

*Fit for  
the future*

# Flexible working

*A summary of  
study results and  
practical recommendations*

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## Foreword

*Demographic change is affecting the world of work. Birth rates are falling. New recruits are in short supply. Older employees are urgently needed to fill the skills gap.*

**Companies need a rethink.** Workplaces should be designed to appeal to professionals, offering people of all ages healthy, motivating working conditions. Flexible working models can be instrumental in creating long-term bonds between the company and its employees, because they accommodate differing life plans and changing life situations.

Many companies – large conglomerates and SMEs alike – are therefore exploring ways to firmly embed flexible working models in their corporate culture. As a leading life sciences company, F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd is also facing this challenge. Scientists, employees and the Roche Employees' Association (AVR) – teamed up with the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland in the "Flexible working in practice" project to examine the various forms of flexible working. After investigating factors that both promote and impede flexible working, they developed recommendations and specific proposals. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have once again highlighted the importance of flexible working. The company will re-evaluate lessons learned in this context in due course.

This brochure summarises the study's most important findings. It also serves as a guide for companies of various sizes and sectors that are wishing to introduce flexible working models as a way of filling the skills gap.



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# How is the world of work changing?

## Several generations under one roof

*Demographic change is making the competition for qualified employees increasingly fierce. Recruiting and retaining professionals is becoming the decisive success factor for companies.*

Flexible working models are one of the keys: recent studies show the positive effect of flexibility – in terms of both time and place – on the performance and well-being of employees in the most diverse age groups<sup>1</sup>. There are also indications that flexible working models make older employees more likely to consider staying on<sup>2</sup>. This is no surprise, because flexible forms of work help to achieve a better work/life balance – encouraging the integration of individual life plans and personal development paths. This means they play an important role in making employers more attractive.

## Technological advances and digitalisation

Digital transformation is also an underlying factor at the workplace: technical innovations and leaps in the performance of mobile devices and network technology are important drivers of flexible working models. Conferencing applications, video and audio communication and social media platforms enable employees to work together in virtual teams whenever they like and wherever they are.

<sup>1</sup> See Engler & Streuli, 2018; Loretto & Vickersstaff, 2015; Weichbrodt & Berset, 2017

<sup>2</sup> See Cahill, James & Pitt-Catsoupes, 2015; Trageser, Hammer & Fliedner, 2012; Jansen, Höchner, Schulze & Zölch, 2017

## What forms can flexible working take?



*Working flexibility can be viewed from a number of different perspectives. While working time flexibility has been common corporate practice for some time, the trend is now shifting to include mobile forms of work.*



Apart from part-time work, the most common form of **flexible working** hours is probably flexitime: within certain limits, employees can decide for themselves when to start and stop work. Other models such as job sharing and trust-based working are also growing in popularity. Flexible working options also include lifetime working hours and annual working hours accounts.



Under location-flexible (**mobile**) **working**, employees can work outside the employer's premises. Modern technology – smartphones, laptops, tablets, social media platforms – is making this possible. Mobile working covers working at home and in virtual teams, which is of particular interest to companies with several different locations. Then there are concepts like desk sharing, in which employees no longer work at assigned workstations. Or their workplaces can be outsourced altogether to what are known as co-working spaces.



# What does flexible working look like in practice?

*How can flexible working support efforts to recruit and retain professionals of all generations and occupations? What obstacles will have to be overcome? How about a few specific approaches?*

**These questions were examined in the “Flexible working in practice” project at the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland in collaboration with the Roche Employees’ Association (AVR) and employees of F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd. The project was funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).**

## Methodology

A team at the Institute for Human Resource Management and Organisation at the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland, in collaboration with the Roche Employees’ Association (AVR) and Roche employees, investigated factors that both promote and impede flexible working from the perspective of employees and managers. All age groups and all occupations were considered.

