

Flexible working increases job satisfaction but it depends on how you arrange it

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Research from Cass Business School and Cranfield School of Management has confirmed that flexible working can increase employee job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

However, the researchers discovered that employees who establish flexible working arrangements through informal discussion with their line manager are judged to perform much better than those who use formal flexible working arrangements.

The researchers surveyed 2665 UK employees across four private sector organisations with established flexible working practices that were available to all employees, not just those with parenting and caring responsibilities. There was a nearly even split by gender and most were professionals aged between 30 – 49 years-old.

The researchers examined the relationship between flexible working arrangements designed to accommodate employees' needs (eg remote working, flexitime, compressed working) and performance appraisals.

They then considered the indirect effects of [employee](#) performance via [job satisfaction](#) and organisational commitment. They also analysed whether the associations varied according to whether the flexible working arrangement was set up via a formal policy or informal negotiation

between the employee and line manager.

Positive association for job satisfaction and organisational commitment

Report co-author Professor Lilian de Menezes, Cass, said the research showed a positive association between both informal and formal flexible working arrangements and job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

"Giving employees the opportunity to work more flexibly gives them more autonomy over their working lives and this gives them a sense of [job satisfaction](#) and loyalty to their employer," she said.

Professor de Menezes said the research found that informal flexible working arrangements were found to be more successful in terms of individual performance because they could stimulate reciprocal behaviours such as loyalty, attendance and punctuality.

"Our research found that employees working under informal agreements received higher performance ratings. Informal arrangements can allow employees to better accommodate personal circumstances than when the arrangement is set up through a formal mechanism, and the informal negotiation with line managers can result in outcomes that are also beneficial to the team," she said.

Negative association for formal flexible working arrangements

Report co-author Professor Clare Kelliher, Cranfield, said the research found that formal flexible working arrangements were negatively associated with performance.

"It is possible that those with formal agreements perform poorly because they have less face time

with their managers and co-workers. They might have fewer opportunities for training or collaborating with colleagues. If their performance is dependent on interacting with co-workers then this might be hampered by some forms of flexible working," she said.

Professor Kelliher said managers who were not supportive of flexible working processes may also, consciously or otherwise, be influenced by this when assessing [performance](#).

"Managers who have not received adequate training in managing flexible workers may also find it more difficult to manage and assess flexible workers," she said.

The report suggests that further research should now be undertaken to examine how individual characteristics may impact the relationship between flexible working arrangements and employee outcomes, including health and wellbeing.

The research was published in *Human Resources Management*.

More information: Lilian M. De Menezes et al. Flexible Working, Individual Performance, and Employee Attitudes: Comparing Formal and Informal Arrangements, *Human Resource Management* (2016). [DOI: 10.1002/hrm.21822](https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21822)

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