AN UPDATE ON FLEXIBLE AND HYBRID WORKING PRACTICES

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 160,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Case studies

An update on flexible and hybrid working practices

Contents

(1) Introduction

The four organisations that contributed these case studies were selected to provide different experiences of flexible and hybrid working across different sectors, in large and small employers, in the public, not-for-profit and private sectors. Within each organisation, both HR and managers were interviewed, to go beyond the policy and explore the practical experiences of designing flexible jobs within organisations.

The case studies explore a range of flexible and hybrid working issues, including:

- transitioning to new ways of working
- engaging stakeholders
- embracing technology and investing in collaborative tools
- managing a hybrid team
- maintaining relationships and engagement
- supporting wellbeing
- focusing on performance outcomes
- embedding effective practices.

They also provide practical top tips and advice for successful hybrid working for others to learn from.

For our accompanying report on flexible and hybrid working practices – which covers the employer and employee perspective, background to the research, implications and recommendations – visit https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/flexible-hybrid-working-practices

(2) Blood Cancer UK: 'Focusing on outcomes and emphasising the value of wellbeing'

In a charity dedicated to beating blood cancer, agile working has been implemented to change the culture to one focused on outcomes rather than presence, and where the value of work–life balance is fully recognised.

Organisation: Blood Cancer UK

Size: 100 employees

Location: London and Edinburgh

Sector: Charity

Blood Cancer UK is a charity dedicated to beating blood cancer by funding research and supporting those affected. It has 100 employees, most of whom are female and around half are parents and/or carers.

When Lisa Freshwater joined the charity as director of organisational effectiveness in 2018, she was keen to implement an agile working policy to drive organisational efficiency and support employee wellbeing: *'We wanted to give employees the freedom to find the working model which best suits them personally so they can work more efficiently and effectively for people affected by blood cancer.'*

With the exception of the regional fundraising team, who had remote contracts, most of the organisation's employees worked traditional hours in offices in London and Edinburgh, with a limited degree of flexible working (for example, the ability to occasionally work from home and/or shift hours slightly earlier or later). It was clear that any change would require a considerable shift in mindsets and cultural norms. Few employees, including those in senior roles, made use of the existing flexible allowances, other than to work from home on a Friday. People were concerned that they might miss out on communications or decision-making if they weren't physically present.

Jessica Badley, who joined the organisation as head of HR and OD in 2019, explains: *'Without meaning to, there was a general assumption that employees would predominantly work in the office. Really early on we knew that we'd have to show employees other ways of working, starting with role-modelling from the leadership team.'*

Lisa agrees: *'We wanted to change the culture to one focused on outcomes rather than being present and where the value of work–life balance was fully recognised. We needed to move away from flexitime with its focus on clocking hours [employees' own and those of their colleagues] because that drives the wrong behaviours and is not outcome focused.'*

One of the ways Lisa strove to achieve this was through implementing hot-desking, leading by example: *'I might work on this desk for an hour and then go to a different floor, or a private meeting room and then go and work in a café. It breaks the awareness people have of the hours others are working and the expectations that accompany that. It also helped that the CEO bought into it and led by example.'*

Initial meetings with all teams were conducted to communicate the purpose of the move to agile working, gather information regarding organisational and employee priorities and identify what was needed to make it work. Reactions varied, with some employees very enthusiastic and others more resistant, concerned, for example, that they needed to sit with their team to communicate and work effectively.

'Then the pandemic hit and that really accelerated everything because it helped people understand what we were trying to achieve, experience the benefits and realise they could actually do this,' says Jessica. *'For example, fundraisers were concerned that it would be difficult to access donors remotely, but they've actually found it easier to arrange meetings virtually than face-to-face. The team that run our telephone support line initially thought they would struggle separating work and home life, particularly because their work can be very emotionally demanding, but now none of them want to go back to the office. They've worked out how to get that barrier in place because they had to during lockdown and they've found they've benefited from being less tired as they don't have to commute.'*

Implementing agile working

The organisation had already made considerable progress in implementing its agile working policy prior to the pandemic, which helped the transition to homeworking during lockdown.

IT equipment and support
HR worked with IT support to make sure that all the technical infrastructure was in place to facilitate agile working. This included ensuring all employees had laptops and any other equipment they needed, incorporating the telephone system into computers and training in Microsoft Teams. Because this was in place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and even fully trialled when the CEO suspected a lockdown was imminent, the organisation was well set up to fully transition to homeworking.

Agile working principles
Blood Cancer UK's approach to agile working does not impose any artificial constraints; the only limits are those which are genuine to individual roles. To provide guidance for employees, the organisation has developed a set of ten principles, which include the need to make all decisions around agile working in line with the charity's mission and values, be agreed with teams and prioritise wellbeing and accountability.

