

Flexible
working in the
Australian
Capital
Territory
Public Service
(ACTPS)

FLEXIBLE WORKING IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY (ACTPS)

A report prepared for ANZSOG and the ACTPS by the University of NSW Canberra Public Service Research Group

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1 Executive summary

Flexible working can enhance productivity, work-life balance, knowledge sharing and collaboration. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated adoption of flexible working among office workers, and most employees now want to work from home at least some of the time. The Australian Capital Territory Public Service (ACTPS) has positioned flexible working as central to their vision to be the most progressive Australian jurisdiction for workplace practices (ACT Government, 2021) and an employer of choice for employees seeking flexibility. Like many organisations looking to develop optimal ways of managing a flexible workforce, the ACTPS has sought to better understand employee preferences and patterns of work, as well as key risks to equitable and effective flexibility.

This research was established to help identify how the ACTPS can better support effective flexible working, focused on the role of technology, communication tools and the built environment. The research focused on knowledge workers, whose work is generally suitable for flexible working as they work autonomously to undertake knowledge-intensive tasks. It was also focused on the perceptions of middle managers and employees, to inform the ACTPS of how to improve support for effective flexible working.

The project was undertaken as a partnership between ACTPS, the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) and the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Canberra.

The research adopted a mixed methods approach gathering qualitative data from ACTPS Flexible Work Working Group meetings and focus group discussions with human resource (HR) managers and general staff. It also involved the secondary analysis of existing datasets (e.g., ACTPS employee census, Microsoft 365 data, building and meeting room data).

Our research demonstrates:

- ACTPS staff value the opportunity to work flexibly. Most research participants were satisfied with their level of choice regarding when, and where they work. Therefore, a key retention factor for the ACTPS is continuing to provide employees flexibility and choice in timing and location of work.
- There has been a move to hybrid working arrangements, with many staff being encouraged to work from the office one or two days a week. However, most staff are predominantly working from home and want to continue to do so to support individual productivity and work-life balance.
- Although many staff want to work hybridly, there is strong resistance to **mandatory** weekly office attendance on arbitrarily assigned days, due to perceptions that it is not operationally necessary.
- Many research participants expressed strong negative perceptions towards activity-based working, primarily due to the design and configuration of buildings. In particular, participants raised concerns about noise levels and neighbourhoods being restricted to teams.
- ACTPS staff are using technology and communication tools to share knowledge and collaborate with others, however, the extent of this usage varies due to team size and degree of task interdependence. Very small or large teams (< 3 or > 10 members) with low levels of task interdependence have less frequent interactions.
- Managers play a central role in the effectiveness of flexible working; however, some managers seem to be experiencing greater work-life spill-over. This may be due to several factors, including the increased workloads required during the COVID-19 pandemic, an ongoing crisis

orientation to working, managers closely monitoring staff working from home, or broader cultural or workload management issue (i.e., unrealistic expectations regarding availability).

In this report, we identify four essential elements of effective flexible working that should help address many of the issues identified in this report:

- **A need for an outcomes-oriented approach to working:** our findings highlight that the effectiveness of flexible working is heavily reliant on individual teams and managers. For more effective flexible working, an outcomes orientation needs to be culturally embedded across the ACTPS. We refer to an outcomes orientation as cultural value placed on results, with a focus on the effective achievement of tasks rather than time spent undertaking those tasks, leading to achievement of broader outcomes. We outline suggestions for embedding an outcomes orientation, including a clear articulation regarding what an outcomes orientation looks like in the ACTPS, why it is needed to achieve its purpose, and what is expected to be different if it was created and embedded in organisational culture.
- **A need for a purposeful approach to working from the office:** there is a need for teams within ACTPS Directorates to clearly establish when and why teams should work from the office. This may include identifying specific activities that require face-to-face interaction to realise improved outcomes, as well as clarifying socio-cultural benefits, such as social learning through modelling or the transfer of tacit knowledge regarding how the organisation works. A purposeful approach to hybrid working could encourage employees to see themselves as part of an organisational system and observe what behaviours are expected. It could also aid employee productivity and well-being. Therefore, it could help balance the needs of individuals, teams and organisations.
- **A need for a team-based approach to working:** more effective flexible working results from what Jelphs et al. (2016) refer to as “real teams” (p.7). This is where members are connected by a common purpose, have interdependent tasks and roles, share responsibilities, and have complementary skills. Our findings highlight that team-based approaches enable more effective flexible working in three ways. Firstly, they take the burden of responsibility off individual managers to be the key facilitator of team interactions; secondly, they encourage greater use of technology, communication tools and the built environment to optimise the sense of social connectedness, purpose and community among employees; and, thirdly, they enable the achievement of desired outcomes.
- **Improved managerial support and development:** our data suggests that flexible working exacerbates and accentuates existing managerial styles, highlighting fragility in a model that relies on individuals and the need for more focussed and proactive management development in this area. Development could focus on translating high-level support for flexible working to the operational context and empowering managers to manage flexible working in ways that ensure work demands and team goals are achieved.

2 Introduction

Flexible working has been recognised as key to attracting and retaining employees with critical skills (APSC, 2021), and for public sector organisations to be an employer of choice (Rubery, 2013). The ACTPS has positioned flexible working as central to its future of work (Strategy and Transformation Office, 2021) with a vision to be the most progressive Australian jurisdiction for workplace practices (ACT Government, 2021).

Flexible working can involve adjustments in the timing, number of hours worked and the location of work – including working at home and in an activity-based work (ABW) environment. In providing employees with greater choice in terms of when and where they work, flexible work can facilitate

greater work-life balance (Bentley et al., 2016; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Shuck & Reio, 2014), employee well-being (Hall & Atkinson, 2006; Noblet et al., 2005) and productivity (Bloom et al., 2014; Colley & Williamson, 2020). However, if not well supported and carefully managed, some types of flexibility, such as working from home, can exacerbate work-family conflict and spill-over, particularly for women employees (Leung & Zhang, 2016; Molino *et al.*, 2020; Craig & Churchill, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in new ways of working, including increased uptake of flexible working, increased recognition of the benefits of this way of working, which has heightened employees' expectations for access to flexibility. Consequently, now more than ever, employers need to understand how to best support flexible working. Optimising the effectiveness of flexible working to capitalise on well-being and productivity requires purposeful management. To address this need, the ACTPS partnered with the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) and a team of researchers in the Public Service Research Group at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Canberra to address the following research questions:

Key research question:

How can the ACTPS better support effective flexible working?

Sub-research questions:

1. How have employees used different technologies, locations, timing and communication tools to support their flexible working practices?
2. How does this vary across the range of occupations and demographic groups?
3. How does current technology support productivity, knowledge sharing and collaboration?
4. How can the ACTPS empower and support managers and employees to optimise the effectiveness of flexible working across the full range of employees?

This report is laid out as follows: we present a literature review that suggests the future of work is hybrid and outlines several areas for consideration when designing more effective ways of working. Then we outline the project details, before presenting our findings that identify how ACTPS employees have used different locations, work timings, technologies and communication tools. We then draw on our qualitative data to identify how technology supports productivity, knowledge sharing and collaboration. Finally, we analyse our data to identify four elements for effective flexible working: an outcomes-oriented approach to working, a purposeful approach to working from the office, a team-based approach to working, and support and development for managers.

3 Flexible working: The existing evidence base

The concept of flexible working incorporates several potential changes or adjustments in terms of when, where or how individuals work. This concept can refer to flexibility in hours worked and the arrangement of these hours (i.e., alternating start and finish times), such as flexitime or a compressed week (scheduling flexibility). Flexible working can involve time reduction, such as part-time work and job sharing (attendance flexibility). It may also refer to flexibility in terms of where individuals work, such as working from home (spatial flexibility) (Bentley et al. 2016; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Hall & Atkinson, 2006; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Maxwell & McDougall, 2004; McCarthy et al., 2010; Stout et al., 2013; Zheng et al., 2016).

3.1 Benefits of flexible working

There are a range of benefits associated with flexible working. These include higher levels of employee well-being due to enabling employees to balance – or integrate – work and personal demands (Casey & Grzywacz, 2008; Sánchez-Vidal et al., 2012; Stout et al., 2013; ter Hoeven & van Zoonen, 2015). Such benefits are largely attributed to employees being able to exercise greater control over when and where they work (Bentley et al., 2016; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Kelly et al., 2014; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Employees having control over working time and location is important for their well-being (Hall & Atkinson, 2006; Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Noblet et al., 2005) as they can then regulate other aspects of their life, having the ability to reschedule work activities to address caring responsibilities (Hall & Atkinson, 2006; Lapierre & Allen, 2006). This enables higher levels of job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction (Hammer et al., 2009; Oishi et al., 1999; Wheatley, 2017a, 2017b). Specifically, teleworking (including working from home), has been found to increase motivation, engagement and job satisfaction (Bai & Kim, 2016; Callier et al., 2012; Lee & Kim, 2018; Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018). Callier et al. (2012) attribute this to employees having greater autonomy, which has been found to be an antecedent to job satisfaction.

Research has also shown that working from home results in self-reported productivity gains (see for example Allen et al., 2015; Bosua et al., 2012; Caillier, 2014; Chung & van der Horst, 2017; Dahlstrom, 2013; Dockery & Bawa, 2014). This can increase knowledge sharing due to those working from home using a broader range of communication tools, leading to work being completed more quickly (Coenen & Kok, 2014).

3.2 Risks and disadvantages of flexible working

Research suggests that hybrid, and newer forms of working (i.e., activity-based working), have differing impacts on diversity groups. Working remotely has traditionally been undertaken by older workers who are managers and knowledge workers, however, the demographics of flexible workforces are changing to encompass younger people and those in a wider range of occupations (Iometrics, 2020). This means that the broader workforce now expects to work in a hybrid way. However, there are challenges that need to be addressed. For example, recent research has shown younger workers experience difficulties working remotely, particularly around networking and career development (Iometrics, 2020; Microsoft, 2021; Williamson & Colley, 2022). Research also suggests that working from home has gendered effects, particularly when it comes to work-life balance (Craig & Churchill, 2020). Research undertaken during the pandemic has shown that women tend to carry more of the domestic and emotional work than their male partners when working from home, potentially increasing time conflict and reducing work-life balance (Adisa et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2021; Craig & Churchill, 2020; Hjalmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2020; Shockley et al., 2021).

Moreover, a recent study found that public sector employees who worked from home during the pandemic worked longer hours, experienced work intensification and increased fatigue which undermined work-life balance (Palumbo, 2020). However, other research found that working from home during the pandemic reduced work-family conflict through alleviating time pressures (Darouei & Pluut, 2021). This research suggests that experiences of flexible working – and working from home specifically – differs across occupational and demographic groups, with both benefits and risks evident.

3.3 COVID-19 pandemic increased uptake of flexible working

The COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a great experiment in flexible working for many, as public health restrictions forced all but essential workers to work from home (Forbes et al., 2020; Williamson & Colley, 2022). This experience challenged a historical barrier to flexible working; the concern that employees will not be productive if permitted to work from home (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Collins, 2005; Harker Martin & McDonnell, 2012). Research suggests that most employees have remained

productive, or have been reported being more productive, when working from home. A 2020 survey of 12,000 professionals in the US, India and Germany found that 75% of employees felt they had maintained or improved productivity in the first months of the pandemic while working from home (Dahik et al., 2020). By the end of 2020, surveys of employees and managers globally were consistently revealing self-reported increases to productivity while working from home. Data from a global survey found that 68% of respondents reported increased productivity (Iometrics, 2020). In Australia, 82% of workers reported being as productive, or more productive, when they worked from home (NSWIPC, 2020). These surveys support research that has found that both managers and employees report higher levels of productivity when working from home than when working in their usual workplace (Bloom et al., 2014; Colley & Williamson, 2020).

3.4 The future of work is hybrid

As public health restrictions have eased, there has been considerable discussion about how to optimise hybrid working. Hybrid working is a form of flexible working when employees split their time between working at home and at employer sites (Graham, 2022; Halford, 2005). It provides the opportunity for senior leaders, managers and employees working from different locations, including home, corporate offices, activity-based working spaces, and remote working hubs, facilitated by supportive information and communication technology (ICT) (see McKinsey Global Institute, 2021; Nenonen & Sankari, 2022; Williamson & Colley, 2022; Williamson et al., 2021). Many have claimed that hybrid working is the ‘new normal’ or future way of working (see Gratton, 2021; NSWIPC, 2020; PWC, 2021; Williamson & Colley, 2022), as it is the preferred and expected model of working for many employees due to increasing choice regarding when to undertake work that requires greater concentration and communication (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022; Graham, 2022). However, debates are emerging on how to optimise the balance between office and home-based working, with executives preferring employees to work from the office at least three days per week and employees preferring to work from home three days per week (PwC, 2021). Organisations are also considering whether employees should choose their days in the workplace, or whether this should be mandated by leaders and managers (Bloom, 2021).

Although hybrid working is the preferred model of many workers, it must be managed strategically and purposefully to ensure desired outcomes, such as enhanced productivity and work-life balance. Thus, attention needs to be devoted to how hybrid working is designed and managed; this requires intentionality to carefully balance the benefits and downsides of each location (Gratton, 2021). For example, the productivity of employees working at home can be impeded if employees experience social or professional isolation, which also lowers employee commitment (Choi, 2018). This highlights the central role of managers in not only supporting flexible working, but in actively managing flexible working arrangements within their teams (see also MacNeil, 2003; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Williamson et al., 2022), particularly to optimise the benefits, and minimise the risks and disadvantages, associated with flexible working.

3.5 Designing virtual working environments

Key to enabling effective hybrid working is creating suitable working arrangements. There is debate regarding whether focus should be on employees working synchronously, adhering to specific (e.g., 9-5) schedules (Gratton, 2020), or asynchronously, enabling employees to work blocks of uninterrupted, focused time and responding at a time that suits them (Thorne, 2020). Recognising the existence of different preferences for flexibility in timing of work, some have argued it is useful to think about what activities need to happen in synchronous ways and what can take place asynchronously (Cazaly, 2022; Gratton, 2020). This, in turn, has implications for work that requires teamwork. In teams, members are connected by a common purpose, have interdependent tasks and roles, share responsibilities, and have complementary skills (see Jelphs et al., 2016); they also involve high levels of interaction and communication. High levels of trust and communication, and appropriate technology, are antecedents for successful virtual working (Klostermann et al., 2021). Therefore, the effective design of virtual

working environments requires managers to think about how they create virtual spaces where teams can come together to interact, share knowledge and collaborate. Organisations have also realised that communication platforms are useful to do virtual check-ins so that individuals do not feel isolated (Gratton, 2020).

Supporting collaboration and knowledge sharing, both between and across teams, is also essential for effective hybrid working. Research on how teams collaborate and share knowledge while working from home is mixed. During the pandemic, survey data of 61,000 employees who worked from home showed that collaboration between employees and teams became more difficult (Yang et al., 2022). This suggests working from home can lead to fewer interactions between team members, thus negatively affecting the transfer of knowledge. These findings concur with those of van der Meulen et al. (2019) who found that knowledge sharing decreases when employees work from home. This is due to the “proximity effect”, with employees seeking information from those physically closest to them, rather than from employees working remotely, despite the availability of digital technology.

3.6 Designing offices for flexibility

The design of physical offices may require re-thinking to optimise flexible working. Activity-based working is one of many forms of office configuration which can potentially support flexibility, but this way of working also involves risks. Activity-based working is underpinned by the idea that “work is comprised of activities to do, and they are best done in different environments, and in cooperation with others” (Falkman, 2021, p.6). Embracing flexible work might therefore bring with it a change to the configuration of buildings to facilitate different work-based activities, with space for socialising, collaborating and working quietly (Falkman, 2021; Hoendervanger et al., 2018).

