



A guide to flexible working

When simple solutions to complex problems don't work

Learnings and insights from a Q5, Beamible, and Datacom project on flexible working



in partnership with



beamible

and

DATACOM

Context

Opening remarks from Joan Lurie ...

"As Australia emerges from pandemic lockdowns and restrictions - moving beyond imposed boundaries and learning to forge new ones is both liberating and challenging. Many saying life was easier before!

Typically, many organisations are implementing 'one-size' solutions with top management deciding what is best for the whole organisation (some after consulting). Within this assumed accountability, there are two further binary responses - everyone back into the office or everyone work from home (you choose).

We love simple responses to complex challenges, they give us a sense of control. Assuming imposing this form of order is best and fairest. But what if organisations allowed flexibility for teams to figure out what worked best for them? To contract at the 'local' level depending on their unique context, nature of work, and team needs. What if organisations had some broad principles, heuristics which they created to enable this?

Instead of binary simple solutions imposed - this complex adaptive challenge may be a brilliant place for us to develop our complexity muscle - grow contextual awareness, systemic intelligence, empathy - learning our way into diversity and interdependence beyond our individual worlds.

Leaning into this complexity, multiplicity, and variety might allow flourishing which we haven't known before - but we won't know it unless we experiment with it..."

Words from Joan Lurie, System Change Leader in her piece Reframing the 'workplace'.

Introduction

We'll spare you the context, given that it's been our reality for the past two years. It's likely that your leaders are already having conversations about their response to the increasing demand for flexibility, which many now see as a non-negotiable in their working life.

What's this paper about?

Q5 recently worked closely with Datacom to help them define and arrange a set of flexible working guidelines that is tailored to the needs of their people, teams, and business.

Tailoring an approach that embeds flexibility across varied teams is often the greatest challenge for leaders. The aim of this paper is to provide guiding principles and considerations to help you decide what's right for your people and business.

Key topics we cover:

- **Guidelines vs mandate:** What works best and how to communicate this to leaders
- **Determining the optimal time in office** based on the nature of job roles across Datacom
- **How culture and engagement affects flexible work arrangements** (and vice versa)
- **Creating space** to discuss how to maintain collaboration, culture, and wellbeing across hybrid teams

Source: "Why hybrid is here to stay and how to seize the opportunities"
Council NSW Productivity Commission, November 2021

Structure of this document

Unpacking location flexibility

Our work with Datacom

Key insights

About us

Q5

Q5 is a global organisation transformation consultancy that builds organisational health for the working world; from emergency support through to the development of peak performance. We work in three tightly linked domains to help organisations transform:

- **Strategy** (setting the right direction)
- **Design** (creating operating models to deliver the strategy)
- **People & Change** (developing people and putting the elements in place to make the change work).

What sets us apart though is not 'what' we do but 'how' we do it. We take a partnership approach to our engagements, helping clients to come together to create tailored and holistic solutions that works for their business and context. Our working style is highly collaborative, which in practice means us enabling leaders through a structured approach and transformational expertise so that they can define, design, and enable their vision.



Beamable is a cloud-based platform that helps individuals, teams, and organisations design, prioritise, and optimise roles. Beamable has designed an interactive platform that helps collate insights and analyse them to provide a better understanding of how roles can be best optimised using a flexible working approach. Using the platform Beamable provided, we captured insights through interviewing different employees to understand the nature of their work. The process of grouping employees with similar needs and expectations was intuitive and much simpler with the help of Beamable and their expert tools.

What was once considered a privilege for those working full-time in an office, has now become a non-negotiable for majority of the workforce.

When curating a suitable model for flexible working, it is crucial to understand the various ways people may desire and undertake flexibility in the workplace.

Types of flexible working



Hours of work

For example, changes to start and finish times



Patterns of work

For example, split shifts or job sharing



Location of work

For example, working from home

Part A

Unpacking location flexibility

Most roles can be grouped into these three categories



Full-time remote

workers: Working more than 4 days a week remotely on average



Hybrid workers:

Working more than 1 day and up to 4 days a week remotely on average



Full-time on-site workers:

Working no more than 1 day a week remotely on average



Why you should care (if you don't already)

The pandemic has reminded us that whilst change is inevitable, transformation is a choice.

