



DIVERSITY  
COUNCIL  
AUSTRALIA

## SYNOPSIS REPORT

# Future-Flex

MAINSTREAMING FLEXIBILITY  
BY TEAM DESIGN

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This Guide has been developed under the joint authorship of Dr Graeme Russell and DCA. DCA would like to thank Graeme for his significant contribution and acknowledge that this *Future-Flex* Guide draws heavily on his long-standing expertise and work in the area of workplace flexibility and job and work design.

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This is a synopsis of the Report. An electronic copy of the full report can be found on the DCA website at <http://www.dca.org.au/dca-research.html>



#### **About Diversity Council Australia**

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) is the only independent, not-for-profit workplace diversity advisor to business in Australia. We offer a unique knowledge bank of research, practice and expertise across diversity dimensions developed over 30 years of operation. In partnership with our members, our mission is to: lead debate on diversity in the public arena; develop and promote the latest diversity research, thinking and practice; and deliver innovative diversity practice resources and services to enable our members to drive business improvement. DCA works in partnership with members to generate ground breaking high impact diversity research that drives business improvement through providing evidence-based guidance on how to fully leverage the benefits of a diverse talent pool.

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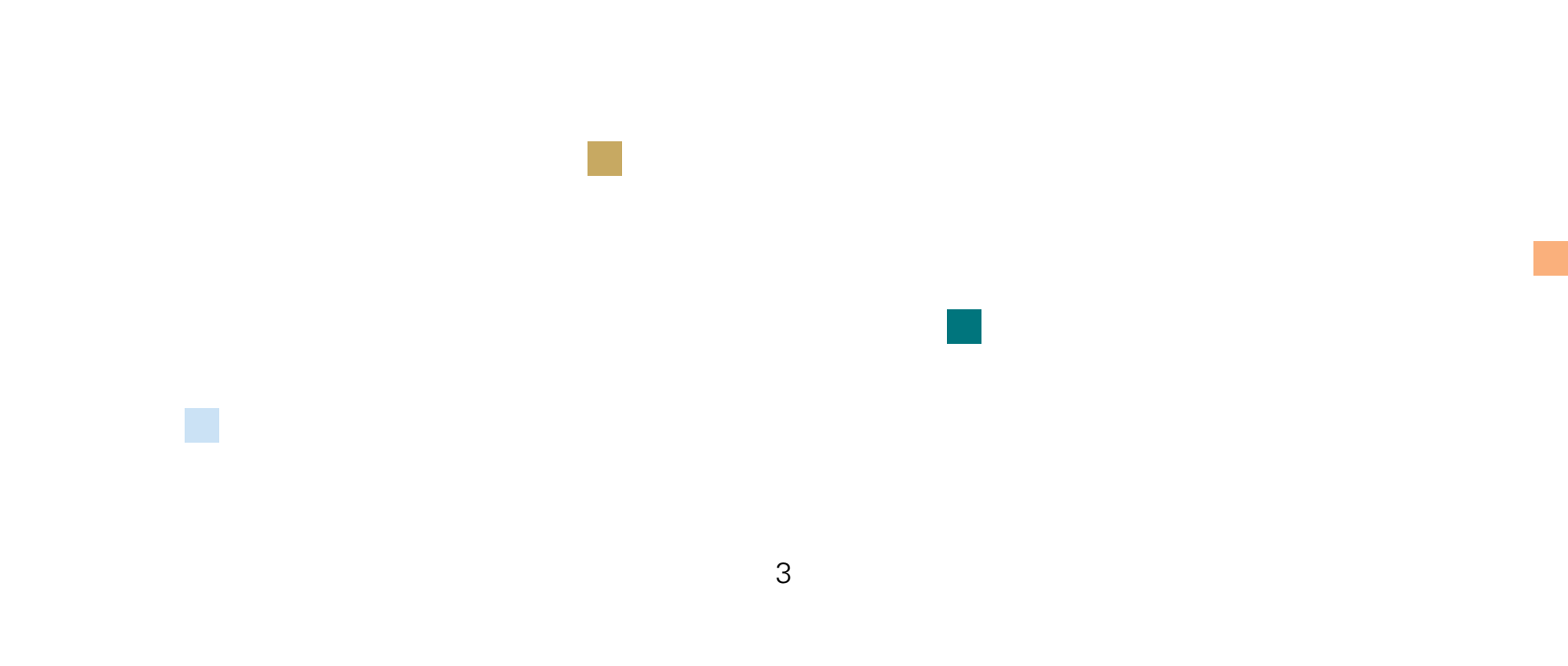
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## ***FUTURE-FLEX: A SNAPSHOT***