The HR team provided several workshops for employees to work through the principles and practice of agile working, including showcasing examples of various employees, including senior directors, who successfully use the policy to support their priorities and wellbeing. Lisa emphasises the importance of ensuring the focus on wellbeing is continually reinforced through communications.

An online Agile Resources Library has also been established to support employees. This includes details of the agile working policy, practical tips and advice (for example setting up workstations remotely, running remote meetings), an FAQ section (for example how travel expenses work), inclusion and diversity considerations, and links to wellbeing support and training slides.

Each team works together, using guidance provided by HR, to establish their own set of 'agile team principles' detailing how it will work in practice for them. These are written down and saved to a central folder so they are accessible to other teams. Jessica reports, *'Being able to look at how other teams are managing similar issues has been really*

helpful. For example, one team found that new recruits felt they had to respond to emails immediately. After looking at how others were managing this, they agreed principles around communications and response times. Having these written down helps people stick to them.'

Team agile working principles are reviewed and refreshed every six months in a team meeting. Jessica says, *'This is really important to review what works and what doesn't as well as accommodate changes in individuals' situations. For example, we originally thought that meetings had to be either completely virtual or completely in person. We've realised that's not very practical and may end up excluding people.'*

Support and training for managers

Blood Cancer UK provides training for line managers on all aspects of agile working (including managing and motivating remote teams, managing by outputs and outcomes, and creating agile principles). The performance management system has also been changed from annual appraisals to setting and reviewing objectives every one to four months.

Network groups have been established across the organisation, including one for managers, to provide strong peer support. Jessica explains, *'They meet monthly, sometimes with input on a particular topic (for example flexible working or motivation) and they share their ideas. That's worked really well because it means they can reach out for help and learn from each other.'*

Strong focus on wellbeing

The charity emphasises the value of wellbeing through training and regular communications about the sort of support people can access. Jessica says, *'Having a menu of formal and informal support people can access has worked well for people working at home, particularly during lockdown. For example, we have mental health first aiders in the organisation, which means that there are people who aren't HR and who aren't your manager who you can go to, not just for big issues but also if you're just having a bad day.'*

The charity increased its support during lockdown. Lisa explains: *'Communications, for example, were stepped up with daily team check-in meetings. We recognised that people might suffer from the lack of contact and that an employee's situation might change from one week to the next and we wanted to be able to support them. We constantly reinforced this message through communications. Some people struggled (for example with home-schooling), so we offered a reduction of hours on a temporary basis. We also increased leave and made it clear people should come forward if they needed more. Everyone has issues at some point, so being flexible and providing support when it's needed pays dividends in terms of productivity and engagement. People affected by blood cancer don't fit into a Monday to Friday 9 to 5, and as the leading blood cancer charity we know that we have to instil a culture where our mission in beating blood cancer and being there for those affected drive everything we do. We then overlaid with giving our staff flexibility and work–life balance.'*

With the move to more remote working, the charity has also stepped up its efforts to prevent people overworking, which Jessica sees as one of their biggest challenges. She explains, *'People join us because they believe in and want to support our charity's mission. In our agile working policy and when we recruit, we make it clear that we trust people to do their job and we don't count their hours unless we think they're working more than 35, because that is a definite no. But it's difficult to monitor with remote working. So every couple of months, we bring that up as a topic for discussion. We introduce practical techniques to help people stop working at the end of their day and not think, "I'll just do this one last thing." We've also conducted training sessions around how to avoid burnout and we're currently running training specifically on digital wellbeing.'*

Benefits

The increased flexibility facilitated by the move to hybrid working has helped the organisation reach and support more people affected by blood cancer, as its support line is now open seven days a week, responding to a considerable increase in calls and contact.

Feedback from quarterly pulse surveys and exit interviews shows significant improvements in employee engagement; the latest survey found that 95% of employees recommend the charity as a place to work, up from 41% in December 2018. Retention rates have also improved, from 70% in 2018 to 94% in 2021, and, by removing restrictions on hours and location of work, the organisation has seen a considerable increase in applications for positions and been able to recruit from a much wider talent pool. For example, the charity recently recruited two clinical nurses to join their support line who live in different parts of the country. Lisa says: *'If we restricted ourselves to people who had to commute each day to our London office, we wouldn't have got the quality of these two nurses.'*

The policy has also been successful in supporting wellbeing priorities; a survey conducted in March 2021 found that 84% of employees felt they had the organisational resources to support their wellbeing. Sickness absence has dropped to an average of just 1.3 days per employee.

Jessica believes that having a practical framework and clear values to guide decisions has been key to their success. She also emphasises the importance of trusting employees. Lisa agrees: *'It does require a step-change in how people work. You hear people [outside the organisation] saying, "Let's get back to normal!" But lockdowns have provided a great opportunity to actually take the positives and create something very different. People here have got more choice now. It's all about how you treat people, so they feel valued and are able to do their best work.'*

Blood Cancer UK's advice for successful hybrid working:

- Be as flexible as possible; don't impose artificial constraints, such as three days at home, two in the office each week.