Many took the leap of making remote work more accessible for their employees in response to lockdowns. In doing so, businesses were saved and many employees were able to achieve a greater work/life balance and improve their wellbeing*.

These are just two of the many benefits we observed as more businesses began shift to hybrid work models. We found that...

For employees, remote work...



reduces their commuting time



improves their sense of wellbeing



allows them to work flexibly around personal commitments



provides greater choice of employers

For employers, remote work...



likely to make a company's remuneration package more attractive to employees



gives them access to larger talent pools, making it easier to recruit staff and fill skills gaps



aids retention because employees prize the option to work remotely and reward it with loyalty



enables business continuity when access to physical workplaces is disrupted

As the widespread benefits of flexible working becomes clearer to employers, it is now much easier for employees to jump ship from an organisation that cannot meet their flexibility needs, to one that can.

The need for flexibility is here to stay, and organisations must adapt or they will risk losing out on top talent in their industry.

What going flex will mean for your organisation



76% of employees who work in a remote fashion don't want to work remotely full-time. They enjoy coming into the office for collaboration and team engagement.



Employees have noted that their sense of wellbeing improved with greater flexibility given they can (generally) manage their work and personal lives better.



For employers, remote work provides access to a wider talent pool. Where jobs were once only available in a particular city, they can now resource these jobs from other regions or even globally.



Employers need to invest in a hybrid culture, both in office and for employees at home. This may mean reshaping office spaces. If employees are coming into the office purely for collaboration and engagement, rows of desks or cubicles don't enable this to happen.



It's important to take time to consider ways to measure work. Just because you can't see someone working from their desk, doesn't mean they aren't working.

Here's how other organisations have started to make the leap



A mandate that teams must spend 3 days per week working from the Google office and the remaining 2 days can be spent from a location of their office.



Teams can be location-agnostic if it suits their role, with no mandated number of days in an office. This is organised through conversation with the employee and manager, with managers able to make decisions that best fit their team.



Staff are encouraged to choose which hub (Home, Office, or Client) to work from based on their client's needs, their team, and individual preference, and have conversations with their leaders to discuss their flexible working arrangement.



Teams are led by their manager, agree on how they will work and meet. At minimum, managers meet with each team member once a fortnight and every second meeting needs to be face-to-face. Teams hold a face-to-face meeting at least once a month.



Adopted a fully distributed model 'Team Anywhere'. They consider work to be a thing you do, not a place you go. Atlassian has around 6,000 employees located across 23 different time zones in 14 countries, with 12 physical offices. While 'Team Anywhere' enables asynchronous working, Atlassian asks teams to find four overlapping work hours.



Adopted an 'all-remote' policy before COVID-19. All employees are provided with full support from their organisation to work remotely. They are given a budget to buy materials to work remotely and get their office set-up. If they prefer, they can work from a co-working space.

Part B

Our work with DATACOM

Datacom is Australasia's largest homegrown tech company. Founded in New Zealand as a family business, it has grown to approximately 6,500 employees across Australasia and Southeast Asia, remaining privately owned. Datacom aspires to foster a more cohesive, collaborative, and customer centric working environment that would help them meet the emerging needs of their customers, whilst still protecting what made them special.

The turning point

For many across Datacom, it was unclear if the balance between what people want, what customers require, and what the Datacom Group requires to run efficiently and effectively overall was correct. As a business, it was acknowledged that COVID had undoubtedly played a part in low office attendance, but anecdotally leaders knew that coming into the office is a lesser priority for many. As a result, Datacom was concerned about potential longer term impacts to internal engagement, customer interactions and also the associated costs with running empty properties.