***Future-Flex* is a new way of thinking about and implementing workplace flexibility, which focuses on team design. *Future-Flex* is about more than just accommodating an individual's needs – it is about redesigning work at a team level to maximise performance and wellbeing.**

In 2012, Diversity Council Australia released its *Get Flexible!* report as a call to action for Australian organisations to make flexible work and flexible careers standard business practice.

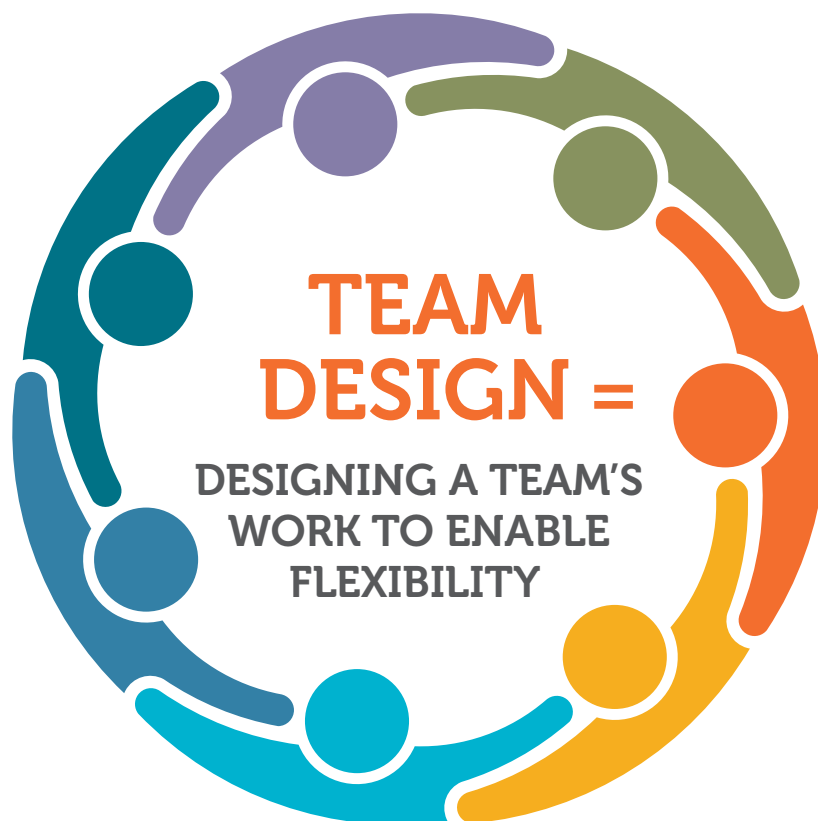
Five years on, workplace flexibility is yet to be mainstreamed in most Australian workplaces.

## MAINSTREAMING FLEXIBILITY BY TEAM DESIGN

DCA's experience is that a critical stumbling block for organisations trying to mainstream flexibility is work and job redesign – managers and employees struggle to redesign work and jobs in ways that are sustainable and improve performance and wellbeing.

Through this project DCA aims to assist organisations by providing practical guidance for managers, teams, and individuals on how to mainstream workplace flexibility through team design.

This project is a partnership initiative between DCA, the Retail Council, National Australia Bank, Allens, IBM, BAE Systems Australia and IAG, which aims to generate practical guidance for managers, teams, and individuals on how to implement and mainstream workplace flexibility through work design.



This involves reviewing the components of all team members' jobs (e.g. tasks, responsibilities, work relationships, location, timing), rather than the job of just one individual employee.





## A FUTURE-FLEX MINDSET

*Future-Flex* requires shifting from an 'individual accommodation' to a 'team design' mindset. Instead of accommodating an individual's flexibility request to improve their work-life balance, the focus is on designing all team members' work and jobs for flexibility to maximise performance and wellbeing.

A *Future-Flex* Mindset has four defining characteristics.