- Invest in technology to ensure everyone's included, regardless of their location.

- Encourage trust and accountability; remind managers that being able to see someone in front of a computer doesn't mean they are working or being productive.

- Facilitate communications between teams so they can learn from each other and find solutions to the challenges they face.

③ Financial Services Compensation Scheme: Smarter working that suits individual needs

In the UK's compensation scheme for financial services, a new 'Smarter Working, Your Day, Your Way' approach has been adopted so employees choose where they work, when they work and what they want to wear.

Organisation: Financial Services Compensation Scheme

Size: Approximately 240 employees

Location: London

Sector: Financial Services

The Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) is the UK's compensation scheme for financial services, protecting people when authorised financial services firms fail. The FSCS is independent and covers all regulated financial services in the UK. Based in London and with approximately 240 employees, the FSCS has helped millions of people and paid out billions in compensation since its launch in 2001.

Over the last few years, the FSCS has adopted a 'Smarter Working', 'Your Day, Your Way' approach. This means employees can choose *where* they work (with an expectation that they spend 40% of their time in the office), *when* they work (within a general framework of 7am to 7pm) and *what* they want to wear (based on comfort and schedule). Working patterns are agreed within teams and rotas published, although there is an understanding that these can flex if circumstances change.

The transition to 'Smarter Working'

The FSCS started offering fully flexible working from day one to all employees in 2019. David Blackburn, Chief People Officer, explains, *'We wanted to encourage our people to work in a smarter way that suited their individual needs and personal commitments. As an organisation we have a strong focus on the employee experience for attracting and retaining staff – we recognised that flexibility was a big attractor even before COVID. We also knew we had to work in a more agile way and find new ways to collaborate through technology in order to meet the changing needs of our customers.'*

The FSCS knew an investment in technology and the office environment was required to enable employees to be as productive as possible in every environment.

Office environment
The Facilities Team conducted an in-depth consultation with employees regarding the use of office space and what they needed to work at their best. Finding that the majority of colleagues sat for most or all of their day and many stay at one desk, they transformed the office environment to encourage movement, desk breaks and areas for collaboration. They created a space for hot-desking, informal meetings and teamworking, and doubled the size of their informal event space to encourage collaboration. A new creative room was

established for private workshops, including soft seating for more relaxed conversations, and an existing meeting room was converted into a quiet/silent working room with individual work pods.

Technology
Desktop computers were replaced with laptops for all staff to enable them to work flexibly and remotely, as well as take full advantage of the new spaces created for collaboration and silent working in the office. The full suite of Microsoft Office 365 was rolled out to allow colleagues to quickly and privately chat or video call using Teams and share and collaboratively work on documents. A new engagement/intranet platform was also created to enable colleagues to share news and information seamlessly and in real time. In addition, every meeting room had new audio-visual technology installed, giving employees the ability to easily run presentations in the room or remotely via Teams to support the new hybrid working approach.

Adapting the 'Smarter Working' approach in collaboration with employees

Ninety per cent of employees had taken up the organisation's 'Smarter Working' options before the first COVID lockdown in March 2020, and all employees had a laptop and the full suite of Office 365, so the organisation did not lose a day of productivity. The FSCS continued to consult extensively with all employees throughout the lockdowns, initially focusing on employee wellbeing, but later also to explore their working preferences post-lockdown. Their approach to 'Smarter Working' was adapted in response.

Removing boundaries and core hours
The FSCS's original flexible working policy included a range of conditions, requiring, for example, flexible working needs to be approved by line managers and people to work core hours between 10am and 4pm. David reflects, *'Looking back, our original flexible working principles were quite prescriptive. During lockdown we weren't following those principles; we were just making it work. Through our consultations and discussions, we looked at how we could take what was working and evolve our principles to reflect the new normal. We decided every meeting should be hybrid by default, so it should always include a Teams invitation. We got rid of our core hours – they didn't make sense anymore. We realised we all want to segment our day in different ways according to our own preferences. But equally, we wanted to give people a frame, so that people weren't working very late at night. Our office building is open 7am to 7pm, so, as a general principle, we agreed that people can choose when they work within that, wherever they are.'*

The FSCS got rid of their formal flexible working policy in favour of a toolkit, which explains the principles and how they can be applied.

The 40% principle
From employee consultations during lockdowns, it became clear that while some colleagues would be happy to work permanently from home, many people missed the human interaction and community as well as the opportunities for connections and collaboration that a shared work environment provides.

Arjian Punnialingam (MI and Analytics Manager) reports that onboarding new colleagues was a particular challenge during lockdown, as it can take people longer to learn and build relationships when working remotely. He himself joined the organisation three weeks before the first lockdown. He reports, *'Although everyone at the FSCS was really friendly and welcoming and made time to chat with us over Teams so we could get to know them, it*

wasn't the same as being in an office environment where you can just turn around and ask a question, pick up on conversations around you and build relationships over a cup of tea or just by being around people.'