The challenge

Q5 was engaged to assist in establishing a phase one plan to address these key issues, particularly through the introduction of flexible work guidelines. For Datacom, the challenge in addressing flexibility stemmed largely from needing to find an approach that worked against role variability. In other words, not everyone did the same kind of work and individuals would need an approach that worked for their specific needs and tasks. Thus, it was necessary to address the issues at a team level rather than as a group wide policy in order to provide clarity.

The key questions we needed to answer



"Who can work from home? And depending on the nature of teams, how much time would each need to be in the office?"

For example...

- **Team X** are fully remote given the distributed location of team members, in addition to their customers also working remotely
- **Team Y** should be in 3 days per week, Tuesday through to Thursday, based on the level of customer interaction and time required together for collaboration and engagement



"If we were to transition to a hybrid work model, how can offices and office equipment be used in a more efficient manner?"

Our approach

Firstly, we wanted to thoroughly understand the unique context of each group and the nature of work that was carried out within them. This involved gaining insight from both managers and their teams.

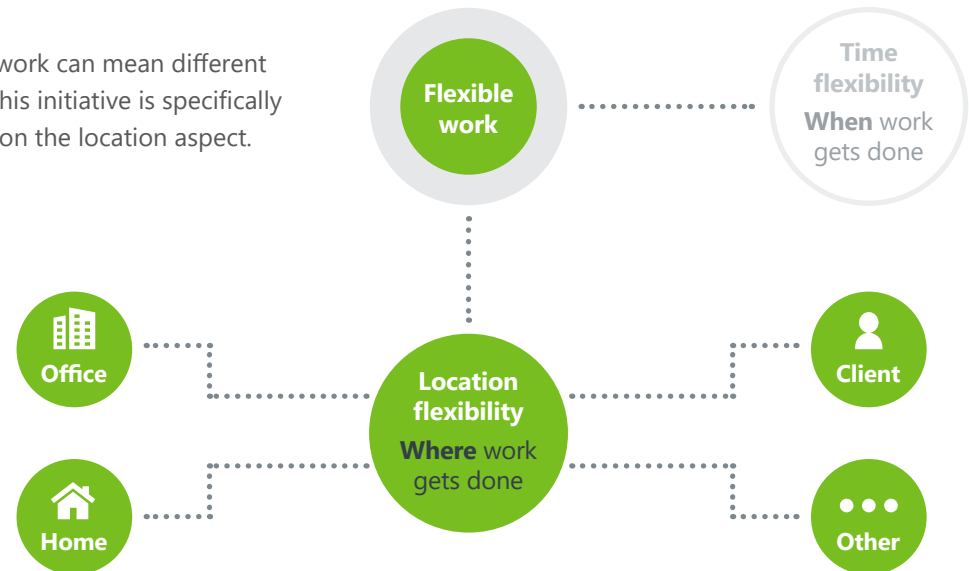
Based on our findings, we determined the number of optimal days recommended for each team to achieve a high level of productivity. This meant their ability to meet specific individual needs and overarching group objectives.

However, this alone does not consider nuances such as role dynamics, individual needs, and other intrinsic factors which are only truly understood within the team. To achieve a greater fit, we encouraged managers take this guide and use it as a reference in their internal discussions when deciding on what working patterns would work for them as a team, from both a group and individual perspective.

This gave us the ability to design work profiles around the work each team was responsible for and what they believed was suitable for them, rather than applying a mandate.

We also wanted to understand how customer needs and group dynamics may impact the ability of teams to complete their duties in locations beyond the traditional office setting i.e. location flexibility. This meant specifically looking into factors such as culture and engagement, management of individual circumstances and team interactions to determine the extent to which each team can adopt location flexibility. These factors are managed on a team-by-team basis, hence why they were excluded from the work profiles that we developed in this case.

Flexible work can mean different things. This initiative is specifically focused on the location aspect.



Within **location flexibility**, the nature of work and customer requirements informed the outcomes detailed in this document, but we recognise it's a broader conversation.