The project focused particularly on occupations in which a skills gap is already emerging, on those tending to work shifts, and on older employees (age 60 and above), for whom the flexible working option is especially relevant. The project’s current status is based on a comprehensive analysis of documents, both within and outside Roche, and a series of structured interviews with managers and focus-group surveys of employees. Specific recommendations and support proposals were developed based on these findings and are now being implemented at Roche, and their effectiveness tested, as part of the project.

## Outcome

F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd has a large number of different models and strategies that facilitate flexible working. They focus principally on the possibility of working from home (“**geographical flexibility**”), and on the annual working time option (“**time flexibility**”). As a means of support, Roche provides a well-functioning infrastructure and various guidelines made available by the HR department. Even so, there are differences within individual Roche divisions and teams with regard to the use and acceptance of flexible working models.

## Flexible working models at Roche



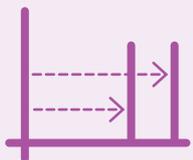
### Flexibility in terms of time

- **Annual working time** is a working time model that defines the number of hours to be worked each year. Employees can decide when to start and finish work within the scope of the working day limits.
- **Part-time work** is a flexible working model in which working hours are reduced to less than full-time.
- **Job sharing** is a flexibility option that divides a full-time job between two or more employees.



### Geographical flexibility

- **Working from home** is a flexible working model in which employees access the necessary systems from home rather than on company premises, provided that their job allows them to do so.
- **Activity-based working** is a concept in which employees no longer have a permanent office workstation. This enables them to use whatever workstation is most suitable for their current activity, thus optimising the use of office space. When choosing where to work, employees should take the criteria of concentration, collaboration and regeneration into account.



### Flexibility of older employees

- **Flex Pool** is a working model under which employees who have retired, either at the statutory retirement age or earlier, can return to Roche on a temporary basis for specific projects. They work as external temporary employees and their hourly rate is based on the new activity. Under this model, employees already draw benefits from their pension fund and do not continue to pay into it.
- **Continued employment until age 70** is a model under which employees can maintain their previous employment contracts after reaching statutory retirement age. With this model, employees do not draw any retirement benefits until they retire, which they must do by the age of 70 at the latest, and continue to pay into the pension funds.
- **Step-by-step** enables employees to reduce their working hours in stages from the age of 60 – with or without voluntary continued insurance of the existing insured salary. Where employees opt for voluntary continued insurance of their existing income, they bear the pension fund difference themselves and the retirement credits remain unchanged.

## Barriers to the use of flexible working models

**The project identified the following obstacles to the successful implementation of flexible working:**

- **Managers** are key figures. It is crucially important whether they personally **support flexible working**, or even practise it themselves – thus act as **role models**. But if managers do not practise it themselves, or have experienced negative aspects of flexible working, they will tend to be sceptical – and may not even allow it.
- **Employees are generally anxious** about extra work, reduced career opportunities and a certain **social pressure** to “be present”.
- Companies should offer **employees with similar activities** (that permit flexible working) **equal opportunities to practise it**. Inconsistent interpretation of existing rules can be perceived as unfair and lead to feelings of resentment.
- Where **activities require employees’ physical presence** (shift work, lab work, non-office activity), opportunities to practise flexible working models are restricted but nevertheless exist, and for every activity they should be accurately evaluated and realistically communicated.

## Possible approaches



**The project team has developed the following approaches to overcoming these barriers:**

- **Open communication** between employees and managers about what they want and expect from flexible working models, and about its limits, is important. The most appropriate approach in each case should be jointly identified by the team.
- **Management based on trust** is a fundamental precondition for flexible working models, in which employees primarily work and act on their own responsibility.
- **Making flexible working models more visible increases their chances** of being identified and accepted. The manager as role model, practising flexible working models him or herself, has a supportive effect.

