

Will remote working become the new normal?

'No daily commute or office environment distractions are popular benefits'



Well before Covid19 began to impact our lives, the demand for flexible work conditions was growing, according to Karen Gately, founder of Corporate Dojo.

Largely driven by a generational shift in mindset around the need for greater balance between home and work, the pressure was well and truly on for employers to respond.

"That is of course if attracting and retaining top talent was important to them," said Gately.

"With so many organisations now forced to adopt practices such as remote working, a unique opportunity has been presented for employers to assess whether some - if not all - of these new ways of working can or should be adopted permanently.

"Now is the time for leaders to deliberately explore their beliefs and challenge those that may have in the past kept them closed minded to flexible work options."

While of course many people in these exceptional circumstances are struggling with challenges, such as a lack of space or kids home schooling, Gately said early indications are that these obstacles are being overcome and people are adapting.

The reality is people are being forced to work differently and anecdotal feedback suggests many are enjoying many of the changes working from home has brought, she added.

"No daily commute or office environment distractions are popular benefits along with the improved ability to balance the demands of work and home," she added.

For employers, Gately said this means is the demand for flexible work is only likely to grow even stronger.

"While we work through this time that no one knows when will end, leaders are wise to get on with seeing remote and flexible working as the new normal," she said.

While some aspects of the ways we once lived and worked will return, many others won't.

"It's highly likely with so many people having had the opportunity to try working from home, more and more will expect the ability to negotiate on some level where and when they work," she said.

Gately added that the good news is the benefits of flexible work for employers are clear.

Research consistently provides evidence of a link between flexible work practices and employee engagement. Improved productivity, quality, growth and customer loyalty are in turn linked to engagement.

Corporate Leadership Council research for example suggests engaged organisations grow profits up to 3x faster than their competitors. Gallup report that engaged business units achieve 21% greater profit.

“Leveraging the benefits of flexible working starts with challenging limiting belief leaders hold and supporting them to overcome the very real challenges of getting the best from people from afar.”

Take for example the commonly held belief that people who work from home are unlikely to be focused and productive. Or the struggle many leaders face in effectively managing the performance of people who aren't sitting in the same office as them, where they can oversee their contribution during predictable hours of work.

Key to any leader's ability to influence the success of people and teams working flexibly is communication, according to Gately.

Leveraging technology to communicate for the purpose of inspiring, educating, informing and consulting with people is essential. Building a strong sense of connection and engagement takes staying in touch with each person on the team and the group.

“Maintaining routines such as one to one and team meetings is an important way of ensuring people don't become isolated and disconnected from either priorities or their colleagues,” she said.

“An obvious risk of people working in different locations at different times is that they fail to collaborate. Purposeful meetings focused on thinking, working and deciding together are critical for a team to be at their best when being in the same room isn't an option.”