

## Fact Sheet

# Work-Life Balance: Making it Work

Swiftwork helps managers understand and implement work-life balance initiatives in their organisations.

These are the most commonly voiced concerns raised by managers.



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***“Offering people the facilities to have more time off is incompatible with increased service provision...”***

The only sustainable initiative is one where service provision is maintained or improved. When you are competing in a tough market, the day to day problems of getting the work done seem paramount; but managing the logistical and practical problems is the way to reach long term gains. Offering more flexible working arrangements is likely to help the business by improving productivity and planning.

***“This is really a policy for people who have children and the rest of us have to cover for them...”***

A few years ago work-life balance was called ‘family friendly’ because it was felt that people who had children had an unequal chance to be employed. It soon became clear that flexible working policies helped almost everyone. In organisations that have embraced these initiatives, a wide range of people have

***“This is all geared to help the staff. It’s is not expected for managers to have work-life Balance too...”***

This is a critical area to be addressed if an organisation is really committed to work-life balance. Swiftwork’s training programmes focus on helping managers not only manage in a flexible environment, but also how they’re able to change circumstances for themselves.

***“I totally agree with the policy but we need extra resources to manage it and these are not on the table...”***

We do sympathise with managers who are often operating under considerable pressure. Since work-life balance is a people led initiative, many of the solutions can be worked out by the staff concerned – they know better than anyone what will help them deliver.

Though you may need to juggle your resources in the short term, a jointly consulted work-life balance programme brings long-term benefits - better working practices, reduced absence, reduced stress, flexible hours to meet customer demands, higher retention of staff and lower recruitment costs. These gains result in a more efficient use of resources in the longer term.

***“I don’t feel happy about people working from home - how do I manage their work?”***

Working from home means a new way of working for the manager as well as the homeworker. Essentially, managers need clear outputs to measure and homeworkers a clear understanding of what’s expected of them. Both need support while they gain confidence in the new arrangement.

***“But if you offer flexible working everyone wants Friday off and that leaves me with shortages...”***

Clearly, not everyone can take Fridays off and there will always be a minimum cover required to operate well. There are many creative ways of managing this. Essentially, everyone must understand the required level of cover. Teams are best at ensuring cover is maintained when they work it out amongst themselves rather than by an enforced rota. One option is sharing out the Fridays, or job sharers can work Mon, Tues, Weds one week and Thurs, Fri the next, thus doing five days over two weeks, but only every other Friday.

***“Because we can’t offer everything that everyone wants, it means that work-life balance opportunities are going to be unequal and won’t be offered consistently...”***

True - some roles are not suited to some policies. You can’t run reception from home, for example, but job share could be an option. Each request should be considered on a case by case basis and assessed according to its effect on customers and colleagues. Clear guidelines for managers can be established to ensure consistency. In organisations with a range of WLB policies there may be opportunities for staff to transfer internally to help meet their requirements

***“If someone wants to work from home or work reduced hours won’t that put extra pressure on the staff in the office...”***

Modern communications systems can ensure that employees are linked to the office, their managers and other team members from wherever they’re working almost as if they’re in the office.

Any shortfall in hours can be tackled in many ways – a part-timer may be willing to increase their hours; if you have several people reducing hours you may have accumulated hours enough for a new part-time member of staff, or employees may suggest productivity improvements. It’s surprising how often a solution suggests itself when everyone is pulling in the same direction.

***“We might have these policies but you try going home at 4 pm and see what people say...”***

We have all fallen for the easy quip: “off home are we? Another half day...” You can help by cheerily responding “Yes! Only nine hours today!” and you’ll soon start feeling less guilty.

Changing a culture is a long term project and to be successful, we all have to take responsibility to encourage everyone to see the benefits. Managers can be shown how, by managing in the new culture of targets and outputs, employees are more than meeting performance levels. Remember, you and your staff are both coping with change.