NSW GOVERNMENT

Flexible work and psychological safety: development of a best practice model to advance psychologically-safe work from alternate locations

Centre for WHS

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1. Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the third phase of a three-phase study: *Flexible work and psychological safety: best practice to advance psychologically-safe work from alternate locations.* Phase 3 utilised a co-design research approach. Working collaboratively with key stakeholders, a model of best practice was developed for flexible working arrangements that promotes participation in work health and safety (WHS) by flexible workers. The need for this research was evident from the findings from the first two phases of the project, which indicated relatively low WHS participation and compliance by flexible workers, as compared to their office-based peers, and organisations without WHS management systems that supported flexible working.

Focus groups, conducted online, were used for data collection, comprising 23 participants: four WHS personnel, two HR managers, three flexible workers, three line managers, three senior managers and eight regulators. The focus of discussions centred on the question, *How can organisations improve their WHS systems and processes to ensure the inclusion of flexible workers within a psychologically-safe work environment?*

The participants were stratified into the five focus groups as follows:

Focus Group 1: Mixed Group (WHS manager, senior manager, HR manager, flexible worker)
Focus Group 2: Homogenous group (line managers, senior manager, flexible worker)
Focus Group 3: Homogenous group (regulators)
Focus Group 4: Mixed Group (regulators, senior manager; HR manager; flexible workers)
Focus Group 5: Homogenous group (WHS personnel)

The research team met following each focus group session to develop the model through an iterative process of reviewing, adapting and refining the model. A thematic analysis was conducted of the transcripts and the notes taken by the research team to identify the key themes. In addition, the suggestions from the participants about the type of information that should be contained in a toolbox for flexible working were compiled. Major outputs of the focus group research were the conceptual model presented in this report, together with a description of what a toolbox for flexible working would contain.

The key emergent themes were considered from the systems perspective, in line with earlier research, incorporating macro, meso and micro-level sub-system factors in relation to the problem of flexible worker engagement with WHS. Within the conceptual model, individual worker engagement with WHS and psychological safety is influenced directly and indirectly by each of the outer layers of the model, including:

- the external environment (e.g. guidance and tools from regulatory and government bodies and other external parties inform organisational policy)
- organisation (senior management commitment to and resourcing of flexible working)
- line managers (support and resourcing for work teams engaged in flexible working)
- individual and work teams (tools to enable effective and safe participation in flexible working and effective engagement with WHS).
- The model also included genuine participation and collaboration between management and flexible workers, and resourcing of flexible working across the system.

The emergent themes from the focus groups for each of these work system layers are detailed in the report.

The systems perspective is applied to the discussion of findings in relation to what is currently known in the existing literature. The discussion considered key areas of concern across the work system, including: regulation, commitment, culture and trust, hazard management, WHS participation, capacity and capability, resourcing of flexible work, and workloads. Finally, the practical implications of our findings for the NSW Government, organisations, and flexible workers are discussed, as well as the broader implications for WHS and flexible work in Australia. A number of prototype tools are provided to support issues of greatest concern to focus group participants in relation to the ability to detect and assess psychosocial hazards in flexible working.

2. Introduction

Flexible and remote working arrangements are a fast evolving trend that has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Estimates vary, although many predict that large numbers of knowledge workers will continue to work remotely beyond the pandemic's restrictions. For example, 67 per cent of employees expect to work from home more after the crisis (NSW Innovation and Productivity Council, 2020, 5). This research study, *Flexible work and psychological safety: best practice to advance psychologically safe work from alternate locations,* was commissioned prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The period of lockdown meant that a larger number of workers and organisations across NSW (and Australia) rapidly transferred to flexible working arrangements. This changed context was apparent in the responses from participants, and must be taken into account when reading this report, as the nature of working from home or alternative locations and associated psychosocial risks differ depending on whether it is forced by the pandemic, or chosen and planned.

The research study comprises three phases. The first phase involved a broad survey of flexible workers and collected data concerning their exposure to psychosocial risks. The second phase involved interviews concerning psychosocial risk exposures, how these impacted across different demographic groups, and the WHS experience of flexible workers. The third phase, reported here, connects the two previous stages and, using a co-design activity, worked collaboratively with key stakeholders through a series of focus group sessions to develop a model of best practice for flexible working arrangements that promotes participation in WHS by flexible workers.

