



CENTRE FOR
**TRANSFORMATIVE
WORK DESIGN**



Curtin University

FUTURE OF WORK INSTITUTE

HOW TO MAKE MY FLEXIBLE WORK SMART

A GUIDE FOR WORKERS

Innovative research.
Informed leaders.
Inspired workers.

Make tomorrow better.

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About Us

The Future of Work Institute promotes productive and meaningful work as an essential foundation of a healthy economy and society. We seek to understand the impact of the digital age in the workplace, particularly the effects of artificial intelligence, changing demographics, and changing patterns of aspiration and mobility.

The Centre for Transformative Work Design is a Research Centre where passionate organisational psychology researchers and professionals are working together to transform work under the directorship of Australian Research Council Laureate Fellow, Professor Sharon K. Parker. We conduct high quality, independent and innovative research to understand the role of work design in generating healthy and productive work.

Foreword

This project, funded by the Western Australian State Government (details below), aims to provide evidence-based and practical resources that inform and enhance the experience of flexible working. The resources provide strategies for employees, teams, and managers to maximise the benefits and reduce the risks of flexible work, and thereby help to support businesses, government, and not-for-profit agencies.

The project is part of the Centre for Transformative Work Design's research program and supports the Thrive at Work initiative; both of which are part of Curtin University's Future of Work Institute.

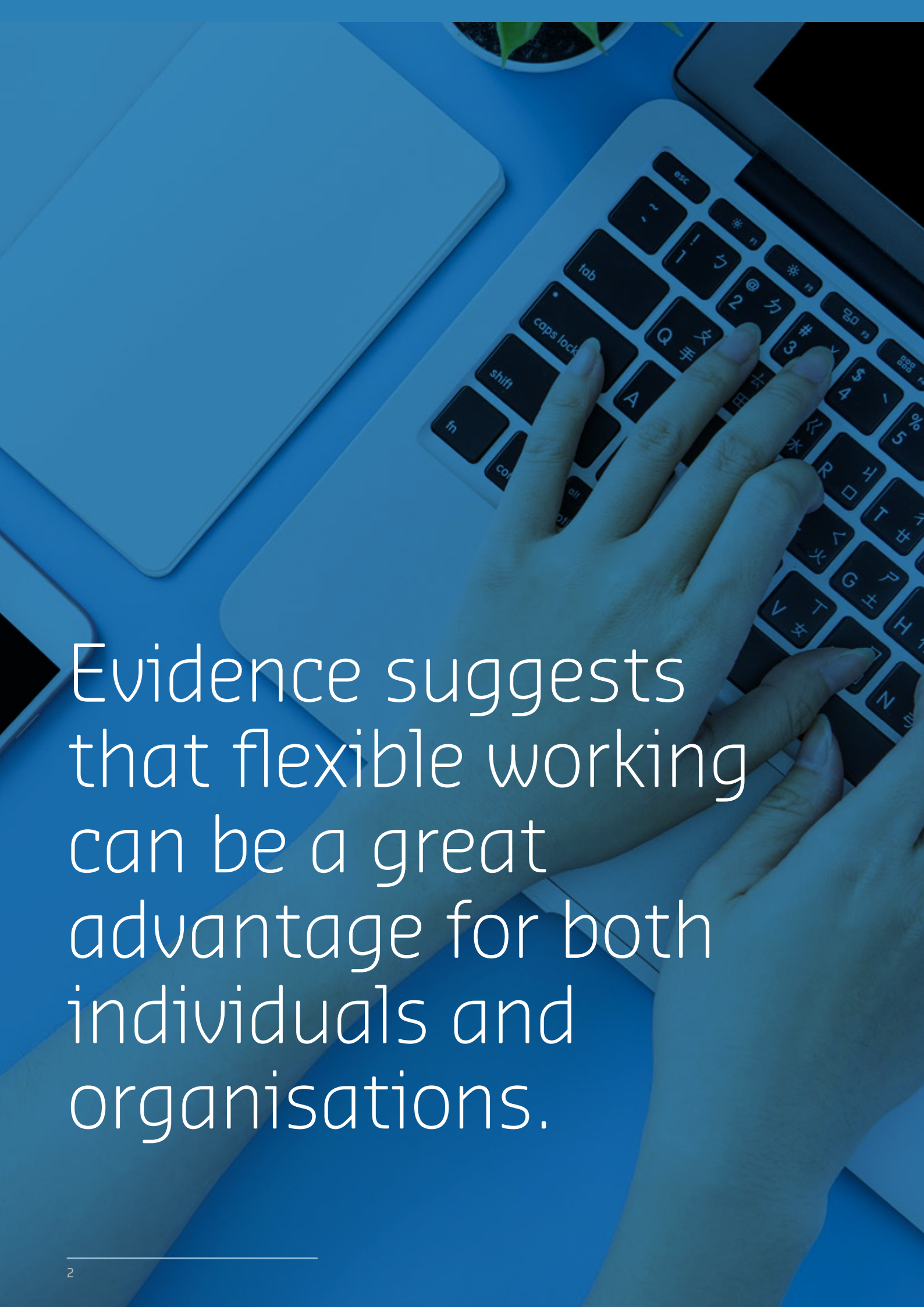
Research Grant Details: Parker, S. K., Griffin, M. A., Jorritsma, K., and Knight, C. (Chief Investigators). Supporting healthy and productive flexible working. Project funded by the Western Australian State Government Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation. 2020. C1128000380.

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It can be cited as: Parker, K., Parker, S. K., & Jorritsma, K. (2020). *How to Make My Flexible Work SMART: A Guide for Workers*. Future of Work Institute. November 2020.

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Evidence suggests
that flexible working
can be a great
advantage for both
individuals and
organisations.

What's in this guide?



Evidence suggests that flexible working- where employees spend at least some of their regular work time outside of the traditional office environment, working from any place (e.g. from home), at any time¹ - can be a great advantage for both individuals and organisations.

However, this advantage only occurs if the right people engage in flexible working (see “**Is flexible work for you?**”), and that they engage in flexible working in the right way (see “**How can I ensure my flexible working is SMART?**”). For an understanding of the research evidence, as well as benefits and challenges of flexible work for individuals, see “**What is the evidence-base?**” in **Appendix 1**. Included in the evidence base is an introduction to our **Global Thrive at Work from Home (WFH) survey**. Some key results from the survey at Time 1 (April 2020) are highlighted throughout this guide, when individuals were mostly working from home (4+ days per week).

The following toolkits are also available and can be accessed below.

- “**How to Manage Virtual Teams for Success: A Guide for Managers**” – Provides guidance on how to successfully manage virtual teams.
- “**How to Lead Flexible Work: A Guide to Successful Policy and Practice for Managers**” – Provides general guidance for managers of flexible workers.

Flexible work: where employees spend a portion of their regular work time outside of the traditional office environment.

What is flexible work?

Telework, telecommuting, virtual work, remote work, flex work, mobile work and others are all terms used to describe flexible work arrangements.¹

Specifically, for the purpose of this guide, the focus is *flexible working in terms of location*, in which employees use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to enable them to carry out work from a distance (i.e. working from home). There are a few different types of flexible working by locations,² such as:

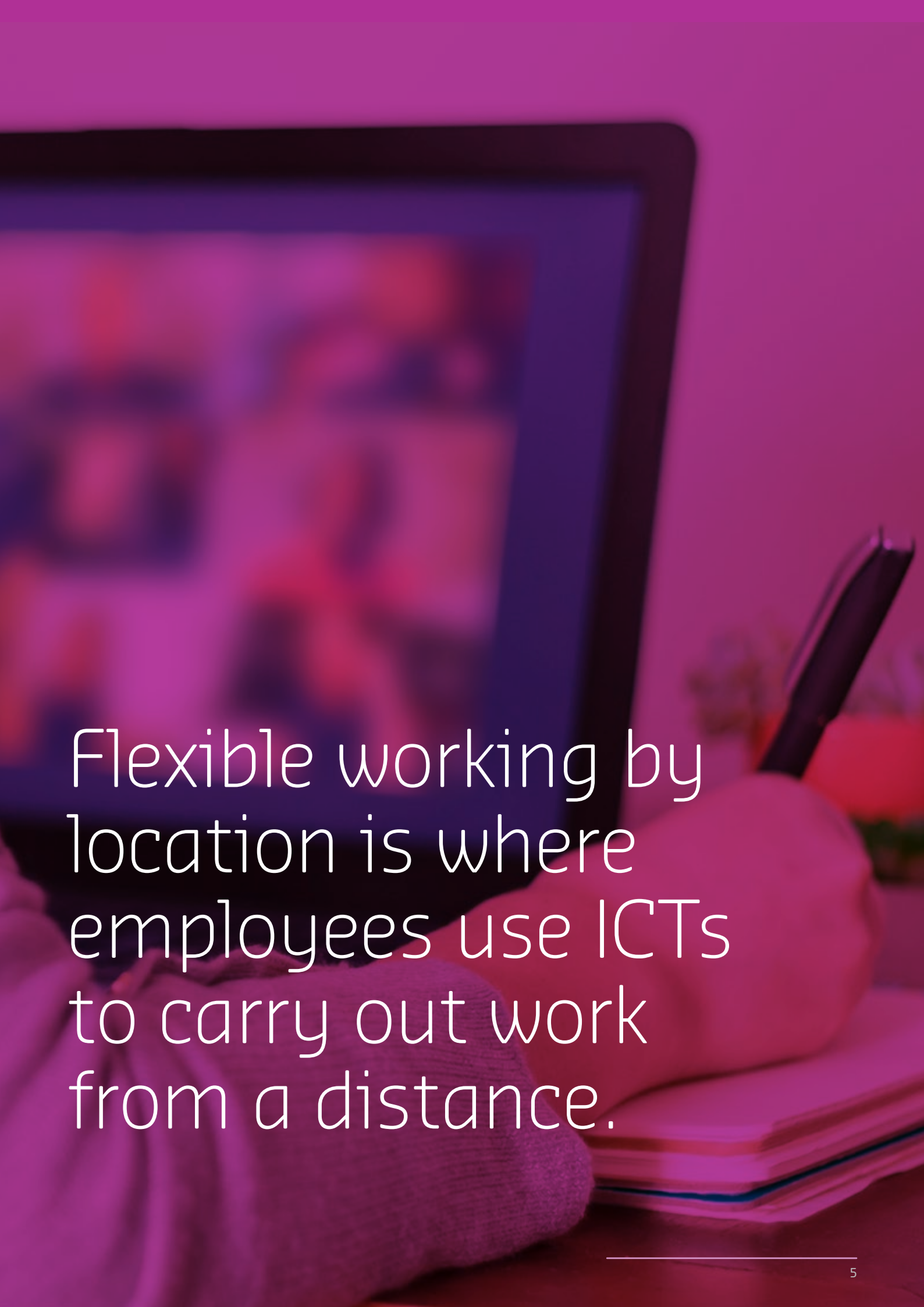
- **Mobile teleworking** – an employee is not located at any one location but travels between locations.
- **Working from home** – sometimes referred to as telecommuting, this is where an employee carries out their work tasks from their home.

- **Telecentres** – local locations that are utilised by the organisation to reduce commuting time and costs.
- **Co-working spaces** – membership-based work spaces that can be shared by remote workers, freelancers or other independent professionals.³

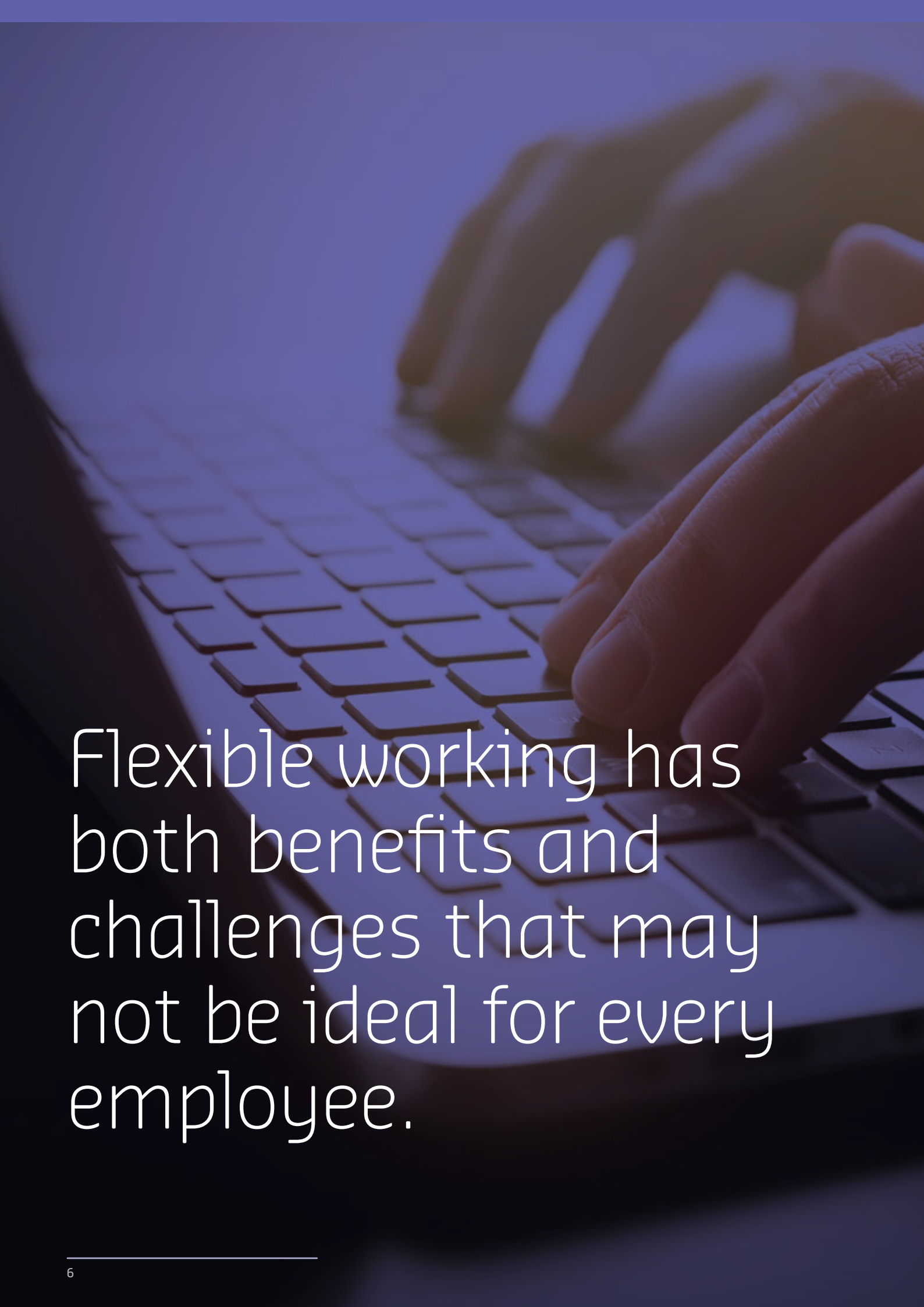
Flexible working by location can vary by intensity, ranging from full-time or on a part-time basis such as 1-2 days per week. The intensity by which people engage in flexible working could be due to a variety of different individual, work design and organisational factors. This will be explored further throughout the guide.