## Recommendations

**The project team makes the following recommendations to promote and further expand flexible working at Roche in future:**

- Flexible working models should be **communicated**, both within and across teams. Specifically, this means attractively presenting relevant information on flexible working models, highlighting their possible implementation for particular occupations and activities (such as those requiring physical presence). Moreover, the sharing of experience should be actively supported by role models and best-practice workshops.
- The project team also recommends focusing on **expanding managers' competencies** to lead teams working flexibly, including organisational help with planning and ensuring accessibility, visibility and dialogue. The culture of meetings and communication must be shaped to align with flexible working (accessibility, presence requirement).

## Specific measures

**The study has had a major impact at Roche and is resulting in the implementation of specific measures within the company.**



The project group developed **guidelines for employees** whose physical presence is required, highlighting the advantages of flexible working and describing the available options.

The guidelines also contain specific recommendations on how shift operation in production and activities requiring employees to be present – in the lab, say – can be made more flexible, perhaps by means of job sharing or reduced working hours.

In addition, comprehensive information about the possibilities and advantages of flexible working must be provided to help employees to prepare properly for a discussion with line managers.



The subject of flexible working is now covered by **manager workshops**, which use specific cases to train participants in how flexible working models can be applied.

A newly developed **toolbox** with video statements by managers, together with links to various information materials and checklists, emphasises the advantages of flexible working.



# How is the work environment becoming flexible?

*Which individual flexibility mix is right for your company? What makes sense and is possible and economically compatible? What are your change management needs?*

**One thing is certain: there are no panaceas, but there is a wealth of experience on which to build. Even so, every company must ultimately identify the mix of flexible working models that meets its needs. The first step is always a thorough analysis of the individual preconditions, in other words the prevailing corporate-culture environment, team processes, IT infrastructure – as well as digital skills.**

## Shaping change

Introducing flexible forms of work always means changing the existing corporate culture. This change must be shaped, because it cannot succeed without the broad and profound involvement of the workforce. Accordingly, a dedicated change project should be set up in which flexible forms of work are designed and implemented jointly with employees, managers, HR managers, IT experts and employee representative bodies.



## The change management process should attach particular importance to the following points:

### Communication

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- Encourage **communication about flexible working models both within and between teams** in order to correct false information, eliminate bias and bring about cultural change. This includes **clear rules** on accessibility, minimum attendance times and clarification about which meetings and activities require employees to be physically present.
- Identify what is **expected and required in terms of flexibility** by your employees (reducing or accumulating working hours, job sharing, etc.) and your managers (budget reductions or reallocations of resources or duties).
- Encourage everybody to clearly articulate any **problems that arise**, like dissatisfaction within the team or adjustments of workloads in line with employment rates, in order to elicit their causes and overcome them.
- **Role models and best-practice sharing** increase the acceptance of flexible working models. It is especially effective for managers to set an example, working flexibly themselves and helping their employees to adopt flexible working models.

### Information materials

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- **Information materials (printed and digital) for employees and managers** clarify important questions such as what forms of flexible working, what special cases and what limits, etc. exist in your company.
- Typical information materials are **checklists, brochures and FAQs**.
- These basic materials can be supplemented with **online training**, or even short **video clips** summarising the most important company-specific information in simple terms.

### Tools and infrastructure

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- **A well-functioning IT infrastructure** permitting remote access to systems and communication and planning tools makes it easier to introduce flexible forms of work.
- Set up **bespoke, company-specific platforms**, for example to enable employees to find **job-sharing partners**.
- For the implementation of flexible working in the shift model in particular, we recommend **planning tools** that simplify shift scheduling and thus take the pressure off managers.

### Manager involvement

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- In order to implement flexible working successfully you should **closely involve managers at all levels**.
- Discuss possible pros and cons of flexible working, and facilitate manager communication with relevant **materials and supporting arguments**.
- Possible action to reinforce **manager commitment** includes special **training** and **best-practice workshops**, in which cross-divisional groups discuss the advantages and challenges of flexible working and seek solutions.



