Effective strategies for making flexible working 'work'

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Flexible working has been defined as 'the opportunity of workers to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks' (Bal & De Lange, 2015, p. 127).

65% of employees report having access to flexible work, with **42%** making use of flexible work arrangements (European Commission, 2018).

Benefits of flexible work:

- Work effort & motivation ✔
- Productivity & organizational citizenship ✔
- Job satisfaction & organizational commitment ✔
- Work-life balance ✔
- Autonomy ✔

'Dark side' of flexible work:

- Work intensification & career 'penalties' ✖

- Perceptions of unfairness ✖

- Competitive climate & stigma ✖

- Marginalization & perceptions of reduced contribution ✖

Working 'anytime' can become working all the time

"My team know when I'm not in that they can get hold of me, usually at night I will pick up my emails…the expectation is that if I am sending an email [at night]…they know quite well that they only need to respond when they are in work. So it's more me following up things then rather than asking them to deliver things outside of work because that's inappropriate. So they know that as well and I try to avoid it…"

Can lead to expectations of being 'on' all the time…

Success of flexible working depends on the quality of the relationship with the manager

But, because flexible workers often work in teams, also with coworkers:

….perceptions of unfairness, effects on cooperation & collaborative working, willingness to cover for colleagues….

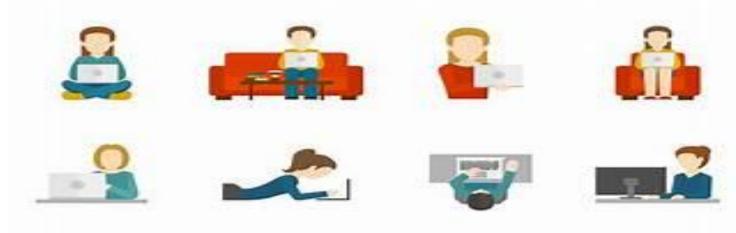# Managers are often reluctant to grant flexible working because….

- Belief that it may be difficult to manage
- It might cause tensions within teams
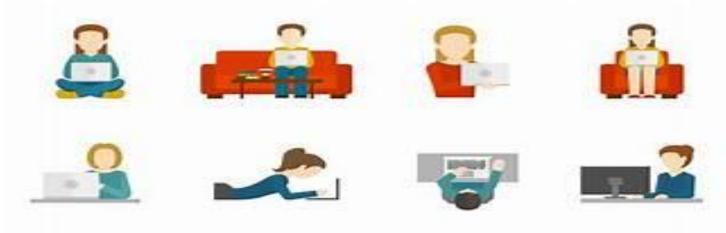- Communication issues (for both individuals and managers)

Strategies for negotiation of flexible working

- Ensure there are clear communications, including setting boundaries and managing expectations

- Be open to requests for flexible working on an individual basis and consider each request on its merits, using consistent principles

- Make formalized arrangements, but ensure that both parties maintain a willingness to be 'flexible with flexibility'

Strategies for managing flexible working

- Implement consistent practices across teams to ensure perceived fairness

- Remain open to ongoing 'crafting' of jobs to ensure that practices may be adapted over time

- Encourage managers to work flexibly themselves, so they act as role models, and develop an understanding of the issues associated with flexible working

Ensuring an effective and sustainable flexible work culture

- Manage within teams – focus not only on those who work flexibly, but also how this affects others within the team

- Success of flexible working depends on the quality of the relationship with the manager, and also with coworkers

- Develop a positive and supportive organizational culture, which will help to mitigate problems associated with flexible working