In this report, we discuss the findings from Phase 3. This Phase aimed to develop a model of best practice for flexible working arrangements that is inclusive of flexible workers with diverse demographic characteristics. We sought to identify the best practice recommendations that organisations can apply to improve their WHS systems ensuring the inclusion of flexible workers within a psychologically safe work environment. These goals are particularly challenging as current legislation (the Model WHS Act), regulations and guidance materials do not adequately reflect the changing nature of work, especially the shift to flexible working arrangements. Furthermore, the research literature is relatively silent on the topic of flexible working and WHS management, despite the growing trend towards new ways of working.

The need for this Phase of the research is evident from the findings from the first two Phases of the project. Those findings relevant to flexible worker involvement in WHS are listed in Table 2.1. Of note, quantitative research findings highlighted relatively low WHS participation and compliance of flexible workers, as compared to their office-based peers. This was perhaps

understandable given the finding that organisations tended not to have WHS management systems that supported flexible working. Indeed, key WHS processes such as communications, training, risk assessment, reporting, and informal and formal involvement in WHS were impacted negatively by flexible work arrangements. Consequently, such processes are at an embryotic stage of development and this report is part of the process informing the key requirements that could be included.

Table 2.1. Findings from Phases 1 and 2 of the project relevant to flexible worker involvement in WHS and WHS management systems

WHS participation and compliance	- WHS participation and WHS compliance were significantly lower for flexible workers. - Reporting WHS problems when working remotely was ineffective for some, making participation in WHS more challenging.
WHS systems and processes	- Some organisations did not have WHS management systems and processes that supported flexible working. - There was an absence of processes relating to physical wellbeing (e.g. accessing monitors or chairs) and mental wellbeing (e.g. check-ins, conversations seeing how the employees are feeling). - There were multiple challenges with risk assessments of the home work environment; especially workstation ergonomics. - There is a need for systems to ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable flexible workers. - Day-to-day informal involvement in WHS needs to be enabled for flexible working.
WHS communication and training	- WHS communications from the organisation to workers were not evident in some workplaces. - There is a need for specific training of managers and employees around mental health issues while working flexibly from home or other locations. - There is limited in-person communication and support from line manager and co-workers, which is challenging for ensuring safe working conditions and instead created increased psychosocial risks of social isolation and workload issues.

3. Literature scan

While a large and growing body of research has focused on flexible work arrangements and work from home (or other alternative locations) in particular, the published scholarly literature is relatively silent on the issue of the challenges flexible and remote working present for WHS management systems, WHS involvement, and participation in WHS for flexible workers in a psychologically safe environment. This is suprising, given the changes to the nature of work and refashioning of the labour market over the past 30 years or so, and particularly in light of the growing propensity for knowledge workers to work remotely, usually from home.

As early as 2005, Johnston, Quinlan and Walters highlighted increasing international evidence of how changes to work arrangements are having detrimental effects on the safety and wellbeing of workers. The importance of this issue has intensified over recent years with the rise in platform work and the gig economy, and most recently with the sudden acceleration of work from home arrangements due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the risk of remote working has brought to the fore the issue of whether WHS systems in their current form are able to protect workers sufficiently from hazards introduced by flexible work.

This section briefly outlines the relevant content from the small body of published scholarly and grey literature that connect these topics of flexible working, WHS management systems and flexible worker involvement in WHS. Table 3.1 summarises the key issues as outlined in the extant literature.

Table 3.1. Key WHS issues associated with flexible worker engagement with WHS identified from the literature scan

1.	Worker participation in WHS and decision making (as part of the empowerment of the workforce) is one of the major factors consistently related to lower injury rates. Flexible workers may experience practical obstacles to participation in WHS.
2.	Current WHS management systems are not designed with the purpose of protecting workers from hazards introduced by remote work.
3.	There are challenges to involving remote workers formally and informally in WHS.
4.	Remote workers may work across multiple locations making it difficult for line managers to monitor and anticipate risks and stressors.
5.	Risk assessments should cover the home (or alternative location) workplace and take into account working tasks, technical factors, the working environment, work organisation, and social relations.
6.	Risk assessments may not adequately address psychosocial hazards and risks.
7.	With an increasingly dispersed workforce, companies have to find ways and means to enable WHS representation – including WHS Committees and WHS representatives.
8.	There may be limited access to organisational sources of information about WHS policy and procedures for remote workers, e.g. limited access to the organisation's intranet.