## How can obstacles be overcome?

*The “Flexible working in practice” project jointly conducted by the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland and the Roche Employees’ Association (AVR) identified obstacles and stumbling blocks to the introduction of flexible working models, and made recommendations on how these can be overcome.*

**Much of this applies equally to other companies. Once again, the principle is: there are no panaceas. Often, it takes a combination of several approaches to achieve the objective.**



### Time flexibility

#### Obstacles

*The **corporate culture** is characterised by a feeling that people must always be physically present and always be available.*

#### Possible solutions

- **Role models** and the sharing of **best practices** can promote changes to that culture.
- Work on **open culture**, promoting trust in both directions and personal responsibility.
- **Part-time working and job sharing** should be discussed at regular intervals to identify the extent to which employees are **really interested** in them. This overcomes employee anxiety about their needs being discussed.

There is no support for *part-time management*.

- Vacancies, including management vacancies, should be designed and advertised so that they are suitable for **part-time or job-sharing models**.
- Support in managing flexibly working teams through **organisational help** with planning and ensuring accessibility, visibility and dialogue.

Part-time work with no commensurate *workload adjustments*

- Reductions in working hours should entail **workload adjustments** agreed between managers and employees.
- Absences can be covered by **assigning deputies**. Team members should ideally be trained to act as **back-ups** at any time.
- **Transparency should be created within projects** and duties, e.g. by means of accessible “status quo” documents.

Flexible working must not be made possible for some *at the expense of others*.

- Managers should have the opportunity to decide on FTE positions so that part-time work and job sharing can be **fairly planned**.

Flexible shift working makes shift scheduling *more complex and time-consuming*.

- This can be mitigated by improving and simplifying planning – using a **shift-scheduling tool**, for example.
- Also, a **job-sharing platform** could help people to find job-sharing partners, making part-time shift work possible.



## Geographical flexibility

### Obstacles

Managers fear that location-flexible working would make *coordination more complex and time-consuming*.

There are *varying ideas* about when employees must be present and when remote access is sufficient.

### Possible solutions

- **Clear, regular communication** within teams about the fact that the home office is **dependent on company requirements**.

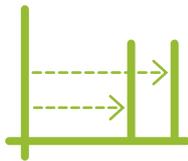
- It makes sense for a team to discuss and jointly decide how often and for how long members need to be present for teamwork. Teams should discuss their **differing ideas and needs** and agree a **standard procedure** on topics such as **accessibility** (possible solution: calendar entries with phone numbers).

Employees working from home are often seen as *less accessible*. This particularly applies to *managers*.

→ The team should discuss how **remote management** works, how **meetings involving dialled-in participants can best be organised** – and the fact that people explicitly want to be able to communicate with colleagues at the home workplace when questions arise.

At first glance, geographical flexibility would appear only to be possible for *office workers*. Flexible-working possibilities are not recognised for employees whose physical presence is often required (such as *laboratory staff*).

→ Employees with required presence cannot carry out more than a small part of their duties – **training, documentation, etc. – from home**. Appropriate **rules** should therefore be set for this part of the workforce and **openly communicated**.



## Flexibility of older employees

### Obstacles

There is *little awareness of flexible models for older employees*. Early retirement is often the only possibility known to employees and managers alike.

Some managers do not know whether older employees *are interested in flexible working beyond retirement age*.

There is a dearth of ideas about what form the *transition into retirement* should take.

### Possible solutions

→ Flexible models and their advantages should be made more visible, for example by means of standardised **information documents** or a **checklist** made available to employees of age 59 and over and their managers.

→ Age-flexible working models could figure in **continual employee appraisal reviews**, and they could also be raised in **seminars for employees who are approaching retirement age**.

→ Employees should undergo **regular training**.  
 → Activities such as **deputising for women on maternity leave and employees on extended leave** should be organised in a way that allows them to be performed by older employees working flexibly.