Flexible working by location can vary by intensity, ranging from full-time or on a part-time basis.





Flexible working by location is where employees use ICTs to carry out work from a distance.

A close-up photograph of hands typing on a laptop keyboard, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text is positioned in the lower-left area of the image.

Flexible working has both benefits and challenges that may not be ideal for every employee.

Is flexible work for you?



It is clear that flexible working has both benefits and challenges that may not be ideal for every employee, and this could be due to individual differences, such as in one's personality⁴ as well as differences in one's life situation (e.g., the space for a home office).

For example, workers may differ to the extent that they value autonomy and flexibility and require social interaction.⁵ As such, flexible working practices should not be implemented as a "one size fits all" approach, rather, it is encouraged that there is a good solution for every individual worker, with key individual differences being taken into consideration.

Therefore, it is important to know for whom flexible working may or may not work for to determine the right fit and potential balance regarding the intensity in which an individual engages in flexible working.

This may be due to differences in;

1. Work-home segmentation preferences and perceived workplace norm
2. Motivation and psychological needs
3. Personality
4. Living arrangements.

As such, the first evidenced-based strategy at the individual level includes participating in a valid and reliable self-assessment that will provide insight into your own work-home segmentation preferences, the perceived workplace home-segmentation norm, psychological needs, and personality.

WORK-HOME SEGMENTATION PREFERENCE

Your work-home segmentation preference

One theory that is central to work-home conflict is boundary theory. *Boundary theory* suggests that individuals form and maintain psychological, physical or behavioural boundaries around various life domains, such as work and home, and that individuals differ in terms of their preferences for segmenting or integrating these life domains in order to fulfil work and home life roles.⁶ Individuals routinely negotiate and manage these boundaries between work and home as they participate in their daily activities, which can be negatively impacted on by both individual differences and/or environmental circumstances.⁷

Research shows that people vary in their preferences for segmenting or integrating aspects of work and home.⁷ For example, “Segmenters” prefer to keep home and work domains completely separate (or as much as possible), creating a boundary that keeps work at work, and home at home. In comparison, “Integrators” prefer a to blend elements of both domains, whereby they essentially remove boundaries between home and work. One simple example of a “segmenter” would be that they keep work and personal calendars separate, whereas an “integrator” would prefer a combined calendar for work and home.

This is not to say that “segmenters” may not wish to work from home, however, they may do so less frequently, and when they do, they maintain stronger and more impermeable physical, behavioural,

and psychological boundaries to prevent work from spilling over into the home domain while working from home (e.g. having a designated office space).⁷ For more tips and strategies on boundary management strategies, please see the section on “**Work-home conflict**” in Tolerable Demands. To understand your own work-home segmentation preference, please refer to “**Understand your work-home segmentation preference.**”

Research shows that people vary in their preferences for segmenting or integrating aspects of work and home.

Understand your work-home segmentation preference⁷

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I don't like to have to think about work while I'm at home	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer to keep work life at work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I don't like work issues creeping into my home life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I like to be able to leave work behind when I go home	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Scoring instructions:

To obtain total score, simply add up all the numbers above, with the lowest possible score being 4 and the highest possible score being 28.

Interpretation:

- **High work-home segmentation preference (score between 20 – 28).** This means that you have a strong preference to keep your work and home domains separate.
- **Neutral work-home segmentation preference (score between 13 – 19).** This means that you may not have a strong preference either way for segmentation or integration.
- **Low work-home segmentation preference range (score between 4 – 12).** This means that you have a strong preference for integration, where both your home and work lives blend together.

Your perceived workplace work-home segmentation norm

Another important aspect of boundary management is the perceived segmentation norm in their workplace.⁷ Just as individuals vary in relation to the degree that they segment or integrate work and home domains, workplaces also vary in terms of the environment that promotes either segmentation or integration,^{8,9} either through informal or formal policies, practices and demands.^{6,10,11}

Research has shown that, from a Person-Environment Fit (P-E Fit)

perspective, congruence between an individual's work-home segmentation preference and what the workplace supplies, affects the individual's level of work-home conflict, job satisfaction and stress.⁷ Generally, an individual is better able to negotiate their work-home boundaries thereby, reducing work-home conflict, stress and increasing job satisfaction, when the workplace segmentation perceived norm more closely matches their own preference.⁷ This demonstrates the importance of workplaces recognising and fostering individual work-home segmentation preferences, whether workers are "segmenters" or "integrators," to ensure positive

outcomes, such as the above. For example, if an individual has a high segmentation preference, and the workplace fosters this segmentation (e.g. clear and articulate work hours, no phone calls outside of hours) would be a good fit, and meets that individuals' preferences. However, if that workplace promotes work-home integration (e.g. always needing your work mobile with you, needing to be available after hours), this would likely create more a mismatch, that may not meet the individual's preferences.

To understand your workplaces' work-home segmentation norm, please refer to "**Understand your workplaces' work-home segmentation norm**".

Understand your workplaces' work-home segmentation norm⁷

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
My workplace lets people forget about work when they're at home	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Where I work, people can keep work matters at work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
At my workplace, people are able to prevent work issues from creeping into their home life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Where I work, people can mentally leave work behind when they go home	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Scoring instructions:

To obtain total score, simply add up all the numbers above, with the lowest possible score being 4 and the highest possible score being 28.

Interpretation:

- **High perceived workplace segmentation norm (score between 20 – 28).** This means that you perceive your workplace to have a strong preference for work-home segmentation.
- **Neutral perceived workplace segmentation norm (score between 13 – 19).** This means that you perceive your workplace to not have a strong preference either way for work-home segmentation.
- **Low perceived workplace segmentation norm (score between 4 – 12).** This means that you perceive your workplace to have a strong preference for integration, where co-workers and/or managers integrate their work and home lives.



WHAT DO THESE SCORES MEAN?

Check whether this score is congruent with your own individual work-home segmentation preference, then:

- If there is a congruence (individual preference = high and workplace norm = high or vice versa), you are most likely experiencing good person-environment fit!
- If there is a low congruence (individual preference = high and workplace norm = low, or vice versa), have a conversation with your manager to see how the workplace could support your preference.
- If your individual work-home segmentation score is neutral, it may not be a salient issue in terms of your individual preference, and arguably will create a fit with a high, low or neutral workplace work-home segmentation norm.

MOTIVATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

According to Self-determination theory (SDT), there are *three universal psychological needs*: autonomy; competence; and relatedness, and SDT suggests that the satisfaction of these three basic psychological needs is essential for individuals to thrive at work.¹² The three needs can be defined as:

- **The need for autonomy** is defined as “the individuals’ need to act with a sense of ownership of their behaviour and feel psychologically free.”¹² In other words, it implies the need to act with a sense of choice and volition.¹³ The need for autonomy is most closely related to the **Agency** element of SMART work design.
- **The need for competence** is defined as “the need to feel a sense

of mastery over the environment and to develop new skills.”¹³ The need for competence is most closely related to the **Mastery** element of SMART work design.

- **The need for relatedness** is defined as “the individuals’ need to feel connected to at least some others, that is, to love and care for others and to be loved and cared for by others.”¹³ This need is satisfied when individuals’ see themselves as a member of a group, and develop close relations.¹³ The need for relatedness is most closely related to the **Relational** element of SMART work design.

Satisfying these needs leads workers to adopt a type of motivation that is more driven by interest, enjoyment and meaning (rather than pressure and reliance on rewards and punishments) and also leads to enhanced mental health and

well-being.¹³ SDT focuses on the degree to which individuals experience need satisfaction in different contexts,¹² as such, it is recommended that:

- (1) You understand your need for autonomy, relatedness and competence at work;
- (2) Whether these needs are likely to be satisfied in a flexible work arrangement, and;
- (3) Any strategies to increase your needs satisfaction in a flexible work arrangement.

To understand your need for autonomy, relatedness and competence at work, refer to “**Discover your need for autonomy at work**”, “**Discover your need for relatedness at work**” and “**Discover your need for competence at work.**”

Discover your need for autonomy at work¹⁵

	not at all	to a very small extent	to a small extent	to a moderate extent	to a large extent	to a very large extent	to an extremely large extent
At work I have the need ...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... to decide on my own how to go about getting my job done	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... to have a say in determining my activities and tasks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... to determine on my own how to best approach my work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... for freedom to do my work in the way that I think is best	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Scoring instructions:

To obtain total score, simply add up all the numbers above, with the lowest possible score being 4 and the highest possible score being 28.

Interpretation:

- **High need for autonomy at work** (score between 20 – 28)
- **Moderate need for autonomy at work** (score between 13 – 19)
- **Low need for autonomy at work** (score between 4 – 12)



According to Self-determination theory (SDT), there are three universal psychological needs: autonomy; competence; and relatedness.

Discover your need for relatedness at work¹⁵

	not at all	to a very small extent	to a small extent	to a moderate extent	to a large extent	to a very large extent	to an extremely large extent
At work I have the need ...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... to hang out with people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... to be with other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... to be around people so I do not feel alone.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... to feel like I am part of a team or a group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Scoring instructions:

To obtain total score, simply add up all the numbers above, with the lowest possible score being 4 and the highest possible score being 28.

Interpretation:

- High need for relatedness at work (score between 20 – 28)
- Moderate need for relatedness at work (score between 13 – 19)
- Low need for relatedness at work (score between 4 – 12)

Discover your need for competence at work ¹⁵							
	not at all	to a very small extent	to a small extent	to a moderate extent	to a large extent	to a very large extent	to an extremely large extent
At work I have the need ...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... to feel that I have the knowledge and skills to do my work well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... to feel skilled.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... to feel that I can finish difficult tasks successfully.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
.... to be good at my work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Scoring instructions:

To obtain total score, simply add up all the numbers above, with the lowest possible score being 4 and the highest possible score being 28.

Interpretation:

- High need for competence at work (score between 20 – 28)
- Moderate need for competence at work (score between 13 – 19)
- Low need for competence at work (score between 4 – 12)



Psychological needs and flexible work

Research shows that those with a high need for autonomy will most likely perform better in a flexible working arrangement, compared to those with a low need for autonomy.¹⁴ Additionally, research found that flexible working is most suitable for workers who are high in need for autonomy, and low in need for relatedness,¹⁵ however, they did not find a significant finding regarding need for competence and flexible work arrangements. Arguably, people with a high need for competence will aim to satisfy this need in order to thrive both in the office and at home.



STRATEGIES TO: INCREASE NEEDS SATISFACTION

- If you like to have a lot of autonomy and don't have a very high need for frequent social connection with your colleagues, you might be a good candidate for a flexible work arrangement. Flexible working is characterised by greater autonomy in deciding how to go about one's work. However, a risk of flexible working is that it can lead to an increase in managerial control "micromanagement" type behaviours, which can decrease one's autonomy,¹⁶ leading to greater frustration in individuals attempts at satisfying their need for autonomy at work. For individual strategies, please see "**Strategies for regaining control and agency**"
- Flexible work can affect how much contact you have with colleagues, it is well documented that this type of work can lead to feelings of social isolation.¹⁷ If you need social contact (high need for relatedness); this can be done by going into the office when needing social contact to achieve work or to get support, or using ICTs to connect with people (to do this, see "**Strategies for increasing social contact and reduce isolation**")



PERSONALITY TRAITS

What do we mean by personality? Our personalities represent our fairly stable behaviours and preferences, and emotional and thinking styles. Everyone's personality is unique – no two people have the same personalities – but we are able to find patterns when we look at personality traits across the population. For example, people we think of as very extraverted tend to be much more talkative and enthusiastic than people we think of as very introverted, who tend to be more reserved. Our personalities are very complex, and to try to make sense of them, we often think about personality traits. We will explain what traits are in a moment!