**STARTS WITH THE TEAM.** *Future-Flex* is about redesigning work at a team level – rather than just redesigning one individual's job. Employees are key partners in developing team-based flexibility solutions that work.

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**CHALLENGES ASSUMPTIONS.** *Future-Flex* recognises that organisational and team cultures are critical to the success of flexibility at work. Shifting to a *Future-Flex* mindset involves being aware of and challenging our own biased assumptions about what it means to be a flexible worker (e.g. about people's career aspirations, commitment to the organisation etc.)

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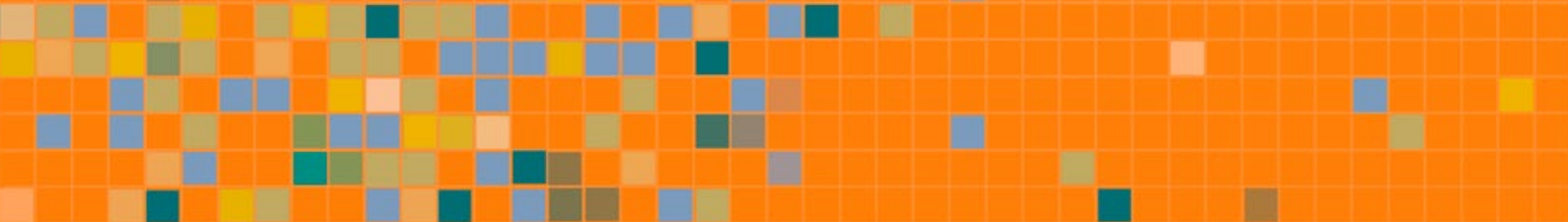


**USES FLEXIBILITY AS A BUSINESS TOOL.** *Future-Flex* focuses on flexible work that boosts the performance and wellbeing of organisations, teams, and individuals. Meeting business goals in areas such as customer service, innovation, growth and efficiency is central to *Future-Flex*.

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**DEFINES FLEXIBILITY BROADLY.** *Future-Flex* defines flexibility as including a variety of ways for team members to work flexibly, which can involve formal or informal arrangements, any role (including managerial roles), and can be accessed for any reason.



CURRENT MINDSET		FUTURE-FLEX MINDSET
INDIVIDUAL ACCOMMODATION		TEAM DESIGN
How can we <i>accommodate individual requests</i> for flexible work so work-life conflict is minimised?	FOCUS	How can we <i>design team members' work</i> and jobs to maximise the performance and wellbeing of our organisation, teams, and individuals?
Individual employee and manager	STARTS WITH	Team and manager
Individual's work arrangement	CHANGES	Organisational and team culture (workplace norms and assumptions)
Flexibility is defined narrowly. Flexibility is limited to start-finish times and part-time work, which is accessed formally, for childcare reasons, and in lower level roles.	DEFINES	Flexibility is defined broadly. It includes flexibility for team members in <i>time, leave, place</i> , and <i>choice</i> . These can be formal or informal arrangements, for any role, and for any reason.
HR policy to improve individual's work-life situation	USES	Business tool to improve performance and wellbeing of organisation, teams, and individuals

Source: Adapted from Clayman Institute for Gender Research, Design Toolkit: Principles, Tools & Starting Points



## STARTING WITH THE TEAM AT NAB

The **NAB Business Banking Centre** based in Marrickville in Sydney's Inner West piloted the Future-Flex process. The team held a workshop where they took the Future-Flex Challenge: *'Design a different approach to your team's work and specific jobs, which enables greater flexibility for team members in how, when, and where work is done.'*

Team members were asked to adopt a *Future-Flex* mindset such that they:

- Looked for ways to increase job flexibility, not block flexibility
- Were flexible in their thinking and considered different perspectives
- Used ideas for how their own particular job could be made more flexible
- Considered different ways in which business outcomes could be achieved
- Used ideas that maintained or had a positive impact on individual, team and business outcomes

Team members overall identified an impressive 17 possible *Future-Flex* options. These included both flexibility options (e.g. flexibility in work location) and work redesign options with a flexibility link (e.g. improving technology could enable flexibility in work location).