## Where can you find help?

### Tools, checklists and further information

There are a great many ways to implement flexible working successfully. As no two companies are at the same stage of the implementation process, measures should be selected individually. We have put together the following further information (available in German) on working models, helpful tools and checklists.

Subject	Content	Source
<b>Flexible working – general</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Work Smart initiative</b>, with helpful hints, practical examples, a FlexWork on-line self-assessment system and a workshop script, all designed to help teams to draw up rules on flexible forms of work</li> </ul>	Work Smart initiative <a href="https://work-smart-initiative.ch">https://work-smart-initiative.ch</a>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>“Flexible forms of work”</b> website with studies including recommendations on flexible working arrangements</li> </ul>	Fraunhofer IAO <a href="https://www.businessmanagement.iao.fraunhofer.de/de/leistungsangebot/flexible-arbeitsformen.html#tabpanel-3">https://www.businessmanagement.iao.fraunhofer.de/de/leistungsangebot/flexible-arbeitsformen.html#tabpanel-3</a>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brochure: <b>“Flexible working hours models: overview and implementation”</b> with recommendations on, for example, part-time work, job sharing, partial retirement, flexitime, annual working time, night and shift work, telecommuting</li> </ul>	Baua <a href="https://www.baua.de/DE/Angebote/Publikationen/Praxis/A49.pdf?_blob=publicationFile&amp;v=9">https://www.baua.de/DE/Angebote/Publikationen/Praxis/A49.pdf?_blob=publicationFile&amp;v=9</a>



Shift work

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recommendations on cost-effectiveness, health, employer attractiveness and the work/life balance in connection with models like <b>flexitime, functional time, annual working time, shift and night work, part-time working, home office</b></li></ul>	<p>The “Intelligent working time management” project as part of the Hesse World of Work Initiative</p> <p><a href="https://www.arbeitszeit-klug-gestalten.de/alles-zu-arbeitszeitgestaltung/arbeitszeitmodelle-im-ueberblick/">https://www.arbeitszeit-klug-gestalten.de/alles-zu-arbeitszeitgestaltung/arbeitszeitmodelle-im-ueberblick/</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>“SME manual: work and family 2016”</b> with recommendations on introducing flexible working time, part-time work and flexible working locations, with suggested solutions to problems</li></ul>	<p>SECO</p> <p><a href="https://vereinbarkeit.zh.ch/dam/justiz_innern/vereinbarkei/publikationen/praktisch_un/tipps/seco_2016_kmu_handbuch.pdf.spooler.download.1481192864841.pdf/seco_2016_kmu_handbuch.pdf">https://vereinbarkeit.zh.ch/dam/justiz_innern/vereinbarkei/publikationen/praktisch_un/tipps/seco_2016_kmu_handbuch.pdf.spooler.download.1481192864841.pdf/seco_2016_kmu_handbuch.pdf</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>“Flexible working at management level”</b> brochure with strategies for the successful introduction and implementation of flexible working models in managerial positions</li></ul>	<p>Flexship</p> <p><a href="https://www.eaf-berlin.de/publikation/flexibles-arbeiten-in-fuehrung/">https://www.eaf-berlin.de/publikation/flexibles-arbeiten-in-fuehrung/</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ergonomic recommendations on <b>arrangements for shift work</b></li><li>• Night and shift work checklist</li></ul>	<p>The “Intelligent working time management” project as part of the Hesse World of Work Initiative</p> <p><a href="https://www.arbeitszeit-klug-gestalten.de/alles-zu-arbeitszeitgestaltung/arbeitszeitmodelle-im-ueberblick/schicht-und-nachtarbeit/">https://www.arbeitszeit-klug-gestalten.de/alles-zu-arbeitszeitgestaltung/arbeitszeitmodelle-im-ueberblick/schicht-und-nachtarbeit/</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recommendations on forward planning, shift scheduling, team building, codetermination and exchange, working-hours location, <b>part-time working/job sharing possibilities</b>, caring responsibilities</li></ul>	<p>Canton of Lucerne social services office – Dienststelle Soziales und Gesellschaft (DISG)</p> <p><a href="https://disg.lu.ch/-/media/DISG/Dokumente/Themen/Familienfreundlichkeit/Themenblatt_Schichtarbeit_web.pdf?la=de-CH">https://disg.lu.ch/-/media/DISG/Dokumente/Themen/Familienfreundlichkeit/Themenblatt_Schichtarbeit_web.pdf?la=de-CH</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Part-time</b> shift work tool</li><li>• <b>Flexitime</b> shift work tool</li></ul>	<p>Portal: <a href="http://www.eff-portal.de">www.eff-portal.de</a> (meeting point for managers)</p> <p><a href="http://www.eff-portal.de/eff-Navi/content/Modelle/Schichtarbeit/Schichtarbeit-index.htm">http://www.eff-portal.de/eff-Navi/content/Modelle/Schichtarbeit/Schichtarbeit-index.htm</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shift work in combination with working-hour accounts, <b>shift systems with variable starting and finishing times</b>, shift schedules with possibilities for divergence</li></ul>	<p>Specialist retention toolbox project</p> <p><a href="http://www.fachkraefte-toolbox.de/fachkraefte-halten/arbeitszeitregelungen/33-flexible-schichtarbeit/">http://www.fachkraefte-toolbox.de/fachkraefte-halten/arbeitszeitregelungen/33-flexible-schichtarbeit/</a></p>