Activity-based working has the potential to increase productivity; however, it can also impede well-being. Increased productivity is primarily attributed to a choice of workspaces available for different work tasks, leading to more efficient ways of working. An open-plan office setting can encourage employee movement, enhanced communication and sharing of knowledge. Through allocating space for socialisation, organisations can increase the chance of employees meeting colleagues outside of their immediate work teams and across departments. This can create opportunities for unplanned collaborations, as well as contribute to task efficiency and productivity (Arundell et al., 2018; Candido et al., 2021; Engelen et al., 2019). Conversely, activity-based working can negatively affect employees’ social well-being due to employees feeling disconnected (Ansio et al., 2020; Arundell et al., 2018; Colenberg et al., 2021). In a study undertaken in the Dutch public sector, it was found that after adopting activity-based working, employees tended to work from home more frequently because they felt that it was pointless going into the office when they could not be with their co-workers (Colenberg et al., 2021).

Another downside to activity-based working is that employees often experience a lack of acoustic and visual privacy, audio and visual distractions and noise, which can impede their work performance, productivity and engagement. The distractions and lack of privacy manifest as increased work demands for employees, and they have to spend extra energy, cognitive resources and time to complete work. This affects their job satisfaction, health and wellbeing (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2020; Hodzic et al., 2021; Hoendervanger et al., 2018; van den Berg et al., 2020). Relatedly, activity-based working environments may be less appropriate to the work preferences of older workers, who may need privacy and quiet work environments (Hoendervanger et al., 2018; Leesman, 2017; van den Berg et al., 2020). This highlights the importance of configuring activity-based working environments effectively, considering factors such the physical configuration of the environment, availability of workstations, suitability to job roles, technologies, and workforce demographics (Williamson et al., 2021).

Overall, research into flexible working demonstrates that it can result in both positive and negative impacts for employees, highlighting the need for employers to establish mechanisms to optimise value gained from flexible working, while minimising its negative impacts.

4 Study details

To identify how the ACT Public Service (ACTPS) can better support effective flexible working, and address the research questions, we adopted a mixed method research design, drawing on the following data sources:

- **ACTPS Flexible Work Working Group Meetings:** focused on experiences with flexible working across all ACTPS directorates and emergent themes to ensure broader applicability of the findings.
- **Human resource manager focus groups:** Nine focus groups were undertaken with 31 senior and middle human resource (HR) managers from the eight ACTPS directorates. The groups enabled an exploration of broader perceptions regarding flexible working in the ACTPS to gain a contextual understanding of potential differences across Directorates. In the report, quotes from these focus groups are represented as HR FG and the focus group number; for example, HR FG 1.
- **General employee focus groups:** 15 focus groups were undertaken with 53 participants to establish an in-depth understanding of flexible working within three Directorates: Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development (CMTEDD), Community Services (CSD) and Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development (EPSDD). Overall, these focus groups explored the experiences of 35 Senior Office Grade (SOG) level staff (31 staff over age 50, four staff under age 30) and 18 Administrative Service Officer (ASO) level staff (nine staff over age 50, nine staff younger than age 30). These age groups were selected as focus groups with HR managers identified them as having unique experiences of flexible working. In the report, quotes from these focus groups are represented as Directorate number, level, and age; for example, D2 SOG 50+.
- **Secondary Use of Existing Datasets:** we accessed aggregated, de-identified data from the following:
 - ACTPS Employee Census: summary statistics of responses to ACTPS wide survey on working experiences and attitudes
 - Microsoft 365 data report: summary data visualisations developed by an external consultant of the ACTPS using 365 data
 - Turnstile data: building entry and exit events
 - Wayfinding data: meeting room bookings
- **ACTPS policy and administrative documents:** we accessed relevant policy and administrative documents such as the ACTPS flexible working policy, interstate working policy, the ACTPS submission to the Future of the Working Week Inquiry (Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality), ACTPS Survey Insights papers (Employee Census results) and the ACTPS Review of SES Leadership and Leadership Development Review Discussion papers.

Appendix A provides a detailed overview of our methodology. All data sources were analysed to develop responses to the research questions, but due to limitations with the quantitative data, both in terms of access and content, this report primarily draws on the focus group data. Microsoft 365 and turnstile data were provided at a late stage in the research and were subsequently used to triangulate focus group findings.

The agreed upon sample of the research was office-based, knowledge workers located in either of the two activity-based working buildings (in London Circuit, Canberra city and Dickson). In this study, we adopt the definition of knowledge workers by Reinhardt et al. (2011) who define it as:

... the execution of knowledge-intensive tasks (e.g., decision-making, knowledge-production scenarios, and monitoring organizational performance), with IT support. In this domain, knowledge work essentially consists of the organization of information artifacts, their creation, consideration, and transformation. The work process is dominated by communication, data production, and consumption actions: sending and processing e-mails, web browsing, working on documents, or doing calculations (p.153).

We focused on knowledge workers due to their work primarily being computer-based, and, therefore, theoretically more conducive to flexible working. We also focused on middle managers and employees due to the ACTPS seeking to remain an employer of choice and therefore being interested in how to improve support and the effectiveness of flexible working from that perspective.

Our study sought to capture insights into the composition and diversity of the ACTPS via the Working Group and human resource manager focus groups across all Directorates, but employee focus groups sampled only office-based knowledge workers. There is a large proportion of ACTPS employees who have very limited access to working from home; these employees are in service delivery and operational roles. Ways to support these employees to achieve some level of flexibility requires further investigation as this was beyond the scope of our research.

The study received ethics approval from the UNSW ethics committee (approval number HC210666). To protect participants' privacy, quotes are attributed to the age and staff level of the participant but include no other potentially identifying characteristics.

5 Findings

As outlined above, the scope of this project was knowledge workers in the two ACTPS activity-based working buildings (in Canberra city and Dickson). Given the investment in technology and the built environment, as well as widespread working from home prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the research questions focus on the experiences of ACTPS employees in working from different locations, flexibility in timing and how they have used technology and communication tools while working flexibly. We were also interested in knowing if patterns of use differed across occupational and demographic groups, and the linkages between technology and desired behaviours and outcomes, such as knowledge sharing, collaboration and productivity.

5.1 Context

Data was collected between December 2021 and June 2022. At this time, the ACTPS was emerging from extended COVID-19 induced public health restrictions and the majority of knowledge workers had been predominantly working from home over the past two years. When focus groups with human resource managers were conducted in March/April 2022, many staff were within the first weeks of returning to the office since March 2020. In addition to this research occurring during a time where patterns of work were starting to change, another key change for participants was returning to an office environment that was unfamiliar. Many Directorates had moved to activity-

based working building environments during, or immediately prior to, the 2020 lockdown. Therefore, participant perceptions expressed in this report may also reflect their adjustment to this new environment.

Despite the enormous upheaval involved in the previous two years, participants overwhelmingly expressed positive experiences with flexible working. It is clear there are areas of effective flexible working practice, with ACTPS knowledge workers valuing the opportunity to work flexibly. The majority of managers appeared to engage with their staff in a positive and constructive way and attempted to support employees to balance work demands with their non-work demands. These positive experiences are supported by the ACTPS Employee Census results, which found that 83% of respondents reported that their immediate supervisor cares about their health and wellbeing, 86% reported that people in their work group treat each other with respect, and 77% reported that people in their work group regularly reach out to support them and their well-being. In addition, 84% of respondents clearly understood what they were expected to do in their job, and 85% saw a clear connection between their job and their organisations' purpose.

These factors bode well for knowledge workers' experience of flexible working, due to this type of work requiring high levels of autonomy (see Drucker, 1999). However, our findings also highlight effectiveness is heavily reliant on individual teams and managers, rather than being culturally embedded across the ACTPS. Therefore, our study has identified several areas for improvement, which underpin our suggestions for how the ACTPS could better support flexible working to optimise outcomes.

5.2 Research question 1: How have employees used different locations, timing, technologies and communication tools to support their flexible working practices?

Summary points

Location

- Most staff spent the majority of their time working at home and want to continue to do so to support individual productivity and work-life balance.
- There have been recent moves to hybrid working arrangements, with most staff encouraged by senior managers to work from the office one or two specific days per week (typically determined at the Directorate level).
- However, there is strong resistance to mandatory weekly office attendance and the perception that office-based working is unnecessary for most ACTPS knowledge workers. This highlights the need for a clear purpose in office attendance.
- Many research participants expressed strong negative perceptions towards activity-based working, primarily due to the design and configuration of buildings. In particular, participants raised concerns about noise levels and neighbourhoods being restricted to teams.

Timing

- Most research participants are satisfied with the flexibility afforded in the timing of work, particularly concerning flexibility with start and finish times, and taking breaks around personal demands.

- There are some concerns that working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the expectation employees will work through personal or family illness.
- Concerns were also raised by some staff regarding unreasonable expectations for availability and responsiveness, with perceptions that some managers expect staff to be showing they are online and working.

Technology

- Most staff have basic technology needs and were satisfied with the technology available.
- Unequal quality in home working environments resulting from personal domestic and financial circumstances has meant that some staff are required to be in the office more than they would prefer.
- This is generating equity concerns as lower-level staff are often less equipped with appropriate office furnishings and accessories (e.g., computer screens, office chairs etc.).
- Some staff in technical roles are also required to be in the office more than they would prefer due to standard issue laptops having insufficient computing power to run specialist software.

Communication tools

- Microsoft Teams is the primary communication technology used by ACTPS staff, with levels of usage differing across teams.
- Team size and degree of task interdependence determine usage of communication tools, with very small or large teams (< 3 or > 10 members) having less frequent interactions.
- There were reports of existing team dynamics being accentuated in a virtually enabled environment, with positive relationships improving and negative relationships worsening in these contexts.
- In some contexts, communication within branches and divisions were improved through regular meetings; however, concerns were raised in other contexts regarding reduced connections across teams within Directorates, with an enhancement of silo mentalities and fragmentation reported.

This research question focuses on the flexible working practices of ACTPS employees in terms of location and timing, as well as how they have used technology and communication tools.

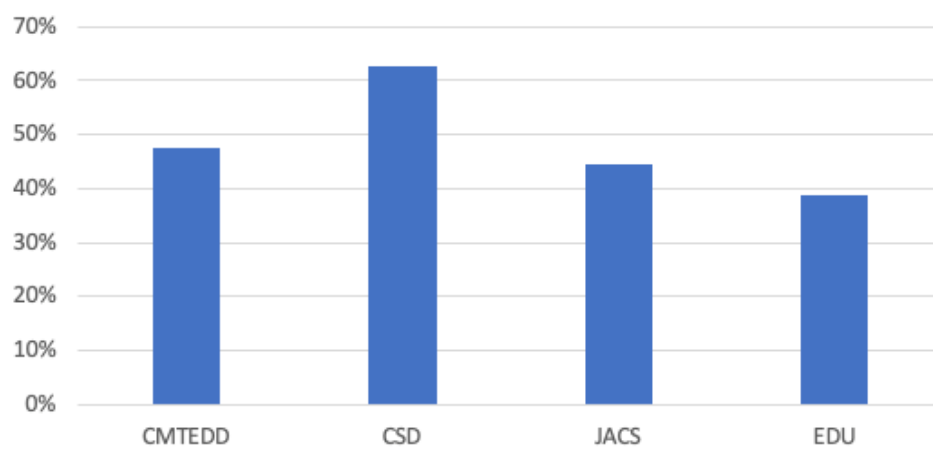
Location of work

Over the past two years office based ACTPS staff have predominantly worked from home, with more recent moves to hybrid working arrangements. Many participants reported that their leadership team had encouraged staff to work from the office on specific days once or twice a week. However, most participants reported that they spend the **majority of their time working at home** and explained they want to continue to do so to support individual productivity and work-life balance.

The number of staff attending the office at least once a week in the Canberra city building is roughly in line with the city average office utilisation rate of 53% reported in the Property Council of Australia's June survey (PCA 2022). In the second last week of May (a week representative of prevailing patterns of office utilisation), 48% of staff within a particular Directorate attended the office at least once per week. As illustrated in Figure 1, these figures range from 63% in CSD, 47% in CMTEDD, 44% in Justice and Community Safety, to 39% in Education. It is important to note that Directorate data were missing for 17% of staff in the dataset so these percentages are likely to be an

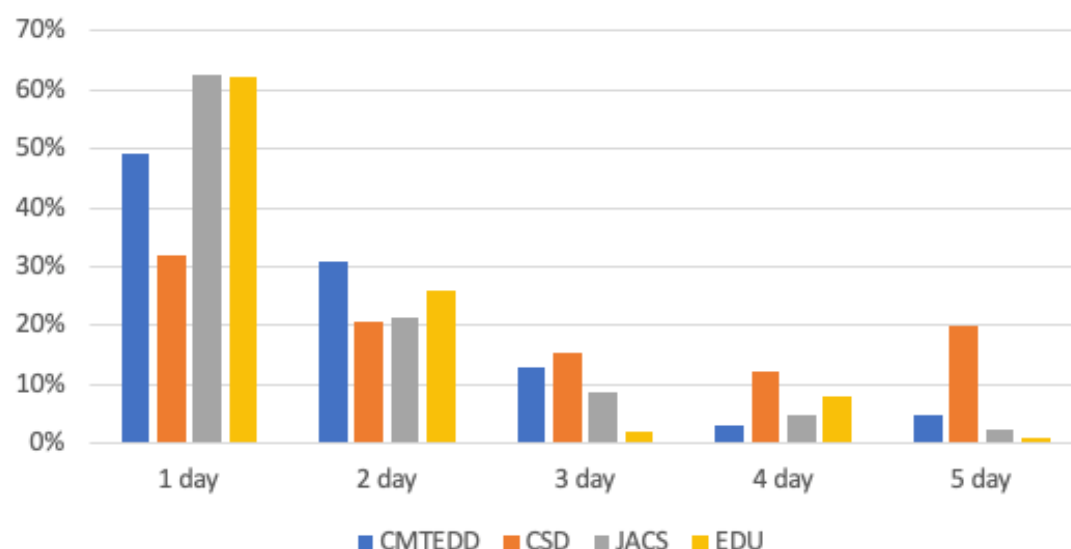
undercount. It should also be noted that the Canberra city building has individual desk space capacity to accommodate approximately 60% of its workforce.

Figure 1. Percentage of the workforce accessing building at least once per week by Directorate



As office utilisation rates intersect with capacity, it is important to also look at frequency of use. As shown in Figure 2, staff in CSD attend the office more regularly than other Directorates in the Canberra city building, with 43% of staff attending the office 3-5 times per week, compared with 21% of CMTEDD. This finding was supported in focus group data where CSD participants reported that higher office attendance reflects the larger proportion of the workforce with public facing duties (e.g., child and youth protection officers). As such, the CSD sample captures more than knowledge workers (which was the focus of this study). CMTEDD participants, conversely, reported having a designated 1-2 days for their team to attend the office. This designation was reported as being determined by COVID-19 restrictions and Directorate level executive management decisions.

Figure 2. Number of days of office attendance per week by Directorate



There was variation, both within and across Directorates as to whether office attendance was perceived to be optional or mandatory. This was evident in discussions with focus group participants who expressed different perspectives as to whether they *had* to attend the office on the designated

team day(s). Although most research participants reported enjoying the social aspects of periodic office attendance, there was **resistance to mandatory weekly attendance**, on arbitrarily assigned days, with many questioning the value or purpose of attending the office when working productively at home. This was particularly when **office days primarily consist of independent, desktop-based working**; the type of work perceived to be more suitable when working from home. As one participant noted:

I'm ... a bit resistant to arbitrary days ... If I'm just sitting behind a computer and a lot of my work is computer based, it makes no sense for me to be in an office nine to five ... I just don't see the logic anymore (D2 SOG 50+).

In addition to general resistance to mandatory weekly attendance, focus group participants expressed a **strong negative attitude towards activity-based working, primarily due to the design and configuration of the buildings**. This was reported to discourage people working in the office. Key points of complaint include inefficiencies in setting desk space up and packing down, difficulty finding people in rotational desks, and high levels of noise due to lack of sound barriers around desks or around informal meeting areas including kitchens. As one focus group participant explained:

... noise from the kitchen kind of goes straight into the desk areas, everyone's trying to be quiet in the kitchen space, which is a pity, because it's a beautiful space, it's just not necessarily practical in that sense. Whereas my previous area had like a huge kitchen with shared seating areas, but with closed doors all the time, so there was that sound barrier. And so yeah, incidental conversations haven't happened all that much at [London Cct] in that respect (D2 ASO <30).