How does personality intersect with flexible work?

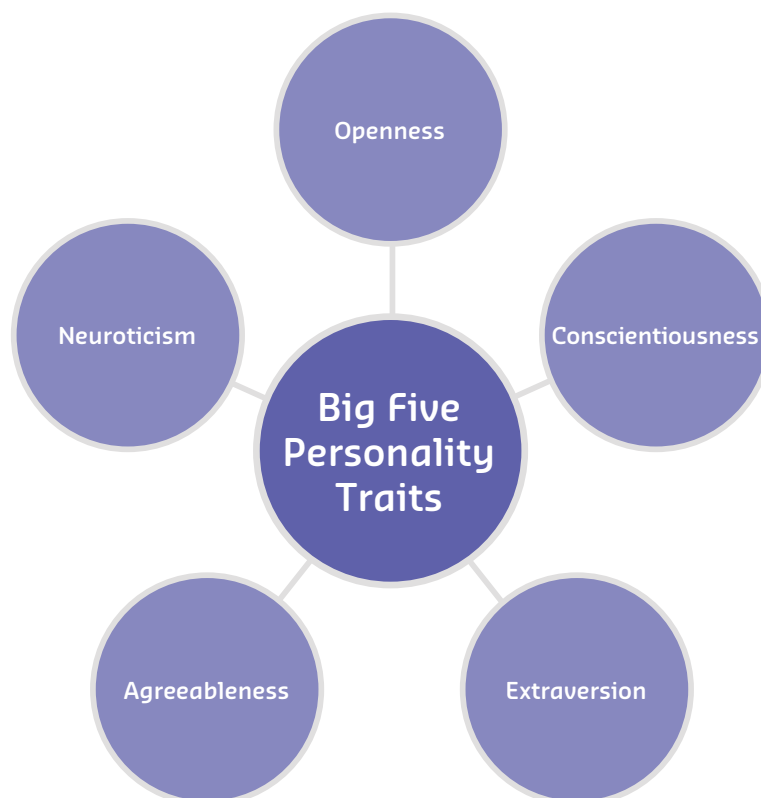
There have been a number of research articles published examining personality traits and flexible work arrangements. This research suggests that our personality can affect our flexible work effectiveness and behaviour both directly and indirectly,¹ with some personality traits providing a good fit with the flexible work arrangement. Why would that be so? The research on personality suggests that people tend to seek out situations that 'match' their personalities.¹⁸ For example, extraverted people like attending social gatherings, whereas introverted people tend to be perfectly happy reading a book. In terms of flexible work, individuals will likely participate in it if the nature and demands of this arrangement provide a good fit with their personality traits.

Personality is very complex but we can simplify it by focusing on a set of broader personality traits.

A well-established framework for studying personality is known as the "Big Five" model, which describes our personalities in terms of five traits: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (sometimes this model is called OCEAN).¹⁹ The focus of this section is to:

- Define each of the Big Five personality traits
- Explain what the research says about each of these personality traits and flexible working, and;
- Suggest any individual tips, where applicable (personality tends to remain relatively stable over-time, as such, only evidence-based strategies that are within the individual's scope of influence will be provided).

But first, please take a moment to discover your own personality according to the Big five by visiting Short Form for the IPIP-NEO



Openness

Individuals high on openness typically seek variety and intellectual stimulation, they are creative, and grasp new ideas well.^{19,20}

Openness and flexible working

The research exploring openness and flexible work has indicated mixed results. One research paper did not find a significant relationship between positive flexible work attitudes and openness.²¹ However, another research paper found a positive relationship between openness and flexible working,²² as well as a positive relationship between flexible work and job satisfaction.⁴ Also, previous research has found a significant moderating relationship between openness and phone communication and video communication.⁴ This indicates that people higher in openness experience greater levels of communication satisfaction

when using the phone or video communication channels, which positively influences their level of job satisfaction. A likely explanation for this is that individuals high in openness are more likely to have a greater willingness to use innovative

technologies²³ and open to new, innovative work arrangements like flexible working. Interestingly, from a virtual team perspective, openness was positively related to team cohesion in a virtual work environment.²⁴



STRATEGIES FOR: PEOPLE HIGH ON OPENNESS

- For individuals high on openness, make good use of the wide array of ICTs available to you; particularly, video and phone communication, to discuss work with your co-workers and managers, to maximise satisfaction when working from home.
- Take the opportunity to explore new technologies that may maximise your performance when working from home
- If you tend to find learning a new flexible work technology to be draining or challenging, consider signing up for online practical courses. For example, LinkedIn Learning has many short easy-to-use courses on the latest flexible work software platforms like Teams and WebEx.



Conscientiousness

Individuals high on Conscientious are characterised as careful, thorough, responsible, organised, self-disciplined, and hard-working.^{20,25} Of the big five personality traits, conscientiousness has been found to be the best indicator of how well somebody will perform at work.²⁵ This is not surprising; high performers tend to be hard-working, organised, and reliable!

Conscientiousness and flexible working

Research has found a positive relationship between conscientiousness and flexible working attitudes (e.g. flexibility, career issues/visibility, interaction with others and social issues, productivity, stress/hassles, and overall attitudes).²¹ Furthermore, research has found a significant positive relationship between conscientiousness and job satisfaction among flexible workers.⁴ The characteristics of an individual who is highly conscientious have often been cited as needed for a successful flexible worker,²¹ due to the demands of that particular flexible work arrangement; the ability to establish a work routine, have the ability to work independently, be ambitious, self-disciplined and manage their time well.^{26,27}

Research linked conscientiousness with both engagement and cyberslacking via regular upward communication, suggesting individuals high in conscientiousness keep their supervisors informed with respect to work issues and their progress with tasks, which likely reinforces these individual's motivation to avoid cyberslacking, and remain engaged at work.¹

In addition, they linked conscientiousness with both engagement and cyberslacking via self-management tactics, suggesting that individuals high on conscientiousness use a set of self-regulatory behaviours (e.g. planning,

structuring their day, goal setting) to remain productive when working from home.¹ These results suggest that those who are highly conscientious are highly suited for working from home, due to their higher display of self-management tactics.



STRATEGIES FOR: PEOPLE HIGH ON CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

- Individuals who are high on conscientiousness may be naturally suited to working from home, however, for individuals low on conscientiousness, consider whether working from home is the right kind of work arrangement for you, if you are concerned you might be easily distracted, or prefer to have some direct supervision. If you find yourself working from home but you know you are not very conscientious, consider investigating organisational tools such as plans, schedules, or software that blocks you from accessing websites that act as routine distractions.
- If you are lower on conscientiousness, remember to engage in regular communication with your manager in relation to your progress at work, which will help you to maintain your motivation and productivity
- Engage in self-management tactics (e.g. setting start, breaks, and end of day times, planning work activities and objectives, deciding the order and timing of duties, and other scheduling and self-monitoring behaviour). For strategies on engaging in self-management tactics when working from home, see "**Strategies to increase self-management skills**" in Agency.



Extraversion

Individuals high on extraversion are characterised as being sociable, assertive, talkative, and active.²⁵

Extraversion and flexible working

Generally, it is thought that extraverted individuals would not be attracted to working from home due to their nature of being sociable, talkative etcetera, however, research found that more extraverted flexible workers tended to be more satisfied than less extraverted flexible workers.⁴ In a study, extraverted individuals seemed to make conscious socialisation efforts in flexible work contexts, which lead to greater engagement.¹ On the other end, individuals low on extraversion (i.e. introversion) were least likely to seek out social connections in a flexible work context. Conscious socialisation efforts mean finding ways to socialise and keep in regular contact with co-workers when working from home through ICTs.¹



STRATEGIES FOR: PEOPLE HIGH ON EXTRAVERSION

- If you are highly extraverted, it is important to maintain conscious socialisation efforts when working from home, which can be a relatively isolating work arrangement, to satisfy your interpersonal and social needs. Otherwise, it does have the potential to become a dissatisfying work arrangement for you. For example:
 - Champion and take ownership over organising virtual morning teas or other team socialisation activities with co-workers when working from home
 - Attend any virtual seminars or networking meetings.



“In a study, extraverted individuals seemed to make conscious socialisation efforts in flexible work contexts.”

Agreeableness

Individuals who are highly agreeable are likely to be modest, cooperative, friendly, and helpful.^{21,28} Individuals that are lower on agreeableness tend to be less inclined to cooperate, less friendly, and less helpful.

Agreeableness and flexible working

Previous research found a strong relationship between agreeableness and positive attitudes toward flexible work.²¹ In addition, further research found a significant positive relationship between agreeableness and job satisfaction.⁴ **Individuals high on agreeableness are considered good candidates for flexible work²¹ due to their cooperative nature and their willingness to trust others.**

Being able to trust others is important to virtual teamwork, where virtual workers must be able to trust each other to collaborate and complete the work with reduced face to face communication, which is one of the primary challenges of flexible work.¹⁷ Also, individuals high in agreeableness also tend to try to please those

around them, which may help them balance work and home demands.²¹

Furthermore, research also found that for individuals high on agreeableness, they experienced greater levels of communication satisfaction when using the phone or video communication channels, which lead to greater levels of job satisfaction.⁴



STRATEGIES FOR: PEOPLE HIGH ON AGREEABLENESS

- For individuals high on agreeableness, make good use of the wide array of ICTs available to you; particularly, video and phone communication, to discuss work with your co-workers and managers, to maximise satisfaction when working from home.

Emotional stability

Emotional stability is often described as its opposite – Neuroticism. Neuroticism is associated with insecurity, fear, instability, and emotionality¹⁹ versus stability, calmness, and relaxed. Neuroticism is also characterised as being anxious, worried, and depressed.²⁰

Neuroticism and flexible working

The role of Neuroticism in flexible work seems to be mixed.⁴ On the one hand, early research suggested that flexible work was not desirable for people high in neuroticism. On the other hand, however, more recent research showed that individuals higher in neuroticism had positive attitudes toward flexible working because of the control and autonomy flexible work provides,²¹ and because flexible working was perceived to produce fewer challenges than traditional work. For example, flexible working can act as a shelter from any interpersonal anxieties typically observed in an office-based work environment.²¹

However, research has found that neuroticism was associated with greater cyberslacking.¹ Cyberslacking is using the internet for non-work-related purposes during work-time.¹ It may be that some individuals high on neuroticism hold positive attitudes towards flexible work because it provides an environment in which to engage in more cyberslacking without being detected by managers or co-workers.²⁹ Furthermore, it has been suggested that individuals high on neuroticism that experience negative affect may have difficulties sustaining concentrations and effort, and avoid any distractions.^{30,31}



STRATEGIES FOR: PEOPLE LOW ON EMOTIONAL STABILITY

- If you catch yourself engaging in cyberslacking when working from home, try to unpack the reasons you are being distracted. These reflective questions may help:
 - How are you feeling right at the moment before you begin cyberslacking (e.g., stressed, anxious, bored)? Try to unpack why you might be feeling that way.
 - Are you satisfied in your job?
 - Are you sufficiently challenged and find your work stimulating?
 - Do you feel that you perform well at work?
 - Are there certain tasks that prompt you to cyberslack more than other tasks?
- Research also suggests that perhaps individuals high on neuroticism may simply require additional support when working from home.¹ These particular resources found in this guide might be most useful:
 - For strategies on how to cope with ICT related hassles when working from home, see "**Hassle-induced ICT demands and interruptions**" in Tolerable Demands.
 - For strategies on managing work-home boundaries, please see the section on "**Work-home conflict**" in Tolerable Demands.
 - For strategies on engaging in self-management tactics when working from home, see "**Strategies to increase self-management skills**" in Agency.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

From a work-home conflict perspective, there are two aspects of your living arrangements that are worth considering prior to working from home in the long term. This includes;

1. **Home responsibilities and degree of autonomy**
2. **A separate work space in the house**

Home responsibilities and degree of autonomy

Finding the right balance between managing work and home roles is of high importance to flexible workers.