At a high level, the approach we took could be summarised as:

Launched a customer survey

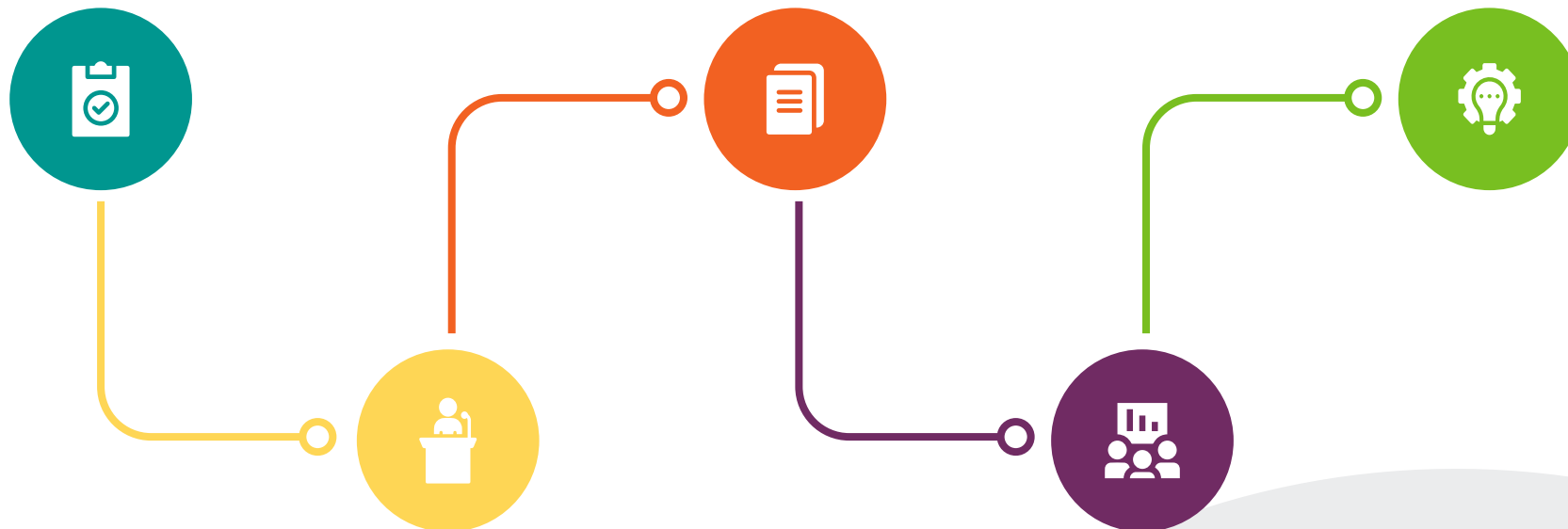
A customer survey was launched to gather insights around how customer requirements may affect where teams can complete their work.

Designed and tested work profiles

Our meetings with leaders and customer survey data informed the design of flexible work team profiles. These were based on key patterns in the data and our assumptions from conversations.

Refined work profiles and designed flexible work guide and resources

Developed resources to complement the existing flexible work resources at Datacom, which clearly set out expectations around new ways of working for Datacom and how these came about.



Spoke to leaders across the business

Across 53 meetings, we were able to identify what tasks and activities teams spend their time doing. The implications of where that work can take place was mapped out to assist in defining what flexible working meant for each team.

Validation workshops

We then tested and validated our initial work profile assumptions through a series of workshops with a range of Datacom stakeholders. We also engaged in discussions about other factors which have or may affect the success of flexibility at Datacom for each profile.

When identifying which work profile teams belonged to, we engaged both leaders and members. Below is a high-level summary of our approach:



Team activity mapping

During our meetings with leaders, we initially asked them to segment their teams according to the day-to-day activities they complete. From here, for each activity we asked them to consider the time their teams spend on each and what type of work each activity is. For example, is it highly collaborative or independent work? We used activity tags on the Beamible platform to do this.