Participants discussed how the activity-based working buildings are configured around 'neighbourhoods', which are clusters of desks where teams are allocated a joint space to work. However, some **expressed concerns about being restricted to neighbourhoods that centre around teams**. This configuration was argued to restrict cross-team interactions, as well as enhance social isolation for employees whose team members are not frequently working from the office. This was due to being the only one working in their designated team space.

Participants also reported that being restricted to neighbourhoods perpetuates issues with a **lack of guaranteed desk space**, which is particularly an issue for groups with high levels of office-based working and large teams. Participants in large teams reported that COVID-19 imposed restrictions and lack of building space meant that all team members could not be physically present in the office at the same time. Many teams negotiated office attendance and worked together to accommodate team members in a designated work area; for example, through establishing rosters so half or a third of the team (depending on team size) can work from the office on each designated day. However, the lack of guaranteed and sufficient desk space presents an impediment to free choice in location of work due to restricting the days individuals can work from the office. Furthermore, multiple participants reported territorialism over space, with some teams occupying and claiming space on their non-designated days.

There's another team that seem to be all there all the time, and they put post-it notes saying that this is their desk. So, we can't actually get a desk in that area. So, we've moved to a different area that's we're not meant to be in (D3 ASO 50+).

These findings demonstrate that many ACTPS employees have been able to work from home, and participants reported this was conducive to productivity and work-life balance. However, several factors constrain the degree to which employees can exercise choice regarding where they work and their willingness to work across multiple locations. These factors include space restrictions in activity-based buildings limiting the days individuals and teams can attend the office, with teams allocated specific days they can use building space. Office attendance can also be constrained by resistance to mandatory weekly attendance, with participants citing the need for a clear rationale for working from the office. Finally, willingness to work from the office is also constrained by the design and configuration of activity-based buildings. All these issues are more pronounced for large teams and those that require frequent office attendance.

Timing of work

Most participants were satisfied with the level of flexibility afforded in the timing of work, in particular the **flexibility to adjust start and/or finish times** to suit individual working preferences, or to structure breaks around personal demands. This appears to be a real strength in the ACTPS and was praised as an important selling point for recruitment and retention. Starting early was reported as particularly common, with staff often feeling most productive first thing in the morning, and/or starting their workday when they would usually have started their morning commute.

Within this flexibility, participants reported a tendency for the middle of the day (10am-3pm) to serve as the core hours for synchronous communication (e.g., via meetings and impromptu calls). Flexibility in timing of work appears embedded in many, though not all, knowledge-based working teams.

People are really flexible around school pickups, drop offs, if you're sick, if you've got appointments, like it's just assumed that you're going to make it work for you, and the work gets done when it gets done, which is quite nice really (D2 ASO <30).

Despite generally favourable perspectives on flexibility in timing of work, some raised concerns that flexibility in hours are being interpreted as **encouraging people to work through personal or family illness**. Such expectations were seen to develop during the initial stages of the pandemic where there was a 'crisis mode' of working created. During this time, it became evident that employees could 'push through' mild illness while working from home. Working while undertaking caring responsibilities had also been proven possible during the pandemic. However, some highlighted the need for these expectations to shift and boundaries to be established regarding balancing personal and work demands in a flexible working context. As one focus group participant argued:

I've found the boundary ... would be something to improve. Like previously if my daughter was sick, I could call in sick and only have the stress of dealing with a sick child. But now I pretty much never take a day off when she's sick, because it's expected that I'll just work when I can from home ... sure, on paper it ... decreases absenteeism, but all I'm doing is stressing about trying to get stuff done and stressing about my daughter. I think more firm boundaries would probably help with the work from home situation (D2 ASO <30).

Some participants also expressed concerns about unreasonable expectations for availability and responsiveness. For example, in many teams there is an expectation that individuals will communicate their availability throughout the day, such as being absent for a brief personal

commitment. The need for ongoing availability updates, and frequent reference to the traffic light system denoting individual availability in Microsoft Teams, appeared to influence how freely some individuals engaged with flexibility in timing of work. This was largely due to concerns that others would perceive employees to be not working if they were not visible online or responsive, contributing to the perceived need to “*always be online*” (D1 SOG <30). In part, these concerns appeared to stem from an ongoing focus on **presenteeism**. As one focus group participant commented:

I do definitely want to not let my computer go to sleep or something if I'm sitting here for a while, reading something on my computer blanks out. I'm like, 'oh, crap ... I'm gonna appear offline' ... I do see that ... other people ... expect a level of responsiveness from us that I don't necessarily hold for other people” (D3 SOG under 30).

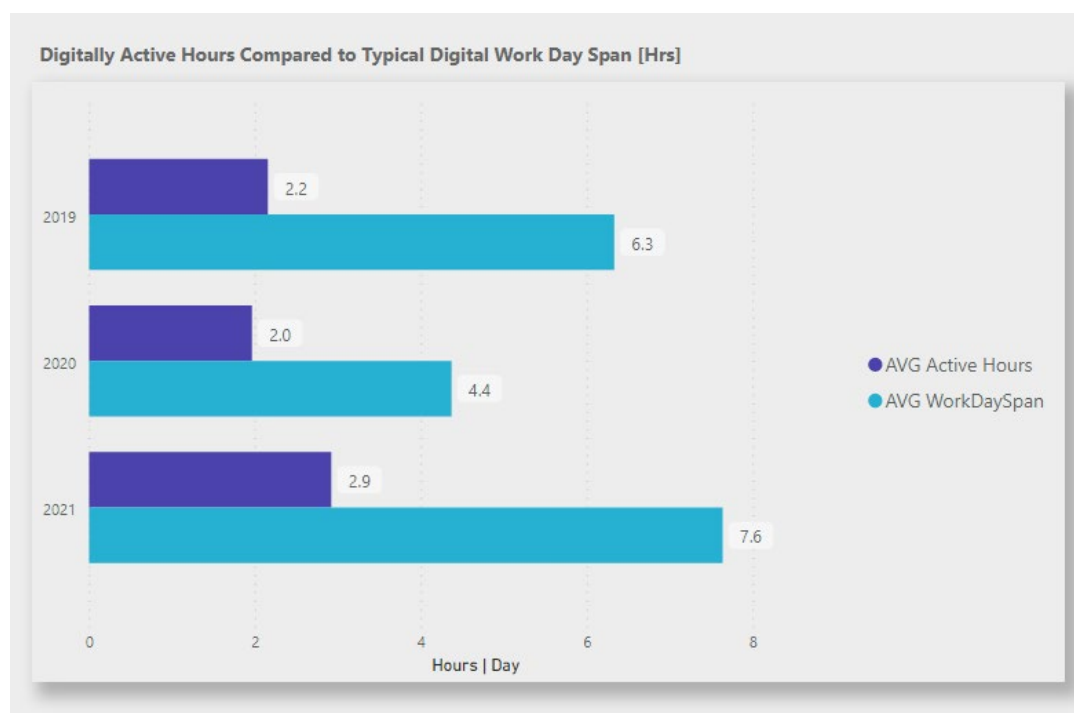
Microsoft 365 data

Meta-data collected from the Microsoft 365 platform was used as an indicator of digital work behaviour for CMTEDD, including but not limited to email, teams’ meetings, accessing, sharing and authoring files, analysing data and reviewing reports. Whilst this data provides some useful insights into the scheduling and duration of work, it is important to note that the digital activity available for analysis represents only some activity in the 365 suite and is unable to include digital activities completed in other platforms. This data captures events based on start time and the time between events, rather than the actual duration of an activity. For example, reading an email and starting a Teams meeting are both single events captured at a single timepoint, although the latter is likely much longer in duration. Therefore, this data is being used as a useful indicator of digital activity rather than a comprehensive audit of digital work tasks completed.

The average number of digital activities performed on the 365 platform per user per day doubled in 2022 [22 activities], compared to 2019 [10 activities] or 2020 [11 activities]. This suggests that CMTEDD users complete more tasks digitally. The average workday span, or the elapsed time between the first and last digital activity for full-time employees also increased in 2021 [7.6 hours], compared to 2019 [6.3 hours] and 2020 [4.4 hours], indicating CMTEDD users are starting digital tasks earlier and finishing digital tasks later. This does not necessarily mean that employees are working longer; for example, in an office environment employees might start and/or finish their workday with face-to-face meetings whereas now they may start and/or finish with an email or Teams meeting.

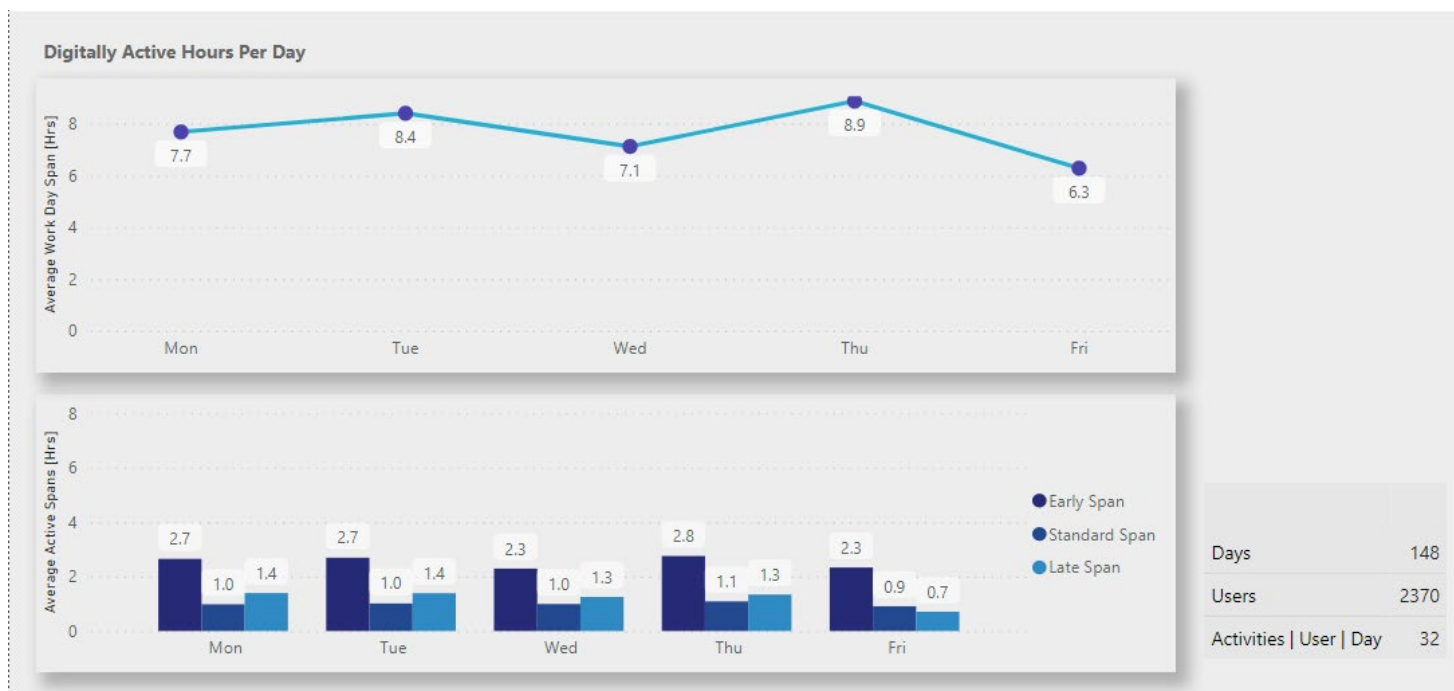
Analysing the frequency of digital activities can provide an indication of patterns of work over the day. A comparison of *highly active hours*, where there is less than one hour delay between digital activities, suggests users spend time being highly active in Microsoft 365 and periods where they take time away from Microsoft 365 activity. It is not possible to identify what occurs in these gaps. This pattern is illustrated in Figure 3 below which shows that highly active hours range between 2 – 2.9 hours per day across 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Figure 3. Highly active hours for full-time employees over time (Source: ACTPS Report)



Comparison of highly active hours before, during and after standard work hours [8:00am to 6:00pm], indicates that CMTEDD users typically had a longer span of *highly active hours* before 8:00am, which may suggest that, for many, the period before 8am was a useful time to engage in Microsoft 365 tasks, such as email, to accommodate work-life balance commitments or to optimise productivity by aligning work activity with peak energy levels for that individual. This pattern is illustrated in Figure 4 which shows that in 2021 roughly half of all digitally active working hours for fulltime employees (bar graph, bottom of figure) occurred before 8am each workday. It is important to note the limitations of the 365 data, where accessing a Teams meeting and reading an email are both considered a single event regardless of the duration, and that the time elapsed between digital activities may be longer before 8:00am.

Figure 4. Digitally active hours by time and day 2021 (Source: ACTPS report)



Top graph: y axis = Average Work Day Span (hrs); x axis = day of the week

Bottom graph: y axis = Average Active Spans; day of the week

Highly active hours in 2019 (presented in Figure 5) shows a similar pattern of early work (bar graph, bottom of figure), suggesting that flexibility in work scheduling was widely utilised prior to the pandemic. However, 2019 is characterised by a shorter span of digitally active hours (line graph, top of figure) and a slightly lower quantity of digitally active hours per day (bar graph, bottom of figure). The differences in quantity of hours may partly reflect different levels of 365 utilisation between the two years; however, the distribution of these hours suggest changes in the scheduling of work and may also reflect increases in the quantity of hours worked.

Figure 5. Digitally active hours by time and day 2019 (Source: ACTPS report)



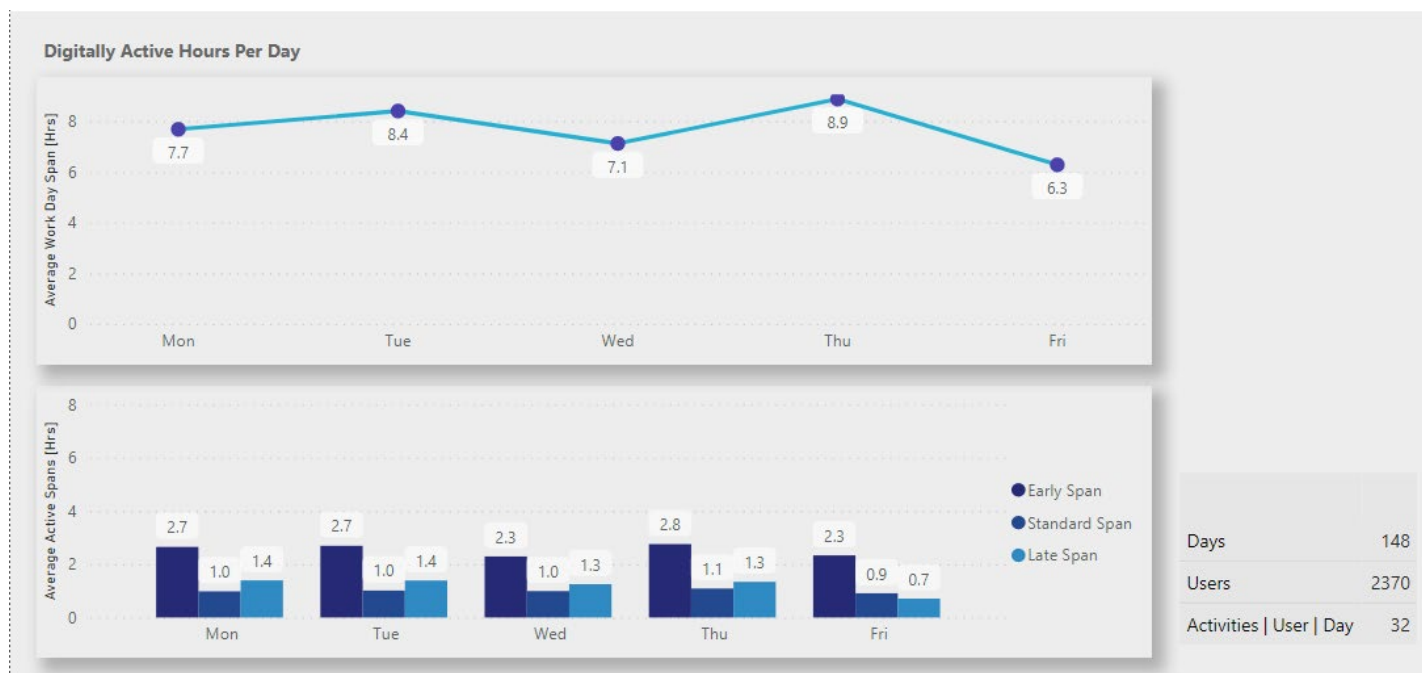
Top graph: y axis = Average Work Day Span (hrs); x axis = day of the week

Bottom graph: y axis = Average Active Spans; day of the week

In both 2019 and 2021, the pre-8am period contained the longest span of highly active digital activity. In 2019 the 8am-6pm period contained the second longest span of digitally active hours, but in 2021 this changed to the post-6pm period suggesting longer periods of evening work. The span of the workday has also increased, and in 2021 peaked at 8.9 hours on the longest workday, compared with 6.8 hours on the longest workday in 2019. That the span of the workday has increased more than the quantity of working hours suggests that employees are balancing work and non-work commitments throughout the day. However, the longer span of working hours in 2021 corresponds with some focus group participants' descriptions of a culture that values employees and managers being constantly responsive and available. This will be discussed further in Research Question 2.