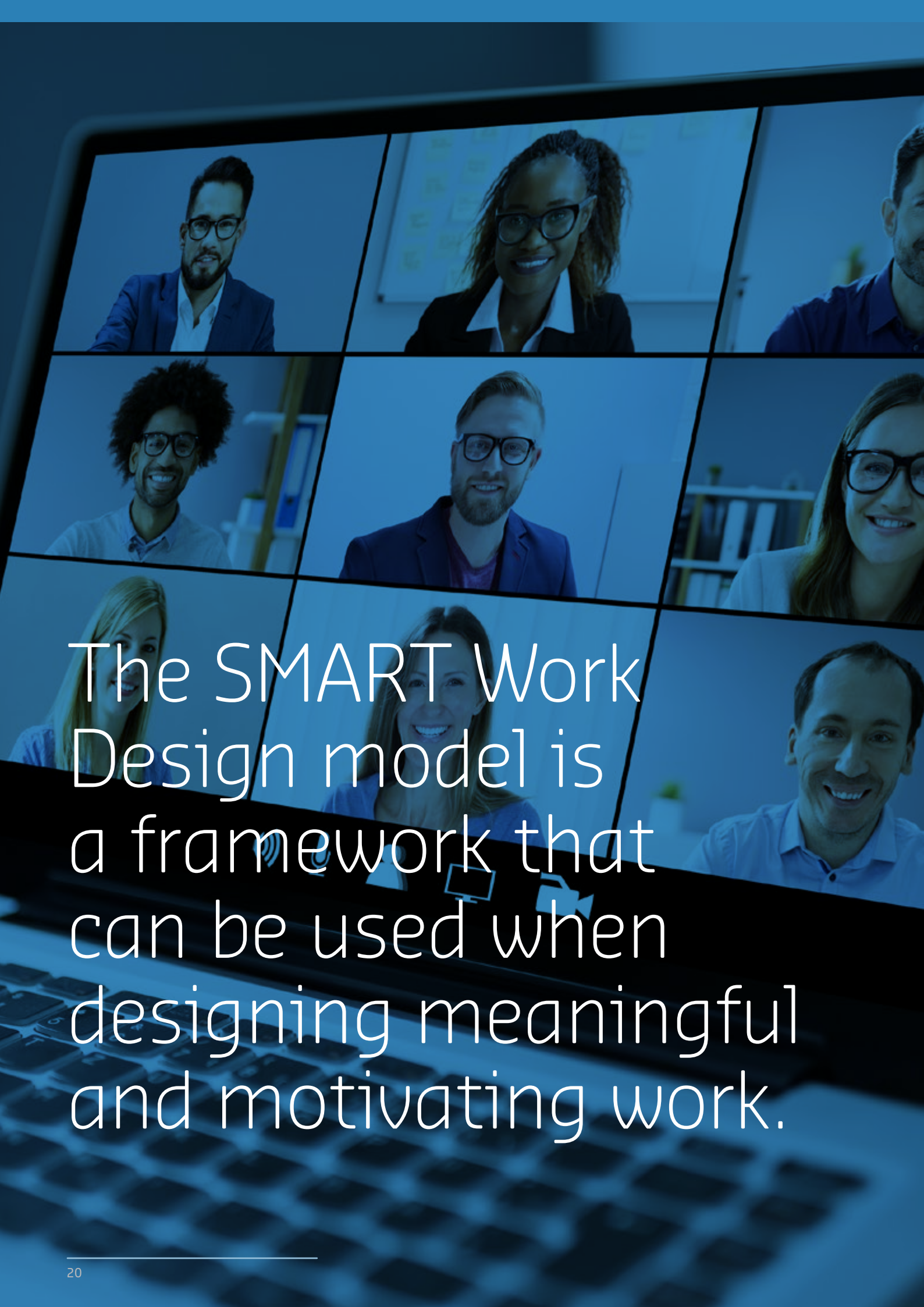
There has been much scholarly debate on whether working from home increases work-home conflict or reduces it.³² Research has shown that those with a high level of responsibilities at home (e.g. children under age 13, caring for a family member and household chores), experience a greater degree of family-to-work conflict, when they don't have a high degree of scheduling autonomy in their work.³³ As such, having limited scheduling autonomy over their work limited the flexibility in being able to carry out home responsibilities and may create greater conflict and tension in meeting the demands of both domains. This means, if you have a high degree of responsibilities at home, and you work design does not afford you a high degree of autonomy over when you complete

your work, consider whether flexible working is the right arrangement for you.

A separate work space in the house

If your home does not allow for the physical separation of work from home (i.e. a designated office space away from living areas), consider whether working from home is the right arrangement for you and your productivity at work. Particularly if you live with others, such as your family or with housemates, and even if you live by yourself, due to the challenges associated with a lack of a physical boundary management strategy, and for your recovery and ability to switch off from work during non-work time.





The SMART Work Design model is a framework that can be used when designing meaningful and motivating work.

How can I ensure my flexible working is SMART?



INTRODUCTION TO SMART WORK DESIGN

The SMART Work Design model, developed by Australian Research Council Professor Sharon Parker at the Future of Work Institute is a framework that can be used when designing meaningful and motivating work. Based on decades of research, the SMART Work Design model identifies five key themes that result in positive

outcomes that contribute to creating Thriving individuals and organisations. The themes for SMART work are: Stimulating, Mastery, Agency, Relational, and Tolerable Demands.



For more information, please visit the **SMART Work Design** website.

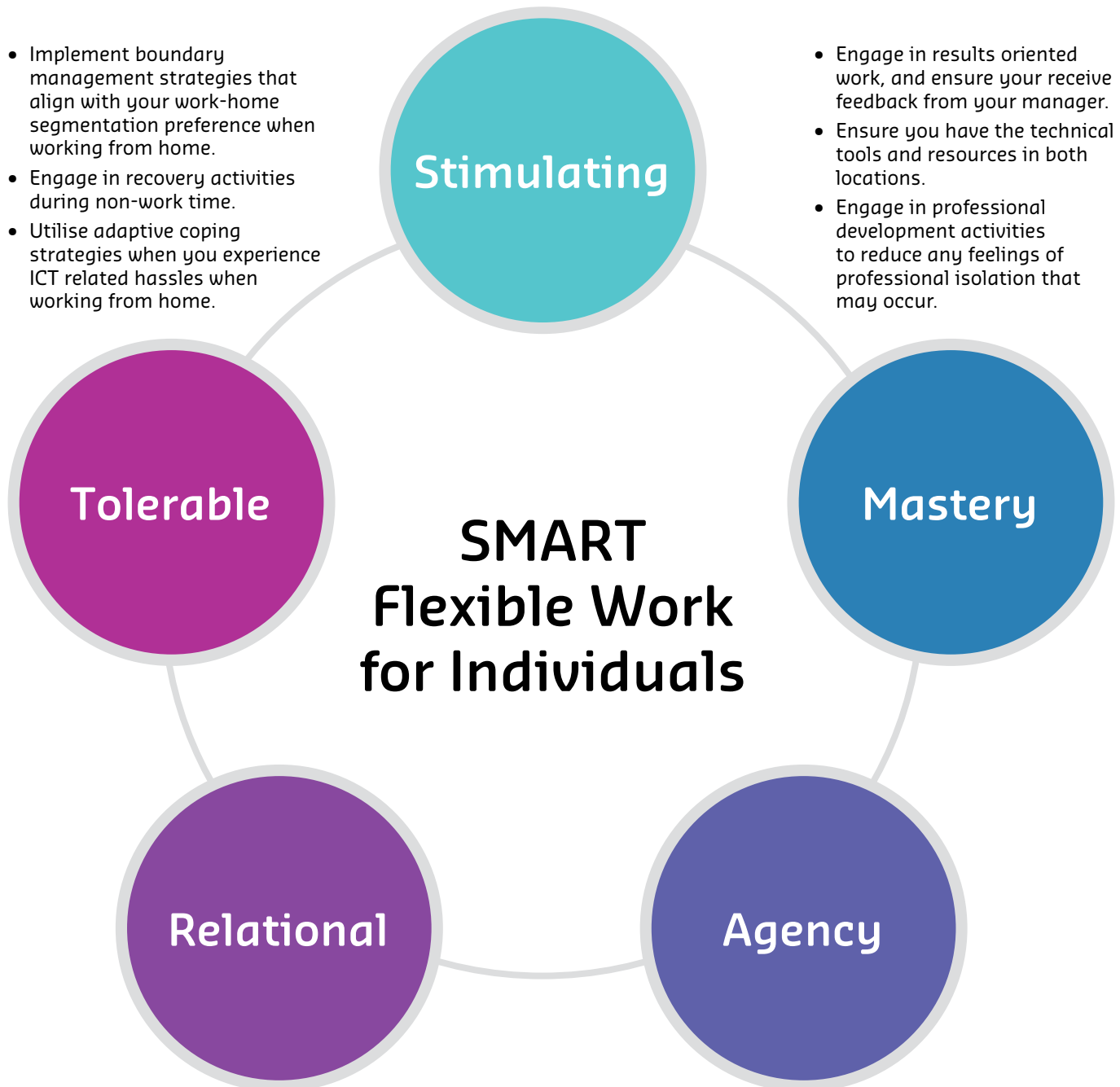


SMART Work Design Strategies for Individuals

- Determine which tasks may be most suited to working from home and which are suited to the office.
- Utilise job crafting strategies to increase stimulating work:
 - Reduce underload and increase task variety.
 - Increase problem solving and complexity demands.

- Implement boundary management strategies that align with your work-home segmentation preference when working from home.
- Engage in recovery activities during non-work time.
- Utilise adaptive coping strategies when you experience ICT related hassles when working from home.

- Engage in results oriented work, and ensure you receive feedback from your manager.
- Ensure you have the technical tools and resources in both locations.
- Engage in professional development activities to reduce any feelings of professional isolation that may occur.



- Take steps to ensure you connect with co-workers and your manager when working from home.
- Ensure that you implement strategies to increase social support (e.g. instrumental and emotional) when working from home.

- Implementing strategies to increase your own self-management skills when working from home.
- Utilise strategies for regaining control and agency if you are experiencing increased connectivity or excessive managerial control.



STIMULATING: CRAFTING WORK THAT IS STIMULATING

Stimulating refers to the extent to which a job involves solving challenging problems, has a range of different tasks, and involves having enough work to do. In highly stimulating jobs, individuals are likely to:

- Use a wide variety of different skills and abilities to complete the work
- Carry out a number of different tasks to achieve their goals
- Engage in complex tasks and problem solving in which your need to 'think outside the box'

Importantly, you can take steps to make your work more stimulating if you are currently experiencing it as insufficiently challenging and/or varied.

Complexity and problem-solving

Complexity captures “the extent to which a job is multifaceted and difficult to perform.”³⁴ When complexity is low, tasks are simple, and when complexity is high, task are difficult and complex.^{35,36} Complex tasks often require high levels of problem-solving requirements and involves dealing with non-routine tasks. When tasks require high levels of problem solving, they require unique ideas and solutions.^{36,37,38} Rarely are complex problems solved by a single individual alone,³⁹ as such, high-level problem solving are more often suited to and found in teamwork (both virtual and non-virtual). This is particularly relevant for knowledge workers.

So where is best to complete challenging work tasks? It is best to understand which tasks are better suited to virtual or non-virtual (office-based) settings. For example, jobs high in cognitive complexity require a great deal of concentration without interruption, may also be best suited to flexible working.⁴⁰ Individuals are less likely to be interrupted at home, provided that there is an effective work station set up and individuals can implement mitigation strategies to avoid ICT related interruptions. As such, it is best to first understand which tasks are best suited to flexible working and office-based settings.

It is best to understand which tasks are better suited to virtual or non-virtual (office-based) settings.

WHAT TYPE OF TASKS ARE BEST TO PERFORM IN THE OFFICE AND AT HOME

- Firstly, work with your manager to determine task fit for working from home and, office-based working. It is recommended that you think about the core tasks of your role in greater detail, to determine which ones are best conducted at home or at the office.
- This will involve analysing your core tasks and allocating them into four broad categories:⁴¹
 - “generate tasks” (e.g., brainstorming ideas, planning an event),
 - “choose tasks” (e.g., finding a correct answer, reaching consensus on a topic),
 - “negotiate tasks” (e.g., conflict management), and;
 - “execute tasks” (e.g., tasks requiring physical movement, psychomotor tasks, sports or production tasks).
- As a first rule of thumb, those tasks that have more cognitive complexities (i.e., generate, choose and negotiate tasks) as opposed to tasks that require more direct behavioral performance (i.e., execute tasks) are better suited for working from home
- For individuals whose tasks predominantly fall into “execute tasks”- Individuals along with their managers should consider how appropriate flexible working realistically is in the longer-term.



However, if you are not in a role that is lower in complexity and/or lower in problem solving demands, and is relatively unchallenging or repetitive/monotonous, you can engage in job crafting. Job crafting is a useful “bottom-up” strategy that individuals can engage in to make their work more stimulating. Job crafting leads to increased engagement in work, better well-being, and performance.^{42,43,44} The tips provided below are some useful, job crafting strategies to increase stimulating work.

Job crafting is a useful “bottom-up” strategy that individuals can engage in to make their work more stimulating. Job crafting leads to increased engagement in work, better well-being, and performance.



STRATEGIES FOR: INCREASING COMPLEXITY OR PROBLEM-SOLVING DEMANDS

- Can you see a better way of doing things? Sometimes we get caught in the habit of doing the same thing the same way because that's how it's always been done. If you can see a process that's not working, try to figure out a way to solve the problem and talk to your manager.
- Meet with your manager and ask for new challenges or more challenging tasks.
- Let your colleagues know you are there to bounce ideas off and help them problem solve any task-related issues they have.
- If you would like to gain new skills at work the best place to start would be to speak to both your manager and HR representative. Having a conversation with your manager about how you would like to develop more in your role will enable them to help you craft your role to give more opportunities for skill development. In addition, speaking to your HR manager will give you more of an idea about what opportunities are available to you.
- If changing your work tasks isn't possible, or there aren't as many opportunities for skill development as you would like, you can also seek to engage more with your colleagues who will have different skill sets and knowledge that they can share.

Underload

On the opposite side of complexity and high problem-solving demands. Not having enough to do at work, or being “underloaded,” is recognised as a reason for stress and low job satisfaction.⁴⁵ Some people may be finding that they cannot carry out some tasks or job roles from home, and links in with the above in that perhaps they have more “execute tasks” that can only be done on-site or in the office, such as work in hospitals, schools and/or courts. This requires further analysis and consideration when working flexibly in the long term. If you are experiencing underload, in other words, unstimulating work, individuals can continue to engage in job crafting. The tips provided below are some useful, job crafting strategies to reduce underload in your job.



OUR RESEARCH

In our global Thrive at Work from home study, for those who were working from home 4+ days per week, 6.7% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘This week, I often did not have enough work tasks to do’ and those who reported higher underload, experienced greater psychological distress.