9. Flexible workers may face psychosocial risks that are poorly understood by workers or their managers. WHS personnel may not have good systems for managing psychosocial risks per se, let alone in the remotework environment.

A recent paper by Robelski and Sommer (2020) using multi-level analysis, identified several shortcomings with regard to WHS structures and instruments. The researchers note that on a company level, the focus should be on the organisation of flexible work arrangements, and risk assessments for flexible work environments. The authors note that the introduction of flexible working should trigger risk assessments as there will be changes to the work environment and work tasks. Risk assessments should be adapted to flexible working and repeated at regular intervals so workers can become aware of the demands associated with the changed working environment. Furthermore, training should be developed for those who will participate in flexible working. An influential report by Eurofound (2020) on flexible working (termed in the report as 'Telework and ICT-based mobile work') noted that developing and implementing psychosocial risk assessments at a company level is also an essential part of identifying and mitigating possible health risks for remote workers. However, Robelski and Sommer (2020, p.1) highlight the difficulties associated with managing risks in flexible work arrangements which are aggravated by 'a lack of adequate instruments and understanding of psychosocial problems', as the traditional perspective of OHS still focuses on identifying, assessing and controlling physical hazards.

Also focusing on the level of work organisation, Eurofound (2020) noted the need for improvements in order to tackle the risks inherent in flexible working. Notable amongst these were countering the risks of flexible workers being constantly available and potentially using flexible working to supplement rather than substitute work done in the office (also known as 'day extending'). This is especially problematic where workloads are high and the corporate culture encourages the behaviour of being always available to respond quickly. The report notes the need for initiatives to assist the flexible worker in managing the boundaries between work and non-work life more effectively. Line managers of flexible workers also need awareness-raising and training to familiarise themselves with the practicalities of coordinating virtual teams. Eurofound (2020) further asserts that the regulation of flexible working should include provisions for the right to disconnect as a means of curbing the trend towards a culture of work characterised by work intensity and constant availability. Regulations should also establish a greater protection for workers against possible health and wellbeing risks associated with flexible working.

Robelski and Sommer (2020) also drew attention to the role of worker participation in WHS, noting that employee representation can be a stabilizing factor for flexible work. Organisations need to find ways of increasing the participation in WHS of flexible workers, including formal WHS representation which is especially challenging with widely distributed workforces (Robelski and Soomer, 2020). This point is also made in a seminal paper on statutory WHS arrangements for 'the modern labour market' from an industrial relations perspective by Johnstone, Quinlan and

Walters (2005). These authors argue that worker participation in WHS and decision making as part of the empowerment of the workforce, is one of the major factors consistently related to lower injury rates, however, they point out that there can be major practical obstacles to flexible worker participation in WHS.

The focus is somewhat different at the institutional level. In particular, Robelski and Sommer (2020) identify the main issue at an institutional level is about how regulations can be enforced. They point to an 'increasing invisibility of occupational health and safety in the digitized world of work' (Robelski & Sommer, 2020, p.1) , as WHS practitioners and inspectors are losing access to employees who work in remote situations. This issue was also raised by Johnstone, Quinlan and Walters (2005) in a wider review of the implications of changes in the labour market and working practices for statutory occupational health and safety. Amongst other issues, these researchers noted, from a survey of regulatory managers and inspectors, that changes to work was a serious challenge to their worklife and, more specifically, few health and safety inspectors monitored work premises in the home. Eurofound (2020) note that the implementation of legislation and regulations to promote flexible worker health and safety in multiple locations is challenging. Accordingly, they argue that this amplifies the need for information and training about workplace risks as a high priority.

On a social level, Robelski and Sommer (2020) argue that work processes need to be organised in a way that enables remote work, including consideration of time schedules that provide time for virtual meetings as well as undisturbed working. They also point to the concern that team processes are likely to be altered with less face-to-face interactions. The authors, consistent with much other general literature about flexible working, discuss the role of leaders of distributed work teams, especially the requirement to guide team interactions and connectivity. These challenges should be addressed through socialising events and the use of chat groups.