A follow up workshop was conducted with a smaller 'implementation team', consisting of volunteers who were key stakeholders and passionate about the proposed changes. The implementation team was asked to review the 17 *Future-Flex* options and consider the following three questions:

- Which flexible work redesign options will be implemented?
- What will be the operating principles for the changes?
- What are the implications for team and work design?

**Below is the team's resultant *Future-Flex Design*!**

### OUR VISION

To create a work environment where individuals can be flexible in when, where and how their work is done, where workflow is seamless and efficient between teams, and where our business goals are met and exceeded.

To think differently about how we deliver outstanding service to our customers, and to embrace opportunities for individuals to achieve work-life balance in a way that makes them happy.

### OUR GOALS

We will achieve our vision through these goals:

- Enabling remote access for all roles
- Facilitating flexible working hours over a 7 day work week
- Ensuring career progression is not limited for individuals employing flexible work options





## OUR OPERATING PRINCIPLES

In bringing these goals to life:



We will achieve our  
**business goals**



We will ensure customers  
are **served well** and  
are confident that we are  
delivering their needs



**Our teams will work  
collaboratively** to achieve  
our common goals, and  
flexibility will be reciprocal and  
add value to the entire group

## OUR FOCUS AREAS:

- **Technology** – Enable remote access for all employees regardless of role type, through hardware and software improvements and process change
- **Operating model** – Agree on a revised operating model, utilising alternative communication channels to support flexibility. Formalise buddy systems to preserve customer continuity and speed of service delivery
- **Support teams** – Clarify roles, responsibilities and hand-off points with support teams, and improve feedback mechanisms and escalations in order to reduce duplicate effort. Consider re-mapping of workflow if required to achieve optimum support
- **Task clarity** – Clarify tasks for each role within the Centre, ensuring a common understanding and appropriate role content
- **Leave and coverage** – Establish a structured mechanism to support customer coverage during periods of leave and ensure balanced workloads
- **Associate Pool** – Consider optimal support structure between Associates and bankers, including a pool model to support greater flexibility and skill acquisition

## OUR NEXT STEPS

The above *Future-Flex* design is currently being implemented, with oversight by the implementation team to monitor process and impact.

The team plans to evaluate the *Future-Flex* pilot once these new more flexible ways of working have been embedded into the way the Marrickville Business Banking Centre works.

The evaluation will review the *Future-Flex* process and outcomes including what, if any, further changes may need to be made to ensure flexibility and work design work – for the business, the team, and individual team members.



# 1. START WITH THE TEAM

***Future-Flex* is about redesigning work at a team level – rather than just redesigning one individual's job. Employees are key partners in developing team-based flexibility solutions that work.**

Design often starts with an individual requesting greater flexibility. But if job design is to be successful for an individual and their organisation, it must involve their team.

*Future-Flex* asks teams to come together to take the *Future-Flex Challenge* workshop, in which they are asked to develop a team based approach to flexibility. You can find the *Future-Flex Challenge* workshop instructions in the full *Future-Flex* Guidelines, available to DCA members.



## STARTING WITH THE TEAM AT ALLENS

As part of their ongoing commitment to Inclusion, the **Allens Inclusion and Diversity Council (IDC)** has reviewed their approach to flexibility across the firm.

Currently, over 25% of the Allens workforce access formal flexible work arrangements with many more accessing informal flexibility. With 85% of those on formal flexible working arrangements being women with caring responsibilities, the firm felt a particular need to broaden the access to flexible working as part of the firm's wellbeing and talent retention strategies.

As Managing Partner, Richard Spurio noted: *"We want a workplace where our people can be their best. To do that, we need to be innovative and inspire new, smarter ways of working. This means more than just implementing formal flexible arrangements when our people ask for them – we want to lead a different kind of conversation about how we can all work more effectively, and be open to experimenting with new ways of working together. A 'one size fits all' approach does not work. While there is more to do, we are continuing to find ways that balance client and team needs with greater flexibility."*

As a first step, the IDC undertook an analysis of all policies, tools and processes. The main goal was to position flexibility as being open to everyone.

The firm then partnered with Dr Graeme Russell to build the capability of partners and people managers enabling them to skilfully manage flexible teams. The original workshops focused on three key skills: job redesign, team based approaches to flexibility and promoting flexibility through regular career discussions held at the firm.

