

Media Release

Flexibility for frontline workers a key driver of labour security and employee health: Champions of Change Coalition

As businesses across Australia are impacted by labour and skills shortages, the Champions of Change Coalition says delivering effective and secure flexible work arrangements for frontline, shift and site-based workers has immediate benefits and should be a long-term strategy for workforce sustainability.

The Champions of Change Coalition's report *Shifting Expectations: Flexibility for frontline, shift and site-based roles*, released today, shows how leadership commitment and innovative work practices are bringing flexibility and business benefits to frontline workplace environments including energy, mining, construction, transport, manufacturing, telecommunications and logistics.

Benefits of flexibility in frontline settings – early indicators

Early indicators from site specific trials and programs (at **Viva Energy, Worley, South32, Telstra, Unilever, Crown and Hanson**) demonstrate positive impacts on workforce engagement and productivity beyond improved employee wellbeing.

Specific benefits of introducing flexible ways of working in frontline, shift and site-based roles vary in nature across industry and business type and include: reaching untapped labour; attraction and retention of talent; faster recruitment into vacant roles; safety improvements; increases in women's representation; reduction in turnover rates and unplanned absences; increased utilisation of assets (mines) through additional shifts.

"In a tight labour market there are huge first mover advantages to those who can crack the code for flexible ways of working in frontline environments," says James Fazzino, Convenor Champions of Change and Chair of Manufacturing Australia.

"Flexible options open up untapped labour and expand the diversity of your talent pool" says Fazzino.

Access to secure flexible work is now a minimum expectation of employees

Secure flexible work is a cornerstone strategy for enabling employees to perform at their best. Flexibility enables more people to participate in paid work while managing their other responsibilities and interests and advances gender equality.

COVID19 has demonstrated that workforce flexibility is vital for business continuity and growth and is now expected within office-based environments. COVID19 has also increased the awareness of the benefits of flexible working across our workforces.

Current employee expectations mean that flexibility is essential for talent attraction and retention and, at a time of skills and labour shortages, providing effective flexible working arrangements is also becoming a way to reach and secure previously untapped labour.

For most Australian workers 'remote' work is off-limits

In 2020, the Australian Institute Centre for Future Work estimated that 9 million workers (70 per cent of the Australian workforce) are unable to work remotely or from home.¹ In the context of Coalition Member organisations, these roles are characterised by work performed on site most or all of the time, often requiring shift work in a 24/7 operating environment.

Operational, structural, cultural, legal and historical factors must be taken into account when embedding flexible work at scale in these environments including: Enterprise Bargaining Agreements and cycles, fixed assets and customer location, technology and training.

¹ A. Pennington and J. Stanford. April 2020. 'Working from Home: Opportunities and Risks'. The Australian Institute. Centre for Future Work.



“It is more complex to improve flexibility for shift and site-based roles. Flexibility needs to work both ways, in the interests of employees and employers, and there are gains to be made in engagement, diversity and productivity if we continue to challenge the ways we have worked in the past,” Scott Wyatt, CEO Viva Energy.

Work being undertaken by Members of the Champions of Change Coalition is focussed on increasing the opportunities for secure flexible work across permanent frontline workforces, by working with employees and other stakeholders to challenge when, how and where work is done.

“Testing and refining new approaches works well when there is open communication and good engagement with the workforce. Employer motivation needs to be squarely focussed on employee retention and satisfaction, not reducing costs or driving efficiency even though these may also be natural outcomes of some of the measures,” says Wyatt.

Flexible work for the frontline means different things for different roles and to different people

Frontline workers canvassed across a range of industries in Champions of Change organisations thought that flexibility could include providing options for flexible rosters, shift swapping, job shares, compressed work weeks, split shifts and multiskilling.

Deep role analysis in some organisations has also identified opportunities for tasks traditionally performed on site to be done remotely through technology.

“Flexible work never means employment conditions falling below the safety net. Neither should flexibility manifest itself in insecure employment through greater casualisation of labour, rather, that organisations find ways to navigate the system to create secure, flexible options for people and at scale,” says Greg Smith AM, Former Deputy President of the Fair Work Commission.

Flexibility and gender equality

“We are making progress in many areas across our workplaces to enable equal participation. By challenging traditional ways of working and sharing our experiences in relation to flexibility for frontline and site-based roles across industries we are creating the environment to deliver not only gender diversity but significant social and mental benefits for employees and communities,” says Gillian Cagney, President ANZ, Worley.

“Improving frontline flexibility is not only about increasing the representation of women in the workforce, to advance gender equality flexible practices need to be designed to be relevant to *all genders*,” says James Fazzino, Convenor Champions of Change and Chair of Manufacturing Australia.

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Champions of Change Coalition

The Champions of Change Coalition includes CEOs, secretaries of government departments, non-executive directors and community leaders who believe gender equality is a major business, economic, societal and human rights issue. Established in 2010 by Elizabeth Broderick AO, our mission is to step up beside women to help achieve gender equality and a significant and sustainable increase in the representation of women in leadership.

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