Indeed, the literature on leading remote workers to enhance wellbeing is growing as a direct consequence of COVID-19, with many studies focusing on how to understand psychosocial risks faced by flexible workers and how to manage them through supportive leadership behaviours. This research specifically deals with the role of the leader in understanding and minimising stress (Frenkel et al., 2021; Molino et al., 2020; Renjen, 2020; Zhao et al., 2020); leader awareness of negative aspects of flexible working, and in the design of healthy flexible work environments (Bolisani et al., 2020; Pluut & Wonders, 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021), which encompasses and demonstrates genuine concern and support for positive employee mental wellbeing (Contreras et al., 2020; Ipsen et al., 2021; Koss, 2020; Pasmore et al., 2020; Pluut & Wonders, 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020). Koss (2020) also suggests encouraging individual employees to take ownership and accountability for their own wellbeing.

A recent study by Nielsen and colleagues (2019) found that health and safety-specific leadership was related to positive outcomes among flexible workers. These included feeling part of the organisation and being more proactive in safety matters. Nielsen et al. (2019) note that flexible workers have limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction with their line managers, who were responsible for their health and safety (Dix & Beale, 1996; Green, Tappin & Bentley, 2020). This leads to the key questions about how leaders can ensure the health and safety of flexible workers, and whether leadership behaviours that influence WHS outcomes can be adapted to a virtual environment.

The authors point out that existing theories of leadership assume frequent in-person interaction through which leaders' behaviours can influence followers through role modelling (also see Allas & Schaninger, 2020; D'Auria & De Smet, 2020) and other behaviours supporting desirable worker motivation and safety outcomes. The paper also highlights other issues that are challenges to traditional ways of leading remote worker health and safety. These include limited access to organisational information about WHS policy and procedures, including safety manuals, and the fact that remote flexible workers work across multiple locations, making monitoring of workers to detect risks and wellbeing threats to WHS more challenging (Nielsen et al., 2020).

At the individual level, Robelski and Sommer (2020) note that flexible workers working remotely expend more effort than office-based workers with greater working hours, work intensity, and voluntary efforts, in-line with our findings from the Phase 2 study (also see Felstead &Henseke, 2017). Indeed, the term, 'autonomy paradox' (Eurofound, 2020, 1), has been coined to explain the increased workload and intensity associated with flexible work. These increased demands include the need for greater self-organisation. Furthermore, negative influences on wellbeing of flexible work can occur through interruptions to work, as was identified in the findings of the Phase 2 study. Robelski and Sommer (2020) identify, in sync with much of the literature in this field, that flexible workers are also more likely to face psychosocial hazards, increasing the risks for mental and physical wellbeing (Eurofound, 2020). Eurofound (2020) highlight presenteeism amongst remote workers, including continuing to work while sick, indicated by low sick days among flexible workers . Finally, technostress and other factors related to technology and flexible working must also be considered (see Frenkel et al., 2021; Molino et al., 2020; Renjen, 2020; Zhao et al., 2020), including telework intensity (Bentley et al., 2016), or the proportion of a person's time spent working remotely.

Nielsen et al. (2019) also point to the importance of safety compliance and safety proactivity for remote flexible workers, as line managers have limited opportunity to monitor safety-related behaviours and the use of safety equipment by remote workers (Neal & Griffin, 2006). Proactivity is also important as remote workers may also be required to make independent decisions when they encounter situations that threaten their health, safety or wellbeing.

In conclusion, this brief scan of the very limited body of literature on topics of flexible working, WHS management systems and flexible worker involvement in WHS, clearly shows the need for a multilevel, systems perspective when taking account of WHS systems and flexible working. As Robelski and Sommer (2020, p.6) caution, implementing flexible work should not be considered in isolation, but 'in the context of organisational processes, working tasks, equipping, and individual needs.

4. Method

The research design utilised co-design methods of collaboration under a design-led thinking framework to establish a model for best practice. Co-design is an effective strategy to generate solutions to wicked problems involving multiple stakeholders. In this case our stakeholders were the flexible workers, senior managers, line managers, HR Managers, WHS personnel and regulators. Co-design was chosen as it is a participative approach, improving commitment and uptake of project findings and recommendations.

Focus groups were utilised for data collection. The focus groups comprised members from the aforementioned stakeholder groups. The groups similarly had an interest in the development of a best practice model in the design and implementation of flexible work arrangements that are inclusive for workers of diverse backgrounds within a psychologically safe work environment. The inclusion criteria included being a NSW-based worker and a member of one of the target participant groups. There were 23 participants (maximum of six participants for each focus group): four WHS personnel, two HR managers, three flexible workers, three line managers, three senior managers and eight regulators. Participation was voluntary, and participants were recruited through a combination of recommendations from the Centre for Work Health and Safety network and contacts of the research team.