David agrees, *'We decided as an organisation that we think the office is massively important for what we call the five Cs – Connection, Collaboration, Celebration, Creativity and Compassion. On average, employees wanted to return to the office two days a week. We didn't want to be prescriptive about this, so we set out a principle that they should be in the office 40% of the time, while giving teams and individuals the flexibility to work this out to best suit them.'*

Arjian reports that most of his team generally try to be in the office two days a week. The exact days may vary from week to week, although they generally try to have one day a week in the office together. Two team members, however, live further afield, so they come to the office for one week every month. Arjian says, *'We make sure that we maximise time together the week they are in. I will go in an extra day that week to spend time with them and we have a whole team review meeting to discuss achievements, priorities and plans so everyone feels part of the journey in terms of setting objectives and goals against the needs of the business. It's also a useful opportunity to discuss challenges and frustrations so I can see how to better support them.'*

Teams publish their rotas so everyone can see when others will be in the office, which makes it easier to arrange formal and informal face-to-face meetings with people in the wider business. The rotas were also important during lockdowns, as there was a limit to the number of people that could be socially distanced in the office.

Purposeful use of time in the office

The organisation has learned that it's important for people to use their time in the office purposefully. David says, *'There's no point coming into the office if you're just going to sit at your desk and make calls all day. We're trying to get people away from the idea that they'll be in the office for certain days to coming in for specific reasons, for example a workshop or team meeting. We have a principle that if you're a line manager, you do your one-to-one meetings face-to-face in the office, where possible, and have an "anchor day" where the whole team is together in a room once a month. We also organise a social event for all employees on the last Thursday of every month, whether that's breakfast, lunch or dinner.'*

Managing a hybrid team

The FSCS provides line managers with formal training and materials to help them manage hybrid workers and regularly holds discussions regarding how they can better support employees. The organisation had already invested considerably in building a high-trust culture as part of an overhaul of its approach to performance management in 2017/18, which smoothed the move to hybrid working.

For Arjian, strong relationships are essential. He asserts, *'Getting to know your team is important for all managers, but particularly when you're working hybrid because you're not there with them. You need strong relationships so people are confident to approach you openly – for wellbeing and work issues.'*

The importance of trust and open relationships was highlighted during lockdown. Because team members were open about the challenges they faced, whether due to caring responsibilities for a family member or the strain of isolation, Arjian was able to put plans and adaptations in place to support their wellbeing and avoid burnout. He says, *'You need*

to communicate regularly and not assume people are okay. I make it clear that if anyone in my team is stuck or has an issue, they shouldn't wait for a scheduled meeting but can drop me a message at any time and I'll call them back asap.'

For Arjian, building relationships means getting to know his team on a personal level. During lockdown he used team meetings not just for work-related issues but also to chat with team members, for example about what they'd done at the weekend. He also instigated an online quiz once a week to encourage some fun and provide some relief to the social isolation. Since restrictions were relaxed, members of his team take it in turns to organise a social activity after work once a month, anything from escape rooms to electronic bingo. This has been very successful in building camaraderie.

Benefits

Feedback from the annual employee survey shows that the move to hybrid working and the 'Your Day, Your Way' approach has resulted in an increase in engagement on every measure: 87% agree that their organisational culture could be described as a healthy one (up 11%); the employer Net Promoter Score (eNPS) has increased by 11 points to 67 (an 'outstanding' score), and overall engagement has increased from 79% to 88%. Alongside this, the FSCS has delivered its highest ever customer satisfaction score of 89%, in June 2021, a reduction in the number of aged claims by 48% (in the period up to February 2022) and external recognition in five national awards for their customer experience, including the quality of call handling and their work to support vulnerable customers. Despite the pandemic, sickness absence rates are consistently below 2%.

Arjian asserts, *'Hybrid allows the best of both. People are more productive working from home in terms of outputs, but in the office you're building relationships with the wider organisation, learning from each other, sharing knowledge and working on joint projects. We've also seen clear benefits in terms of wellbeing and engagement. Commuting can take a lot of energy. Not having to commute every day means people can get extra sleep if they need it and spend more time with their family, not to mention the financial savings.'*

The FSCS's advice for successful hybrid working:

- Develop your approach in collaboration with employees to understand their needs and support them to work at their best wherever they are.

- Build relationships and communicate regularly so people are confident to raise issues or seek support when needed. Don't assume people are okay.

- Build in regular time for teams to get together physically to discuss achievements, priorities and plans.

- Encourage employees to use their time in the office purposefully and ensure office design supports collaboration and connectivity.

④ The Sovini Group: Finding flexibility to adapt as needs and preferences change

The group provides construction, property and facilities services to the public, not-for-profit and private sectors. With half of the group's workforce employed in customer-facing roles, the other office-based half have transitioned to an agile model, and removed the need for a head office – placing a focus on empowerment and trust.

