



REMOTE WORK IN NZ: FLEXIBILITY VS. OFFICE CULTURE – CAN WE HAVE BOTH?

Kia Ora Koutou and Welcome to Our Last Newsletter of the Year!

Wow! Can you believe how quickly 2024 has flown by? It feels like just yesterday we were setting our goals, and here we are, wrapping things up! As we wind down the year, we wanted to dive into one of the biggest shifts in the workplace: **the dynamics of remote work.**

COVID-19 transformed the work landscape for everyone, and here in New Zealand, employees have especially embraced the flexibility of remote and hybrid setups, even as government mandates urge a return to the office. Despite the push, it seems clear that employees are reluctant to give up the flexibility remote work brings. But while remote work has certainly gained momentum, there's no “one-size-fits-all” solution. So, grab a cup of coffee – whether it's at home or at the office! – and keep reading as we explore some insights to help leaders decide on the best options for their teams and organisations.

Motivating Employees to Return to the Office

As more companies adjust to a mix of remote and in-office work, when large groups of employees **work remotely for extended periods**, it can be difficult to **foster the sense of camaraderie and connection** that in-office work often provides. **Team-building activities, spontaneous brainstorming sessions, and face-to-face interactions help employees bond and build trust.** Without these moments, workers may feel isolated, and it can be harder to create a cohesive team.



Additionally, an organisation's culture can begin to fragment. **In-person communication helps reinforce company values, mission, and vision.** It creates a shared space for informal conversations, celebrations, and collective problem-solving, which can feel more challenging in a virtual setting. As a result, **employees may become disengaged**, and the organisation may **struggle to maintain a strong sense of identity.**



If your employees aren't motivated to return to the office, here's a quick summary of initiatives you can implement to make the office environment more appealing:

1. Prioritise Wellbeing: Promoting wellbeing programmes is one of the most effective ways to entice employees back into the office. **Offering support for physical and mental health**, such as on-site wellness checks, fitness classes and mental health seminars, can show employees that the office is a place where their health and wellbeing are valued. Incorporating **flexible wellness initiatives** like stress-reduction workshops, healthy snacks, and company-sponsored activities that promote health and balance can **create an office environment that employees are excited to return to.**

Boost Your Staff's Health with our Health Check-in Day!

Our mobile clinic will be on-site for a **special Health Check-in Day**, offering one of our health checks. It's a practical drop-in service designed to show your people how much you care about their wellbeing.

*No need for special facilities—we bring everything needed! **Talk to us to plan ahead!***



2. Encourage Collaboration: Some employees may resist returning to the office because they feel more productive working from home. To address this, create a **work environment that encourages collaboration, innovation, and social interaction.** Design open spaces for teamwork, encourage spontaneous meetings, and emphasise the importance of collaboration in driving company goals.

3. Offer Flexibility: Many employees may still appreciate the option to work from home part-time. Consider a hybrid model that allows employees to choose **certain days to work remotely.** The **hybrid model offers the best of both worlds**—employees can enjoy the flexibility they desire while still benefiting from in-person collaboration and culture-building opportunities.

Allowing employees to feel that they have a say in their work arrangements helps increase engagement and satisfaction. Shay Peters, CEO of recruitment agency Robert Walters for Australia and New Zealand, says flexible work arrangements shouldn't focus solely on the number of office days. **Considering flexible start and end times for shifts** can enhance benefits significantly. He suggests that **a 3-4 day office presence can strike a good balance** and anything less may dilute the collaborative environment, which can be challenging to replicate online. This aligns with recent studies showing that such balance helps maintain team cohesion, optimise productivity, and keep employees motivated.

4. Highlight the Value of In-Office Interaction: Remind employees of the **benefits of in-person work**, such as the ability to quickly resolve issues, **engage in team-building activities**, and strengthen relationships with colleagues. Foster a welcoming environment where employees are excited to interact with one another. **Provide opportunities for social events**, such as lunch breaks, team lunches, or after-work meetups, to help employees build personal connections.

Motivating employees to return to the office requires more than just enforcing a policy—it's about **offering value and building trust.** By addressing concerns related to work-life balance, fostering a culture of collaboration, and emphasising the importance of mental and physical health, you can create an environment that improves both productivity and company culture.



Thinking Through Remote Work Implementation

Many businesses have found success with casual work-from-home arrangements, **allowing employees occasional flexibility** to work from home as needed. However, it's worth considering whether **formalising these options could offer additional benefits** for your organisation and **become a part of your business strategy**.

Establishing an official remote work policy can set clear expectations for both employees and managers, streamline communication practices, and ensure consistency across departments.