The focus groups were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, with three members of the research team co-facilitating each of the focus group discussions. The discussion focused on the central question, *How can organisations improve their WHS systems and processes to ensure the inclusion of flexible workers within a psychologically safe work environment?* Prior to the focus groups, the research team developed a set of questions which were used as prompts to guide discussion and improve consistency across the five focus groups (See Appendix A for the Focus Group Question Schedule).

The data were collected from the five focus groups held over two weeks in May 2021. The participants were stratified into the five focus groups as follows:

Focus Group 1: Mixed Group (WHS manager, senior manager, HR manager, flexible worker)
Focus Group 2: Homogenous group (line managers, senior manager, flexible worker)
Focus Group 3: Homogenous group (regulators)
Focus Group 4: Mixed Group (regulators, senior manager; HR manager; flexible workers)
Focus Group 5: Homogenous group (WHS personnel)

The research team met regularly to develop the model through an iterative process of reviewing, adapting and refining the model after each focus group. The focus groups were recorded and

transcribed. A thematic analysis was conducted of the transcripts and the notes taken by the research team to identify the key themes. In addition, the suggestions from the participants about the type of information that should be contained in a toolbox for flexible working were compiled. The key themes, and the model co-designed with the focus group participants are presented in the findings section of this report, together with a description of what a toolbox for flexible working would comprise.

This study was approved by the Edith Cowan University Research Ethics Committee: 2021 02361-Bentley. All participants provided formal consent to take part in the focus groups.

5. Findings

This section of the report is divided into three main parts. The first overviews the primary output from the focus group research: a conceptual model for WHS engagement for flexible workers. The second section describes each of the key themes that emerged from the focus groups, under the different levels in the model – external environment, senior manager/organisation, line manager, and team and individual. These findings are considered in relation to the extant literature later in the report's Discussion section. The third section outlines the various toolbox components, as suggested by focus group participants to support flexible worker WHS engagement, and effective and psychologically safe flexible working.

5.1 A systems model for effective flexible worker engagement in WHS within a psychologically safe environment

The key themes emerging from the five focus groups and their relationship to each other were considered from the systems perspective, as shown in Figure 5.1. This perspective was selected in-line with the literature reviewed above that has considered macro, meso and micro-level sub-system factors in the problem of flexible worker engagement with WHS. The systems model highlights the need to consider the problem of how organisations can improve their WHS systems and processes to ensure the inclusion of flexible workers within a psychologically safe work environment from a multi-level perspective. Within this model, individual worker engagement with WHS and psychological safety are influenced directly and indirectly by each of the outer layers of the model. Hence, the external environment, including guidance and tools from regulatory and government bodies and other external parties, inform organisational policy and senior management commitment to, and resourcing of, flexible working. This high-level commitment supports line managers, who in turn support and resource work teams engaged in flexible working. At the teams level, focus groups recommended a range of tools to enable effective and safe participation in flexible working and effective engagement with WHS. These tools enable system safety across the organisation by supporting the development of tailored policy, systems, practices and actions that promote psychological safety in flexible working, and as such form part of the work system. Critical to all levels of the system within organisations where flexible working has been implemented are genuine participation and collaboration between management and flexible workers, as opposed to checklist and compliance approaches, and resourcing of flexible working across the system.