STRATEGIES TO: REDUCE UNDERLOAD

- Ask your colleagues if you can support them with their tasks.
- Use down-time at work to learn new skills that are relevant for your role.
- Create variety and interest in your work by sharing knowledge and collaborating with others. For example:
 - Knowledge sharing (e.g. identifying and sharing tips)
 - Coaching others in your area of expertise (which helps develop your ability to coach)
 - Setting up a session with a colleague to test and explore the functions of communication tools such as Zoom or Teams, or experiment with team coordination tools such as Trello.
- Meet with your manager and ask for new challenges and skill development opportunities.



Task variety

Task variety refers to the degree to which you perform a wide range of tasks in your role. If you are experiencing low task variety, in other words, unstimulating work, individuals can continue to engage in job crafting. The tips provided below are some useful, job crafting strategies to increase task variety.



STRATEGIES TO: INCREASE TASK VARIETY

- Seize the day and learn about something new: Keep learning – this could be a perfect opportunity, especially if your work demands have lessened, to build a certain skillset that might be relevant to future work.
- Speak to your colleagues or your manager about moving into a different role for a period of time. This is a form of job enrichment called job rotation and may help to increase the meaningfulness you experience in your job.
- Organise your work in such a way to provide a sufficient variety of tasks within the job, include tasks that offer some degree of responsibility, and try to ensure you make use of the skills and knowledge that are valued by you.
- Your manager might not realise that you'd like some more variety. Meet with your manager and ask for new challenges and skill development opportunities. Take advantage of any career counselling available, and brainstorm ideas for moving forward.
- Make a list of the different types of variety in your job: the skills you use, activities you do, and people you interact with. Can you find a way to mix things up? Try to focus on a different area each day.
- If elements of your job are quite repetitive, see if you can think of ways to improve the way in which the job is performed. Some tasks are repetitive by nature though, so if this is the case talk to your manager about switching tasks regularly so that your brain gets an opportunity for a workout, rather than being stuck on autopilot.
- Create variety and interest in your work by sharing knowledge and collaborating with others. For example, knowledge sharing (e.g. identifying and sharing tips on how to work more effectively) or coaching others in your area of expertise (which helps develop your ability to coach).
- For more job crafting strategies, see Professor Sharon Parker's video and blog "[I'm Bored!': How To Make Your Work More Stimulating.](#)"



OUR RESEARCH

Our global Thrive at Work from home study found that those who had greater task variety were significantly more satisfied with their job.



M MASTERY: MASTER YOUR TASKS WHEN WORKING FLEXIBLY

Mastery refers to the degree to which a job provides role clarity, feedback from the job, and feedback from others. Mastery is most closely connected with the need for competence (please refer to **“Motivation and psychological needs”** for more information). Work that enables mastery is work in which:

- You are clear on what to do and why
- You receive feedback and recognition from supervisors and peers in addition to feedback on performance from the job itself
- You can complete a whole piece of work with identifiable outcomes.

Importantly, there steps you can take to increase your sense of mastery in your job.

Results oriented work

Flexible working removes the direct supervision that you typically receive in a traditional office environment,⁴⁰ as the work performed by flexible workers may not always be physically observed. As such, there needs to be a slightly different approach to performance conversations, compared to traditional office-based workers. This includes having performance grounded in out-put based results or results oriented, rather than behaviour-based that you typically observe in an office-environment such as judging performance based on observable worker activities.⁴⁶ Output-based performance is defined as “Output-based controls refer to supervisor’s evaluation of performance on the basis of the evaluation of output, products, or deliverables of work, not on the process or behaviours involved in producing the output.”³²



STRATEGIES FOR: RESULTS-ORIENTED PERFORMANCE DISCUSSIONS

- Firstly, try to have performance-oriented discussions in person if possible. If not, use rich ICTs that allow for virtual “face-to-face” communication such as Zoom or Microsoft teams. Avoid using emails, web chats, or phone calls for conversations that entail performance conversations, unless it is a simple and straightforward matter. This will reduce any uncertainty regarding the information provided, and will allow the worker to clarify with the manager.
- Proactively seek feedback on your performance. Check if any of the tasks you complete can offer immediate feedback. If they do, make a list of what criteria indicate high levels of effectiveness and performance and what indicates that there is room for improvement, then check your feedback against these criteria.
- As an individual, set clear performance objectives and measures with your manager. As such, meet with your manager to discuss your tasks and ask for clear performance criteria (objectives, goals, processes, methods and communication lines). You can then track your performance against those criteria. Ensure that the performance criteria are based on results or outputs.
- Proactively organise regular check ins with your manager and ask for feedback on how you are performing and ways in which you could improve. If you are ever unsure of what to do between these check-ins or are struggling, don’t hesitate to ask for clarity and assistance from your manager.
- Talk to your colleagues. Is the way you’re doing your job working for them too? There might be a few things you could do differently that would have a positive impact on their work, and vice versa – have a chat with them and see how you can work together best.
- Go the formal route. see if you can schedule in a performance appraisal with your manager. This will give you an opportunity for an in-depth discussion about your performance, highlighting training opportunities that might be useful as well as areas in which you’re doing well. This will impact on professional development activities to ensure continuous learning and growth.



OUR RESEARCH

In our global Thrive at Work from home study, for those who were working from home 4+ days per week, 48.5% disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement ‘This week, other people in the organisation, such as managers and co-workers, provided information about the effectiveness (e.g. quality and quantity) of my job performance’.

As a worker, it is therefore important that you have regular performance and feedback conversations to ensure that you are clear on performance goals and objectives, and also clear on how to go about achieving these goals. Doing this correctly will result in greater role clarity and reduce role ambiguity, as well as help create an atmosphere of trust with your manager.

Following this, it is important to consider through which medium (e.g. ICTs) these results-oriented work performance conversations take place. According to media richness theory, face-to-face interactions provide the richest information compared to telephone and emails.^{47,48} Face-to-face interactions provide individuals verbal, nonverbal, social and personal cues simultaneously, which enable workers to understand the information more easily, and it can be clarified instantly.⁴⁶ Flexible workers do not receive the same amount of face-to-face contact compared to traditional office-based workers, which means that flexible workers may receive more information through less rich mediums through various ICTs.⁴⁹ Due to performance discussions occurring more often through ICTs for flexible workers, it is important to consider which ICT provides the richest information, if it can't be organised as a face-to-face meeting in the office.



Technical resources

Establishment of a working place at home (or an alternative remote location) is an important issue for flexible working and it is important for individuals in order to master their work tasks. A study reported that the suitability of the working space was found to strengthen all measured outcomes of flexible work, particularly, overall job satisfaction and self-reported productivity.⁵⁰ This is consistent with previous findings regarding the importance of the working place for flexible worker's efficiency.⁵¹

Suitability in terms of:

- (1) Having access to the appropriate technology and tools, and any organisational documents required to perform your job remotely
- (2) That it is a safe from an Occupational health and safety perspective, and;
- (3) That you have an appropriate location within your house that limits the impact of potential distractions, reduce work-home conflict and increase recovery from work.



STRATEGIES TO: ENSURE APPROPRIATE TECHNICAL RESOURCES

- Ensure that you access to the appropriate technology and tools to perform your work successfully in both locations,^{52,53} at home and in the office. If you are not sure, speak to your manager.
- Ensure that your workstation in both your home and office are ergonomically sound to avoid poor posture that can lead to eye strain and/or musculoskeletal injury.
 1. Firstly, when working from home, the Australian Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws still apply. Both you and your organisation have a joint responsibility to ensure your health and safety while working from home. As such, follow any reasonable policies and directions that your organisation gives you about setting up your workstation. Alternatively, refer to any advice from the WHS regulator in your state or territory.
 2. For some immediate best practice ergonomic tips, **Safe Work Australia** developed **this guide** to help individuals set up their workstations during the COVID-19 lockdown.
- Ensure that your work station is set up in your house away from the living areas, to reduce noise and distractions during work hours, and to also use this as a physical boundary management strategy to encourage psychological detachment and recovery from work during non-work time. If you are unable to do this, consider whether working from home is right for you.

Professional development

A review found that time spent away from the workplace can have negative implications on individuals' perceptions about career opportunities⁵⁴ and how much the organisation invests in training and development of employees.⁵⁵ This centres around individuals visibly not being able to demonstrate dedication and commitment to the organisation when working flexibly, which consequently impaired their perceptions about their career opportunities.⁵⁴ However, there are mixed results when in the literature when it comes to career threat or prospects. A study found that manager appraisals suggested that all individuals had the same opportunities for career advancement.⁵⁶ However, one meta-analysis did not support any negative links between flexible work and perceived career prospects.³²

Furthermore, flexible working can create greater feelings of professional isolation compared to their traditional, office-based counterparts.⁵² Not consistently being in an office environment was negatively associated with developmental activities, making individuals feel professionally isolated.⁵² Individuals missed the informal learning and interpersonal networking which develops work-related skills and information.

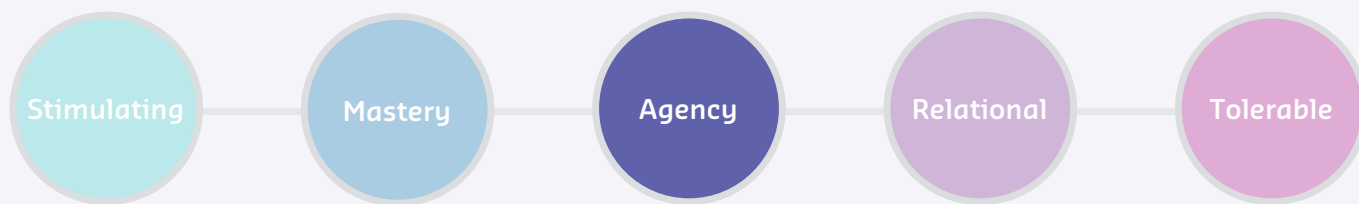


STRATEGIES FOR: ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Engage in regular career conversations with your manager to discuss professional and/or career development opportunities
- Create the right balance between working remotely from home, and being office-based to limit feelings associated with professional isolation
- Attend Professional Development (PD) events, networking or meetings provided by your organisation, or, take the lead and organise a semi-regular peer to peer PD meeting.



Flexible working can create greater feelings of professional isolation compared to their traditional, office-based counterparts.



A GENCY: MAKING THE MOST OUT OF A HIGH DEGREE OF AUTONOMY

Agency refers to the amount of control and decision-making influence that an employee has in their job regarding where, when and how they do their work. Agency is most closely connected with the need for autonomy, (please see “**Motivation and psychological needs**” for more information) For example, jobs with a high degree of agency allow individuals to:

- Control the timing and scheduling of their tasks
- Decide upon the best methods of completing a task, including the chance to show initiative
- Make decisions independently and feel empowered in doing so.

Job autonomy is defined as “*the degree to which a job provides discretion over daily work decisions, such as when and how to do tasks*,”⁵⁷ including work scheduling, decision-making, and work method autonomy.⁵⁸ According to work design theory, autonomy is a vehicle for desirable worker outcomes such as;

- **Enhanced individual performance** – for example, autonomy can enhance job performance through fostering intrinsic motivation⁵⁹ and enabling individuals to address problems effectively at their source.⁶⁰
- **Work engagement**⁶¹
- **Worker well-being**⁶²

Flexible working naturally affords a high degree of job autonomy by having control over work scheduling,⁶³ work location³² and the use of ICTs.⁶⁴



STRATEGIES TO: INCREASE SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS

- **Create daily to-do lists and schedules.** Creating daily to do lists, thinking about important goals and tasks, and scheduling work activities can help you to structure your day, and help you to feel in control of your time. This is not to say you should plan every minute of every day when working from home - you could add in “buffer times” where unplanned tasks can be handled or anything else that crops up over the course of the day that requires your attention.
- **Scheduling work during the most productive time for you.** For example, if you find that you are most productive in the morning, schedule important work tasks during that time, and vice versa if you find that you are more productive in the afternoon / evening. In addition, this could depend on your living arrangements, particularly if you have children that are at school and you need to do school drop offs and/or pickups.
- **Plan your breaks.** Include them as part of your daily to-do list and tick them off as you would a task:
 - **Find a technique that works for you.** Everyone is different - some people take short breaks every 25 minutes, others can focus for longer and like to work in 90-minute blocks. If your job involves staring at a computer screen all day, which is tough on both your eyes and brain, it’s handy to use the 20-20-20 Rule (every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break to look at something 20 feet away).
 - **Get amongst greenery.** Research has found that breaks in nature are more restorative, help us to relax and boost our creativity.
 - **Socialise.** Interacting with people is a great way to spend your breaks. Conversation helps take your mind off work and allows you to build relationships at work that are crucial to our well-being.
 - **Unplug completely.** While it’s tempting to spend your breaks scrolling through emails and social media, this doesn’t give your mind or body the break it needs. Leave your phone at your desk and get away from your computer during your breaks. This helps you to more fully recharge and re-energise.
- If you are struggling to remain focused at work, please read Professor Sharon Parker’s video and blog “**Struggling to stay focused? How to boost your work mojo.**”

If you do have greater autonomy as a flexible worker, it is important that you act responsibly, in a way that lives up to the trust placed in you. Working from home is a highly autonomous work environment, which can make it easy to dedicate time to less important tasks or to be easily distracted by non-work activities such as home chores, hobbies, or surfing the internet.⁵⁰ As such, there are strategies you can put in place to minimise any potential distractions, remain focused and create some structure on a day to day basis.