Organisation: The Sovini Group

Size: Over 800 employees

Location: North-West of England, with a head office in Bootle

Sector: Construction

The Sovini Group provides quality construction, property and facilities services to the public, not-for-profit and private sectors. Based predominantly in the north-west of England, they employ over 800 people.

About half of the Sovini Group's employees have remote contracts working in communities in customer-facing roles (that is, repairs and maintenance, trade supplies, and so on). The other half, who pre-pandemic were office-based, have now transitioned to an agile model. Its starting point is the needs of the service and the focus is on outputs rather than hours. It can be practised in different ways: time (hours to suit working requirements and individual preferences); location (working from home or other sites); role and function (for example, reception and telephone responsibility can be shared to allow uninterrupted/ focus time). Line managers have a responsibility to support and sign off agile working arrangements and document their teams' arrangements in a protocol. Employees have a responsibility to remain in contact with their team and do the job that is expected of them.

A rapid transition

Prior to the pandemic, the organisation had given some consideration to agile working, including running a trial 18 months before the first lockdown, but they were not fully set up for agile working when the lockdown hit and its 400 office staff had to switch to working from home.

The immediate challenge the organisation faced was ensuring colleagues were equipped with the technology and communications to work remotely. The IT infrastructure team reacted swiftly to ensure equipment and systems were in place and employees understood how to use the online systems. As it became clear that there would be no speedy return to the office, the Sovini Group initiated consultations with employees to consider the implications of agile working.

A business transformation group was formed with three key subgroups: information technology, people and culture, and facilities and assets. They met every month to review their current position and discuss how to move forward. A full review was carried out

against all elements of their people strategy (including recruitment and retention, reward and recognition, feel good (health and wellbeing), engagement, performance, and learning and development) to ensure they could address risks and move forward.

Over a six-month period the company held a number of briefings with staff and conducted two employee surveys to gather feedback on the future of work when pandemic restrictions eased. They found that the majority of employees were enjoying the flexibility and work–life balance of agile working and decided to consult on moving permanently to a fully agile working environment with the aim of optimising performance.

The CEO held presentations with all affected employees to give them the opportunity to ask questions and share their thoughts. A full consultation document, draft agile working policy and a variation to contract was written and shared with employees. Their employee app, OurSpace, was also used as a forum for two-way communication, to supply information (including FAQs and updates) and provide an opportunity for employees to express their views.

The Sovini Group had planned to carry out a formal consultation with any employees who were not happy to voluntarily move to agile working, but this was not necessary as all affected employees agreed that agile working was right for them as well as for the future of the business. A managers' pledge and an employees' pledge were developed, which start with the fundamental purpose of the company and its values to help shape where people work, how they work and the way they work.

Two years on, the business transformation group continues to meet on a monthly basis to review and evaluate processes and progress and to explore how the business might change further over the next five years. Steven Scott (head of HR) says, *'Essentially we're continually assessing our purpose, how we're progressing and how we can better support our colleagues for continual growth and improvement.'*

Key challenges in the move to agile

Embracing technology
The move to agile working has required the organisation to update its technology, and employees to fully embrace new systems for communication. Laptops were upgraded, the functions of the company intranet and employee app have expanded, new software for project management has been installed and even the post room is now digital.

Jessica Cooney (marketing manager) reports, *'It's completely transformed how we work. We now have really easy access to information, we can set deadlines, checklists and tasks online, so as a team we all know where we are on projects and there's no confusion.'*

Maintaining relationships and engagement
Pre-pandemic, the Bootle head office was considered the heart of the organisation for work, collaboration and social events. The Sovini Group was keen to ensure that the strong relationships and 'family feel' of the culture was not lost in the move to more agile working, through a strong focus on communications and giving employees the opportunity to get together regularly and have some fun.

The group introduced a bespoke support and best practice sharing page on their employee app so managers could connect with their peers. It conducts a monthly care survey and has ramped up its one-to-ones, alongside running reviews of managers' competencies to include an emphasis on engagement.

Each team has an engagement budget (reviewed quarterly) to encourage them to get together regularly for team-building activities – anything from crazy golf to brunch. In addition, the organisation holds wellbeing events, social events and away days to bring people from the wider organisation together. Jessica believes that stepping outside the office environment has helped build stronger relationships: *'Before we would have coffee in the bistro in our head office, but it was still a professional environment. Now, for example, we might have a team meeting over brunch, or if I'm out on a site visit with someone we make time for a coffee together afterwards in a cafe. People appreciate that personal touch.'*

She believes she has a better understanding of her team since moving to agile: *'We've had to focus strongly on engagement because colleagues can't just raise an issue with me as they could when we were together in the office. As well as more formal, work-related one-to-ones each month and a full team meeting every Monday, I have weekly informal one-to-ones with my team to just catch up. It means I'm more informed.'*

Moving from a focus on time management to performance outcomes
Prior to the lockdown the organisation had a traditional flexitime system, where employees would clock in and clock out and accrue hours. Steven says, *'That stopped when we went into lockdown. Almost immediately we realised we were measuring the wrong thing. We measured time – how many hours a day we could see you – but not necessarily what you were doing.'*

Removing all time constraints as well as implementing 'unlimited annual leave' (enabling employees to take time off when it suits them, as long as their objectives are being met and it is agreed with their team) required a shift in mindset that was initially quite overwhelming for both employees and managers. Employees wanted managers to know they were working and line managers needed to adapt to the loss of control.