In addition to these patterns of work for all staff, Figure 6 presents digitally active hours for part-time employees only. The figure shows that patterns of work across the day are even more heavily skewed towards the pre-8am period amongst part-time staff. This population also has higher levels of post-6pm working relative to the 8am-6pm block. This may suggest that part-time staff have daytime non-work priorities, such as caring responsibilities, and are able to balance these responsibilities by working flexibly at early and late times of day.

Figure 6. Digitally active hours by time and day for part-time staff in 2021 (Source: ACTPS report)



Top graph: y axis = Average Work Day Span (hrs); x axis = day of the week

Bottom graph: y axis = Average Active Spans; day of the week

These findings highlight that many employees have the flexibility to adjust their start and finish times, with most staff overlapping in the middle of the day to enable synchronous communication. Most participants expressed appreciation for this flexibility and wanted it to continue. However, participants also reported that working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the expectation that employees will continue working through personal or family illness. Participants also discussed the perceived need to be online and responsive constantly; what our data cannot tell us is whether this is solely a product of working from home, due to lack of visible attendance as evident in the office, or if this is a broader cultural issue within the ACTPS. Some of these issues are discussed further regarding Research Question 2 in relation to managers.

Technology

Most focus group **participants had relatively basic technology needs and were generally satisfied with the technology available**. Participants who worked from activity-based working environments reported using ACTPS-issued laptops to enable flexibility in the location and timing of their work but expressed concerns about inequality in the quality of home working environments, with limited equipment provision beyond laptops.

Some employees have been provided with hardware accessories such as screens, headsets, and external keyboards, but this is not universal. There were limited reports of the provision of home office furniture and accessories except for office chairs, which appeared to have been provided in limited circumstances due to office refurbishments and subsequent disposal of existing office equipment due to the move to activity-based working buildings.

As a result of a lack of equipment provision (beyond laptops), in addition to personal financial and domestic circumstances, there were many reports of staff working in **sub-optimal home working**

environments without ergonomic setups or dedicated workspace. This is despite initiatives in place to support appropriate ergonomic setups, such as a working from home checklist, online resources regarding how to set up workstations, workstation assessments, and a virtual physiotherapy program. Economic factors appeared to be at play here, with more highly paid staff having greater capacity to purchase ergonomic equipment individually than lower paid staff. Additionally, they were more likely to have a dedicated home working space, as illustrated in the following quote:

... just general office equipment ... didn't necessarily mean it was compatible for the home, or able to be set up, or you could actually get it home ... And at the end of the day, someone saying 'can you sign your WHS sheet to say that everything is OK?', so that we have no liability ... I'm fortunate that I can afford to do certain things and I'm well set up, but I know a lot of people aren't, and I don't think that's really being taken seriously ... ticking off on a form, and signing it to say that you've done the thing, does not remove the responsibility of your managers or of government to provide the workplace that you need (D2 SOGs 50+).

A lack of safe and quality home working set-up is an impediment to productivity when working at home. Reflecting this, **unequal access to home office equipment** was considered an impediment to equal access to flexibility in location of work. Across all Directorates, participants reported a lack of access to employer-provided equipment, meaning that some staff needed to work in the office more often than they would prefer.

Participant 1. I found it to be more productive working from the office rather than home, because I didn't have a good set up from home and working from just one laptop doesn't speed up my work. And having three screens here [at the office], I'm much more productive (D1 ASO 50+).

Participant 2 you'll find the majority of people who are going into the office are those that don't have a dedicated workspace at home (D1 ASO 50+).

Focus group participants reported that standard issue laptops had **insufficient computing power to run specialist software** or particular IT platforms, including some ACTPS developed platforms. As a result, some specialist technology users had higher office utilisation rate than they would otherwise prefer, as illustrated in the following quote:

Systems that are the foundation for all the online GIS systems – they don't work at home very well at all. So, I've had to, you know, go into the depot on a weekend here and there just to fix something up that I couldn't do from the computer [ACTPS issued laptop] at home (D1 SOG 50+).

Examples were also provided of opportunities for technology-enabled process innovation, such as document approvals being manually emailed rather than delegated in a workflow management program.

I think there's a bit of catching up to do with the software and the applications that we can use too. Because, you know, we don't have the ability to make workflows for smartphones and things like that... in this digital world people want to fill things out online. But as a Directorate...we're not allowed to have those programs (Working Group).

These findings demonstrate that ACTPS employees have been provided with the basic technology required to enable flexible working. However, participants expressed concerns about the quality of home office set-ups, inequities across hierarchical levels, issues with specialist software and a lack of investment in technologies enabling process innovation. These issues constrain flexibility in location in work, as they lead to some employees working from the office more out of necessity, rather than choice.

Communication tools

Participants identified that Microsoft Teams, which facilitates video meetings, calls, instant chat and message boards, is the primary communication technology used by ACTPS employees. However, levels of Teams use varies. Some participants reported using instant chat extensively to share information, communicate availability and engage in social interactions with their team members. Most participants reported using video meetings to facilitate verbal communication, particularly within teams. However, the frequency of video meetings varied considerably across work groups; these range from daily to fortnightly. Some teams meet weekly or fortnightly to check-in with one another, report on work progress and share information, whereas other teams did not schedule recurring meetings, instead opting for meeting as work requires it.

Many participants reported their team holds daily (morning) team video meetings– often called **‘daily chats’ or ‘well-being check-ins’**. In some teams these are exclusively focused on social interaction for the purpose of team connection building, while others incorporate both work and non-work discussions.

We have a compulsory, there’s 15 minutes in the morning which I don’t know whether it’s across everywhere, but you get to see people in their home environments, you get a feel... we don’t talk about any work, so it’s a work free zone, and the engagement and collaboration and innovation and respect that it creates across the team – I’ve never seen anything like it, it’s fantastic (D1 ASO 50+).

Our focus group data highlights that a central factor in the utilisation of communication tools is team size and dynamics, as well as the degree of task interdependence. Staff in roles with **lower levels of task interdependence, or in very small or large teams (e.g., <3 or >10), appear to have less frequent team interaction**. Autonomous roles with low levels of task interdependence were mostly reported by older (>50 years) participants at the ASO level, often reflecting their high levels of experience; individuals in these roles more often sought out face-to-face social interaction when available (e.g., team office days or social events), but did not always have colleagues who were similarly motivated for face-to-face engagement.

When I was really getting frustrated and depressed by the isolation and started going into the office, there was no one there from my team. So, I quickly bailed on that idea (D2 ASO 50+).

Microsoft 365 and HR data show that team size is not correlated with the frequency of use of Microsoft Teams. This reflects participants’ distinction between the quality and quantity of interaction. Participants largely viewed the team as the primary point of social connection, and the setting in which strong social and professional bonds are formed. Microsoft Teams data captures only the quantity of interaction, whereas our focus group data highlights the centrality of task

interdependence and service or support delivery. For example, individuals in coordination / liaison, administrative support and information points (e.g., internal call centres) are more likely to have a high quantity of Teams interactions that may not reflect the quality of connections developed via those interactions.

Communication within teams

Our focus group data suggest there is potential for **existing team dynamics to be accentuated in an online environment**. For example, in teams where regular communication, inclusive practices and supportive behaviours were already evident, these practices were transferred to the online environment utilising the tools available to facilitate communication and purposeful social interactions. However, in teams that were not inclusive or cohesive, negative behaviours were heightened due to less frequent engagement and/or active disengagement, such as individuals not turning up for team meetings or events. Less frequent team engagement appeared to be associated with social isolation and dysfunctional team cultures, which were characterised by disengaged staff, lack of motivation and lack of social connections.

Communicating online may be associated with more risk of unacceptable behaviour. This may be due to a lack of face-to-face interactions and the ability to address issues as they occur, or a lack of visibility weakening social norms around acceptable behaviour. As one participant noted:

... [working from home has] kind of emboldened what I personally think was not very professional behaviour, because they weren't seeing people in person ... I guess once you're at home for a while, and you don't have to have discretion and professionalism as much because you're just by yourself in front of a screen, and those like trolls on the internet, I feel like some of that kind of seeped into the workplace, which was really unpleasant ... I guess a bad situation was made worse probably by the fact that we weren't in the office ... I think the managerial response was good, but I think that being apart also made it difficult for them to intervene effectively because it's all remotely (D2 ASO <30).

Communication across teams

An additional area of concern for some participants was the potential for reduced connections within Directorates. While some participants highlighted that, in some contexts, senior managers were using Microsoft Teams to hold Branch and/or Division meetings, others reported minimal communication and coordination across teams within Directorates. Several participants reported having minimal contact or interaction outside of their team, with some having no broader awareness of their directorate or what other teams are working on. This may reflect broader analyses by Microsoft that the move to remote working has made teams more siloed, with broader networks and inter-team interactions decreasing (Microsoft, 2021). Some participants claimed there has been an enhancement of silo mentalities and fragmented relationships. However, we are cautious to claim this represents broader experiences across the ACTPS, as the Employee Census results state that 92% of respondents were able to work effectively with others outside their immediate work group. Due to potential implications for the cohesiveness and strength of organisational cultures, it may highlight an area that warrants further investigation.

These findings highlight areas of effective practice, with the utilisation of technology and communication tools to support flexible working. The extent to which these tools are utilised largely seems to be shaped by team-level factors, specifically team size and dynamics, and the level of task interdependence within the team. It appears that existing team dynamics are accentuated in an online environment, which can affect the extent to which tools are utilised.

Overall, the findings for Research Question 1 highlight that ACTPS employees have flexibility to determine the location and timing of their work. However, the extent to which flexibility is exercised

is constrained by several factors concerning the built environment, perceptions attendance was closely monitored when working from home, issues with home office set-ups, a lack of clear rationale for working from the office, and team-level factors.

5.3 Research question 2: How does the utilisation of technology, location, timing and communication tools vary across the range of occupations and demographic groups?

Summary

- Our analysis was constrained by limited access to quantitative data and its analytical power.
- Our qualitative data highlights that a key occupation of interest is managers, who were reported as using technology and communication tools at a high rate.
- There are several factors that *may* explain the high usage of technology by managers, including the increased workloads required during the COVID-19 pandemic (due to the transition to working from home), an ongoing crisis orientation to working, managers closely monitoring their staff working from home, or broader cultural or workload management issues (i.e., unrealistic expectations regarding availability).
- Irrespective of the contributing factors, our qualitative data suggests that working from home has contributed to greater work-life spill-over for managers.
- Our qualitative data did not reveal clear differences across demographic groups, as some preferred to work from the office, whereas others preferred to work from home, irrespective of age.
- A key retention factor for the ACTPS is continuing to provide employees flexibility and choice in timing and location of work.

In addressing this research question, we sought to understand differences across occupational and demographic groups in terms of their timing and location flexibility, as well as their use of technology and communication tools. Due to a lack of access to quantitative data, we could not analyse patterns across a range of occupational or demographic groups. Therefore, this section draws on focus group data to analyse the qualitative differences reported about utilisation.

Occupation differences

Moreso than occupation, our findings suggest that whether an individual is in a managerial role influences the utilisation of technology, location, timing and communication. Participants reported that most managers utilised technology and communication tools to foster team connections and communication and held regular one-on-one meetings with their team members while undertaking their task-based work.

The usage of technology and communication tools by managers may reflect the shift in working required of managers since March 2020. Managers have moved from being able to informally interact with their team in the office to moving completely online with less visibility of their employees and their work. One manager referred to it as “... a surprisingly difficult transition to make”, because “having to change the way you work to adjust to [not having employees in the same space] was challenging for people” (HR FG 6). Many participants reported high frequencies of meetings between managers and their employees in the initial stages of the pandemic, but this had

dissipated over time as work practices had become embedded. However, participant reports of attendance being closely monitored (identified in Research Question 1) suggests that some managers continue to closely monitor their staff working from home, which may contribute to higher technology usage. This may suggest that such monitoring indicates a digital working manifestation of presenteeism, where some managers value knowing employees are either physically or virtually 'present', as opposed to focusing on the results they deliver. It also seemed to contribute to the increased workload of managers.

Our qualitative data suggests that for some staff, **working from home contributed to greater work-life spill over**, due to inadequate work boundaries and **unrealistic expectations regarding availability**; these challenges were most often reported by managers. Some participants reported that working from the office enabled clearer boundaries, with delineation between work and home. This was often facilitated by transition moments, such as the commute to and from work. In contrast, widespread home-based working has blurred the boundaries between work and non-work contexts. Amongst managers, many participants reported receiving phone calls on their personal mobile at all times of day, including if they did not immediately respond to an email sent 'urgently'.

... I think I deliver more than I used to, and I prioritise better, so on paper that's like 'yay, flexible work going really well', but on the personal mental side I'm not so sure anymore, because ... I now feel 24/7 a bit ... Whereas I think in some ways going into the office, if you're on your way to work and something urgent comes in, you're driving your car or your boss needs to see you and you've gone to get a coffee, you literally just won't even know about it until you come back, they're unlikely to pick up the phone and ring you if you're not there yet ... I think that's an interesting side of it that probably isn't looked at, the over workers ... [and] is that going to tip some people over the balance in terms of burnout and fatigue as well (HR FG 5).

