

Flexible versus fixed working hours: what works best for businesses?

It's no secret that the pandemic changed many businesses' ways of working. But in a post-Covid-19 world, how can firms reevaluate what method is best for them?

Ways of working have changed since the pandemic, and so have people's approach to their jobs. When our freedom of movement was restricted during the lockdowns, we were forced to work from home and could suddenly better utilise the hours that were once spent commuting or getting stuck in the office late.

As the pandemic has waned, the shift in attitude to work hasn't. The 'Great Resignation' after the height of the pandemic has seen people quitting their jobs voluntarily en masse, instead looking for new opportunities, better work and life balance, and remote or flexible working.

When it comes to the latter, businesses are facing pressure from employees to justify their stance on hours. Flexible and fixed hours each have their benefits and downfalls – but is one better than the other when it comes to both staff satisfaction and business success?

Flexible working allows us to access the best talent

Research by time tracking app DeskTime found that 59.1% of businesses that employ office workers are now offering flexible working hours. The rest – 40.9% – requires people to work fixed office hours. The study included 5,000+ companies worldwide that use DeskTime and had either set fixed office hours or indicated that they offer flexible working hours.

What does this data tell us? It shows that working from home during lockdown restrictions gave many people who were used to commuting to an office everyday more freedom when it came to a work and life balance. More flexible hours have become a byproduct of this.

“Just a few years ago, flexible working hours were seen as a privilege of freelancers and lucky ones,” explains Artis Rozentals, CEO of DeskTime. “The pandemic made flexibility mainstream. Our data shows an almost 20 percentage point difference in favour of flexible working hours, and I’m sure this trend is only going to grow. We’ve tasted what it’s like to adjust work to life instead of the other way around, and there is no way back.”

Richard Mabey, CEO and cofounder of the all-in-one contract automation platform Juro, agrees with Rozentals and says – the key reason he offers his staff flexible hours is to help attract the right people and the best talent to the business.

“We believe that a flexible working model and giving people a choice leads to a healthy work environment and an increase in productivity,” says Mabey.

“We try not to discriminate based on where our employees choose to work. It’s important for us to create an equal workplace for all our employees, wherever they desire to work. Therefore, we’ve encouraged flexible working from the get-go, since launching in 2016, which transformed into a fully-fledged remote working model during the height of the pandemic.”

Juro offers its staff office-first, remote-first or choice-first (hybrid) working models, and has created two benefits packages to foster equality amongst staff. One supports and incentivises people who prefer to be remote-first, focusing on elements like budget for home office equipment and WiFi costs. The other package does the same for people who like to work mainly in Juro’s London or Riga hub, and focuses on support for access to social events.

“For us, it’s clear that flexible working arrangements have a big impact on whether employees feel comfortable, happy and productive in their roles,” says Mabey.

“A testament to its success can be seen in our low staff turnover calculated over a period of six months, which is currently at 10.8%. Our own data also suggests that around a third of our employees prefer remote working. It’s vital to cater for such a sizable portion of one’s company.”

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Fixed hours can benefit staff’s mental health

While offering less flexibility overall, fixed hour working still has significant benefits. It creates clear structure for employees, simplifies keeping track of hours worked, and can help separate work and personal life.

Jonathan Bird, director at social media and marketing agency *[Delivered Social](#)*, offers his staff fixed working hours.

“It is important that everyone remains in the loop with each business or charity and can collaborate to ensure a brief is presented cohesively,” says Bird.

“It is for this reason that we run on fixed hours. Communication is one of the most important things to us and we want to keep our reliability high. When clients are fully aware of when and how they can reach the person they need, work gets done much more efficiently and to the best ability of our people.”

According to data by DeskTime, 40.9% of businesses currently offer fixed hours. Bird believes that such an approach can also be positive for staff wellbeing.

“Fixed hours can benefit staff’s mental health as they have a portion of the day dedicated to their job; they can reach the people they need to and clients can ask them questions,” he says. “But, at the end of the day when they ‘clock-out’, they know they will not be disturbed and can shut their laptops down until the next day.

“With remote working taking off, a lot of us struggle to switch off. However, we

are still accommodating to those who need flexibility whether it be for medical reasons, childcare or just the odd off day. While we do have fixed contract hours, flexibility is always available to those who need it.”

When strategising on employee terms, making a list of business priorities and goals will help a company to decide whether to offer flexible or fixed hours. Many industries, such as those who serve clients, are more likely to need staff to be present during certain hours of the day. Others – like creative industries – could lend themselves to a more flexible working pattern.

Remember, there is no right or wrong approach, but ensuring you have an open dialogue with staff and clearly communicate your final decision is essential to build trust and keep morale high.

Article by KIRSTIE PICKERING