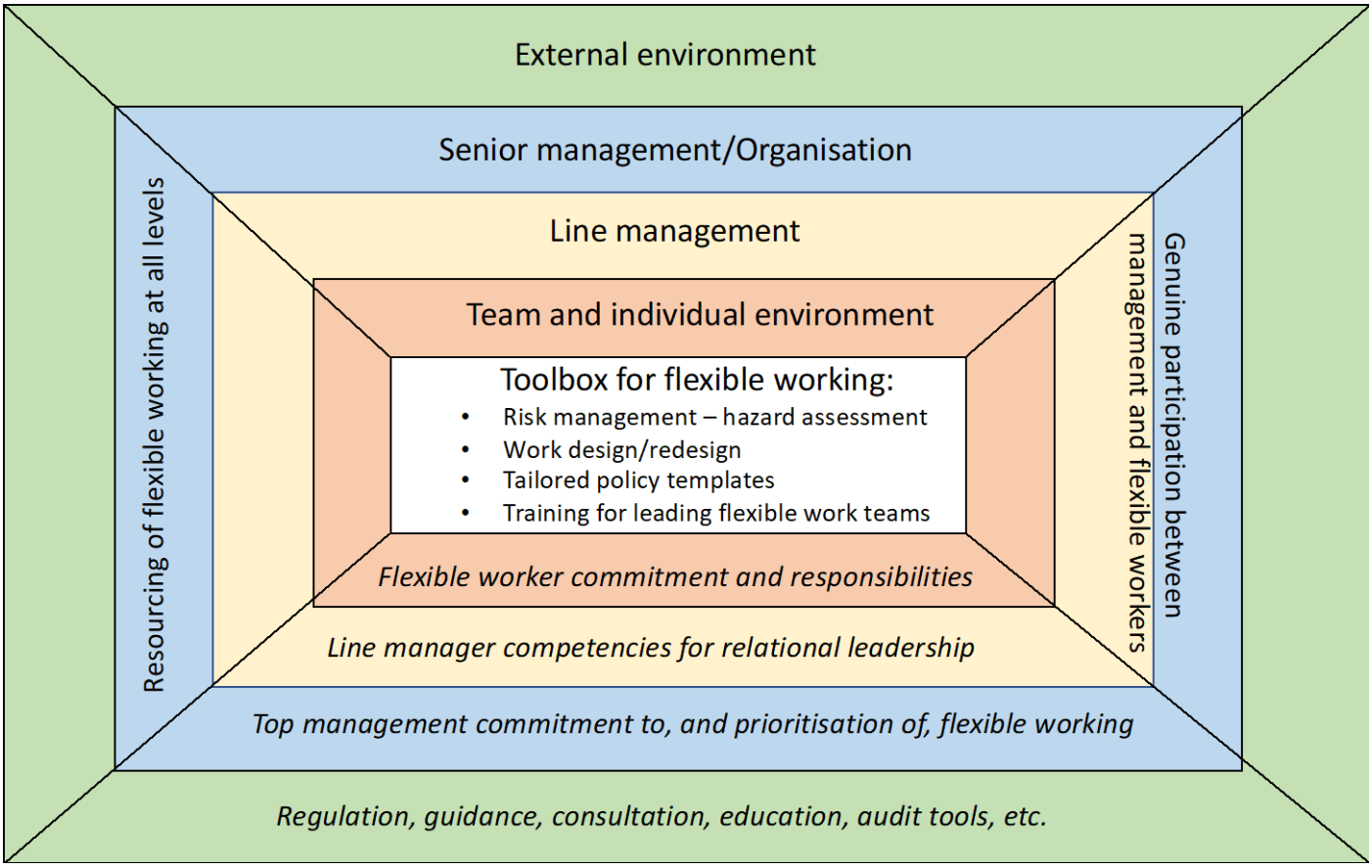

Figure 5.1. A systems model for effective flexible worker engagement within a psychologically safe environment

5.2 Key themes

This section uses a systems perspective to structure the findings, with tables 5.2.1 to 5.2.4 providing an overview of the key emergent themes, along with brief descriptors of each key theme. The key themes are considered under each of the systems level perspectives, using quotes that are representative of each theme.

5.2.1 External environment

Table 5.2.1 shows the key themes that relate to the external environment, influencing organisational behaviour, along with descriptors of these themes.

Table 5.2.1: Key themes: external (including regulatory) environment

Key Themes	Descriptor
Legislation is slow to respond to environmental changes	There was a perception that organisations would need to be proactive in relation to WHS, as the legislation may be slow to respond to environmental changes.
Systematic approaches to managing psychosocial hazards	There was a perception that efforts to manage psychological hazards in a systematic way was problematic, particularly if linear systems and/or 'one-size-fits all' approaches are promoted at a systems level.