Steven says, *'We had to challenge ourselves that we don't have to see someone to know they're doing a good job. What really helped us was to look at what success looks like in a role. As a manager, what do you want?'* Revisiting how performance and targets were measured and having clear, up-to-date performance indicators helped with the transition.

A series of workshops helped equip and support managers to adjust to effective agile working practices. Ongoing support and communications are facilitated through the managers' hub on their employee app, enabling them to share challenges, ideas and support.

For Jessica, leading by example is key to building mutual trust: *'It isn't enough to tell your team that it's now acceptable to take the afternoon off, do your shopping or school run in the middle of the day. You have to lead by example and demonstrate that you are doing the same, and not burning yourself out. You need to build mutual respect and understanding of each other's work preferences so it is clear that, while I may prefer to work in the evening, I do not expect you to reply to emails then, and similarly, if someone else logs in at 7am, they should not expect a response from me then.'*

Onboarding new colleagues
The organisation learned valuable lessons addressing the challenges of onboarding new colleagues during lockdown. Jessica reports, *'We do things now that we didn't do before. As a team we meet new starters before they join, in person or on Teams, to get to know them on a personal level and make them feel welcome. We promote our new starters to the wider organisation on our employee app through spotlight articles. We also have a new starter pack on our Google Drive so people have easy access to all our comms and*

technology as soon as they start. When you're a new starter, if you're not in an office it can be very difficult to find passwords and information that you need, so this has been really helpful.'

Benefits

The organisation is currently in the process of selling their head office, as the space is no longer needed and this will release capital that can be reinvested in their business, communities and employees. As an alternative, the organisation has spaces where employees can come together to socialise, hold meetings or just catch up face-to-face. Social events are held off-site in different locations. Steven reports, *'Reviews are ongoing to ensure we can respond to changing needs in terms of workspace or offices, but we now have more flexibility to keep things fresh and adapt as needs or preferences change, rather than having everything invested in one facility.'*

Agile working has also led to notable improvements in wellbeing and engagement. Employee sickness absence levels have decreased from 1.69% in 2019/20 to 1.37% in 2020/21, and turnover rates improved from 18.18% in 2019/20 to 13.2% in 2020/21. A recent survey found that 96% of employees say the group is a great place to work.

Jessica reports that their analytics show performance is better than ever before: *'It's because of how we spend our time. Instead of getting writer's block and wasting time blankly staring at the screen as you might in an office, you can go for a walk or do your weekly shop. You can choose to work when you're ready to perform. In addition, we're seeing the benefits of being able to attract different skills from all over the country instead of just our local vicinity – one of our new recruits has increased our social media following by 50% in three months. It's helped us become more diverse and inclusive. Employees also have more opportunities as it's easier to combine work with raising a family or studying for a qualification.'*

Steven agrees that having happier, healthier colleagues, who have responsibility and ownership over their own work, inevitably leads to improved performance and retention: *'We are continually questioning what other barriers we can remove to help our employees feel empowered to deliver results and act in the best interest of the group. We want them to have that confidence that we believe in them. It's all about empowerment and trust, and if you get that right, you really see it in engagement and performance.'*

The Sovini Group's advice for successful hybrid working:

- Share ideas for change with employees at an early stage and seek their opinions. It builds confidence. Accept that you might not have all the answers or that things might not work out, but be committed to putting them right.

- Make a conscious effort to engage with your team and build relationships and trust. Lead by example.

- Focus on what you are trying to achieve as an organisation and as a team and challenge existing practices that do not support this.

- Let colleagues own their own work – a heightened sense of ownership makes people more driven and passionate about what they do.

⑤ Standard Chartered Bank: Rolling out flexible working on a global scale and creating a differentiated employee experience

Standard Chartered (SC) Bank is the leading international banking group. Under their Future Workplace Now initiative, they identified that a flexi-hybrid approach offers significant strategic opportunities and potential for improved productivity and wellbeing.

Organisation: Standard Chartered Bank

Size: Around 87,000 employees

Location: Headquarters in London, England, with a network of more than 1,200 branches and outlets across more than 70 countries

Sector: Financial services

SC is the leading international banking group, with a presence in 59 of the world's most dynamic markets, and serving clients in a further 83.