**After a successful pilot, the program is being rolled out nationally. The next phase will be developed with the benefit of the insights from the workshops and will include supporting whole team approaches to flexibility.**





## 2. CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS

**Shifting to a *Future-Flex* mindset involves being aware of our own biases and assumptions about work and flexibility – conscious and unconscious.**

These biases discourage both organisations and individuals from engaging in flexible work – they keep flexible work and flexible careers on the margins rather than mainstream.

Assumptions are often made about what it means to be a flexible worker – for example:

- Flexible team members are less ambitious and less committed to their organisation
- Flexible work is not possible in teams which do client/customer facing work or for people who manage teams/staff
- Flexible work is only relevant to women with young children
- Everyone will demand flexibility and be resentful if they don't get it
- People will take advantage of the company

When your team is doing the *Future-Flex Challenge* ask team members to question some of the underlying assumptions about their work, specifically: *What does the 'Ideal Worker' look like in your organisational area? What is valued and rewarded? How is commitment to your job assessed?*



## BAE SYSTEMS AUSTRALIA: CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS

**BAE Systems Australia's Agile Work Project** was the perfect opportunity to challenge the prevailing view about workplace design and flexibility. Despite flexible work practices being well promoted, there was still a strong expectation on "face" hours.

- Our survey data showed that 76% of employees reported the business offered flexible working arrangements, however 33% believed they could not perform their role effectively away from the office.
- This was largely driven by the complex Defence environment that the team works within and the high level of security requirements. The focus on security requirements underpinned expectations that work needed to be completed on site.

Our pilot began with a team that was experiencing a tenancy challenge; a requirement to increase desk utilisation and reduce occupancy costs. As Michael Partridge, Technology Development Program Manager in our Aerospace Business Unit noted: *"We explored an agile working environment where employees could work collaboratively from any location, engage with one another in different contexts (including face-to-face and via technologies), while maintaining customer delivery and reducing overall operating costs."*

To address assumptions that flexible work design was not possible in our operating environment, and to support the transition to an environment of increased flexibility and collaboration, the project team:

- **Analysed** the current work being completed within the team, best practice agile working environments externally and how a redesign could maintain or increase productivity.
- **Consulted** to determine minimum operating requirements and an Agile working environment which could increase collaboration, maintain work output and maximise occupancy rate.
- **Held** briefing sessions and listening and consultation sessions with employees, managers and teams before the transition occurred and post the "go live" date to inform about expectations and milestones and provide further opportunity to provide feedback and raise any concerns.
- **Nominated "Agile Champions"** who could be approached for further information, to manage feedback and follow up on the issues register.

The Agile working environment was a measurable success, reducing office footprint and increasing desk utilisation, team collaboration, and work satisfaction, while maintaining customer delivery.

Agile is truly challenging the perception that flexibility is solely an employee benefit – business leaders have been able to see the significant business value gained by mature and innovative approaches to flexibility.

**The greatest achievement has been challenging assumptions about what was possible, demonstrating that agile environments can exist despite the most complex Defence security requirements.**





### 3. USE FLEXIBILITY AS A BUSINESS TOOL

*Future-Flex* focuses on flexible work that boosts the performance and wellbeing of organisations, teams, and individuals. Meeting business goals in areas such as customer service, innovation, growth and efficiency is central to *Future-Flex*.

When your team is doing the *Future-Flex Challenge* ask team members to review their ideas for working flexibly by considering: *'Does this idea either maintain or have a positive impact on individual, team and business outcomes?'*



## FLEXIBILITY AS A BUSINESS TOOL...



### PROFIT AND PERFORMANCE

Bank retail branches that were supportive of flexibility and people's personal lives had a 50% higher retention rate and a 7% increase in customer retention, resulting in a \$106 million profit increase.

A work design project in a U.S. information technology company had a positive return on investment (ROI) of 1.68 – for every dollar spent on the project, average organisational costs fell by \$1.68.

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### SUSTAINABILITY

Flexible work has played a critical role in enabling companies to respond to the economic downturn. Companies including KPMG and Norton Rose, offered staff the option of working four days a week, taking a sabbatical on reduced pay, enabling them to avoid major staff cuts.

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### WELLBEING

Employees participating in a work redesign model called Predictability, Teaming and Open Communication (PTO), were significantly more likely than other employees to feel comfortable taking time off for personal life, to feel satisfied with their work-life balance, and to imagine themselves staying at the company for the long term.