Formal representation and participation for flexible workers in WHS	There was a perception that the logistics of remote working, such as working from home, may lead to reduced participation in WHS and underrepresentation for flexible workers in formal WHS processes.
Consultation	There was a perception that while consultation is mandated in legislation, consultation must be underpinned by open communication and trust if it is to be effective.
Privacy	There was a perception that the practice of working flexibly from home or other alternative locations challenges our understanding of 'workplace' and to what extent regulation for WHS can impinge on privacy in an employee's home.
Challenges in promoting psychological safety	There was a perception that it was easier to promote WHS at the physical safety level because it is more tangible. When it comes to psychological safety, participants were unsure how easily it could be regulated, particularly with the interconnectedness of one's work and personal life in relation to individual psychological wellbeing.
Capacity building in psychological safety for regulators	There was a perception that there was a need to improve the level of knowledge and competence at the regulatory level in providing guidance in implementing, managing and assessing psychological safety risks in the workplace, particularly given the changing environment.
Risk assessments and psychosocial hazards	There was a perception that psychosocial hazards would need to be included in risk assessments if they are to be perceived and managed in the same ways as physical hazards.

The analysis revealed that within a rapidly changing external environment, work practices (e.g. working from home) can be implemented without an opportunity to consult and develop robust WHS regulations. As such, WHS regulations may be slow to respond, making it necessary for organisations to implement changes in a way that, in this case, supports psychological safety when working flexibly from home or other alternative locations. One WHS professional spoke to this point saying,

> *The way that we've all been institutionalised in the health safety industry to process an emerging hazard, you know, procedures. Consultation arrangements that are very formal. I just think with psychological and psychosocial hazards we should try and establish best practice procedures knowing that Codes of Practice and legislation hasn't caught up with it being a requirement.* (P14)

As well as a focus on the legislation, participants suggested that awareness, involvement and participation with the development and implementation of systems was paramount, with one regulator saying,

> *I think it's about letting people know that there are those systems and processes in place and then remain[ing] connected when they need to use them.* (P9)

Similarly, a WHS professional suggested,

have a discussion with your remote worker in and around something as uninteresting, and as unemotional as a risk assessment. You're going to get an outcome, but if we wait for law, codes of practice, you just won't achieve anything because that is slow and cumbersome. (P14)

The same WHS professional also noted that there was generally a lack of skills in this area, saying,

a lot of Australian leaders are very ill-equipped to actually know how to deal with it [psychosocial hazards], and there has not been Codes of Practice. (P14)

One of the regulators suggested that while there may be a need to improve competencies in managing psychosocial hazards, it is a two way conversation, saying,

unless the worker has trust and confidence in that system, they may not disclose any of that [information]. So that comes back to the legislation. I think, in that reasonably practicable space. (P10)

The focus group data suggests that working from home arrangements are challenging perceptions about the organisation's obligations, and ability, to provide a psychologically safe workplace for flexible workers, particularly when there is a lack of consensus about where, and when, an employee's home can be considered an extension of the workplace. Working from home challenged perceptions of WHS obligations, as one WHS professional noted,

It's very hard if this psychosocial issue is something that's not really related to work, and that the only link is the fact that they're working from home on some of their week. (P22)

The systems level focus was on the external environment, and the overarching question was about privacy, particularly, the line between work and home. By contrast, the regulators were more focused on the legislative requirements about the 'Right of Entry' to a workplace, and consequently, were not as clear about where the line should be drawn in relation to working from home. One participant said

I haven't looked into whether there's enough legal precedents around that, or enough cases to support businesses to say this is where we draw the line. Usually it's at your front gate or your front door, not necessarily on the inside. (P10)

They went on to identify a perceived regulatory gap saying,

the legislation doesn't allow us to go into someone's house purely because they are working there [...] So that's a gap in the legislation. (P10)

The WHS professionals put this into context saying,

Do we start the risk assessment from the sidewalk? from the driveway? from the door? [..] but then does that bring up a privacy concern? (P23)

Privacy was identified as an issue in some focus groups, with participants raising concerns about the risk of invading the personal privacy of an employee/colleague, questioning,

how can an organisation influence the design and setup of your own home? (P10)

In particular, there were concerns about safety and a lack of clarity about the line between work and home, with one WHS professional explaining that,

We have heard about the fact that there were increased rates of domestic abuse and violence over the last year, when more people were at home. But again, where do we draw the line on? That's a very difficult one for an employer to have any impact on in terms of if somebody is already living in that situation. (P22)

Overall, the participants suggested that psychosocial risk identification is not linear, nor necessarily rational (or causal) like physical or mechanical hazards; as such, a self-assessed check-box list of risks that a flexible worker completes and submits will not suffice. While internal surveys and informal data collection were being conducted by some managers, they did not include the formal collection of information about psychosocial hazards for flexible workers.