For example, to improve productivity while working from home, good time management skills and strategies are an important resource.⁶⁵ For example, using a work design lens, time management skills and tactics can be an important resource in decreasing time pressure (a known job demand), which leads to greater productivity and satisfaction with flexible working.⁵⁰ Research has shown that employees who reported planning most of their days reported higher job performance.⁵⁰ Daily planning helps employees to keep their focus on the tasks at hand and not get side-tracked by distractions. Also, previous research has shown that working at peak efficiency hours is important for flexible worker effectiveness.^{66,67}

Autonomy and ICT use

When it comes to worker agency, there are some paradoxical effects that are noted in the research regarding workers' ICT usage on job autonomy. Previous studies have shown that ICT use can directly increase work scheduling autonomy as workers can engage in work digitally, anytime, anywhere.⁶⁸ On the other hand, ICT use can expose workers to negative issues such as managerial control (e.g. electronic monitoring) and it can also pressure workers to be "always online" in collaborations and communications, which may actually reduce workers' perceived autonomy.¹⁶



For more information, tips and strategies on increased connectivity or the pressure to be always "on", see **"Connectivity demands and recovery"** in Tolerable Demands.

Managerial control is characterised by excessive monitoring and micromanaging type behaviour in a flexible work arrangement. For individual strategies on managerial control, please see below.



STRATEGIES FOR: REGAINING CONTROL AND AGENCY

- The best strategy you can take as an employee when it comes to managerial control in a flexible work arrangement is to move to results oriented work, as recommended in **"Strategies for results-oriented performance discussion"** as well as maintaining transparency, having clear communication lines, providing regular progress updates at agreed upon timeframes and delivering on the agreed upon results.
- If you want to learn more about this, read our HBR article **"Remote Managers Are Having Trust Issues"** written by Professor Sharon Parker, Dr. Caroline Knight and Anita Keller and Professor Sharon Parker's video and blog **"Tethered or trusted? The 'There's no excuse not to be at your desk' phenomenon."**



OUR RESEARCH

In our global Thrive at work from home study, excessive performance monitoring was significantly related to increased psychological distress whilst working from home. In the survey, one main reason why managers monitored too closely was that they did not trust their employees, with 24.2% reported doubting the ability of their employees to perform their jobs.



RELATIONAL: BUILD POSITIVE RELATIONAL ELEMENTS INTO YOUR WORK

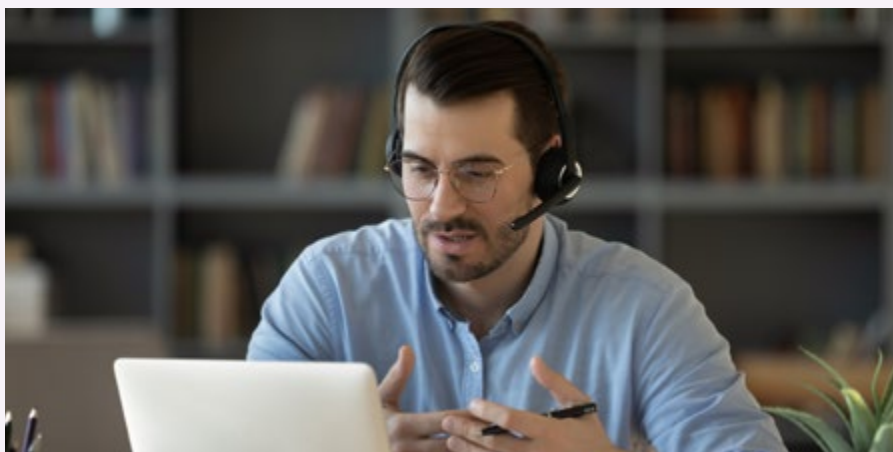
Relational refers to the amount of support an employee receives from the people they work with, meaningful connections with others, and a sense of doing work that is valued by others. The Relational aspect of work design is most closely related to the need for relatedness (please refer to “**Motivation and psychological needs**” for more information). Jobs that are highly relational are likely to involve:

- Employees and supervisors who support each other and show personal interest
- Having connections and social contact with peers
- Involves some connection with the people who benefit from your work, leading to sense of feeling valued.

Importantly, you can take steps to make your work more relational by ensuring you connect with others and reach out for social support.

Social contact and reducing isolation

In the context of flexible working, relationships and social contact are critical success factors.⁵⁴ Due to the physical separation from the traditional office, flexible working may result in social isolation which can negatively impact on job performance, particular for those who are more frequently working from home or other remote locations.¹⁷



Social isolation may occur due to having less frequent interactions and communication with colleagues and managers⁵² and could be treated as a job demand leading to greater job dissatisfaction.⁵⁰ The interactions flexible workers typically miss are the spontaneous social interactions and information sharing that can occur in the office environment (i.e. “watercooler conversations”), which can contribute to individuals’ feelings “out of sight, out of mind.”⁵⁴

Although social isolation has been repeatedly identified as one of the drawbacks of flexible working,⁶⁹ individuals can be proactive in mitigating these feelings.⁵⁴ For example, individuals can reduce feelings of social isolation by effectively using ICTs to stay connected with colleagues.^{70,71} A meta-analysis reported that spending more than 2.5 days per week away from the office was associated with a deterioration in the quality of co-worker relationships.³²



STRATEGIES TO: INCREASE SOCIAL CONTACT AND REDUCE ISOLATION

- During video meetings, factor in five minutes at the beginning and end of the meeting for informal and unstructured conversation. Take the lead in initiating these conversations.
- Where possible, phone call or a video call rather than email.
- Reflect and ask yourself how you can protect yourself against feeling isolated.
- If you work in a virtual team, make sure that your team has access to social communication tools such as messaging or video-based programs and either engage with or initiate virtual catch-ups or even virtual lunches/morning teas.
- Craft time into your day to have conversations with clients or customers which can also reduce isolation and increase social contact.

Social support

Social support is the degree to which individuals experience being valued, cared for and supported in the workplace, and this can be from multiple sources, such as co-workers and managers.⁷² Social support may be:⁷²

- Instrumental (e.g. tangible help to complete the work, providing advice or information),
- Emotional (e.g. listening to a colleagues' problem and providing sympathy).

The degree to which co-workers and managers provide social support in the workplace have an impact on individuals experience of work, and influence the psychological strain and well-being of workers.⁷³ For example, workers who experience social support from colleagues are less likely to leave the organisation in the short term⁷⁴ however, on the other hand, detrimental workplace relationships (e.g. disrespectful) can negatively affect an individual's emotional

well-being, and is a predictor of depression.⁷⁵ Furthermore, from an instrumental and informational support lens, colleagues and managers who provide help and

clarification on tasks can reduce an individual's role ambiguity, role conflict and work load, which can increase job satisfaction and organisational commitment.⁷⁶



STRATEGIES TO: INCREASE SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Where possible, phone call or a video call rather than email
- Ask for regular one-on-ones with your manager
- Ask for regular feedback from your manager and/or co-workers
- Work on improving your communication strategies with your line manager to increase the effectiveness and frequency of your communication. Modify your interactions with your line manager according to your needs.
- Ask for help from colleagues if you have a complex work problem - sharing knowledge and skills not only helps solve the problem; it also helps build trust.
- For more tips, please read ARC Laureate Professor Sharon Parkers' blog "**High quality connection (And we're not talking about the Internet)**"





TOLERABLE DEMANDS: ENSURE YOUR WORK HAS REASONABLE DEMANDS

This refers to employees' job demands, such as workload, work-home conflict, emotional demands, expectations to be available, monitoring (of performance and via technology), and ICT demands. A job with tolerable demands for the individual would likely involve:

- A manageable work load with reasonable time pressure and work hours
- Work with manageable emotional, mental or other pressures that create challenge without unnecessary strain
- Work without excessively conflicting expectations or instructions
- Tolerable physical demands.

Importantly, there are steps and strategies you can take to ensure that your work demands are tolerable.



OUR RESEARCH

The results of our global Thrive at Work from home study found that the greatest driver of psychological distress was work-home conflict. Furthermore, 37.1% agreed or agreed strongly with the statement 'This week, the demands of my work interfered with my home and family life.'

Work-home conflict

The vehicles through which greater work-home conflict may occur when working from home could be due to;

- (1) Work and home activities being in the same physical location, and;
- (2) Through ICT use. ICT use can blur work and non-work boundaries contributing to work-home conflict.⁷⁷ For information, tips and strategies, see the connectivity demands and recovery in Tolerable Demands.

In this section, we will focus on work-home conflict that can occur due to work and home being in the same physical location. To reduce work-home conflict due to work and home activities being in the same location, it is recommended that you engage in boundary management strategies.

Boundary management strategies

When work and home activities take place at the same location, physical, temporal and psychological boundaries between the two domains can become blurred. As mentioned in the section on "Work-home segmentation preference" in "Is flexible working for you?" boundaries are mental constructions that individuals create between home and work activities, and individuals vary in the degree to which they prefer to keep those activities separate, known as segmentation, or overlap with each other, known as integration.¹¹ "Segmenters" prefer strong, impermeable boundaries compared to "integrators," who prefer more permeable boundaries in meeting the demands of their work and home lives.

Working and living in the same location presents unique challenges and demands to boundary management due to the traditional boundaries, physical and time-based, that are associated with the office are no longer

there. One research paper proposed four categories of strategies that individuals use to manager boundaries between work and home, which are:⁷⁸

- Physical
- Behavioural
- Time-based
- Communication

A qualitative research study conducted interviews with public sector employees in the UK, who work from home either occasionally, between 20-50 per cent of the work week and full-time flexible workers.⁷⁹ They found that individuals yielded strategies across these four categories, with examples they reported provided in Tables in their relevant sections.

Physical strategies

The study found that individuals who struggled the most were the ones that could not physically separate work from home (i.e. having the work space set up in the living area).⁷⁹ This created some difficulty for individuals being able to "switch off" from work and devote their full attention to non-work activities. As such, it is important that individuals create a separate work space in the home that is purely designated for work activities.

EXAMPLE PHYSICAL BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES⁷⁹

- Having a dedicated work space in separate room in your house
- Closing the door between your work space and any living areas
- Separate computers and/or mobile phones for work and personal use.

Behavioural strategies

The study found that they were primarily related to ICT use and often they mimicked those of the office-based environment, such as logging off your computer for the day and turning off your work phone, which all signal the end of a work day.⁷⁹ Also, it removed the temptation of checking emails during non-work hours and aided individuals to delineate between work and non-work time.

Interestingly, preliminary research shows that sticking to morning work routines (e.g. getting dressed for work) when working from home positively influenced worker's daily work engagement and job satisfaction.⁸⁰ Morning work routines are those actions that prepare you for engaging in work, as such, you might have few morning routines you can apply to the working from home context.



EXAMPLE BEHAVIOURAL BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES⁷⁹

- Shutting down your computer
- Turning off your work phone
- Avoid (as much as possible) entering the designated work space during non-work time
- Have a morning work routine, such as getting dressed for work and changing into non-work clothes at end of work day. To know more about this, see Professor Sharon Parker's video and blog "To dress or not to dress? Getting into a work mindset"

Time-based strategies

The study reported that even though flexible workers often worked longer hours, individuals still developed tactics to create boundaries between work and non-work time.⁷⁹ Time-based could be when children return home from school or walking your dog at the same time every day.⁷⁹ These act as signals that it is the end of work-time, and it's time to focus on non-work activities.

EXAMPLE TIME-BASED BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES⁷⁹

- Finishing work when the children return home from school
- Walking dogs at the same time every day
- Making appointments or meeting friends at end of day.

Communicative strategies

The study found that flexible workers would reinforce boundaries between work and non-work time through setting expectations with family or housemates at home and with the work-place.⁷⁹ This could be around setting up boundaries around interruptions and noise during work time when working from home if there are others in the house at the same time, and the use of the designated work space.⁷⁹

EXAMPLE COMMUNICATIVE BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES⁷⁹

- Setting expectations with family members regarding interruptions during working time and work hours
- Setting expectations with colleagues or clients regarding contactability after working hours.