This quote reflects sentiments by other managers, who reported that working from home led to a reduction in their work-life balance due. This was due to working longer hours and the perceived expectation they should be constantly available and responsive to requests, including outside of working hours. As explained by a focus group participant:

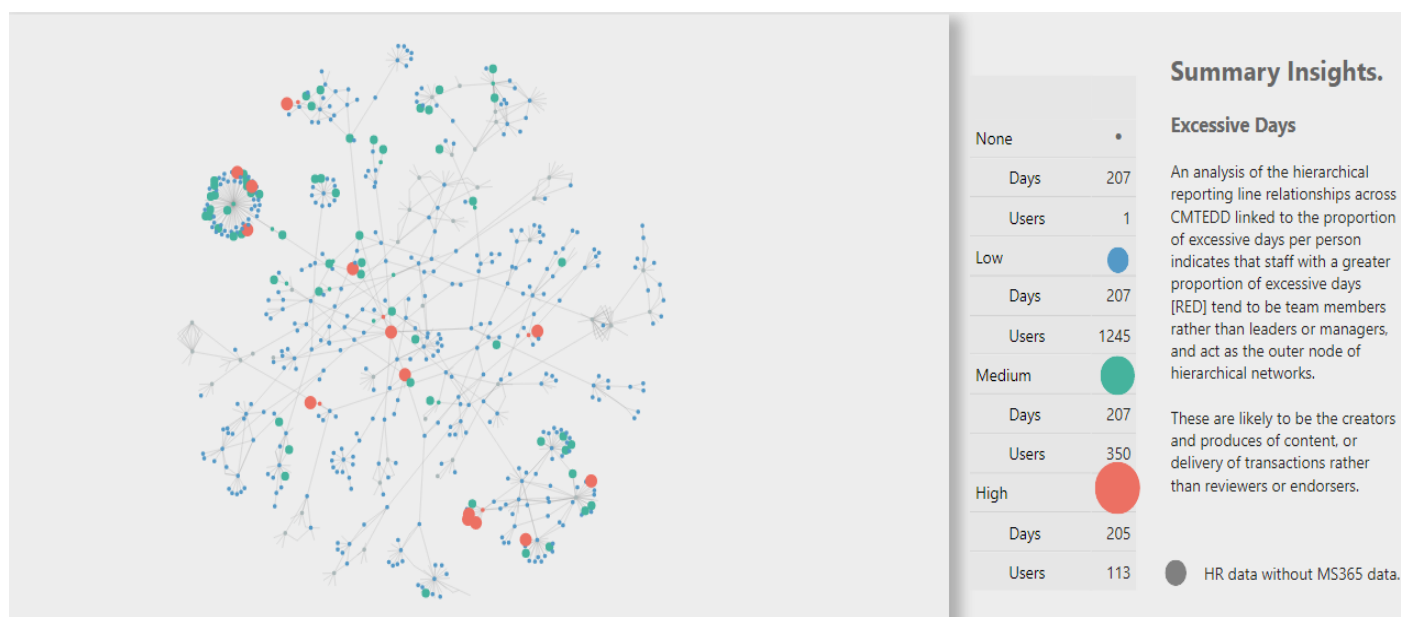
Within the workgroup, we are all being demanded to undertake far more work than we've ever been required to do ... working public holidays, Sundays, long hours and expectations ... and huge amounts of pressure to get that work completed, and there doesn't seem to be any level of connection, totally lost as to us as humans and individuals, and our own work-life balance ... work is permeating into our whole life. Working from home, and it's absolutely destroying it. So, I like working from home, but I don't seem to have a private life, because I'm available, and it's electronic. Emails at midnight, 3 o'clock in the morning, all sorts of things like that, and expectations of instant delivery. And just total loss of what is achievable within the timeframes (D2 SOG 50+).

However, as this quote suggests, there may be broader factors at play than just the blurring of boundaries between work and home. While some participants identified they experienced additional workload demands in a flexible working context, other managers reported they worked **fewer** hours and more productively, while maintaining frequent communication with their team. The experiences of those managers facing high workload demands may reflect some of the team-based factors discussed in Research Question 1, such as large teams, low task interdependence and/or low levels of team cohesiveness; all of which would require more active coordination of managers regardless of if they are working face-to-face or flexibly. These findings could also reflect perceived

expectation that employees will be available and responsive regardless of personal circumstances (such as illness), also discussed in Research Question 1.

In contrast with our focus group findings, Microsoft 365 data showed that lower-level employees with no supervisory or managerial responsibilities are more likely to work excessive hours than managers; although this reflects hours worked within 365 platforms only. Lower-level staff who participated in focus groups were also more likely to report feeling subject to presenteeism pressures. The distribution of excessive working hours is shown in Figure 7. The network map depicts employees as nodes (dots on the map). The map is structured around reporting lines, meaning that more senior staff are closer to the centre of the network map while lower-level staff are closer to the outer edges of the map and at the end of network paths. Each node (dot) is colour coded to represent the frequency of excess working hour days, defined as more than nine digitally active hours. Red nodes depict employees working the highest number of 9+ hour days per year. As can be seen, lower-level employees towards to outer edges of the network are more likely to experience medium or high frequency excessive working hour days.

Figure 7: Network map excessive hours (Source: ACTPS report)



It is important to reiterate that this data represents a subset of 365 data only and subsequently does not account for employee time on activities outside the Microsoft suite. As only Microsoft 365 data are captured, the figures presented are likely to be an undercount of actual hours worked given that employees are likely undertaking activity not captured in the dataset. It is thus possible that excessive working is more common than is suggested in these figures. However, we are cautious about emphasising this point due to limitations with this dataset; instead, we highlight this as an area that warrants further investigation.

Excessive working hours may reflect an ongoing crisis orientation in parts of the ACTPS due to the COVID-19 pandemic or a broader cultural or workload management issue. The potential for broader cultural issues is supported by the ACTPS Review of SES Leadership and Leadership Development which highlighted the lack of outcomes orientation, with a tendency to try and do everything or

focus on familiar work (suggesting a lack of prioritisation). It also found that there is an expectation that leaders will be across too much detail and their technical knowledge is valued (rather than leadership). The Leadership Review also identified that the ACTPS has a risk averse culture, which contributes to the tendency for leaders and managers to micro-manage employees. This may help explain why, in our study, some managers felt the need to be instantly responsive to their leaders and to have a detailed response, with some closely monitoring their employees' digital activity (as discussed in Research Question 1). Although this may not be evident across the entire ACTPS, perhaps reflecting variation in subcultures, it is a concerning issue that warrants further investigation.

Potential issues with workload management are also indicated in the ACTPS Employee Census results, where 67% of respondents reported having unrealistic time pressures at least some of the time, with 30% often or always having unrealistic time pressures. In addition, 62% of respondents reported that their current workload was above capacity and only 52% reported having enough time during their work hours to do their job effectively. In addition, having too many competing priorities was identified as the number one barrier to performing at their best and time pressure was the number one cause of work-related stress, followed by workload. The Employee Census also identified that work-related stress was primarily manifesting as an inability to switch off, which is also reflected in our data.

Irrespective of the reasons for increased workloads, these findings highlight there is more work to be done to support reasonable working hours and **work-life balance** across the ACTPS, and to minimise potential adverse consequences of flexible working and broader working norms. In the 2021 ACTPS Employee Census, 67% of respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied to the question "How satisfied are you with the work-life balance in your current job?". However, only 52% of respondents reported having "enough time during work hours to do my job effectively."

Demographic differences

We analysed focus group data to identify demographic differences regarding perceptions of flexible working and utilisation of technology and communication tools. Data generated via focus groups with human resource managers, in addition to academic literature, suggests that differences may exist across age groups, with those under the age of 30 and over the age of 50 having different experiences with flexible working. As discussed in our methodology section, this was the basis for focus group sampling according to these groups. However, our focus group data suggest that differences across these groups are not clear cut, with the key finding that all employees desire choice in the location and timing of work.

For both younger (< 30 years) and older (> 50 years) employees, **a mixture of location preferences was evident**. Some preferred working from home, due to it enabling greater productivity, work-life balance, and the ability to meet both work and non-work demands. This included undertaking caring responsibilities (for children, grandchildren, or parents) and the ability to better manage disabilities and/or health issues (e.g., medication regimes, associated fatigue, sporadic medical appointments). Some participants reported that working from home supports their fuller participation and engagement in work. For example:

I have ... Sensory processing disorder ... [working from home] I could control the environment like I could wear my headphones and cancel out the noise. And I'm not putting up with people moving around, I can adjust my lighting like is so much better working environment for me just personally,

health-wise. So, I think I would really take a hit to my mental wellbeing if I had to go five days a week in the office (D3 SOG <30).

Other participants – both younger and older employees – preferred to work from the office. This was primarily due to sub-optimal office set-up at home, feelings of social isolation at home, or the desire to ‘get out of the house’ or ‘see people’. Living alone was reported as a pull factor for more frequent office-based working, as was having difficult or unhealthy relationships at home – an issue primarily experienced by female participants. As one HR manager reflected:

... a lot of the staff live alone, they might live in unstable housing, in rental accommodation, or be vulnerable to domestic violence, be vulnerable to lifestyle habits such as smoking, having others around their house (HR FG 4).

Most participants, irrespective of age, argued that **continuing to provide flexibility and choice in timing and location of work is a key retention factor for the ACTPS**. Younger participants argued they would remain with the ACTPS for a long time, with older participants referring to flexible working as a “*career expander and extender*” (D2 SOG >50). Many participants over 50 years cited their intention to remain with the ACTPS much longer than they originally anticipated due to flexible working enabling them to contribute to their Directorate while meeting their personal demands (i.e., caring for grandchildren). Flexible working options, particularly working from home, but also options around part-time work and/or job sharing were also reported as potentially beneficial in transitions to retirement. Some participants also discussed creative ways of supporting flexible working, such as job redesign, to increase mentoring opportunities, and normalising periods of leave without pay to enable sabbatical or gap year type intermissions.

These findings highlight that continued support for flexible working, with employees having greater choice in where and when they work to meet personal preferences and work demands is central to the ACTPS employee value proposition. Considering how to ensure “*equitable access*” (Working Group) to flexible working arrangements could support workforce equity, maximise employee opportunities for participation and optimise employee productivity and retention.

5.4 Research question 3: How does current technology support productivity, knowledge sharing and collaboration?

Summary

- Technology is an essential baseline factor for supporting effective flexible working; however, is insufficient on its own for enhancing productivity, knowledge sharing and collaboration.
- Factors such as work environment, managers, and team structures and dynamics, are core to the effectiveness of flexible working.
- Participants perceive that working from home has enabled greater productivity and has contributed to a greater focus on work outputs, rather than hours of attendance.
- Technology and communication tools can support knowledge sharing and collaboration; however, these tools are not necessarily being used extensively for communication across teams.
- Key factors shaping usage of technology and communication tools is team size, with knowledge sharing and collaboration impeded in small and large teams, and where there are low levels of task interdependence. This is due to a lack of perceived need to work with others to achieve outputs.
- Technology and communication tools are not being used extensively to facilitate knowledge sharing and communication across teams within Directorates.

Our findings highlight that technology is an essential baseline factor for supporting effective flexible working. However, it is insufficient on its own for enhancing productivity, knowledge sharing and collaboration. Most participants reported having access to basic technology; this seemed to be consistent across Directorates. However, there was considerable variation in reported good flexible working practices within and across Directorates, with this primarily attributed to the work environment, managers and team factors. Therefore, in this section we identify the role of technology, as well as these additional factors.

Productivity

The degree to which individual and team productivity is influenced by technology is shaped by the nature and requirements of work. For many staff, the basic Microsoft Office suite is sufficient for their work and is working well.

Productivity was more often discussed with reference to home-based work environments than technology. Most participants reported being more productive at home due to a quiet work environment and fewer interruptions. Some participants stated that working from home has enabled them to work fewer hours while enhancing their productivity; however, this was not a widespread experience.

I'm getting far more done than I ever thought I would do in a day. Which means, what's actually happening for me is I'm working less hours, but more productive hours. So, I'm doing an average eight and a half, nine-hour day, whereas I used to do a 10, sometimes 10-and-a-half-hour day and feeling like I got less done in that time, because you're constantly, someone's tapping you on the shoulder (D2 SOG 50+).

Many participants identified that the shift to working from home has contributed to a greater focus on work outputs, rather than hours of attendance. This was widely lauded as more effective management practice and more enabling of employee autonomy and productivity. Most participants considered working from home to be highly conducive to increased productivity and some highlighted benefits to their work-life balance. However, as discussed in Research Question 2, our qualitative data suggests that input factors, such as workload and working hours, are not considered. In some instances, this is creating significant risk of work overload and burnout, particularly for managers. Some participants reported reduced work-life balance due to working longer hours and the perceived expectation they should be instantly responsive to requests.

Knowledge sharing and collaboration

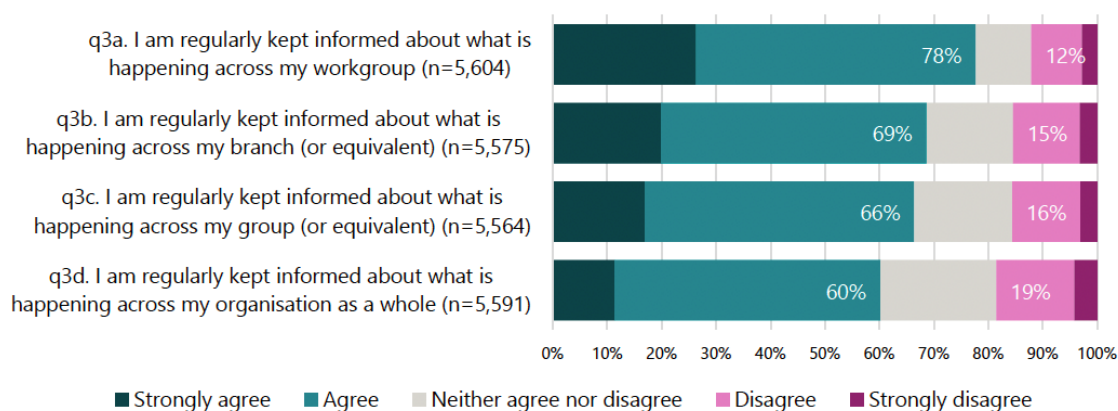
Technology can and does support knowledge sharing and collaboration, with most participants reporting using Microsoft Teams to share knowledge. This primarily occurred through daily, weekly, or fortnightly meetings and using the chat function of Microsoft Teams. However, the extent to which technology and communication tools are utilised depends on team structures, dynamics, work configuration, and task interdependence. As discussed in Research Question 1, knowledge sharing, and collaboration is impeded in small or large teams and where there are low levels of task interdependence. In these circumstances, there is little perceived need to work with others to achieve outputs, with interactions being largely social in nature rather than work focused. There were a few examples of collaboration being a core requirement of employees' roles; these were primarily in teams of moderate size and for those in central or coordination roles. However, most employees' roles appear to have relatively defined role boundaries, with low levels of interdependencies. In some circumstances, there was a need to share information rather than genuinely collaborate or work together to deliver collective outputs.

Qualitative data suggests that communication within teams has been facilitated by technology and communication tools; however, these tools are not necessarily being utilised extensively for communication across teams. As discussed in Research Question 1, some participants reported minimal communication and coordination across teams within Directorates (except for those in central and coordination roles).

These qualitative findings correspond with quantitative data in the Employee Census. Although the census asked about information, rather than knowledge, sharing, it provides a relevant insight into patterns of communication. The census results show that staff feel less informed about happenings at more distant levels of their Directorate. These results, illustrated in Figure 8, show that staff are more regularly informed about happenings in their workgroup than the organisation as a whole. Again, these reflect on the quantity of communication, not the quality of communication, but support focus group messages about team-centric communication and the existence of silos within Directorates.

Figure 8: Patterns of communication

Communication



Specialist knowledge sharing

Participants with certain specialist roles (e.g., technical officers or personnel officers) reported that technology and virtual communication tools enabled knowledge sharing. This is due to the screen share function enabling more interactive and advanced demonstration than typical office settings which rely on sharing a single desktop screen.

So, a lot of my teamwork in a technical space and with data as I've mentioned, and so, like sharing knowledge is often done by looking at each other's screens. With Microsoft Teams, screensharing is so easy that actually it's almost easier doing it on Microsoft Teams because you're both looking at the same thing and you can both see exactly where the mouse is and have that conversation while stepping the other person through it, rather than me needing to drive or it, you know, having to sit right next to someone in order to talk them through that process. So, I've actually found in that sense it's been easier to go through and provide additional knowledge in some of those technical areas (D1 SOGs < 30).

The privacy of the virtual environment was also identified as an enabler of knowledge sharing and communication regarding sensitive issues, due to their security or personal nature.

It's [working from home] a perfect solution for us because we have to have private conversations with people and that thing it's just far easier to be able to do [at home] ... So, I don't have on-lookers, and that makes it so much easier to conduct private conversations... so that certainly works a lot better for us, especially when you are not in the line of sight of our colleagues (D2 ASO 50+).

Our findings highlight that technology plays a role in supporting productivity, knowledge sharing and collaboration in flexible working contexts. However, this is more of a baseline factor – without the technology, flexible working would not be possible. But the extent to which it enables desired outcomes on its own is limited. Therefore, technology is insufficient on its own, with other factors such as managers, team structures and dynamics, and work requirements being core to the effectiveness of flexible working.

