



Flexibility works for customers and staff

Commonwealth Bank's story

Consumers of banking products are firmly in the digital arena, and banks have adjusted their products and services (as well as how and when they are offered) for customer convenience. Running parallel to this are the needs of workers for flexible work at various stages of their careers.

The Commonwealth Bank sees flexibility as a key to customer satisfaction and business competitiveness, as well as to attracting and retaining a productive, motivated and talented workforce. The bank offers 'reason-neutral' flex options for workers, and has been rewarded with greater productivity, less absenteeism and more engagement from workers who access flexible work arrangements.

Changing work needs

The Commonwealth Bank recognises that the work environment is changing, and that it needed to build flexibility into the organisation and culture to be competitive. By providing a supportive and flexible work environment, the bank aims to be an employer of choice for workers in the industry, and to provide customer convenience.

'Reason-neutral flex'

However, the Commonwealth Bank quickly realised that no two employees are the same, and neither are their needs for flexibility. Most people will require some form of flexible work arrangement during their working lives - to care for children or family, to pursue sports or study, to accommodate an impairment, to transition to retirement, to manage commuting, to observe religious or cultural practices, and many other life circumstances. For this reason, the bank made its flex policy 'reason-neutral', so that no one reason for requesting flexible arrangements is more or less legitimate than any other.

The flex options available to workers include: reduced hours (including part-time work), job-share arrangements, remote working (from home and from other Commonwealth Bank locations), flexible hours and career breaks. These arrangements can be either formal or informal.

Trust rewarded with productivity

Initially, there was some concern about trusting workers to deliver outcomes when they were not physically in attendance at the workplace. However, the excellent results achieved by workers have shifted the focus for managers from concern about physical attendance of staff to concentration on their output. Sarah Abbott, Senior Manager, Group Diversity and Inclusion, at Commonwealth Bank says:

The work that employees are able to produce from home is impressive! Managers often say that they know they can rely on a deliverable to be completed on the 'at home day' because they tend to be such productive days for staff due to fewer meetings and distractions.

Consistent implementation

As a very large organisation, the Commonwealth Bank was determined that all managers should adopt a consistent approach to managing flexible work arrangements, and that access to flexible options was available at all levels of the organisation. In response, the Diversity and Inclusion team developed tools and resources for managers so that all workers would have the same experience, regardless of their manager.

Benefits to the bank

The Commonwealth Bank has identified the following benefits directly as a result of its flexible work practices:

- * retention rate of staff improved;
- * capacity to adapt to customer needs outside of usual business hours;
- * ability to adapt to business demands;
- * reputation as an employer of choice;
- * productivity improved;
- * engagement score on the staff survey was higher for staff who work flexibly;
- * talent pool widened; and
- * absenteeism decreased.

Personal story: Geza, Assessment Manager

Geza is an Assessment Manager at the Commonwealth Bank with a role in Wealth Management that does not rely on set hours. This means that he can manage his workload around other commitments and change his start or finishing times as needed.

'Having the ability to work flexibly since 2005 is a major reason I pursued the employment opportunity with the Commonwealth Bank. It has enabled my wife and I to maintain our careers while looking after three young and very active boys. Along the way, I have changed my part-time working days to accommodate my wife's changing work situation, and it has enabled us to share those home duties.'

With careful planning, Geza is involved in this phase of his young family's life, and it allows him and his wife to have active careers. The trust of his managers is important to Geza, and he advises anyone wanting to explore a flexible work arrangement to be sure they are:

- * organised;
- * good communicators;
- * able to look ahead, plan and forecast; and
- * able to be flexible in their flex arrangements, using a 'give and take' approach.

Advice to other organisations

The Commonwealth Bank's message to other organisations is to ensure that the flexibility options you offer are sustainable for your business. The next step is to promote the changes across all levels of the organisation, and showcase the many ways the staff are working flexibly.

To manage implementation and expectations, the Commonwealth Bank produced tools and resources to assist managers and workers including:

- * a job re-design tool to start the conversation around what is entailed in role and how individual requirements can be supported;
- * a communication pack for leaders and managers to share insights and processes easily and effectively with their teams;
- * a training program for HR practitioners to support them in implementing and managing flex; and
- * online and hard copy self-help manual for managers and employees to quickly and easily understand the approach to flex and how to start the conversation.

Where to get more information on flexibility at work

Australian Human Rights Commission Flexible work arrangements

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12036>

Queensland Government, Flexible work arrangements

<https://www.qld.gov.au/gov/flexible-work-arrangements>

