactions and the ability to address issues as they occur, or a lack of visibility weakening social norms around acceptable behaviour. As one participant noted:

> … [working from home has] kind of emboldened what I personally think was not very professional behaviour, because they weren't seeing people in person … I guess once you're at home for a while, and you don't have to have discretion and professionalism as much because you're just by yourself in front of a screen, and those like trolls on the internet, I feel like some of that kind of seeped into the workplace, which was really unpleasant … I guess a bad situation was made worse probably by the fact that we weren't in the office … I think the managerial response was good, but I think that being apart also made it difficult for them to intervene effectively because it's all remotely (D2 ASO <30).

Communication across teams

An additional area of concern for some participants was the potential for reduced connections within Directorates. While some participants highlighted that, in some contexts, senior managers were using Microsoft Teams to hold Branch and/or Division meetings, others reported minimal communication and coordination across teams within Directorates. Several participants reported having minimal contact or interaction outside of their team, with some having no broader awareness of their directorate or what other teams are working on. This may reflect broader analyses by Microsoft that the move to remote working has made teams more siloed, with broader networks and inter-team interactions decreasing (Microsoft, 2021). Some participants claimed there has been an enhancement of silo mentalities and fragmented relationships. However, we are cautious to claim this represents broader experiences across the ACTPS, as PSC Employee Census results state that 92% of respondents were able to work effectively with others outside their immediate work group. Due to potential implications for the cohesiveness and strength of organisational cultures, it may highlight an area that warrants further investigation.

These findings highlight areas of effective practice, with the utilisation of technology and communication tools to support flexible working. The extent to which these tools are utilised largely seems to be shaped by team-level factors, specifically team size and dynamics, and the level of task interdependence within the team. It appears that existing team dynamics are accentuated in an online environment, which can affect the extent to which tools are utilised.

Overall, the findings for Research Question 1 highlight that ACTPS employees have flexibility to determine the location and timing of their work. However, the extent to which flexibility is exercised

is constrained by several factors concerning the built environment, perceptions attendance was closely monitored when working from home, issues with home office set-up, a lack of clear rationale for working from the office, and team-level factors.

5.3 Research question 2: How does the utilisation of technology, location, timing and communication tools vary across the range of occupations and demographic groups?

Summary

- Our analysis was constrained by limited access to quantitative data and its analytical power.
- Our qualitative data highlights that a key occupation of interest is managers, who were reported as using technology and communication tools at a high rate.
- There are several factors that may explain the high usage of technology by managers, including the increased workloads required during the COVID-19 pandemic (due to the transition to working from home), an ongoing crisis orientation to working, managers

dissipated over time as work practices had become embedded. However, participant reports of attendance being closely monitored (identified in Research Question 1) suggests that some managers continue to closely monitor their staff working from home, which may contribute to higher technology usage. This may suggest that such monitoring indicates a digital working manifestation of presenteeism, where some managers value knowing employees are either physically or virtually 'present', as opposed to focusing on the results they deliver. It also seemed to contribute to the increased workload of managers.

Our qualitative data suggests that for some staff, working from home contributed to greater work-life spill over, due to inadequate work boundaries and unrealistic expectations regarding availability; these challenges were most often reported by managers. Some participants reported that working from the office enabled clearer boundaries, with delineation between work and home. This was often facilitated by transition moments, such as the commute to and from work. In contrast, widespread home-based working has blurred the boundaries between work and non-work contexts. Amongst managers, many participants reported receiving phone calls on their personal mobile at all times of day, including if they did not immediately respond to an email sent 'urgently'.