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### ENGAGEMENT

Employees with the flexibility they need have 55% higher engagement, 55% less stress, and 45% lower turnover intention than employees who do not.

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### GENDER EQUALITY

Flex options are linked to greater career aspirations amongst female (and male) employees. In a recent Bain & Co. survey, 83% of female employees aspired for senior executive roles in 'flexible' organisations (i.e. those with flexible work options) versus only 54% in 'inflexible' organisations.

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### TALENT MANAGEMENT

The Gap Inc. conducted a pilot work redesign initiative with a team with high work-life conflict and burn out levels. Six months after implementation staff turnover in that team was down by 50%, productivity was up 21% and engagement up 7%.

Almost one in five Australian workers (18%) has considered resigning in the last six months due to lack of flexibility.



## FLEXIBILITY AS A BUSINESS TOOL IN IAG

Traditionally, flexible work options for contact centre consultants have been limited due to the nature of customer facing work which is highly dependent on technology. But **IAG's Customer Sales & Service team**, based in Perth, have shown that this needn't be the case.

With an initial 30 customer-service employees taking part in the Work from Home trial, providing a full span of coverage from 7am to 8pm AWST including weekends, IAG has started to reap the real benefits of work from home arrangements and has since expanded to eight teams across Perth, Sydney and Brisbane.

- **Improved Workforce Planning.** Not only did the program see service improvements with increased staff available to take calls, but the consultants increased their demand for overtime work. So when grades of service required additional support, those working from home could be placed on-call to jump on the phones and provide additional support where needed. This has now created a more scalable workforce planning model with benefits for both the business and our people.
- **Increased Engagement.** Employees started to experience greater flexibility in their working day, resulting in increased engagement, an 18% drop in absenteeism and a 4x increase in the take up of overtime hours by our WFH teams, with no decline in business performance.
- **Quality Customer Service.** From a technology perspective, the systems remained stable with similar response times recorded as to working in the office.




## FLEXIBILITY AS A BUSINESS TOOL IN IBM

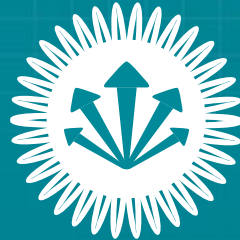
**IBM** has achieved cost savings and improved client and employee satisfaction through flexibility and mobility.

- **The company benefits** from substantial real estate savings, increased employee retention, enhanced productivity, lower absenteeism and increased revenue.
- **Teams benefit** from productivity improvement, more face time with clients, improved customer satisfaction, more accessible and responsive, work longer hours with less impact on personal / family life and higher morale.
- **Clients benefit** from increased customer satisfaction, better accessibility to IBM team, more "face time" with IBMers, more productive at client site and faster response to inquiries.