**Geographical flexibility**

<p><i>Job sharing</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Job sharing</b> guidebook: various job-sharing models, including intergenerational job sharing</li><li>• <b>WeJobShare</b> platform (to find a partner)</li></ul>	<p>Go For Jobsharing initiative <a href="http://www.go-for-jobsharing.ch/de/home.html">http://www.go-for-jobsharing.ch/de/home.html</a> <a href="https://www.wejobshare.ch">https://www.wejobshare.ch</a></p>
<p><i>Part-time working</i></p>	<p><b>Part-time toolbox:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Job analysis by job holders and managers</li><li>• Analysis of a job for its potential for part-time working and/or job sharing</li><li>• List of decision-making criteria</li><li>• Checklist on appointing part-time employees</li><li>• Checklist on day-to-day work with part-time employees</li><li>• Checklist on space utilisation and infrastructure for part-time employees</li></ul>	<p>Part-time toolbox <a href="https://www.sta.be.ch/sta/de/index/gleichstellung/gleichstellung/familie_und_beruf/vereinbarkeitsfreundlichearbeitsbedingungen.html\$.html">https://www.sta.be.ch/sta/de/index/gleichstellung/gleichstellung/familie_und_beruf/vereinbarkeitsfreundlichearbeitsbedingungen.html\$.html</a></p>
<p><i>Home office/telecommuting</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Checklist on home office/telecommuting</b></li></ul>	<p>The “Intelligent working time management” project as part of the Hesse World of Work Initiative <a href="https://www.arbeitszeit-klug-gestalten.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Downloads/Checkliste_Homeoffice.pdf">https://www.arbeitszeit-klug-gestalten.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Downloads/Checkliste_Homeoffice.pdf</a></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Tool on “Important factors when introducing telecommuting”</b></li><li>• Checklist on “Mobile forms of work/telecommuting”</li><li>• Checklist on “Suitable activities for the mobile workplace”</li><li>• Checklist on “Implementation stages when introducing mobile workstations”</li><li>• Checklist for employees when switching to telecommuting</li></ul>	<p>Portal: <a href="http://www.eff-portal.de">www.eff-portal.de</a> (meeting point for managers) <a href="http://www.effportal.de/eff-Navi/content/Modelle/Mobiler_Arbeitsort/Mobiler_Arbeitsort-index.htm">http://www.effportal.de/eff-Navi/content/Modelle/Mobiler_Arbeitsort/Mobiler_Arbeitsort-index.htm</a></p>

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