



## Five Steps to Formalizing the Flexible Workplace

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January 28th, 2021

Every organization had to pivot quickly when the pandemic hit. Some companies had long histories of flexibility and were able to adapt with little disruption. Many companies were thrown headfirst into very new ways of working and have spent the past 10 months doing their best to keep everyone supported. If your company falls into the latter scenario, now is the perfect time to formalize a flexible workplace strategy. Not just in preparation for future business continuity events, but to accept that the way people are working will not go back to the traditional, onsite, workstyle that people have been doing for decades.

### Step 1: Organize a Steering Committee

The best way to ensure a flexible work strategy becomes embedded in the culture is to have committed stakeholders that include Human Resources, Information Technology, Legal, Real Estate, Diversity and Inclusion, Learning and Development and an executive sponsor. This group will lead the creation and implementation of the vision and strategy of workplace flexibility. They will also ensure a well-executed deployment, using good change management and stakeholder involvement practices, that align with the overall vision and strategy of the organization.

### Step 2: Develop Policies

There is so much to think about when supporting a flexible work environment. The first item on the list is a consistent policy that clearly outlines the mission and vision for flexible work. This document provides important details about the type of flexible work arrangements that will be offered. The policy must include eligibility, request process, IT security, benefit impact,

procurement, reimbursement and more. The good news is that most organizations have related policies that can be referred to in this focused flexible work policy, so nobody is reinventing the wheel. Work from home employees want clarity; a good policy provides it.

### **Step 3: Draft Communication Strategy**

Look around your organization and understand what campaigns or messaging are really “sticking” and being adopted. No reason to reinvent, just copy what is working really well, even if it’s not related specifically to flexible work changes. Examine the components that help people listen and really hear, both up and down and across your organization. Develop your workplace flexibility messaging on these components that already work well. Consider branding your flexibility program, develop internal social media opportunities where people can connect to share their experiences, tips, and other support resources. Integrate the messaging with other business processes, including performance management, new employee orientation, open enrollment, DEI training and other programs. The more integration, the better adoption.

### **Step 4: Conduct a Pilot**

The best way to understand the impact a new strategy will have is to conduct a robust pilot program that includes a pre and post survey for both managers and employees as well as before and after focus groups and manager roundtables. Often the pilot will include coaching support for team leaders and essential virtual leadership competency training. Workplace flexibility requires a specific set of competencies that must be embedded in both leaders and individual contributors. To understand if new behaviors and competencies are being adopted, it is best to run the pilot for a minimum of 3 months. Take time at the end to adjust policies, communications, training and processes based on the pilot participants’ experience.

### **Step 5: Deploy Workplace Flexibility Across the Organization**

You’ve finalized your policies, process and communication. You’ve measured your pilot’s success and learned valuable lessons, making any needed course corrections. Now it’s time to roll the flexible work arrangement strategy across the organization. Here is the thing about rolling out a new strategy: it can rarely be done quickly or all at one time. Remember an old adage that volume is vanity, while execution is strategy. In other words, slow and steady wins this race. Unfortunately, many companies make the mistake of sharing information a few times and assume their work is done and it’s up to the managers now to “make it so.” I always recommend that organizations roll out in phases, starting with the least resistant areas, holding them up as models of success, and then moving across the organization slowly, developing best practices for your organization, until all areas have adopted workplace flexibility as a new way of doing business.

The five steps outlined here are high level, but they will get your organization headed in the right direction when it comes to developing a business-based workplace flexibility strategy. You can visit [The SMART Workplace knowledge center](#) for additional information and free assessments that will help you understand your organization’s readiness to adopt a formal flexible workplace strategy.

One more thing, here's the secret to a successful workplace flexibility strategy: it's never done, change is constant, and for flexibility to be the powerful business lever it can be, ongoing care and feeding of the strategy is required.