



Business benefits: increased productivity

Business metrics demonstrating value: increased revenue and cost reduction

Our Cambridge office launched an initiative at the end of 2010 that took a holistic view at ways of improving the office environment and the working lives of our employees. Several initiatives were launched, but one of the most significant initiatives was to launch an 'informal flexible working' pilot. The idea of flexible working was not new to Eversheds employees: indeed, for many years there had been a 'Lifestyle' policy, offering employees the opportunity of flexible working arrangements. This new initiative, however, suggested a more informal approach to working flexibly that did not require anything as formal as a change in employment contract. This was about informal, 'ad hoc' flexible working, allowing all employees to try out different types of flexible working that would suit their personal circumstances, as long as it did not adversely impact their work, their clients and the other members of their teams. Our aim was to promote a **'smarter working approach'** and to manage our working practices and the office environment in a way that had a positive impact on the energy, job satisfaction and performance of our people.

A key element for success was having a strong message from leadership and ensuring that there was engagement for this initiative at every level. We had no doubt that employees would be keen to try out different working arrangements as long as it would not be frowned upon by their manager, or any other colleague for that matter. The message had to be clear and strong with managers visibly endorsing the scheme. A great win was to have the Senior Office Partner being the sponsor of the pilot. In collaboration with HR, he approached the other Partners to get their buy-in: any concerns that the proposal would be rebuffed soon appeared unfounded and the partners even encouraged a **'blue sky'** approach where employees would be able to try out any type of flexible working, whether this was working from home, mobile working or flexible hours. Formalities were avoided except for a record sheet that participating employees were asked to complete with the purpose of measuring impact on productivity and obtaining their feedback.

All staff were called into a meeting where the Senior Office Partner explained the context and purpose of the four week pilot and encouraged every member of staff to consider participating. This was followed up by an email to all staff which provided guidelines on how the scheme would work. In short, there was little formality to it and some basic, **'common sense'** rules applied: let your manager know and agree approval, if you are going to work from home ensure you have the right office environment to do so, keep a record of any issues you encounter, and ensure your proposed arrangement has no detrimental impact on the work you deliver for your clients, your manager or your colleagues.



The HR Advisor was the key contact for employees during the pilot, with help from the Office Manager. Feedback was collected through record sheets, verbally during 'office walkthroughs' and through Focus Groups. During the pilot, the HR Advisor liaised with local IT to have any technical issues addressed. The feedback during the pilot indicated there was an appetite for informal flexible working in the Cambridge office, and this was also aligned to the feedback from an earlier employee Pulse survey. As a result the pilot was extended by four weeks, after which an electronic survey was sent to all staff.

The results revealed that there had been a great take up by staff, it had led to a measurable increase of productivity and it had lifted the perceived barriers to flexible working. Before the pilot, 50% staff felt they needed to be in the office the whole time and 45% thought they were not allowed to work flexibly, but during the pilot the number of respondents who had tried flexible working increased from 48% to 91%. Working from home and working flexible hours proved to be the most popular type of flexible working. Whilst at the start of the pilot there were some technological problems to overcome (forwarding phones, having the right equipment at home), 42% of respondents had experienced no technical issues, and no-one had any negative client feedback as a result of working flexibly.

Staff reported an improved work/life balance (60%), felt more valued and trusted (49%), felt more motivated (42%) and saw it as a form of recognition (30%). In addition, it was most encouraging to see that 28% of respondents felt it had increased their productivity, with 14% increasing their amount of chargeable hours. This may seem like a modest number, but it should be noted that during this short pilot approximately 40% of staff worked flexibly only once every fortnight, and it would be expected that improved productivity would emerge as a result of a more sustained regular flexible working approach. This is supported by the utilisation figures for the Cambridge office which moved from 88% in January to 92% in February and 97% in March, which was the highest increase in utilisation of all UK offices between January and March, and was up 5% from March 2010 (*source: Office Utilisation - Firm Report, run 23rd May 2011*).

In summary, the outcome of the pilot was certainly positive, with 81% of staff agreeing that it had had a positive impact on the flexible working culture in their teams and 75% agreeing they would continue to work flexibly. These results indicated flexible working has a considerable positive impact on work/life balance, job satisfaction and employee engagement. These areas tend to drive improvements in the area of attrition and support our strategy of flexibility and inclusiveness. Moreover, this ultimately should lead to an increased productivity and therefore profitability, with the first signs of increased profitability already emerging during this pilot. As one member of staff put it: "Our team is very supportive of flexible working and I think this greatly contributes to a positive working environment and motivates staff. Our team members are very responsible and I cannot see client service suffering in any way from this flexibility. On the contrary, I think clients benefit from having more motivated lawyers who feel they are treated as the adult professionals they are."





A few considerations which we found will help make flexible working become a successful working practice:

- You need a senior sponsor who is an advocate of flexible working.
- You need to engage with leadership and managers beforehand, be upfront about what you are trying to achieve. Their commitment is essential for success.
- Continue to build on existing flexible working practices. You may find in certain teams flexible working is already an accepted practice. Use the managers in those teams to help you engage with other managers.
- Provide support throughout the trial, make sure employees have a key point of contact where they can raise any issues. Consider using Flexible Working Ambassadors.
- Gather feedback during the trial (focus groups) and act on issues raised.
- Engage with IT first and check out if and how technology supports flexible working in your offices. You may need to provide staff with technical information beforehand (how to login to another computer, how to transfer your phone...?). In short, technology should be ready in advance and staff should know how to use it!
- Think in advance about whether *all* staff could work flexibly, and manage expectations in your initial communications and guidelines.
- Avoid any 'red tape', this is an 'informal' approach to flexible working. Feedback during the trial could be gathered through an interim survey.
- Make people aware that they may have to do some advance 'logistics' planning if they want to work flexibly (transport of paperwork, collection of post).

"We are constantly looking for new ways of enhancing the service we deliver to the business and our clients whilst making Eversheds a flexible and inclusive place to work where all employees have the opportunity to flourish.



Flexible working is just one of the steps towards achieving our vision. It's about client service excellence and working smarter, exactly what our people and clients would expect from a progressive law firm like Eversheds".

John Heaps - Chairman