Under their Future Workplace Now initiative, SC offers a range of hybrid and flexible working options to employees from day one. Some roles aren't able to support the full flexibility available for regulatory or business reasons (for example, roles in trading or in a branch), but where applicable, the organisation's people leaders work with their teams to agree working patterns that suit them and make sense for their clients, colleagues and business. Employees can opt for full flexibility, in terms of hours and location, or fixed hours/fixed days at home and/or in the office.

The full flexibility of the new Future Workplace Now initiative has been rolled out in 28 markets, and 73% of employees in these markets are on flexi-working arrangements (as of end of 2021). The vast majority of these have opted for a hybrid approach, with less than 5% wanting to work exclusively from home. All remaining countries are expected to complete the transition to the new approach by the end of 2024.

Development and implementation

Prior to the pandemic, flexible working was available to employees at SC and was becoming part of the culture. The bank had a flexible working policy (covering hours and location), and more and more employees were taking this up (in most cases to accommodate part-time working). Some teams worked flexibly on an informal basis to collaborate across time zones or accommodate the needs of stakeholders. However, the pandemic accelerated changes that were anticipated in the bank's business and people strategy.

SC knew from listening to their colleagues and assessing productivity data that there was a stronger case and a real appetite for them to offer even more flexibility than before. More flexible practices would offer significant commercial and strategic opportunities, including

potential for improved personal productivity and wellbeing, lower travel costs and carbon footprint, reduced property spend, better organisational resilience, access to more diverse talent pools, and a differentiated employee experience for a workforce who want to contract with work in different ways.

Engaging all stakeholders
SC initiated a programme called Future Workplace Now, to roll out their flexi-hybrid approach. This combined a top–down and bottom–up approach to engage all stakeholders. The heads of HR and change leads engaged with the business leadership, with colleagues country by country, and in smaller groups by department.

Laura Cole (head of HR, UK and Europe) believes that having a strong business case helped get people on board: *'Our industry is heavily regulated and inevitably there were some concerns from a risk perspective. But we had a strong business case which we shared with stakeholders. We had seen through COVID that we could work effectively from home at scale. Colleagues consistently told us that they wanted more flexibility and we saw it as a strong talent differentiator. People got behind the business case.'*

The organisation worked with regulators to confront compliance challenges, addressing the potential and perceived risks of a move to hybrid working. SC's HR, legal and compliance teams, and the chief operating officers of each of the different business areas worked together using their job family framework to develop hypotheses on which job families are best and less suited to flexible working (for example for regulatory reasons).

Employees were consulted throughout the process. Surveys, focus groups and interviews were used to determine appetite, understand what working from home meant, what challenges people were facing, and the critical enablers and blockers from a country lens, to gather feedback through the development of the strategy and review how the changes are perceived.

International rollout
International rollout added an additional layer of complexity from a legislative perspective, as changes needed to accommodate differences in local labour laws. Demand for hybrid and flexible working also varied across (as well as within) countries – due to cultural norms and views around flexible working, differences in people's living conditions (size of accommodation, multigenerational family units), the convenience of existing commutes, as well as connectivity. Laura explains, *'We start with a global standard "template" approach and work with country teams to understand where we need to adapt that based on local nuances and local legislation and how to position the approach in terms of local messaging.'*

International rollout was planned through three phases, allowing SC to be agile in how it delivered into different markets. The first phase covered eight of SC's largest markets – Hong Kong, the UK, UAE, Singapore, Poland and selected business units in India, Malaysia and China, followed shortly after by the US. In phase two it was rolled out further to a total of 28 markets, and now, in the final third stage, SC is rolling out the approach to the rest of the organisation.

Investing in collaborative tools and home/office spaces
SC is enhancing their digital workplace capabilities so that colleagues can access their applications and data, and connect with each other wherever they are. They are investing in 'bring your own device' and virtual desktop infrastructure initiatives to support workforce mobility. This bi-modal access to both 'online' and 'offline' applications/data is key where the quality of connectivity may vary as colleagues move between locations.

Effective and healthy homeworking practices are supported through a one-time payment to cover setup costs or equipment at home. The organisation is also redesigning offices to better support hybrid working. Its strategy includes areas for activity-based working and collaboration as well as quiet spaces, and increasing videoconferencing facilities in meeting rooms to ensure inclusion. Assigned desks will be replaced with bookable workspaces, large community floors and social hubs to promote engagement, education and wellbeing in a broader sense than previously associated with work, for example TED talk-style presentations and yoga sessions.

Laura reports, *'We are encouraging the use of the office as a purposeful destination through training and guidance on what work is best done at home and how to get the most out of coming into the office, that is, for collaboration, socialising, team meetings. We don't want people's diaries to look the same if they're at home or in the office.'*

Maintaining connections
Colleague feedback indicated that while people enjoyed the benefits of remote working during the COVID-19 lockdowns, the benefits of face-to-face interactions – connection, collaboration, wellbeing – also became clear from their absence.