Activity analysis, discussion, and guide

Based on how we tagged activities and assumptions on where work can best take place, we were able to provide a guide or suggested number of days for each team spend in the office, client site, or home based on the nature of their work.

The number of days in specific location was informed by a set of assumptions which sat behind each Beamible activity tag.



Engaging teams

We encouraged leaders to speak to their teams following the session. Using the suggested number of days, we suggested leaders with their teams decide on the number of days they wish to spend in the office, home, and client site per week in the future. The number of days and where these were spent was then used to determine which work profile their teams would be assigned.






Confirm team decision

Once leaders and teams had made a reasonable decision (a number of days in a specific location, and a rationale), a work profile based on the days and location, was assigned.



What we found

Based on the conversations with leaders across Datacom, 6 work profiles were developed based on the different location flexibility patterns that are evident across the organisation.

Persona	 Orangutans	 Meerkats	 Bees	 Orca	 Mountain Goats	 Chameleons
% of whole team	15%	55%	6%	10%	3%	10%
Location requirements	Orangutan teams work fully remotely and may only visit client sites or Datacom office only when required.	Meerkat teams visit the office 1 to 2 days per week to connect and collaborate with other Datacom teams.	Customer requirements mean Bee teams work and collaborate across the Datacom office, customer sites, and their personal spaces.	Orca teams are in the Datacom offices 3 to 4 days to collaboratively work through client needs and coordinate across teams.	Mountain Goat teams work at the Datacom offices largely because a physical presence is required for their roles.	Chameleon teams work on customer sites due to contractual obligations, security access or to support their customer's infrastructure.
Time requirements	In office only in when required	In the office 1 to 2 days to collaborate and connect	3 days roaming between client, Datacom, and home	In the office 3 to 4 days to work	In Datacom offices full-time	On client site, full-time

Challenges faced by each work profile

The employees were segmented into 6 work profiles each faced their challenges regarding working 'All-remote' or 'All-Hybrid'. These challenges faced by different work profiles are linked to the change in culture and engagement due to lesser utilisation of properties.

Work Pattern Challenge	 Orangutans Only when required	 Meerkats In the office 1 to 2 days to collaborate and connect	 Bees 3 days roaming between client, Datacom and home	 Orca In the office 3 to 4 days to work	 Mountain Goats In Datacom offices full-time	 Chameleons On client site full time
Staying connected when remote; culture/engagement	•	•				
Structuring time and setting boundaries for both in office and at home work	•	•			•	
Collaborating with those who are virtual	•				•	
Making it easy to go into the office; desk booking, facilities available	•					
Informal/social/networking	•					
Coordinating when to go in		•		•		
Office set-up for collaborating and individual work		•	•	•		
Location differences. If someone isn't in the office ensure they still feel part of the team		•				
Focus time vs commuting; context switching			•			
Flexibility for individual/ home needs when on-site full-time					•	•
Staying connected to Datacom when on site full-time						•
Carving out non-client space and time when on site						•

Three key issues

1

The challenges of managing remote work

Some managers feel that they do not have the capabilities and support to manage remote teams in an effective way. While there is a need to upskill managers, part of this involves re-thinking our view of culture and how work is architected (the operating model). For example, remote work changes the communication flows and practices in a team, and this requires a deliberate design and thought into skills required for these changes.

2

Reduced property utilisation

Office utilisation has been at an all time low. Employee surveys indicate a willingness to return but this hasn't translated to teams making the commute. This is further compounded by the fact that the use of the office is changing. The challenge is how to effectively forecast how much space is required and match that against lease obligations and options in both major cities and regional areas.

3

The dilemma: do we 'tell' employees or ask them what they want?

Each organisation requires a different approach to developing flexible work group level policies. Asking teams to decide or even individuals (referred to as 'hyper-personalisation') is a complex undertaking. On the flip side, some of our clients have trialled mandating time in the office only to find employees disgruntled and unhappy about the loss of their autonomy. Choosing your approach to determining flexible working arrangements will depend on your business context and include factors such as the organisation's culture, performance, nature of work, homogeneity of the business and geographic spread.