5.5 Research question 4: How can the ACTPS empower and support managers and employees to optimise the effectiveness of flexible working across the full range of employees?

Research questions one to three have highlighted that configuration of the built environment, provision of technology and availability of communication tools are core to flexible working. They also highlight that effective flexible working is heavily reliant on the ACTPS being purposeful in its approach to office-based working, team factors, and managers. Reflecting on our data, we identified four essential elements of effective flexible working that should also address many of the issues identified in this report:

- A need for an outcomes-oriented approach to working;
- A need for a purposeful approach to working from the office;
- A need for a team-based approach to working; and
- Improved managerial support and development.

5.5.1 Element 1: An outcomes-oriented approach to working

A core element of the effectiveness of flexible working is the shift to an outcomes orientation within the ACTPS. Our findings highlight an undercurrent of risk aversion and presenteeism; in some contexts, this seems to be contributing to micro-management and employee perceptions of attendance monitoring. Our findings reveal areas of effective practice; however, these seem to be heavily reliant on individual managers and isolated to individual teams, suggesting that flexible working is not yet culturally embedded. For more effective flexible working, an outcomes orientation across the ACTPS will need to be culturally embedded. Here an outcomes orientation is akin to the Results-Only Work Environment as outlined by Moen, Kelly and Hill (2011). This represents a cultural value on results, with a focus on the effective achievement of tasks rather than time spent undertaking those tasks, leading to achievement of broader outcomes. This reduces the emphasis on “when and where work is completed and the amount of time spent accomplishing tasks” (Moen et al., 2011, p.71).

While planned cultural change is widely accepted to be challenging (see Schein, 1999, 2017), action can be undertaken to create a cultural shift. It will start with creating a shared understanding within Directorates and across the ACTPS of, first, what is meant by outcomes orientation and, second, what behaviours are needed to enable this. Thus, a plan of action would consist of:

- Establish why an outcomes orientation is needed in the ACTPS. This would include clarifying what an outcomes orientation is in the ACTPS context, what is expected to be different if it was successfully created and how it would support the ACTPS to achieve its purpose.
- Define an outcomes orientation in behavioural terms. This is where ACTPS leaders identify and describe the behaviours that need to be evident.
- Once desired behaviours have been determined and specified, ACTPS leaders should focus on the levers likely to encourage behavioural change. This activates cultural change by creating structures that exemplify the desired state (Denison, Hooijberg, Lane & Lief, 2012).
- Clarify expectations regarding desired behaviours to employees and provide ongoing support to enable learning and achieve alignment with the desired change (see Schein, 1996; 1999). This could include identifying the mechanisms required to enable an outcomes orientation and encourage and reinforce desired behaviours.

Behavioural levers could include:

- Participatory workshops that aim to critically examine existing cultures, surfacing and challenging existing assumptions about work. These workshops should lead to identification

of team practices that could support an outcomes orientation and, ultimately, change the implicit and explicit rules that govern when and where people work (see Moen et al., 2011).

- Shifting to hybrid working and an outcomes orientation requires a new approach to job design, articulating the desired behaviours and ways of working required. Job design sets the expectations for an employee of not only what they need to do, but how it needs to be undertaken (Oldham & Fried, 2016). New designs could reflect a range of ideas including: expectations regarding location of work, who employees engage with and how that might be managed, or how roles fit with broader outcome activities. The objective would be to create a clear context that enables managers and employees to communicate clearly what needs to be done and why.
- Using recruitment and selection to appoint employees and managers whose attitudes and behaviours are both compatible with, and should reinforce development of, the desired culture (Schein, 2017).
- Reconfiguring performance and reward management to encourage and reward desired behaviours (Schein, 2017). Central to effectiveness will be ensuring coherence between performance (task and behavioural), rewards and recognition - so that employees perceive a link between how they behave and recognition they receive. It will also be important for employees to be offered a reward they value, highlighting the need for a range of reward options, incorporating development opportunities, formal **and** informal recognition, and ensuring employees are undertaking meaningful work (see Blackman et al., 2013, 2019).
- Incorporating an outcomes orientation perspective when setting criteria for promotion (Schein, 2017). Promoting managers who have demonstrated an outcomes orientation and desired behaviours will continue to reinforce the new cultural development.
- Designing and implementing learning and development interventions that equip managers and employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully enact an outcomes orientation.
- Identifying members who are not demonstrating desired attitudes and behaviours: for example, managers who micro-manage their teams and engage in behaviours that encourage presenteeism. Create management plans to ensure expectations are clear and support in place to enable desired behaviours to be adopted.

Undertaking these actions addresses issues raised regarding risk aversion and presenteeism through establishing a shared understanding of both the need for adopting an outcomes orientation and how to achieve it. They should also help address issues concerning individuals primarily focusing on the personal benefits of flexible working and connect their behaviours and choices regarding where and when they work with team and organisational outcomes. This therefore strikes a balance between individual, team and organisational needs.

5.5.2 Element 2: Purposeful approach to hybrid working

A core practice that enhances the effectiveness of flexible working is a **purposeful approach as to when and why teams work from the office**. Many ACTPS managers and employees will embrace working from the office, provided it is clear **why** this is important and **how** this adds value to their work, team or directorate. This highlights the need to identify activity, relational and/or socio-cultural based reasons for being in the office. As one participant noted:

... what are the reasons that people want to come back into a workspace, like an office or a collaborative space? What are the sorts of things that it's patently pretty ludicrous to come into an office for when you could be doing those at home just as effectively, and not gaining any benefit from coming into a workplace? (HR FG 2).

Participants identified several areas of activity that can be beneficial to undertake face-to-face include collaborating to address complex issues and problems; conduct stakeholder meetings; planning days; onboarding new employees; and activities aimed at strengthening social connections and cohesiveness within teams and across the broader directorate:

...what I really need to be focusing on now is actually those cross connections and creating space on those days that we're in the office to meet with other teams to meet with other areas of business with whom we need to engage ... (Working Group).

Although some participants reflected that these activities can be, and are, undertaken online, others perceived that face-to-face communication aided improved outcomes. Improved outcomes may be supported by two means: firstly, face-to-face interactions could enable rich social learning through modelling. Through observing others, employees learn what behaviours and performance are considered appropriate (see Bandura, 1977); this can aid learning regarding organisational culture and could help support the shift to an outcomes orientation in the ACTPS. Employees also learn through the transfer of tacit knowledge; that is, the know-how gained through experience, which is difficult to capture and document (Holste & Fields, 2010; Koskinen, 2003; Perraton & Tarrant, 2007). Tacit knowledge reflects the “unwritten memory of the firm” (Holste & Fields, 2010, p.135), revealing important insights into how the organisation works and how to undertake work more effectively. Tacit knowledge is transferred more readily between those who share quality relationships based on trust (Holste & Fields, 2010; Koskinen, 2003). This highlights that, although work may be completed as required, there is **potential** for higher levels of success or performance when **some** face-to-face interactions take place due to supporting learning about how to undertake work and behave appropriately. This corresponds with research undertaken by Coenen and Kok (2014) that found, even though knowledge can be shared while working remotely, a base level of face-to-face communication is still necessary for work to be completed **successfully**.

Secondly, face-to-face interactions also appear to be central to employee well-being, with participants discussing the need for social connectedness. Higher levels of maintained physical and mental well-being have been associated with face-to-face interactions, when compared with online interactions (see Marinucci et al., 2022), with face-to-face interactions also associated with lower rates of depressive symptoms (Simone et al., 2019). Face-to-face interactions have also been associated with improved communication and relationship quality, due to increasing social cues and enabling a more nuanced understanding of one another (Rains et al., 2019). Therefore, there is potential for face-to-face interactions enabling both high performance (due to social learning through modelling) and minimising employee burnout (due to supporting well-being). This suggests that consideration should be devoted to how to balance the needs of individuals, teams and organisations when working hybridly; a key mechanism for this may be the purposeful management of hybrid working.

Our findings suggest that a purposeful approach to working needs to be undertaken to balance the needs of individuals, teams and organisations. Purposeful management of hybrid working could enable employees to achieve desired productivity and maintain their well-being, while also supporting the achievement of high performance at the team and organisation (Directorate) level. A purposeful approach to hybrid working, combined with an outcomes orientation, could encourage employees to see themselves as part of an organisational system, aid their understanding of how they contribute to team and organisational goals, and observe what behaviours are expected. Participants explained that adopting a purposeful approach to office-based working can help optimise the benefits of working from different locations as well as clarify for employees when and why they were working in the office. As discussed in Element 1, this would also involve a different

approach to job design to ensure an appropriate balance between individual and organisational needs.

Fundamental to the creation of a purposeful approach to hybrid working is consideration of equity in access to flexibility. Consideration must be devoted to addressing issues raised in Research Questions 1 and 2, particularly concerning different quality home office set-ups and the configuration of activity-based working environments to enable employees to engage in work in a meaningful way. Key to this approach is purposefully designing physical space and buildings to encourage desired behaviours (Schein, 2017), particularly since our data suggests there are several barriers to ACTPS employees returning to the office. Therefore, we suggest that the ACTPS consider how to address these barriers and configure physical space to encourage employees to work from different locations, not just from home, to realise desired behaviours.

This supports the ideas presented in response to Research Question 1, where we highlighted the importance of supporting effective teamworking (also covered in Element 2 below). More effective teamworking could be facilitated by a purposeful approach to interaction, with managers and teams identifying what activities need to be undertaken synchronously and when this ideally should be undertaken online or face-to-face. This could help clarify what requires members to come together to create momentum for ideas, leading to work allocated to individuals to progress, with follow-up interaction enabling the sharing and consolidation of ideas and knowledge. Configuring work in a purposeful way will help individuals see their role in the broader purpose of their team and create the capacity to work together more effectively. As one interviewee described:

... It's around managers and employees understanding the benefits of that face-to-face interaction at times. The collaboration, the teamwork and things like that, that can be recognised through some form of face-to-face [interaction] (HR FG 7).

Recognising the importance of teamworking highlights the second area of focus; ***the need for a team-based approach to working.***

5.5.3 Element 3: The need for a team-based approach to working

A key factor that could improve the effectiveness of flexible working is a team-based approach to working. As evident in Research Questions 1 and 3, team factors play a central role in the extent to which employees work together effectively and constructively, feel connected and engaged, share knowledge, and collaborate. These factors include team size, the level of task interdependence, and team dynamics.

Reflecting on the data in relation to the academic literature on teams, it appears that more effective flexible working results from what Jelphs et al. (2016) refer to as “real teams” (p.7). This is where members are connected by a common purpose, have interdependent tasks and roles, share responsibilities, and have complementary skills. Central to the establishment of true teams is size, with suggestions that teams should comprise 6-8 employees. This size is thought to optimise social interactions, with interactions more difficult in smaller or larger teams. Careful team configuration also enables employees to establish a clear sense of how they interact with others and their understanding of their contribution to the common purpose and how they need to work with others. A final characteristic of true teams is that they are embedded in one or more larger social systems in the organisation (see Jelphs et al., 2016); that is, they have a sense of the interdependencies that exist across teams and who they need to work with across the broader organisation.

In the ACTPS context, although the term ‘teams’ is used frequently, in many circumstances the characteristics of ‘true teams’ are not always apparent, with many working in groups – that is, a collection of individuals who perform tasks independently. Several participants reported working in teams of less than three or greater than 10 team members, with those in smaller teams largely undertaking tasks independently and reporting to their line manager. Employees also tended to experience higher levels of social isolation, and less frequent communication and engagement with colleagues. Participants who reported working in larger teams (> 10 members) conveyed that they share information and update their colleagues, but there was scant evidence of team members working towards a common purpose and undertaking interdependent work.

There were also issues with accommodating all team members in the same office space. It appeared that, in small and large teams, there was a tendency for employees to focus on their personal circumstances and the benefits of flexible working for them as an individual, contributing to a continued desire to primarily work from home, rather than in the office. Some participants discussed how working from home has contributed to a diminished sense of community, with individuals forgetting *“it’s not actually about ... you as an individual, but it’s actually about you as a team in a community”* (D2 SOG <30). This highlights the importance of managers fostering a greater sense of community and ensuring employees understand how they contribute to the performance of their team.

CMTEDD HR data on reporting lines shows a medium team size within the Directorate of five people, which is below the range for optimal team size, as per Jelphs et al. (2016). However, as shown in Table 1, team size varied widely, ranging from 1 to 95 people. Given this variety, it is not surprising that there is similar variety in individuals experiences of team dynamics and interactions. While we recognise that true teams have specific characteristics that may not be universally applicable, Directorates could establish mechanisms to support connections within small and large group sizes to enable effective communication, collaboration and social connections for all staff.

Table 1. CMTEDD team size summary data

Team Size Data Summary No. of People	
Min	1
Max	95
Average	8.6
Standard Deviation [P]	9.8
Median	5

Our qualitative data does highlight there **are** exemplars of true teams within the ACTPS and where these exist, they tend to report perceptions of improved experiences and outcomes. For example, when effective teamworking is evident, members frequently communicate with one another, share knowledge and collaborate. Participants reported **positive experiences with flexible working that went far beyond individual gain** (i.e., enhanced individual productivity and work-life balance), **focused also on collective gains**, such as team members working together to achieve desired outcomes and enhance the sense of connection and engagement at the team level. A potential issue, however, is that stronger intra-team connections, accentuated through flexible working, is not necessarily coupled with an enhanced sense of embeddedness within broader systems within Directorates, as indicated in Research Question 2 regarding the enhancement of silo mentalities and

fragmentation across teams. This highlights the need for Directorates to consider how to encourage a sense of embeddedness. Our data highlights two issues reported to impede this: restricting teams to neighbourhoods within the activity-based working buildings; and technology and communication tools not being utilised to share knowledge and collaborate across teams.

Our findings highlight that team-based approaches enable more effective flexible working in three ways. Firstly, they take the burden of responsibility off individual managers to be the key facilitator of team interactions; secondly, they encourage greater use of technology, communication tools and the built environment to optimise the sense of social connectedness, purpose and community among employees; and, thirdly, they enable the achievement of desired outcomes. This supports claims in the literature that real teamwork is associated with higher levels of organisational performance, employee productivity and satisfaction, and lower levels of absenteeism (Jelphs et al., 2016). An example of where a team-based approach has contributed to improved outcomes is onboarding (see Box 1).

Box 1: A team-based approach to onboarding

Most participants reported that teams are struggling with onboarding effectively in a flexible working context, as it can take new employees more time to learn how to undertake their role and establish relationships in the workplace. Participants reported difficulties with new starters understanding requirements and expectations, how to navigate processes and systems as well as knowing who they need to establish contact with to achieve goals and undertake their work. They highlighted that this led to new starters floundering and spending an inordinate amount of time trying to figure things out, potentially impeding their productivity.

There were examples of effective onboarding in a virtual environment. Key to effectiveness was the adoption of a whole team approach, with all team members reaching out to the new staffer individually as well as in collective engagements (i.e., spending time together in the office as a team in the new starter's first week).

I think part of that [onboarding remotely] is our team has a really strong focus on being friendly and supportive; so when someone new comes on, it's something we pretty much do automatically... Usually the supervisor will say 'so and so is starting - can everyone try and take some time to give them a call and welcome them and have a chat?'. So even if it's just a 15-minute chat and then you let them know, "hey, if you need any help with anything" [and they] know if they're in my area (D3 ASO 50+).

Establishing team-based onboarding practices can ensure that new starters are clear about their performance and behavioural expectations, understand how they contribute to the team's goals and purpose, and who they need to work with on a regular basis.

5.5.4 Element 4: The need to enhance support for managers

A strong theme in our data, which supports extant research (see Kossek & Thompson, 2016; Ryan & Kossek, 2008; Williamson et al., 2022) is the **central role that middle managers and supervisors play in the effective implementation of flexible working**. Overwhelmingly, participants expressed satisfaction with how their manager managed in a flexible working context; this is reflected in the Employee Census data where 79% of respondents were generally satisfied with their immediate supervisor. However, it is evident that managerial practices vary considerably across the ACTPS and within individual Directorates. The variation evident in participant accounts about their experiences with flexible working were largely attributed to their line managers' perceptions of flexible working,

their approach to people management and the impact this had on their support, or not, of flexible working.