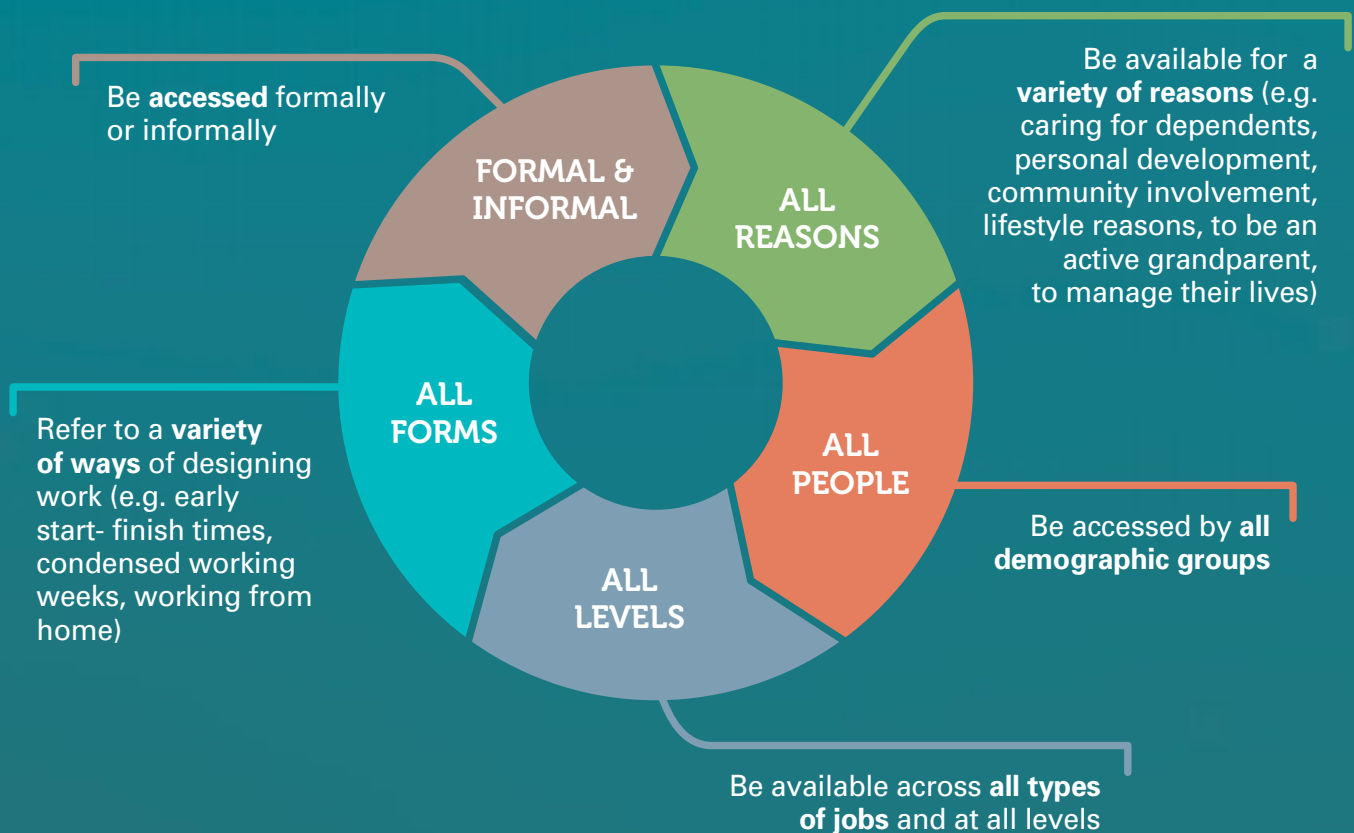


Boston Consulting Group employees participating in a work redesign model called Predictability, Teaming and Open Communication (PTO), were significantly more likely than other employees to feel comfortable taking time off for personal life, to feel satisfied with their work–life balance, and to imagine themselves staying at the company for the long term.



## 4. DEFINE FLEXIBILITY BROADLY

For flexibility to become standard business practice and the default 'way we do things around here' it needs to:





## WHAT IS A FUTURE-FLEX DEFINITION OF FLEXIBILITY?

*Future-Flex* includes flexibility for all team members in time, leave, place, and choice.



Source: Adapted from Families & Work Institute

When your team is doing the *Future-Flex Challenge* encourage team members to cross-check their ideas for flexibility by referring to the *Future-Flex* definition of flexibility, and considering:

***'Do our ideas include a variety of ways of working including flexibility for all team members in time, leave, place, and choice – including formal or informal arrangements, for any role, and for any reason?'***

# METHODOLOGY

To develop these evidence-based guidelines we drew on four main data sources, these being:

- International and national industry and academic literature about workplace flexibility and the future of work including shifts in the nature of work, how work is done, and processes to analyse and design jobs, work and organisations
- A *Future-Flex* pilot conducted in NAB's Marrickville Business Banking Centre in Sydney
- Interviews and liaison with staff working in a range of workplace settings
- Our own extensive experience working as practitioners and consultants in the area of diversity, inclusion and workplace flexibility, assisting workforces make flexible work and flexible careers standard business practice.

# FIND OUT MORE

DCA members can access the full Guidelines by logging into the Members Only area of the DCA website. The full Guidelines include detailed information on:

- The *Future-Flex* model and mindset to mainstream flexible work and flexible careers
- Practical activities and guidance for individuals, team, managers, and D&I practitioners wishing to take a team-based approach to flexible work
- The business case for *Future-Flex*, including all research references
- Full case studies and practice examples of *Future-Flex* leading practice



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