Generally, individuals align their boundary management strategies with their work-home segmentation preference.⁷⁹ In addition, those who perceive greater job autonomy and scheduling control, were better able to implement boundary management strategies that aligned with their work-home segmentation preference.⁷⁹

These findings further support the notion that individual differences are important, particularly when it comes to boundary management styles. Research has demonstrated this by finding that the higher congruence between boundary management preference and the ability to enact that preference (work-home segmentation “norm”) can lead to more positive outcomes for individuals, such as reduced work-home conflict, and higher job satisfaction.⁷ As such, it is recommended that individuals enact boundary management strategies that align with their work-home segmentation preference as much as possible, to reduce any potential work-home conflict and stress that may result from flexible working and ICT use. To find out your own work-home segmentation preference, refer to this section on “**Your work-home segmentation preference**”.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) related demands

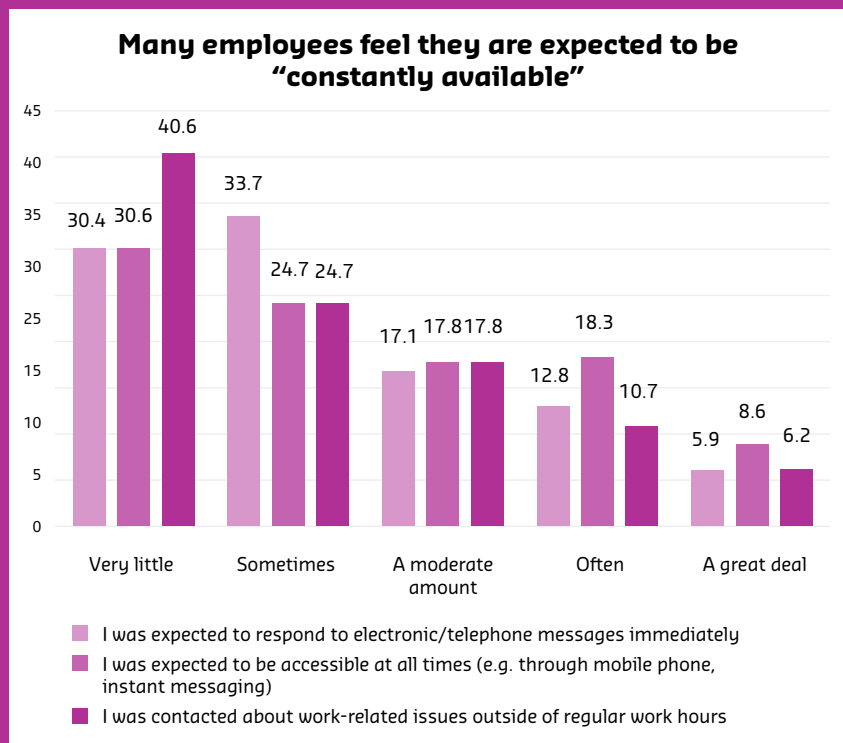
ICT use connectivity demands and recovery

Despite that flexible working (enabled through ICT use) can increase scheduling autonomy, ICT use can also create certain expectations of constant connectivity, or a “digital cage.”^{64,81} A large body of research has shown the negative consequences of intensive work-related ICT use after hours such as work-home conflict, diminished well-being (e.g., emotional exhaustion and poor sleep quality) and reduced performance.^{82,83,84,85,86}



OUR RESEARCH

This was reflected in our global Thrive at Work from home survey, where many people were feeling pressure to be ‘present’ at all times and to work outside of hours.





For example, individuals can send emails directly to recipients at any time, and anywhere without the concern of disturbing them, however, recipients will be obligated to respond to these emails in a timely manner, otherwise, it may violate social norms.⁸⁷ Additionally, due to the constant availability of ICT, work demands may creep into the individuals home life through ICT usage, blurring the boundaries between work and non-work domains. A research study tracked individuals across four working days and reported that perceived control in -off-the-job activities mediated the relationship between after work ICT use and well-

being.⁸⁸ Meaning, the intensity of work-related ICT use during non-work hours had indirect negative effects on start of the day mood, via reduced perceived control over off-the-job activities.

Research also shows that workers have difficulty switching off from work after hours due to the increasing use of ICTs.⁸⁹ However, switching off from work during non-work time is essential for worker health and being able to recover from the demands of work.⁸⁹ This can be due to a number of factors, such as the “always on” expectation, to be available or feeling compelled to respond to work matters

outside of work hours and the “norm” set by the workplace,⁹⁰ which can lead to an impaired ability to switch off from work, poorer well-being and mental health. A study found that workers with a stronger preference for segmenting work from non-work domains experienced greater psychological detachment from work during non-work time, and those who perceived other people at work practicing work-home segmentation also reported higher levels of psychological detachment from work during non-work time.⁸⁹

Importantly, technology use at home mediated these relationships, meaning, less technology use at home led to greater psychological detachment from work. Therefore, individual's boundary management strategies and creating a sense of segmentation from work during non-work time, particularly when it comes to ICT use, is crucial in being able to switch off from work.

Switching off from work during non-work time is essential for worker health and being able to recover from the demands of work.



STRATEGIES TO: REDUCE CONNECTIVITY DEMANDS AND INCREASE RECOVERY

- Construct impermeable technological home boundaries when working from home. This may be an important strategy for a worker who has difficulty “switching off” from work during non-work hours.
 - impose restrictions on the amount of technology use for work after hours (e.g. don't read emails)
 - Align the selective features of technologies with segmentation ideas (e.g., separating e-mail accounts for work and personal use, screening work-related incoming calls during nonwork time⁷⁸). Individuals who prefer integration of work and the family may regard ICT as a useful tool to increase autonomy in balancing different roles. In contrast, those who prefer segmentation are more likely to perceive after work ICT use as a stressor
- If you work in hybrid team, establish communication norms and expectations, specifically around responsiveness during after work hours.

General tips on increasing your ability to detach from work:

- Have a hobby. Having something non-work related to do and think about outside working hours helps take your mind off your job. This is a mastery recovery activity - they are challenging and involve learning outside of work. Mastery activities are an active recovery strategy that build your internal resources and self-efficacy, increases your detachment from work, and reduces job stress
- Get outside. Research has shown that spending time in the outdoors can help boost positive feelings such as enjoyment, fulfilment and satisfaction.
- Get physical. Finding time to exercise before or after work, or even as part of your lunch break, is important as it good for both mental and physical health.
- Learn to switch off and recover: See Professor Sharon Parker's video and blog on 'Switching Off: Recovering After A Long Day At The Desk.'

Hassle-induced ICT demands and interruptions

The greater the use of ICTs that individuals engage in, the more ICT related hassles that they can encounter, arguably more so when working flexibly.^{68,91,92} ICT use bring new hassles into the workplace such as ICT malfunctions, security threats or technological incompatibilities (e.g., the incompatibility of software or documents between Macs and PCs⁹³) which can disrupt task performance. In addition, ICT hassles can negatively affect individuals' emotions, well-being and performance.^{68,91,94,95,96}

However, the strength of these relationships varies across both individuals and situations.^{68,94} For example, some individuals use adaptive coping strategies when facing ICT related hassles, that help them to better manage and address these ICT related hassles. However, some individuals use maladaptive coping strategies and react negatively, like aggression or withdrawal.^{68,94,97} Furthermore, organisational support on ICT related hassles matter, for example, a study found that personalised technical assistance can reduce the unfavourable impacts of ICT hassles on individuals strain and cynicism.⁹¹

Not only does ICT related demands cause hassles from a technical aspect of work, there is increasing attention on the demands derived from interpersonal communications via ICTs such as interruptions (e.g. frequent instant messages).

Research has shown that ICT-related interruptions increase job demands such as time pressure and workload, and as a result, have a negative effect on performance and well-being.^{68,98,99,100,101,102} In a diary study, they found that receiving ICT related interruptions and intensively responding to online messages increased workers' daily negative affect, through increased time pressure.¹⁰¹ On a more positive note,

another study found that frequency and duration of email interruptions that contained useful information for the workers' main tasks, this was positively related to performance, whereas, the frequency and duration of interruptions that did not provide relevant information for the workers' primary tasks had a negative indirect effect on performance through increased perceived workload.⁹⁹



STRATEGIES TO: REDUCE ICT RELATED HASSLES AND INTERRUPTIONS

- Avoid maladaptive coping strategies (e.g. avoidance such as withdrawal or disengagement) when experiencing ICT related hassles, and engage in adaptive coping strategies when managing ICT related hassles. Adaptive coping strategies include:
 - Seeking support
 - Problem solving and planning
 - Using humour to reduce feelings of being overwhelmed
 - Try reframing the problem into something more positive – for example, you may have conducted a workshop online, and you experienced some ICT related hassles as a result. Even though it didn't go to plan, you may have learnt something worthwhile from the experience. Also, be kind to yourself and practice self-compassion in this situation. For more tips, read Professor Sharon Parker's video and blog "[Be kind to yourself: Self-compassion in difficult times](#)"
- Seek support from your organisation through contacting IT support directly when experiencing ICT related hassles
- Need time to focus on work without interruption? Mute notifications when you need to focus, but still check in so you don't miss any urgent tasks that need priority or information.
- Be mindful of the amount of emails and instant messages you send to colleagues to limit the interruptions they experience for their own well-being and performance at work.



OUR RESEARCH

In our global Thrive at Work from Home study, participants indicated greater psychological distress when experiencing ICT related hassles and interruptions when working from home.

Information or cognitive ICT use overload

ICTs have modified the cognitive aspects of work by supporting individuals to accomplish tasks with a lower level of cognitive resource completion and it can support workers to achieve their work-related goals more easily.⁶⁸ However, on the other hand, ICT use can enhance cognitive demands such as information overload and learning induced demands.¹⁰³

When the information exceeds an individual's capacity for processing it, this can be characterised in two ways:¹⁰⁴

- **When workers are given more information than they can absorb** – A study found that intensive social media use at work exposed them to more information than they could absorb, and that information overload led to exhaustion and hindered subsequent performance.¹⁰⁵
- **When there is simultaneous information flow from multiple channels** – with ICT enabling multiple streams of information flow simultaneously coming towards individuals, they are often having to engage in various tasks in order to meet different goals at the same time (i.e., multitasking) which results in information overload.^{68,103}



Research shows however, that is may vary depending on individuals' preferences and age. For example, some individuals prefer multitasking and therefore, may experience less information overload when dealing with a variety of information.^{68,106} Also, in the same study, older

individuals reported greater information overload compared with younger individuals, which could be due to the reduced cognitive capacities of older individuals and may find it harder to cope with multiple, simultaneous flows of information.^{68,106}



STRATEGIES TO: REDUCE ICT RELATED INFORMATION OVERLOAD

- Ensure ICT supports a moderate level of multitasking within an acceptable range for you so it is considered a 'job resource' as opposed to a 'intolerable demand.'⁶⁸
 - For example, you may wish to "chunk" tasks over the day rather than consistently move back and forward between different tasks to reduce any information overload through multi-tasking
- Limit the amount of social media use at work to avoid information overload
- Avoid back to back virtual meetings to allow for breaks and recovery in between
- For more tips, read ARC Laureate Sharon Parker's video and blog for strategies on managing virtual meetings "**Are you a Zoom Zombie? How to take control of your virtual meetings**".

Learning-induced ICT demands

This is very relevant to flexible working, as workers may be required to use new and different ICTs compared to traditional office-based working. Research shows that there are learning-induced demands experienced by workers in the early stages of ICT adoption, as they perceive that their work processes have become more complex than before and in order to perform well, workers exerted additional cognitive resources to learn and be accustomed to the new ICT.^{68,107} As a result, workers experience increased learning demands following the implementation of a new ICT in the initial phase of implementation, however, these demands should decrease within the first two months following implementation.¹⁰⁸ As such, perceived learning demands will decrease following increased user familiarity, however, due to the ever changing/advancing nature of new ICTs, this will likely create a cyclical type learning demands for workers.^{68,109,110}

The research shows that individual differences and learning new ICTs are important to consider, for example, older individuals tend to show poorer performance in technology training due to their confidence in their abilities to learn new technologies and generally speaking, they tend to be more resistant to technological change.^{68,111,112} In addition, there could be differences in perceived learning induced demands depending on prior knowledge and experience with ICTs, for example, those with less experience with ICTs may be required to invest more cognitive resources compared to those who have more experience and knowledge.^{68,113}

Research has shown that learning-induced demands can bring about stress and reduce employee well-being as well as their performance,^{68,114,115} as such, to mitigate these outcomes,

the following strategies are recommended, which, in turn, help workers to view new ICT learning demands as demands that challenge them in a positive sense.



STRATEGIES TO: MANAGE ICT RELATED LEARNING DEMANDS

- Ensure ICT supports a moderate level of multitasking within an acceptable range for you so it is considered a 'job resource' as opposed to a 'intolerable demand.'⁶⁸
 - For example, you may wish to "chunk" tasks over the day rather than consistently move back and forward between different tasks to reduce any information overload through multi-tasking
- Limit the amount of social media use at work to avoid information overload
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As a result, workers experience increased learning demands following the implementation of a new ICT in the initial phase of implementation, however, these demands should decrease within the first two months following implementation.



The purpose of this section is to unpack how the evidence for this project and guide was gathered and synthesized.

Appendix 1

What is the evidence-base?

The purpose of this section is to unpack how the evidence for this project and guide was gathered and synthesized. Firstly, the methodology that was undertaken will be described, followed by a brief literature review that includes the benefits and challenges of flexible work.

Process

The aim of this guide is to outline the benefits and challenges of flexible working at the individual level, and provide evidence-based individual-led strategies that will guide workers on how to be productive and healthy when working flexibly, either intensively or in combination with work in the office. individual-level strategies are actions individuals can take to support their own well-being and productivity in a flexible work arrangement.

For guidance specifically targeted at supervisors and managers, or teams, please refer to the **“How to Lead Flexible Work: A Guide to Successful Policy and Practice for Managers”** and **“How to Manage Virtual Teams for Success: A Guide for Managers”**.

A three staged approach took place to develop these guides:

Stage 1: The first stage was a comprehensive literature review, with synthesis of the key findings.