> … I think I deliver more than I used to, and I prioritise better, so on paper that's like 'yay, flexible work going really well', but on the personal mental side I'm not so sure anymore, because … I now feel 24/7 a bit … Whereas I think in any inuan3 (k)(een)-0.6 (w)-1.8 (o)(k)(e7 (…)-2.9o9ei-5.1 (din (l)-5)-7

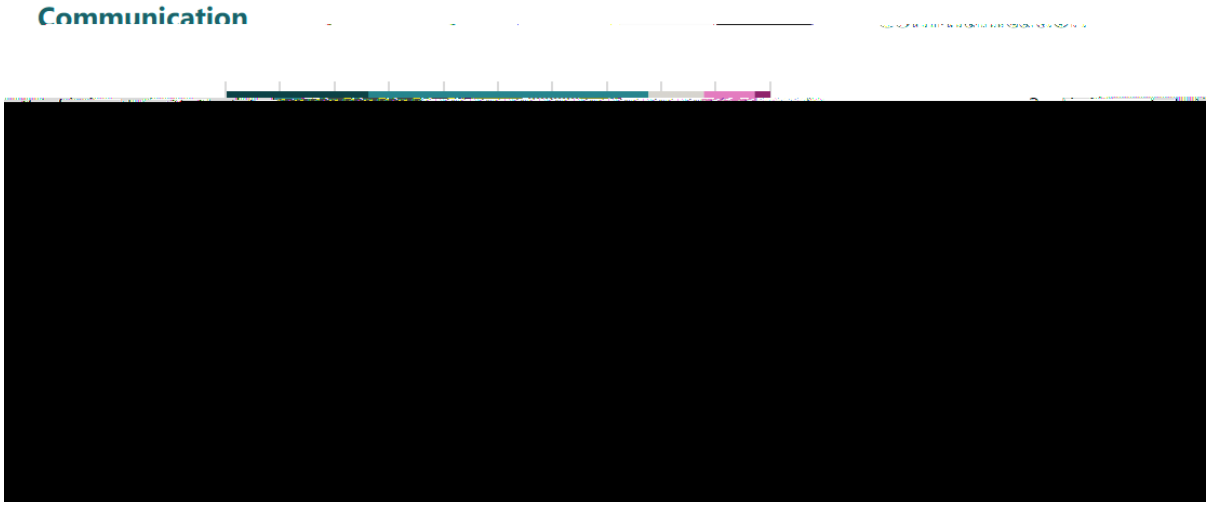
health-wise. So, I think I would really take a hit to my mental wellbeing if I had to go five days a week in the office (D3 SOG <30).

5.4 Research question 3: How does current technology support productivity, knowledge sharing and collaboration?

Summary

- Technology is an essential baseline factor for supporting effective flexible working; however, is insufficient on its own for enhancing productivity, knowledge sharing and collaboration.
- Factors such as work environment, managers, and team structures and dynamics, are core to the effectiveness of flexible working.
- Participants perceive that working from home has enabled greater productivity and has

Figure 8: Patterns of communication



Specialist knowledge sharing

Participants with certain specialist roles (e.g., technical officers or personnel officers) reported that technology and virtual communication tools enabled knowledge sharing. This is due to the screen sharefunction enabling more interactive and advanced demonstration than typical office settings which rely on sharing a single desktop screen.

> So, a lot of my teamwork in a technical space and with data as I've mentioned, and so, like sharing knowledge is often done by looking at each other's screens. With Microsoft Teams, screensharing is so easy that actually it's almost easier doing it on Microsoft Teams because you're both looking at the same thing and you can both see exactly where the mouse is and have that conversation while stepping the other person through it, rather than me needing to drive or it, you know, having to sit right next to someone in order to talk them through that process. So, I've actually found in that sense it's been easier to go through and provide additional knowledge in some of these technical areas (D1 SOGs < 30).

The privacy of the virtual environment was also identified as an enabler of knowledge sharing and communication regarding sensitive issues, due to their security or personal nature.

> It's [working from home] a perfect solution for us because we have to have private conversations with people and that thing it's just far easier to be able to do [at home] … So, I don't I have on-lookers, and that makes it so much easier to conduct private conversations… so that certainly works a lot better for us, especially when you are not in the line of sight of our colleagues (D2 ASO 50+).

Our findings highlight that technology plays a role in supporting productivity, knowledge sharing and collaboration in flexible working contexts. However, this is more of a baseline factor – without the technology, flexible working would not be possible. But the extent to which it enables desired outcomes on its own is limited. Therefore, technology is insufficient on its own, with other factors such as managers, team structures and dynamics, and work requirements being core to the effectiveness of flexible working.