The research shows that **flexible working exacerbates and accentuates existing managerial styles**. That is, when managers are focused on actively managing people, they are supportive and see the benefits of flexible working and actively work to enhance the benefits gained. However, those managers who are less focused on active people management struggle to optimise the benefits of flexible working. As one participant noted:

... I would suggest that the managers who ... have a personal bias to always want to drive their staff harder and longer and have problems with leave and other conditions of work flex, and whatever. This seems to be, that's the hotbed, this environment is a hotbed for them to keep driving and driving. The ones that are reasonable and understand the limitations of the job and the conditions of employment and all that, I think continue to be understanding ... (D2 SOGs 50+).

This highlights fragility in a model that relies on individuals and is why we advocate for more focussed management development in this area. More focused management development is central for more effective flexible working as it would help address capability gaps, as well as support broader cultural change efforts. This is because frontline supervisors and managers play an integral role in cultural change (Denison et al., 2012) and in communicating and encouraging desired behaviours within an organisation (Schein, 2017). Our suggestion that further managerial development is required is supported by the Review of SES Leadership and Leadership Development, which found there is a gap in 'management 101' skills and practice, with no common view about what good management looks like. This review highlighted that the ACTPS had not adequately invested in management training "in a consistent, enduring way for a long time, and this was evident in the capability of both managers at the middle level and more senior level" (ACTPS, 2021, p.5). The review findings highlighted the need for **mandatory** foundational management training, with staff held to account to attend.

It is clear from the data that any new support and development initiatives should focus on translating the high-level support for flexible working to the operational context. More specifically, developing and supporting managers to ensure that they feel capable and empowered to manage flexible working in ways that ensure work demands and team goals are achieved. Moreover, our findings suggest that it was working at the team level that challenged many managers:

... that team aspect ... is really important ... Because that's when you look at, you know a team of 10 people has 10 different personal flexibility requests, challenges and they have one service delivery, or you know one aspect that they need to deliver. All those things have to line up to that and individuals obviously in teams don't always appreciate that the connectedness of the decision making which is where it comes down to ... inconsistency. So, we have an inconsistency at a team level, at a business unit level, at a directorate level and then at a whole of government level (Working Group).

The data we collected points to specific capabilities and behaviours that are viewed as requisite for managers to effectively lead a hybrid team and manage flexible working. As we were told, managers must "understand what they need to do. They need to understand, I mean some strategies on how they can think about it for the individual, but also have the conversations with the team, how do we want to work, what looks good for us?" (HR FG 7).

A key factor attributed to effective flexible working is trust. That is, managers being trusted to manage their team in a way that enables the attainment of team goals, while also meeting individual preferences as much as practicable. It also involves managers trusting their team and employees to undertake their work, aligned with their performance expectations. However, trust levels vary across the ACTPS, with some managers trusting their staff to undertake their work at a time and in a location that best supports and enables them to perform and meet personal demands, whereas other managers are deeply entrenched in a presenteeism mindset not underpinned by trust.

... the more trust there is ... the easier it's going to be, there's no micromanagement, and each of the senior directors feel sufficiently empowered to take control of all of these sorts of things without worrying about what other people are thinking ... I'm mindful that there are some other executives and other senior directors and other divisions where that's not the case" (D1 SOG >50).

Our qualitative data highlights that whilst some managers have the required capabilities and exhibit supportive behaviours, many do not. Therefore, more proactive strategies are needed to aid their development. In Table 2, we suggest areas for support and development.

Table 2: Suggested areas for managerial support and development

Capability / Behaviours Required	Diagnosis	Suggested Support Activities
Shared understanding of what good management and leadership looks like	It is clear there is not a shared view about what good management and leadership looks like, as identified by the ACTPS Review of SES Leadership and Leadership Development (see ACTPS, 2021).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACTPS leaders and managers clarify what good management and leadership looks like, particularly in a hybrid working context that adopts an outcomes orientation. This would feed into the behaviours leaders role model, as well as informing the job design, performance management, reward management, and learning and development interventions for middle managers.
Leadership modelling	<p>Leaders identifying, communicating and reinforcing desired behaviours is critical as this makes it clear what is desirable, and what is unacceptable, in an organisation. In the data it was explained that leaders need to “lead by example” (D1 SOG <30) when it comes to flexible working behaviours, with some presence in the office as well as visibly working from home.</p> <p>This is important as one of the deterrents for employees working from the activity-based working buildings is when leaders and managers are not working from these buildings themselves; equally, others reported some leaders are not working from home. As identified in the Leadership review, and implied in our study, some leaders are also not adopting an outcomes orientation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACTPS leaders to consciously identify and visibly role model desired behaviours. Create stories for the management development based on real-life success examples within the ACTPS. The behaviours that leaders role model is central to transmitting values and norms, as leaders’ visible behaviours communicate values and assumptions to employees and managers (Schein, 1996, 1999, 2017).
Outcomes orientation	The current task orientation leads to managers trying to oversee when and how work is undertaken, rather than focusing on desired outcomes and outputs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management development that actively explains and models what successful outcomes orientation looks like.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching to support managers as they move to working this way. • Ensure that performance management processes encourage a focus and measurement of outputs and outcomes, rather than inputs.
Developing a hybrid team not a group	The need for purposeful approaches to working highlight the need to support managers to proactively manage team interactions to enhance cohesion. This includes their ability to communicate and encourage people to work as part of a team, what is expected in terms of personal contribution and team effort, and what work is required in the office and face-to-face. A key focus is on how to manage a hybrid team effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This reinforces the need for support requirements including learning and development on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to increase team cohesiveness ○ How to manage hybrid and online workers ○ How to create effective team goals and accountabilities.
Managing expectations	<p>Managing expectations is important for both leaders, in terms of clarifying what their managers need to do, and for managers, focused on what their team is expected to do (see Blackman et al., 2019).</p> <p>Managing expectations covers both desired behaviours and performance expectations, involving regular conversations to ensure progress is being made (without micro-managing).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing conversational skills may include the expectation that managers hold regular conversations with their team and individual employees regarding existing flexible work arrangements to reflect on what is working and what requires improvement, with these discussions documented. • Developing clear expectations, including in performance management, that managers are responsible for actively working to enhance team cohesiveness, capability and communication. • Provide managers with a conversational template to guide their conversations with employees; for example, an amended version of the <i>Crafting a Conversation Planning Table</i> proposed by Blackman et al. (2021).
Team Management and Accountability	It became apparent that managers need support in developing, managing, and enabling their teams. This manifested in topics around prioritisation, the creation of team-level goals and work and the adoption of a team-based approach to managing flexible working arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This reinforces the need for support requirements including learning and development on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to create effective team goals and accountabilities ○ How to manage hybrid and online workers ○ How to co-create team goals in a flexible context

	<p>This would involve focusing on the performance and work requirements of the team, ensuring delivery of these requirements and, where appropriate, managing individualised flexible working arrangements in ways that still support the team. This means that it is <i>“the balance of people and work that really needs to be considered to make the flexibility [work]”</i> (Working Group).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to prioritise in a complex environment.
Classifying work	<p>Building upon the need for team management and accountability, it was clear from the data that employees needed to know the value of working from the office for them as an individual, their team and Directorate. This emerged out of a lack of clarity as to why and when to be in the office (i.e., the need for purposeful work).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is suggested that each Directorate identifies a set of work characteristics where face-to-face interactions will lead to better outputs and outcomes. • Work with managers to apply and communicate the characteristics framework to identify work activities that require face-to-face interaction.
Mentoring and Coaching for hybridity	<p>Participants stressed the variety of skills and approaches required to work in a hybrid way, particularly for managers. For example, what happens when new people are onboarded – how do they become socialised?</p> <p>Recognising the central role that both experiential and social learning play in capability development (see Johnson, Blackman & Buick, 2018) highlights the importance of mentoring and coaching to support managerial development for hybrid working.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider how people will be learning “on the job”, which needs active planning in a flexible work environment. • Identify who is coaching and mentoring managers and set up sessions to establish what advice is being given about managing a hybrid workforce – i.e., coaching the coaches, initially based on ACTPS values, desired behaviours and outcomes. • Ensure all managers have mentors and coaching support to develop new strategies regarding hybrid working. • Create a peer supported managers community of practice where specific issues related to hybridity and how to manage it are discussed.

In proposing these four elements of effective flexible working, we identify several areas that require action. However, we also recognise there is already work underway in some areas, to varying degrees of maturity. Our suggestions for improvement could build on existing work to drive future performance.

We also recognise that, given the limitations in our research, more work is required to explore some of the themes presented in more detail and understand the broader context of flexible working in the ACTPS. Our qualitative participant sample was restricted to human resource managers across eight directorates and general staff in three directorates, with 84 participants in total. It was also focused on knowledge workers in the activity-based working buildings. This only covers a small proportion of the ACTPS workforce which, in 2020-2021, comprised 26,141 employees covering a range of classification groups (i.e., administrative, policy, service delivery, medical, education, legal, fire and rescue, correctional officers, transport, technical) (ACT Government, 2021). Staff work across several locations, including flexi offices, schools, hospitals and bus terminals. Therefore, further research is required across different ACTPS contexts to capture broader experiences with flexible working across the ACTPS.

This is particularly because our human resource manager focus group data suggests there may be inequities across the ACTPS with flexible working offered to some, but not all, of the workforce. In particular, flexible working was reported to be limited for service delivery staff. Given the ACTPS faces significant skills shortages in a tight labour market in certain areas (i.e., nursing, teachers), future research could explore the issues faced in these occupations and what flexibility could be accorded to this workforce to address inequities and therefore position the ACTPS as an employer of choice. Our data was also specifically focused on the experiences of employees and middle managers at the team level; therefore, future research could focus on senior managers' experiences and perceptions, with particular emphasis on the organisational level.

6 Conclusion

The Australian Capital Territory Public Service (ACTPS) has positioned flexible working as central to their vision to be the most progressive Australian jurisdiction for workplace practices (ACT Government, 2021). This project was established to help identify how the ACTPS can better support effective flexible working, focused on the role of technology, communication tools and the built environment. It was undertaken as a partnership between ACTPS, ANZSOG and UNSW Canberra.

Our research demonstrates that flexible working is a key retention factor for the ACTPS. There are positive perceptions regarding the opportunity to work from different locations and adjust the timing of work to enhance individual productivity and work-life balance. However, currently there is a strong preference for many to primarily work from home, with resistance to mandatory weekly office attendance due to low perceived need. This has the potential to constrain the degree of flexibility in location of work within the ACTPS, with timing of work also potentially constrained by perceived requirements to be constantly responsive and available. Furthermore, while technology and communication tools support flexible working and can aid knowledge sharing, productivity and collaboration, the extent to which they are used to optimise outcomes varies. We have identified the core role of team factors, particularly team size and degree of task interdependence, and managers in facilitating desired outcomes and mitigating the risks associated with flexible working (i.e., social isolation).

We have identified four elements of effective flexible working, with the need for **an outcomes-oriented approach to working** and **purposeful approach to working from the office** to encourage greater flexibility. **A team-based approach to working** could help join staff together through a common purpose, having interdependent tasks and roles, and shared responsibilities. Finally, the effectiveness of flexible working required **improved managerial support and development** to help managers translate the high-level support for flexible working to the

operational context and empower them to manage flexible working in ways that ensure work demands and team goals are achieved.

7 References

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8 Appendix A: Methodology

In this study we adopted a mixed methods research design. Mixed methods research is defined as “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.17). This methodology is appropriate to answer the research questions because it will enable us to explore the experiences of ACTPS managers and employees with flexible working, reflecting on what has worked well and perceptions regarding what supports are required in the future to embed flexible working (qualitative data collection and analysis). It will also enable us to identify patterns in the use of technology and the built environment (new ACTPS buildings) (quantitative data analysis).

When undertaking mixed methods approaches the ordering of the data collection is chosen based upon the research questions and desired outcomes (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In the original research design, an analysis of existing quantitative datasets – raw data from Microsoft 365, building access and the Employee Census – was to occur first to identify existing patterns across occupational and demographic groups. It was intended that this would inform sampling and design of the qualitative data collection. However, in early stages of research it emerged that this level of data sharing would not be possible due to issues with consent protocols, privacy, confidentiality and data governance and ownership. The research team subsequently needed to redesign the project and re-orient around qualitative data collection, with aggregate data summaries of quantitative datasets to be provided by ACTPS in response to specific data analysis protocols. Therefore, in our qualitatively dominant study, the qualitative and quantitative components were undertaken sequentially, with the qualitative insights provided by participants providing direction to analysing extensive and diverse datasets (as explained below).

Data collection

The agreed upon sample of the research was office-based, knowledge workers located in either of the two Activity-Based Working buildings (in London Circuit, Canberra city and Dickson). The study sought to capture insights into the composition and diversity of the ACTPS via key informant interviews across all Directorates, but the main series of focus groups sampled only office-based knowledge workers.

This project involved the following data collection methods:

- Working Group Meetings
- Focus groups with human resource managers
- Focus Groups with general employees and managers
- Secondary Use of Existing Datasets

Flexible Work Working Group Meetings

An ACTPS Flexible Work Working Group was established through the People Forum (the primary vehicle through which whole of ACTPS human resource matters are discussed). Two Working Group meetings were held, one in November 2021 and the second in June 2022. The aim of the first meeting was to understand the ACTPS context and discuss experiences with flexible working across all ACTPS directorates (see Appendix B for protocol). The aim of the second meeting was to discuss emergent themes to obtain insights and ensure broader applicability of the findings.

Focus groups with human resource managers

Focus groups were undertaken with 31 senior and middle human resource managers from the eight ACTPS directorates. The aim of these focus groups was to explore broader perceptions regarding flexible working in the ACTPS to gain a contextual understanding of potential differences across Directorates. A semi-structured protocol was used to ensure consistency across focus groups, focused on flexible working in the ACTPS, whilst allowing sufficient flexibility for participants to respond according to their experiences and context (Bryman, 2004). Questions were broad to encourage the emergence of ideas the team had not expected, and then the research team probed to develop clearer understandings (see Appendix C for the protocol). Due to COVID-19, all focus groups were held online, via Microsoft Teams.

These focus groups established that the ACTPS is a diverse entity, with likely differences in perceptions of, and access to, flexible working. These differences appear to stem largely from the proportion of the Directorate workforce that are involved in operational and/or service delivery activities; constrained access to flexibility amongst these workforces appears to have something of a spill-over effect to office-based staff in those areas. In attempt to capture this variation while sticking to the agreed sample of office-based workers with a presence in either the Canberra city or Dickson buildings, we selected three Directorates that appeared to have lower (CSD), moderate (EPSDD) and higher (CMTEDD) levels of flexibility in location of work.

These focus groups also suggested there may be differences in experiences and perceptions of flexible working across hierarchical level and age or career stage. In particular, individuals with managerial responsibilities appear to have faced changes and challenges relating to managing and supporting staff in a virtually enabled environment. Younger workers were reported to have been more likely to feel isolated during widespread working from home and more enthusiastic to move to hybrid working, while older workers were reported as experienced higher levels return to work anxiety, particularly due to COVID-19 transmission risks. These preliminary observations informed our general employee and manager focus group sampling.

Focus groups with general employees and managers

Fifteen focus groups were undertaken with 53 participants to establish an in-depth understanding of flexible working within CMTEDD, CSD and EPSDD. Based on identified themes in the informant interviews, we organised groups according to level (Administrative Service Officer (ASO) – general staff level, and Senior Officer Grade (SOG) –management level) and age (younger than 30, older than 50 years), with questions exploring participant experiences with flexible working practices within their team and directorate (see Appendix D for protocols). Overall, these focus groups explored the experiences of 35 SOG level staff (31 over 50, four under 30) and 18 ASO level staff (nine over 50, nine younger than 30) from the three directorates. Due to COVID-19, all focus groups were held online, via Microsoft Teams.