Flexible Work Benefits: Adapting to the Needs of Every Role

Recognising that flexibility doesn't need to be uniform, leaders can design flexible options that best support each role, the team, and the overall business goals. Here are some ideas:

Creating Flexibility in Work Models

Implementing remote, **in-office, and hybrid options based on specific roles** is a forward-thinking approach that can benefit diverse team structures. **Not all roles have the same requirements**: some rely heavily on collaboration, brainstorming, and in-person discussions—ideal for an in-office or hybrid model. Others, especially roles with a strong focus on independent tasks, may be well-suited for fully remote arrangements. **By reviewing and adapting flexibility to the needs of each position, companies can enhance productivity, reduce disruptions, and improve job satisfaction.**



Employee-Centred Benefits

Flexibility that allows employees to work remotely at least part-time can improve work-life balance, reduce commute stress, and create more time for family and personal activities. In turn, this can lead to **happier, healthier, and more engaged employees**. With increased control over their work environment, employees often experience enhanced productivity and motivation, benefiting the organisation as well. This personalised approach can also **foster greater loyalty and commitment, helping retain valuable talent in a competitive job market.**



Employer-Centred Benefits

From an employer's perspective, hybrid work models provide a unique chance to **optimise operations while reducing overhead costs on office space and associated expenses**. Companies with flexible work policies also benefit from **access to a broader talent pool**, as they're no longer limited by geography. With greater diversity, inclusivity, and adaptability in the workforce, organisations are better positioned to respond to industry shifts and **attract top talent**. This reputational strength, in turn, can **improve their standing in the marketplace.**



Continuous Feedback and Long-Term Success

Because **flexible work models aren't "one-size-fits-all,"** it's essential to **gather employee feedback on what works and what doesn't**. Regular check-ins and surveys provide valuable insights and can help **refine work models** that continue to meet the needs of both the employees and the business. Sustainable flexibility requires **consistent adjustment**, promoting a culture of trust and commitment while keeping burnout at bay. In adapting to the changing landscape of work, organisations can reap the benefits of a **flexible approach that prioritises both people and productivity**. As we look ahead, businesses have an opportunity to create an agile, future-ready workforce that aligns with their long-term vision and empowers their teams.



Key Considerations for Implementing Flexible Work Options

Here are some essential aspects to consider when creating a flexible work environment:

Clear Expectations

Leaders should establish **guidelines for availability, response times, meeting attendance, and deadlines to ensure everyone is on the same page**. Communication protocols, such as preferred channels for different types of messages and expectations around response times, can also help streamline workflow and reduce unnecessary interruptions. **Documenting these guidelines provides employees with a roadmap, ensuring consistency across remote, hybrid, and in-office roles.**

Employee Wellbeing

Flexible work arrangements can **impact employees' mental and emotional wellbeing in both positive and challenging ways**. While remote work **can reduce commute stress and improve work-life balance**, it can **also lead to feelings of isolation**. Regular check-ins—whether through one-on-one meetings or team catch-ups—are essential to **maintaining a sense of connection and support**. It's also helpful to provide resources, such as access to **wellness programmes, mental health days, or online workshops**, that encourage employees to prioritise their mental health. A workplace culture that genuinely values wellbeing goes a long way in fostering long-term job satisfaction and productivity.

Life Care Mental Health Training for your people!



[CLICK HERE](#)

**INTRODUCTION
TO MENTAL
HEALTH**

**MENTAL
HEALTH
101**

**BUILDING
RESILIENCE
& SELF-CARE**

Outcome-Focused Performance Management

In a flexible work environment, managing by outcomes rather than hours worked is more effective. By focusing on task completion, quality of work, and impact, managers can promote autonomy and accountability while building trust across all work models. Encouraging a results-oriented culture allows employees the freedom to work at their own pace and emphasises meaningful contributions over merely being present. Leaders can further support this by setting measurable goals, providing constructive feedback, and recognising accomplishments regularly.

Data Security

With remote work, the security of company data becomes a top priority. To reduce the risk of data exposure, it's essential to train employees on cybersecurity best practices, including safe browsing habits, recognising phishing attempts, and secure password management. Implementing secure access protocols, such as VPNs and two-factor authentication, can provide additional layers of protection for sensitive information. Regular security audits, along with consistent communication around best practices, help ensure that employees are equipped to handle data securely, regardless of where they're working.

At **Life Care**, we are here to support you as you plan for the year ahead. Whether you're focusing on **health initiatives, flu vaccination, training programmes, or employee wellbeing**, we're happy to offer a **free consultation** to explore options tailored to your organisation. **Let us help you build a comprehensive approach that supports your team's health, safety, and productivity in 2025. Reach out to us today!**



New First Aid Course Names!



Course	New Name	Unit Standards
Advanced Work-based First Aid Training	→ New Zealand First Aid Certificate	→ 6400, 6401, 6402
Refresher First Aid Training	→ First Aid Revalidation Certificate	→ 6401, 6402
First Responder First Aid Training	→ Foundation First Aid Certificate	→ 6401, 6402

Sources:

[Driving and Implementing a Flexibility at Work Agenda](#)

[Research finds 90 percent of white-collar workers in NZ would look for new job if they had to stop working from home](#)

[Watch: Nicola Willis demands tightening of working-from-home public service arrangements](#)

[End of working from home? Employment law expert's advice on WFH changes as Government cracks down](#)

[The pros and cons of working from home](#)

[Workers called back to the office as Census data shows a growing WFH preference](#)

[Employee wellbeing matters!](#)