In the ACTPS context, although the term ‘teams’ is used frequently, in many circumstances the characteristics of ‘true teams’ are not always apparent, with many working in groups that is, a collection of individuals who perform tasks independently. Several participants reported working in teams of less than three or greater than 10 team members, with those in smaller teams largely undertaking tasks independently and reporting to their line manager. Employees also tended to experience higher levels of social isolation, and less frequent communication and engagement with colleagues. Participants who reported working in larger teams (> 10 members) conveyed that they share information and update their colleagues, but there was scant evidence of team members working towards a common purpose and undertaking interdependent work.

There were also issues with accommodating all team members in the same office space. It appeared that, in small and large teams, there was a tendency for employees to focus on their personal circumstances and the benefits of flexible working for them as an individual, contributing to a continued desire to primarily work from home, rather tha

fragmentation across teams. This highlights the need for Directorates to consider how to encourage a sense of embeddedness. Our data highlights two issues reported to impede this: restricting teams to neighbourhoods within the activity-based working buildings; and technology and communication tools not being utilised to share knowledge and collaborate across teams.

Our findings highlight that team-based approaches enable more effective flexible working in three ways. Firstly, they take the burden of responsibility off individual managers to be the key facilitator of team interactions; secondly, they encourage greater use of technology, communication tools and the built environment to optimise the sense of social connectedness, purpose and community among employees; and, thirdly, they enable the achievement of desired outcomes. This supports claims in the literature th

their approach to people management and the impact this had on their support, or not, of flexible working.

The research shows that flexible working exacerbates and accentuates existing managerial styles. That is, when managers are focused on actively managing people, they are supportive and see the benefits of flexible working and actively work to enhance the benefits gained. However, those managers who are less focused on active people management struggle to optimise the benefits of flexible working. As one participant noted:

> … I would suggest that the managers who … have a personal bias to always want to drive their staff harder and longer and have problems with leave and other conditions of work flex, and whatever. This seems to be, that's the hotbed, this environment is a hotbed for them to keep driving and driving. The ones that are reasonable and understand the limitations of the job and

A key factor attributed to effective flexible working is trust. That is, managers being trusted to manage their team in a way that enables the attainment of team goals, while also meeting individual preferences as much as practicable. It also involves managers trusting their team and employees to undertake their work, aligned with their performance expectations. However, trust levels vary across the ACTPS, with some managers trusting their staff to undertake their work at a time and in a location that best supports and enables them to perform and meet personal demands, whereas other managers are deeply entrenched in a presenteeism mindset not underpinned by trust.

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		x Coaching to support managers as they move to worki this way. x Ensure that performance management processes encourage a focus and measurement of outp and outcomes, rather than inputs.
Developing a hybrid team not a group	The need for purposeful approaches to working highlight th need to support managers to proactively manage team interactions to enhance cohesion. This includes their ability to communicate and encourage people to work as part of a team, what is expected in terms of personal contribution and team effort, and what work is required in the office and face-to-face. A key focus is on how to manage a hybrid team effectively.	x This reinforces the need for support requirements including learning and development on: o How to increase team cohesiveness o How to manage hybrid and online workers o How to create effective team goals and accountabilities.
Managing expectations	Managing expectations is important for both leaders, in terms of clarifying what their managers need to do, and for managers, focused on what their team is expected to do (see Blackman et al., 2019). Managing expectations covers both desired behaviours and	

In proposing these four elements of effective flexible working, we identify several areas that require action. However, we also recognise there is already work underway in some areas, to varying degrees of maturity. Our suggestions for improvement could build on existing work to drive future performance.