Part C

Key insights



Flexibility seen as a value of the organisation, rather than just a feature

There is no set method to designing flexible work arrangements. In the case of Datacom, a mandate wasn't appropriate given teams across the organisation all do different work, meaning designating a set number of days for all teams to work from the office wouldn't be successful. This meant taking a flexible approach to developing guidelines for teams to follow.

This was Datacom's first phase attempt at providing guidelines around flexible work practices and it was important to stress to teams that this wasn't a mandate – it was a guide. It showed managers that they were being trusted to determine what would work best for their teams and hence, their autonomy was valued.



Being intentional about the days you spend in or out office

We wanted to make clear that defining the recommended number of days in the office was not merely a 'tick-box' exercise. Rather, our calculations were based on the specific needs/wants as defined by team members. For example, teams that would spend 1 – 2 days in the office did so because engagement and collaboration with their teams' members was of great importance to them. Other teams that spent approximately 3 days per week roaming between the office and client site had similar requirements from a social connection perspective however they also had a requirement to visit their customers.

A number of days wasn't enough to define a team, rather the purpose of where they spend their time to work. Understanding how teams are distributed and what they use the office space for has implications on how offices are designed in the future. If over 50% of an organisation uses an office 1 – 2 days per week for the purpose of connection and collaboration, are rows of desks or cubical conducive to this?



Setting flexible work guidelines isn't just about 'how many days'

Beyond agreeing a number of days there are other considerations around managing individual circumstances and deciding on how culture and engagement will feed into flexible working arrangements. There needs to be a clear mechanism that allows for individual circumstances to be discussed and catered for.

In addition, as part of the wider operating model, there is a need to consider how different teams collaborate and especially when they need to work together to deliver joint customer outcomes.



Provide clear insight to your managers into the different options, and understand their needs too

Transparency goes a long way and means even if you haven't got it right, you are willing to share the thought process and approach in a way that invites feedback from managers at all levels.

Engaging them in an open conversation is critical because everyone comes at flexible working from different perspectives that impact them in a very real and personal ways. These conversations are an investment to build a shared understanding, alignment and buy-in into the change you're looking to facilitate.



Start the right conversations to understand your team and their needs

Having a set number of days to work in the office and designing hybrid ways of working without having a conversation with the team is not effective. Decisions need to be made collaboratively with the involvement of all team members with regard to remote working.

Having conversations and getting to know the needs of each employee is important when designing flexible working guidelines. A model that takes into account the different work profiles and people expectations is more likely to be adopted by teams and reap long-term benefits for the organisation



Our view of culture needs to shift to be less focused on the office

Culture is not derived from teams working in-person, with the change of working remotely a new view of culture is required. It is evident that culture can be formulated even when teams are not in the office.

With the widespread adoption of flexible working, there are now many online platforms that allow teams to stay connected while providing a positive and fun experience. Leaders and teams should be aligned on the fact that culture can be formulated and nurtured beyond the traditional office setting.

Meet our experts | The humans behind it all



Vickesh Kambaran

Global Head of Organisational Design

Vickesh is an Associate Partner at Q5 who specialises in delivering large-scale, complex transformation programs across different teams setting. He has been consulting across the UK, Europe, and Australia for 14 years, developing his passion designing and implementing end-to-end transformations that engage the whole organisation. He enjoys working hands-on with bold leaders and teams, supporting them to define and deliver enterprise-wide transformation that has led to tangible, commercial results.



Mackenzie Clark

Consultant

Mackenzie is a Consultant based in our Sydney office. She enjoys collaborating with others to assist in overcoming organisational challenges and has experience working across financial services, technology, public sector, and retail. Mackenzie's curiosity and ability to quickly adapt to many settings is evident when working with clients. Having an adept knowledge in many fields has spurred her development and provided Mackenzie with solid foundations as a well-rounded individual.

Ready to make flexible working a **superpower** for your organisation?

Let's talk about your needs and how we can help



Learn more about our partner