The organisation wanted to find a way to maintain the serendipitous connections that occur in a communal office. They came up with the Watercooler Challenge, to crowdsource ideas on how they might encourage unplanned collaboration, innovation, and inclusion in a hybrid environment. Colleagues submitted their ideas and those shortlisted attended an 'intrepreneurs' bootcamp' to refine their ideas, do market research and create prototypes. SC is now developing the winning ideas into a single optimised solution, combining an app for global staff engagement with a machine-learning-based matching algorithm to help make connections between colleagues who might otherwise never meet. SC have also begun working with the valuable inputs from other colleague ideas to build connectivity. They have run a Connections Week and launched a variety of resources to support colleagues, such as flexible working conversation guides and learning pathways on the learning portal.

Sonia Rossetti, regional head, corporate affairs and brand and marketing, for Europe and the Americas, stresses the importance of scheduling in time to develop and maintain relationships: *'If you're face-to-face, people can more easily ask a question or you can see if they're struggling or not managing well. It can be harder to pick up on that when people are working remotely. During lockdown my team had a weekly 30-minute catch-up to just chat with no agenda – as people would have in the office over coffee. Now we schedule in time for the whole team to meet face-to-face once a month and we also have activities that bring part of the team together. You definitely get a different interaction when people are physically together and people feed off each other a lot more.'*

Supporting wellbeing
SC has adapted its wellbeing initiatives to support hybrid working. They have focused strongly on promoting mental health through training, tools and communications as well as providing guidance on being respectful and mindful of others and promoting good physical health.

Sonia reports, *'Being connected to a screen the whole time when you're working remotely is draining. Initially we found that people were having back-to-back online meetings all day because they could just log out of one and into another – when you're in an office you have to at least move floors. We are working to encourage breaks away from the screen and increase mindfulness around wellbeing.'*

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Embedding effective hybrid and flexi-working practices

Full implementation of hybrid working arrangements have, understandably, been slowed down by COVID restrictions and employee concerns about returning to the office, but in most geographies these are now easing. SC is keen to ensure that senior leaders and key influencers in all countries support the new approach through their actions and is encouraging them to share their experiences of how hybrid and flexi-working works for them and supports their work–life balance, wellbeing and productivity. Sonia believes this is essential for success: *'You need to ensure that words and actions are aligned and that requires a definite mind shift. You need to make sure you don't underestimate taking people on that journey.'*

A range of training programmes throughout the rollout has helped people adapt to and review agile working practices, including how they work in teams, respect people remotely, ensure wellbeing and inclusion. Particular attention has been given to equipping people leaders with the skills and behaviours they need, as they have most influence and impact on how employees feel and perform. SC has also produced clear expectations and guidance for managing key stages of the employee lifecycle in a hybrid environment (for example, onboarding, performance management, creating development plans, return from long-term absence, and so on), as well as how to approach other aspects which are crucial to colleagues' success (staying connected as a team, giving support and giving feedback).

Benefits

Initial feedback from employees that have moved to the new hybrid arrangements confirm that their engagement and work–life balance have improved. SC is also seeing the benefits in terms of attracting and retaining more diverse colleagues, including people who live outside their traditional commuter areas. Sonia says, *'It's definitely a competitive advantage. People have a different consciousness about work now and we are offering that genuine work–life balance and allowing people to set their own agenda.'* It is a game-changer for supporting the pipeline of future female leaders too, as the flexible arrangements allow women to better manage family and home-life responsibilities and progressing their career. Sonia, also chair of the bank's gender employee network, adds, *'We are committed to hitting our senior women targets in leadership and know that flexible working is breaking down barriers preventing talented women entering the workplace and remaining in work after having children.'*

Feedback also suggests that colleagues are finding they are more productive, with quiet, focused time for certain activities at home, as well as regular opportunities to work, collaborate and learn from colleagues in an office environment.

SC is now collecting data to measure the effect of hybrid working going forward and correlate data on evolving working practices with colleague sentiment and business outcomes data. This includes the use of Microsoft Workplace Analytics, which collects (anonymised) data on working practices (for example hours worked, time spent multitasking, in meetings, with people leaders, and so on). Laura says, *'We're currently exploring how we can best use, share and act on this data. It will help us understand which working practices or locations support better delivery, enhance employee experience and drive improved business results.'*

SC's advice for successful hybrid working:

- Getting employee voice in the design is critical. Marrying that with the business need creates synergy and balance.

- Don't make it an HR initiative. Consider the employee experience from a property, technology and HR lens and bring leaders and influencers on the journey.

- Start small and scale up, incorporating lessons learned.

- Have connection points to maintain relationships, engagement, mutual learning and wellbeing. Don't underestimate the wellbeing aspect.

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