We also recognise that, given the limitations in our research, more work is required to explore some of the themes presented in more detail and understand the broader context of flexible working in the ACTPS. Our qualitative participant sample was restricted to human resource managers across eight directorates and general staff in three directorates, with 84 participants in total. It was also focused on knowledge workers in the activity based working buildings. This only covers a small proportion of the ACTPS workforce which, in 2020-2021, comprised 26,141 employees covering a range of classification groups (i.e., administrative, policy, service delivery medical, education, legal, fire and rescue, correctional officers, transport, technical) (ACT Government, 2021). Staff work across several locations, including flexi offices, schools, hospitals and bus terminals. Therefore, further research is required across diff S(e)0G-2 (t)-4.8 (h)-6.1 (e (v)-1.5 41[(S(e)-2.9 5 4P2 (rc)3S-0.7 (r)-0.7 (e)(e (v

operational context and empower them to manage flexible working in ways that ensure work demands and team

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8 Appendix A: Methodology

In this study we adopted a mixed methods research design. Mixed methods research is defined as “the class of

- ACTPS Employee Census: summary statistics of responses to ACTPS wide survey on working experiences and attitudes
- Microsoft 365 data report: summary report developed by an external consultant using 365 data
- Turnstile data: building entry and exit events.
- Wayfinding data: meeting room bookings.

This project received ethics approval from the Human Research Advisory Panel A: University of New South Wales Canberra (approval number HC210666).

Qualitative data analysis

Flexible work working group and focus group sessions were recorded, transcribed and loaded into the qualitative research software NVivo. We undertook a process of open, axial and selective coding to identify emergent patterns, themes and interrelationships (Patton 1990). The open coding process involved: (a) reviewing the data line-by-

primary, limitationof this data for insight into flexible working more broadly is its confinement to the Microsoft 365 suite (including Outlook, Teams and SharePoint).

9 Appendix B: Flexible Work Working Group questions

Question	Purpose
1. Why are you interested in improving flexible working within your Directorate?	Elicit insights into why WG members

10 Appendix C: HR manager focus group questions

Questions	Purpose
1. How is flexible working implemented in your Directorate? How does this differ across occupational and work groups? a. How do patterns of flexible working differ across these groups (e.g., location, time)? b. What are your plans moving forward with flexible working?	

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11 Appendix D: Focus Group Protocols

Focus Group Guide – ASOs under 30

Questions	Purpose
1. How has flexible working been managed in your team? i. How prevalent is remote working in your work context / team? a) Do a lot of staff work remotely, or do they mostly work from the new buildings? Why do you think this is? b) How are decisions about location and hours of work made (e.g., collective decision-making, individual-led, manager-led)? c) Are there equity issues around access or inclusion? ii. Can you reflect on whether particular cohorts of employees favour some work locations (e.g., home v office)? Why you think this is? For example, younger workers / early in career, older workers / more advanced in career, across SOGs / ASO?	To gain an understanding of what flexible working arrangements are in place at the team level and whether there are differences across employee cohorts.

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	v.	What data would be helpful to support more effective flexible working in the future?	

4. For those of you who are starting to think about retirement, what role, if any, does flexible working play in enabling the transition to retirement?	To gain an understanding of whether flexible working has impacted retirement intentions and plans.
5. How can flexible working be better supported in [Directorate]? i. Reflecting on the past two years, what has been working well and therefore should continue? ii. Reflecting on the past two years, what has not been working well and therefore should stop? iii. What additional processes and procedures, systems and/or behaviours would need to be in place to enable its effectiveness? iv. How can flexible working be embedded your work context? v. What data would be helpful to support more effective flexible working in the future?	To gain insight into perceptions regarding areas of strength and areas for improvement.
6. Are there forms of flexibility not currently available or not commonly used that would support your preferences for flexible working (e.g., extended leave without pay, job sharing)?	To determine if there is a desire for broader forms of flexible working.
7. Is there anything you wanted to say that you haven't had a chance to say? Or anything you want to add to the discussion before we leave?	

Focus Group Guide – SOGs under 30

Questions	Purpose

2. To what extent has flexible working, particularly widespread work-from-home, changed dynamics within your team, or your feeling of connectedness?
    i. What changes have you seen

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Focus Group Guide – SOGs over 50

Questions	Purpose
1. How has flexible working been managed in your team? i. How prevalent is remote working in your work context / team? a) Do a lot of staff work remotely, or do they mostly work from the new buildings? Why do you think this is? b) How are decisions about location and hours of work made (e.g., collective decision-making, individual-led, manager-led)ed)k t) a)	