Focus group participant recruitment and sampling

Focus group participants were recruited through Working Group representatives in each of the three Directorates (CMTEDD, CSD and EPSDD). In each Directorate, a Working Group representative sent an email staff who fit the inclusion criteria (under 30 or over 50 years, ASO or SOG levels); those who were interested in participating in the research contacted the research team directly. This means that participants were self-selected, which may affect results (e.g., participants may be more or less in favour of flexible working than the general population, or particular demographics (beyond age) being over- or under-represented).

Secondary Use of Existing Datasets

To support qualitative data, we accessed aggregated, de-identified data from the following:

- ACTPS Employee Census: summary statistics of responses to ACTPS wide survey on working experiences and attitudes
- Microsoft 365 data report: summary report developed by an external consultant using 365 data
- Turnstile data: building entry and exit events.
- Wayfinding data: meeting room bookings.

This project received ethics approval from the Human Research Advisory Panel A: University of New South Wales, Canberra (approval number HC210666).

Qualitative data analysis

Flexible work working group and focus group sessions were recorded, transcribed and loaded into the qualitative research software NVivo. We undertook a process of open, axial and selective coding to identify emergent patterns, themes and inter-relationships (Patton 1990). The open coding process involved: (a) reviewing the data line-by-line and breaking it into discrete parts; (b) comparing the data for similarities and differences; and (c) grouping it into categories based on this comparison (Corbin and Strauss 2008). We then undertook axial coding to cluster data together, identifying associations between themes (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Both coding processes were inductive, with the research team working intensively with the data to establish a comprehensive set of emergent themes (Creswell 2013). These themes are presented in this report, in response to each of the sub-research questions.

Quantitative data analysis

The research team accessed several ACTPS quantitative datasets; however, limitations with both access and the data itself meant that analysis was constrained. The datasets accessed, and their limitations, include:

- **ACTPS Employee Census:** The research team accessed de-identified summary data tables of responses to a sample of employee census questions, disaggregated by age, gender, cultural and linguistic diversity, and Directorate. Census data provides a rich insight into the employee experience but is of limited value for understanding flexible work due to no questions specifically addressing this issue. Limitations were also evident due to analysis being constrained by the structure of the summary statistics shared with the team, with only mean values presented for each variable, with no other information. This made it impossible to: (i) perform simple t-test of mean differences (they require knowing the standard deviation in addition to means); and/or (ii) cross-tabulate indicators of interest (age groups and gender, by Directorate). These limitations meant that the research team was unable to perform statistical analyses of the quantitative data and hence was unable to derive evidence-based insights and conclusions.
- **Building access data:** The research team also accessed building access data for the 220 London Cct building in the form of swipe card event records; these records consist of the time stamp of an access event (whether an entry or exit not recorded) associated with an individual user. However, limitations were evident due to the dataset including relatively high levels of missing and anomalous data, which limited the extent and depth of analysis.
- **Wayfinding room booking data:** The research team accessed de-identified room booking data which captured when a room was booked and for how long. However, this data was deemed of limited use for understanding flexible working due to it not being possible to identify the number of users within that room (i.e., meeting attendees) or the purpose of the booking.
- **Microsoft 365 metadata:** The research team was unable to access any Microsoft 365 metadata due to privacy and confidentiality constraints. Therefore, access to this data was provided in preliminary summary form after being analysed by an external consultant. Additional limitations emerged due to data processing constraints impeding the analysis of this data; this includes large quantities of missing data and insufficient computational processing power in ACTPS secure data access laptops. An additional, and

primary, limitation of this data for insight into flexible working more broadly is its confinement to the Microsoft 365 suite (including Outlook, Teams and SharePoint).

9 Appendix B: Flexible Work Working Group questions

Question	Purpose
1. Why are you interested in improving flexible working within your Directorate?	Elicit insights into why WG members have volunteered to participate in the study (as part of the working group)
2. What is your Directorate currently doing around flexible working? Follow-up: What has changed around flexible working since COVID?	Obtain insight into what each of the directorates are doing and if there are any obvious differences across the directorates.
3. What is working well with flexible working in your Directorate? Follow-up question: Have you observed any impact of flexible working on employee productivity, wellbeing, teamworking, knowledge sharing etc.?	To find out areas of effective working / strength
4. What are the key challenges faced by your Directorate with flexible working?	To find out what the key challenges have been with flexible working / the management of flexible working
5. What would your Directorate like to be able to do in the future with flexible working? Chat room question: what are the top three priorities with flexible working in your Directorate?	To ascertain if the directorates are seeking to improve how flexible working is undertaken / implemented / supported, and what these plans are.
6. What would your Directorate like to know about flexible working, in general and to help achieve future aspirations with flexible working? Follow-up questions: what existing datasets are you aware of that could help provide this information? We can access the employee survey and wayfinding data – are there additional datasets?	To find out if our study can help obtain the information needed by the directorates to make progress with flexible working
7. Is there anything we haven't asked you that you think we should have, or do you have anything to add?	

10 Appendix C: HR manager focus group questions

Questions	Purpose
1. How is flexible working implemented in your Directorate? How does this differ across occupational and work groups? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do patterns of flexible working differ across these groups (e.g., location, time)? b. What are your plans moving forward with flexible and hybrid working? 	To gain an understanding of how flexible working is implemented within and across Directorates to establish the basis for general staff focus groups.
2. What are the main barriers to flexible working in your Directorate?	To identify key barriers to the implementation of flexible working and identify similarities and differences across Directorates.
3. What are the main enablers to flexible working in your Directorate?	To identify key enablers to the implementation of flexible working and identify similarities and differences across Directorates.
4. What are the three most important things that need to be improved to better support flexible working?	To identify priority areas within each Directorate and across the ACTPS.
5. How do policy and industrial arrangements (e.g., Enterprise Agreement) influence flexible working in your Directorate?	To understand the influence of the industrial framework on flexible working.
6. What technology and infrastructure support (e.g., home office, hardware, software) is available to staff working remotely?	To understand what technology and infrastructure Directorates provide to employees and identify potential differences across Directorates.
7. What have been your observations of how activity-based working has been used to support flexible working?	To identify perceptions about activity-based working and usage of the built environment.
8. What support, development and training are available to managers to help them manage flexible working effectively?	To understand the support and development provided to managers to enable them to manage in a flexible working context.
9. Is there anything we haven't discussed about flexible working that you would like to discuss?	

11 Appendix D: Focus Group Protocols

Focus Group Guide – ASOs under 30

Questions	Purpose
<p>1. How has flexible working been managed in your team?</p> <p>i. How prevalent is remote working in your work context / team?</p> <p>a) Do a lot of staff work remotely, or do they mostly work from the new buildings? Why do you think this is?</p> <p>b) How are decisions about location and hours of work made (e.g., collective decision-making, individual-led, manager-led)?</p> <p>c) Are there equity issues around access or inclusion?</p> <p>ii. Can you reflect on whether particular cohorts of employees favour some work locations (e.g., home v office)? Why you think this is? For example, younger workers / early in career, older workers / more advanced in career, across SOGs / ASO?</p>	<p>To gain an understanding of what flexible working arrangements are in place at the team level and whether there are differences across employee cohorts.</p>
<p>2. To what extent has flexible working, particularly widespread work-from-home, changed dynamics within your team, or your feeling of connectedness?</p> <p>i. What changes have you seen, if any, to communication practices?</p> <p>ii. How often do team members interact and communicate with one another? How do they communicate and work with one another?</p> <p>iii. To what extent has flexible working shaped communication between teams?</p>	<p>To gain an understanding of how teams are communicating and interacting with one another and with other teams.</p>
<p>3. To what extent has flexible working impacted your ability to share knowledge with, and learn from, others?</p> <p>i. how well do you feel supported in your development and your ability to develop others?</p>	<p>To gain an understanding of whether flexible working has impacted knowledge sharing and employee development.</p>
<p>4. How can flexible working be better supported in [Directorate]?</p> <p>i. Reflecting on the past two years, what has been working well and therefore should continue?</p> <p>ii. Reflecting on the past two years, what has not been working well and therefore should stop?</p> <p>iii. What additional processes and procedures, systems and/or behaviours would need to be in place to enable its effectiveness?</p> <p>iv. How can flexible working be embedded your work context?</p>	<p>To gain insight into perceptions regarding areas of strength and areas for improvement.</p>

<p>v. What data would be helpful to support more effective flexible working in the future?</p>	
<p>5. Are there forms of flexibility not currently available or not commonly used that would support your preferences for flexible working (e.g., extended leave without pay, job sharing)?</p>	<p>To determine if there is a desire for broader forms of flexible working.</p>
<p>6. Is there anything you wanted to say that you haven't had a chance to say? Or anything you want to add to the discussion before we leave?</p>	

Focus Group Guide – ASOs over 50

<p>Questions</p>	<p>Purpose</p>
<p>1. How has flexible working been managed in your team?</p> <p>i. How prevalent is remote working in your work context / team?</p> <p>a) Do a lot of staff work remotely, or do they mostly work from the new buildings? Why do you think this is?</p> <p>b) How are decisions about location and hours of work made (e.g., collective decision-making, individual-led, manager-led)?</p> <p>c) Are there equity issues around access or inclusion?</p> <p>ii. Can you reflect on whether particular cohorts of employees favour some work locations (e.g., home v office)? Why you think this is? For example, younger workers / early in career, older workers / more advanced in career, across SOGs / ASO?</p>	<p>To gain an understanding of what flexible working arrangements are in place at the team level and whether there are differences across employee cohorts.</p>
<p>2. To what extent has flexible working, particularly widespread work-from-home, changed dynamics within your team, or your feeling of connectedness?</p> <p>i. What changes have you seen, if any, to communication practices?</p> <p>ii. How often do team members interact and communicate with one another? How do they communicate and work with one another?</p> <p>iii. To what extent has flexible working shaped communication between teams?</p>	<p>To gain an understanding of how teams are communicating and interacting with one another and with other teams.</p>
<p>3. To what extent has flexible working impacted your ability to share knowledge with, and learn from, others?</p> <p>i. how well do you feel supported in your development and your ability to develop others?</p>	<p>To gain an understanding of whether flexible working has impacted knowledge sharing and development.</p>

<p>4. For those of you who are starting to think about retirement, what role, if any, does flexible working play in enabling the transition to retirement?</p>	<p>To gain an understanding of whether flexible working has impacted retirement intentions and plans.</p>
<p>5. How can flexible working be better supported in [Directorate]?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Reflecting on the past two years, what has been working well and therefore should continue? ii. Reflecting on the past two years, what has not been working well and therefore should stop? iii. What additional processes and procedures, systems and/or behaviours would need to be in place to enable its effectiveness? iv. How can flexible working be embedded your work context? v. What data would be helpful to support more effective flexible working in the future? 	<p>To gain insight into perceptions regarding areas of strength and areas for improvement.</p>
<p>6. Are there forms of flexibility not currently available or not commonly used that would support your preferences for flexible working (e.g., extended leave without pay, job sharing)?</p>	<p>To determine if there is a desire for broader forms of flexible working.</p>
<p>7. Is there anything you wanted to say that you haven't had a chance to say? Or anything you want to add to the discussion before we leave?</p>	

Focus Group Guide – SOGs under 30

Questions	Purpose
<p>1. How has flexible working been managed in your team?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. How prevalent is remote working in your work context / team? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Do a lot of staff work remotely, or do they mostly work from the new buildings? Why do you think this is? b) How are decisions about location and hours of work made (e.g., collective decision-making, individual-led, manager-led)? c) Are there equity issues around access or inclusion? ii. Can you reflect on whether particular cohorts of employees favour some work locations (e.g., home v office)? Why you think this is? For example, younger workers / early in career, older workers / more advanced in career, across SOGs / ASO? 	<p>To gain an understanding of what flexible working arrangements are in place at the team level and whether there are differences across employee cohorts.</p>

<p>2. To what extent has flexible working, particularly widespread work-from-home, changed dynamics within your team, or your feeling of connectedness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. What changes have you seen, if any, to communication practices? ii. How often do team members interact and communicate with one another? How do they communicate and work with one another? iii. To what extent has flexible working shaped communication between teams? 	<p>To gain an understanding of how teams are communicating and interacting with one another and with other teams.</p>
<p>3. How are managers supported to manager flexible teams?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. How has managing teams working flexibly impacted your workload? 	
<p>4. To what extent has flexible working impacted your ability to share knowledge with, and learn from, others?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. how well do you feel supported in your development and your ability to develop others? 	<p>To gain an understanding of whether flexible working has impacted knowledge sharing and development.</p>
<p>5. How can flexible working be better supported in [Directorate]?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Reflecting on the past two years, what has been working well and therefore should continue? ii. Reflecting on the past two years, what has not been working well and therefore should stop? iii. What additional processes and procedures, systems and/or behaviours would need to be in place to enable its effectiveness? iv. How can flexible working be embedded your work context? v. What data would be helpful to support more effective flexible working in the future? 	<p>To gain insight into perceptions regarding areas of strength and areas for improvement.</p>
<p>6. Are there forms of flexibility not currently available or not commonly used that would support your preferences for flexible working (e.g., extended leave without pay, job sharing)?</p>	<p>To determine if there is a desire for broader forms of flexible working.</p>
<p>7. Is there anything you wanted to say that you haven't had a chance to say? Or anything you want to add to the discussion before we leave?</p>	

Focus Group Guide – SOGs over 50

Questions	Purpose
<p>1. How has flexible working been managed in your team?</p> <p>i. How prevalent is remote working in your work context / team?</p> <p>a) Do a lot of staff work remotely, or do they mostly work from the new buildings? Why do you think this is?</p> <p>b) How are decisions about location and hours of work made (e.g., collective decision-making, individual-led, manager-led)?</p> <p>c) Are there equity issues around access or inclusion?</p> <p>ii. Can you reflect on whether particular cohorts of employees favour some work locations (e.g., home v office)? Why you think this is? For example, younger workers / early in career, older workers / more advanced in career, across SOGs / ASO?</p>	<p>To gain an understanding of what flexible working arrangements are in place at the team level and whether there are differences across employee cohorts.</p>
<p>2. To what extent has flexible working, particularly widespread work-from-home, changed dynamics within your team, or your feeling of connectedness?</p> <p>i. What changes have you seen, if any, to communication practices?</p> <p>ii. How often do team members interact and communicate with one another? How do they communicate and work with one another?</p> <p>iii. To what extent has flexible working shaped communication between teams?</p>	<p>To gain an understanding of how teams are communicating and interacting with one another and with other teams.</p>
<p>3. How are managers supported to manager flexible teams?</p> <p>i. How has managing teams working flexibly impacted your workload?</p>	
<p>4. To what extent has flexible working impacted your ability to share knowledge with, and learn from, others?</p> <p>i. how well do you feel supported in your development and your ability to develop others?</p>	<p>To gain an understanding of whether flexible working has impacted knowledge sharing and development.</p>
<p>5. For those of you who are starting to think about retirement, what role, if any, does flexible working play in enabling the transition to retirement?</p>	<p>To gain an understanding of whether flexible working has impacted retirement intentions and plans.</p>
<p>6. How can flexible working be better supported in [Directorate]?</p> <p>i. Reflecting on the past two years, what has been working well and therefore should continue?</p> <p>ii. Reflecting on the past two years, what has not been working well and therefore should stop?</p>	<p>To gain insight into perceptions regarding areas of strength and areas for improvement.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none">iii. What additional processes and procedures, systems and/or behaviours would need to be in place to enable its effectiveness?iv. How can flexible working be embedded your work context?v. What data would be helpful to support more effective flexible working in the future?	
7. Are there forms of flexibility not currently available or not commonly used that would support your preferences for flexible working (e.g., extended leave without pay, job sharing)?	To determine if there is a desire for broader forms of flexible working.
8. Is there anything you wanted to say that you haven't had a chance to say? Or anything you want to add to the discussion before we leave?	