GUIDE

Why Flexible Working is No Longer a Benefit

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Flexible working has been a growing trend for many years; with the outbreak of COVID-19, this trend has reached its tipping point.

For many employers, flexible working arrangements have been the only way to handle the unprecedented challenges the pandemic brought about; with 78% of workers now saying they want increased flexibility in their work moving forward, it will be exceptionally difficult for employers to justify denying them it.

This marks a fundamental change in the way organizations need to think about flexibility. ▸

Flexible work is no longer a perk

Historically, flexible work has been seen as a benefit: if it was bestowed upon workers, the assumption was they would be grateful and repay organizations with loyalty.

With flexibility increasingly expected to become the norm, this assumption will need to be seriously reassessed.

The reality is, flexible working offers a huge range of benefits – not just for workers, but employers too. It increases productivity, improves job satisfaction and opens the door to a far more diverse group of workers.

As more employers observe these benefits and become more flexible in their arrangements, workers will increasingly have the option to jump ship to a different employer who is more flexible if their current employer doesn't allow it.

Even before the pandemic, Aviva found that 22% of UK workers had changed companies or departments to gain greater flexibility.

Organizations which claim to be doing workers a 'favour' by allowing flexible work will now risk alienating workers and sending their talent running to more accommodating organizations.

Facilitating flexibility

Perhaps most crucially, organizations which present flexible work as a 'benefit' will likely miss out on opportunities to empower their workers.

According to some sources, as many as 46% of employees feel awkward discussing personal commitments with their employers and a fifth are convinced they would be refused if they asked for more flexibility in their work.

This creates an atmosphere where far less flexibility – and all the benefits that come with it – is being taken due to structural communication challenges.

The knock-on effect is clear: not only do employees not get the kinds of working arrangements they would like, they feel less confidence and trust in their employers.

If organizations simply present flexibility as the norm, these difficulties will be mitigated and workplace morale will likely improve considerably.

However, it is not enough simply to make clear that workers are allowed more flexibility. ▸

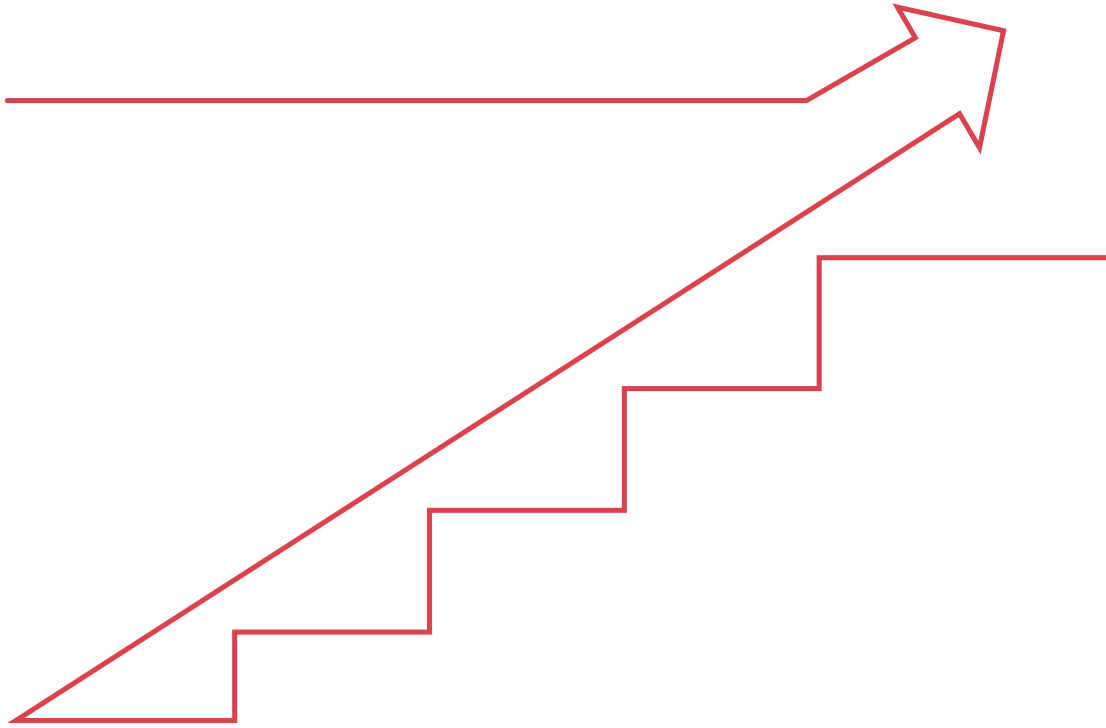
New normal, new benefits

By failing to embrace flexibility, organizations risk overlooking and missing out on a whole new range of benefits which their competitors are offering.

Such benefits might include important resources which actually help make flexible working more pleasant, easier or more productive – from improved digital communication platforms and tech equipment to more flexible holidays, increased individual autonomy or upskilling resources.

This will mean that even if two organizations both ostensibly offer equally flexible work arrangements, the organization which has gone out of its way to improve such arrangements will win every time.

As workers' needs adapt to the post-pandemic landscape, organizations must focus on providing real value to their employees and demonstrating a willingness to be forward thinking; a large part of this must be changing their assumptions about what is a benefit and what is simply a fact of working life.



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