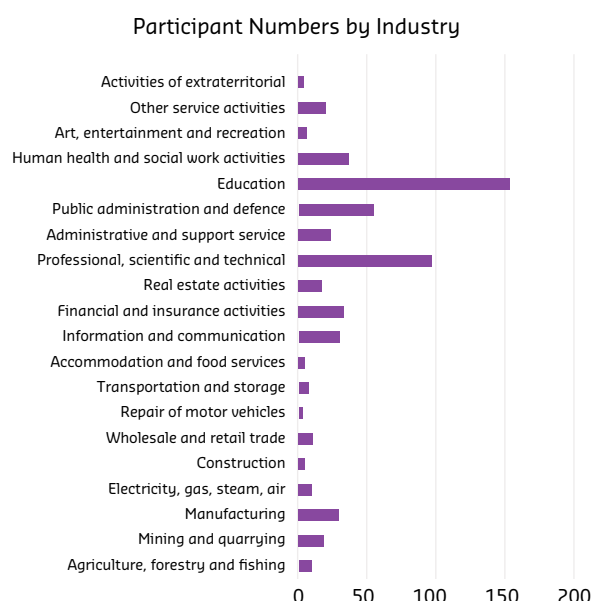
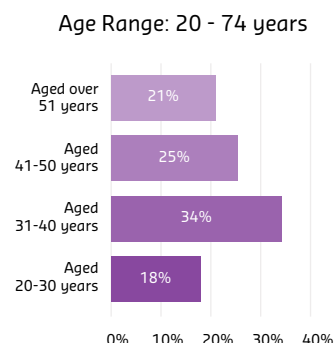
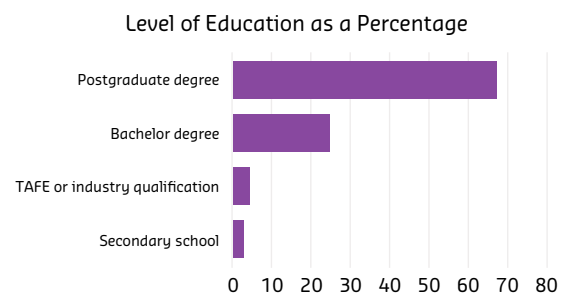
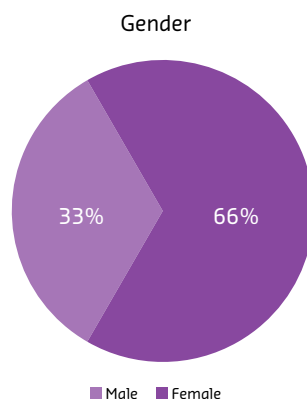
Stage 2: The second stage included engaging industry for anecdotal evidence on how teams and managers responded to COVID-19, what they found worked well, what didn't, and the resources they drew upon to ensure this was successful.

Stage 3: Based on material from stages 1 and 2, as well as FOWI's own research, we developed evidence-based strategies for individuals, managers and teams.

In addition, the Centre for Transformative Work Design (CTWD), part of the Future of Work Institute (FOWI) at Curtin University, undertook a Global Thrive at Work from Home (WFH) survey with the aim to understand how workers are being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and how best to support large scale working from home during this crisis. The survey explored:

1. The multiple factors involved in influencing home workers' well-being and productivity;
2. Employees' level of mental health and well-being
3. The strategies organizations and individuals adopt to cope with working from home.

The Global Thrive at WFH survey is longitudinal, spanning over a 6-month period that commenced in April 2020. For more information on the survey, please see **this section** on the CTWD website. This guide includes results from the Global Thrive at WFH survey at time 1 in April 2020, during lockdown when individuals were mostly working from home (4+ days per week). A total of 452 employees were surveyed at Time 1 with some demographic information provided below.



Brief literature review

Flexible working has been a topic of considerable interest to both researchers and practitioners, especially as a strategy to help individuals manage their work and home domains. Two key meta-analyses¹ showed that overall, flexible working (i.e. telecommuting or teleworking) is mainly positive, and that flexible work is effective for individuals and organisations.^{32,67} See “**Summary of benefits and challenges of flexible work**” for a snapshot of the key benefits and challenges of flexible work from the literature, from an individual’s

perspective. This table shows that individuals typically experience time and cost savings from less commuting, greater autonomy and higher job satisfaction and well-being in a flexible work arrangement, however, a flexible work arrangement could lead to greater work-home conflict, and feelings of professional and social isolation if individuals are not proactive in mitigating against these. In addition, there are important individual differences that need to be taken into consideration prior to considering flexible working (see “**Is flexible working for you?**”).

Flexible working has been a topic of considerable interest to both researchers and practitioners.



1 “A meta-analysis is a quantitative study design used to systematically assess the results of previous research to derive conclusions about that body of research.”¹¹⁷

Summary of benefits and challenges of flexible work

BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORK	CHALLENGES OF FLEXIBLE WORK
Time and costs savings from less commuting Workers who engage in flexible working and that are home-based save in terms of time and costs from commuting less to the office. ⁶⁶	Increased home-to-work conflict A study found that flexible work had a differential impact on work-home conflict, such that the more extensively individuals work in this mode, the lower their work-to-home conflict, but the higher their home-to-work conflict. ¹¹⁸
Lower work-home conflict A meta-analysis revealed flexible working had small but mainly beneficial effect on work-home conflict. ³² They also found that high-intensity flexible working (more than 2.5 days a week) accentuated flexible working's beneficial effects on work-family conflict (i.e. reduced work-family conflict).	Lower levels of psychological detachment ("switching off") Research showed that one's spatial boundaries between work and home are related to psychological detachment from work. ¹¹⁹ Specifically, individuals who reported having an office at home reported lower levels of psychological detachment during nonwork hours. This could also be further exacerbated by poor technological boundaries by responding to work-related issues during non-work hours.
Increased autonomy and work motivation At the individual level, flexible working affords increased job control whereby employees can establish a work arrangement that suits their needs and preferences regarding when and where they engage in work. ¹²⁰ Also, a study found that home-based work or virtual work had a positive influence on job motivation which can be explained by having a greater sense of autonomy in performing your work (Hill, Ferris, & Martinson, 2003). ¹²¹	Lack of social connection One of the most cited risks of flexible work arrangements is a lack of social connection as employees are physically separated from the workplace and are more than likely to be excluded from whether it would be formal or informal discussions with colleagues, unless there is a conscious effort to organise regular meetings and informal get-togethers, either face to face or virtually. ¹²⁰
Greater job satisfaction A meta-analysis revealed that flexible working is positively associated with job satisfaction. ³²	Increased role ambiguity Role ambiguity involves uncertainty about the expectations involved in performing a task or carrying out activities in one's role. ¹²² One study found that flexible work increased role ambiguity, ¹²³ which is perhaps due to being physically away from the office and relying on ICTs to communicate and connect with the workplace.
Increased organisational commitment and productivity A meta-analysis results indicated that there was a positive relationship between flexible work and organisational commitment and productivity. ⁶⁷	Perceived lack of promotion opportunities Further to the separation from the workplace in terms of from a relational perspective, there is a common perception that this type of work arrangement acts as a threat to career advancement opportunities due to being "out of sight, out of mind." ¹²⁰
Lower turnover intentions Flexible work has been associated with lower turnover intentions. ³²	Individual differences in preferences for flexible work This type of work arrangement may not suit everyone in the workplace and different individual differences will need to be taken into consideration prior engaging in flexible working. For example, some employees may have small children who are at home during the day which may not be conducive to working from home productively. ¹²⁰
Greater worker well-being Research has shown that flexible working is associated with greater well-being. ⁶²	Reduced support and feedback Flexible work was found to be negatively related to feedback and social support. ¹²³ The researchers argued that this could be dependent on the richness of the ICT used when working flexibly. By using richer ICTs (e.g. videoconferencing) this may mitigate some of the negative effects of flexible work such as a lack of feedback and support. ¹²³



The research on flexible work itself is scattered across a wide array of fields, including work-home conflict, maternity leave policies, telecommuting or use of technology, work distribution and scheduling, and others. However, two common paradoxes that often surface in the flexible working literature that are worth highlighting⁶³ (1) work-home conflict paradox and the (2) autonomy paradox, as they have implications on what strategies individuals might put in place to ensure healthy and productive flexible working. Following on from this, it is briefly discussed how flexible working can be applied using a work design lens.

The work-home conflict paradox

Flexibility has been viewed as a popular tool to help balance competing work and home demands for employees. The results of numerous studies have shown flexible work helps workers to accommodate work-life balance, for example, one study compared traditional office workers, remote workers, and home-based workers and found that home-based workers reported the highest levels of work-life balance.¹²¹

Paradoxically, however, flexible work can also be a source of work-life imbalance.⁵ This can be explained by the greater permeability of work and home domains when working from home. In other words, the boundaries of work and home are less distinct,

which allows the role of one (e.g. home) to enter the role of another (e.g. work).

Work may interfere with family or non-work roles, just as family or non-work roles may interfere with work. The bi-directional nature of work-home conflict here is an important distinction to make in understanding the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-home conflict.⁵ For example, one study found that flexible work had a differential impact on work-family conflict, such that the more extensively individuals work in this mode, the lower their work-to-family conflict (that is, less negative impact of work on family), but the higher their family-to-work conflict (that is, more negative effect of family on work).¹¹⁸ Importantly, they found that scheduling autonomy positively moderated the impact of flexible work on work-to-family conflict.¹¹⁸ This means workers who work flexibly more extensively experience less work-to-family conflict when they have more flexibility in choosing when work activities are performed. In addition, they found that household size was found to negatively moderate flexible work's impact on family-to-work conflict. Meaning, workers who work flexibly more extensively experience greater family-to-work conflict when the workers have larger households.¹¹⁸ This suggests that there is important domain specific (home and work) contextual factors that have the ability to impact, positively or negatively, on work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict.

In summary, with the increased use of ICTs, although it contributes to individual's flexibility and productivity, it has also increased engagement with work "after hours" which has resulted in individuals limiting their autonomy over time.

The autonomy paradox

Research conducted with knowledge workers found that the more autonomy that workers have, the harder they work, devoting more hours to work (i.e. work intensification), and as a result, the greater they feel constrained and controlled by their work.⁶⁴ To explain the paradox further, the perceived greater autonomy in flexible working has been facilitated through ICTs, which have enabled individuals to work anywhere, and anyplace. This has subsequently increased expectations of responsiveness and accessibility (i.e. connectivity demands), where individuals increase their engagement with ICTs that enable them to work anywhere/anyplace (enhancing autonomy),

and as a result, research shows that individuals then work everywhere/all of the time, thus diminishing their autonomy.⁶⁴

In summary, with the increased use of ICTs, although it contributes to individual's flexibility and productivity, it has also increased engagement with work "after hours" which has resulted in individuals limiting their autonomy over time.⁶⁴ This is important to be mindful of, as such, to minimise the effect of the autonomy paradox long term, maintain a work life balance and increase your ability to recover and switch off from work, individuals can engage in technological boundary management strategies and If you work in hybrid or virtual team, establish communication norms and

expectations, specifically around responsiveness during after work hours.

It is also important to note some other additional explanations as to why flexible workers intensify their work practices such as working longer hours, such as;

- Balancing work and home duties throughout the day (e.g. school pick up/drop-offs, appointments)
- Spending the time that they normally would commuting to and from work as additional work hours, and/or;
- They may feel a greater sense of obligation to reciprocate with additional effort as working from home can be viewed as a "reward."^{124,125}



Flexible work and work design

Work design is defined as “the content and organisation of one’s work tasks, activities, relationships, and responsibilities.”⁵⁷ Well-designed work involves the presence of motivational task characteristics or resources (e.g., job autonomy), stimulating knowledge characteristics (e.g., the chance to use one’s skills), and beneficial relational characteristics (e.g., social support), as well as tolerable levels of job demands (e.g., work load).^{58,126} At the individual level, high quality work design leads to a variety of positive outcomes for the individual, such as better job performance, positive work attitudes, and greater well-being.³⁴

The general work characteristics – job demands and job resources (e.g. autonomy and social support)- as

described in the Job Demands-Resources Model, can be applied to flexible working in the sense that there are particular resources and demands that are related to this type of work design.⁶² Job demands deplete workers well-being and result in health-related problems such as exhaustion and increased burnout, whereas, job resources enhance worker well-being through motivation, enjoyment and absorption at work.^{127,128} A job demand or “strain” specifically related to flexible working is increased role ambiguity and reduced support and feedback, and a job resource is increased autonomy.¹²³

Most research in the field of Organisational Behaviour and Organisational Management is complex, and flexible working is not an exception. Flexible working when

approached and implemented well, that is tailored to allow for individual needs and preferences across their life or career stage, can produce many of the benefits reported the table “**Summary of benefits and challenges of flexible work.**” Flexible working has the potential to both benefit and strain workers simultaneously.⁶² However, the potential ‘strains’ of flexible working can be addressed through appropriate evidenced-based strategies that individuals can put in place in order to ensure healthy and productive flexible working (for these strategies, please see “**How can I ensure my flexible working is SMART?**”)





Further Information

- For more information and resources on our Work from Home materials, visit our **Thrive at Work from Home** page.
- Learn more about work design at **Centre for Transformative Work Design**.
- For more information about our demand-driven research, visit **Future of Work Institute**.
- Learn more about our Thrive at Work Initiative at **Thrive at Work**.

Well-designed work involves the presence of motivational task characteristics or resources, stimulating knowledge characteristics and beneficial relational characteristics, as well as tolerable levels of job demands.

A blurred background image of an office setting. In the foreground, the back of a person's head and shoulders are visible, looking towards the right. In the background, another person is standing, and a third person is partially visible on the left. The overall tone is professional and modern.

Flexibility has been viewed as a popular tool to help balance competing work and home demands for employees.

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Contact

The Centre for Transformative Work Design engages with all sectors of the economy to transform work to create better lives for workers, better outcomes for organisations, and a better society for all. If you'd like more information about our research or are interested in working with us, please contact us.

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