5.2.2 Senior management/organisation

Table 5.2.2: Key themes: senior management/organisation

Key Themes	Descriptor
Psychological safety, hazard identification and reporting	There was a perception that reporting was impacted by the maturity of the WHS system, together with accessibility and the willingness of flexible workers to report hazards in their homes or other alternative locations.
Changing attitudes for flexible work and psychological safety	There was a perception that there are changing attitudes towards psychological safety and flexible work; however, working from home or alternative locations is not universally accepted as being a part of the future of work.
Commitment, senior management trust and organisational policy is critical	There was a perception that the commitment and trust from senior leaders, and consistency in leadership approaches towards flexible working were critical for the psychological safety of flexible workers.
Recognition of psychological safety as an aspect of WHS	There was a perception that the importance of psychological safety, regardless of where the work is conducted, is not embraced as an important aspect of WHS.
Lack of clarity between WHS or HR responsibilities	There was a perception that there is a lack of clarity in some organisations about whether psychological safety is a human resources or WHS responsibility.
Capacity building for WHS professionals	There was a perception that there was room to improve the capability of WHS personnel in regard to psychological safety and flexible work.

Where organisations had existing systems with online portals for accessing WHS materials, participants suggested that current processes could cater for flexible workers, with one WHS professional saying,

> *If your current existing system has an emphasis on immediately reporting hazards near misses and incidents or injuries in the workplace, it's easy enough because you go onto your online portal.* (P23)

A sentiment echoed by another WHS professional, saying,

> *psychosocial issue or whatever they still can report it in using exactly the same process.* (P21)

Participants raised concerns about the barriers to reporting risks and hazards with one WHS professional saying,

> *I think there is a bit of a reluctance to report issues that arise from home because people view them as having fair control over it and therefore what they're admitting is their own failings.* (P21)

Other participants agreed, with one regulator noting that,

> *people [are] fearful that if they're working flexibly and remotely if they start raising issues that they may have to then not work remotely* (P15)

Some participants explained that where employees were encouraged to report psychological hazards, there needed to be leadership and commitment at an organisational level to provide the level of support needed for flexible workers with diverse needs. One regulator commented on this suggesting,

> *I want you to report if you've got a sore back because you've been sitting on the couch with your laptop all day. But if domestic violence is a thing for you as well, I want you to let us know so that we can provide you with an alternative location to go to. That comes back to, again, that leadership, that commitment [it is] more than the base level requirements of the legislation.* (P10)

If psychological hazards were reported, some participants suggested that the maturity of the organisation would influence the capability of existing systems, WHS personnel and managers to respond. One line manager posed the question,

> *How do you lift the maturity or provide guidance generally to organisations on work, health and safety? … because this is just one small component of a broader issue.* (P4)

Similarly, a WHS professional said that they thought that,

> *The mental health aspect of health and safety isn't mature enough for health and safety professionals with low levels of training to actually stick their neck out, because what do you do?* (P14)

Overall, the data suggested a need to ensure that reporting systems are accessible, and that the organisation has policies, procedures and personnel sufficiently trained to support psychological safety at work for flexible workers, particularly those working from home.

The focus group participants suggested that there were changing attitudes towards flexible working with many organisations recognising that flexible working will be a part of work into the future. One HR manager said that their executive instigated a review of their flexible working policy, because clearly things have changed because of COVID-19.

> *We renewed that policy […] and in that policy we actually said remote working is now just part of the way that we're going to work.* (P6)

Several participants thought that organisations needed to be proactive in this area, with one WHS professional saying,

> *I think remote working just can't afford to be bureaucratic, so I like the idea of organisations writing a procedure. I think organisations should be thinking around what they do if they see hazards and risks because I think it's good for people to have a bit of a guide.* (P14)

In contrast, one WHS profession warned that,

> *Many organisations are still viewing the idea of flexible work as a temporary measure […] I don't believe they've actually said going forward, we're going to have a greater element of flexible workers and therefore we need to more specifically reference that within the overall system and processes.* (P21)

But one regulator, was optimistic about changing attitudes and organisational leadership saying:

> *I do see a lot of people doing a lot of good work. It might be taking some time to filter down and it's not as strongly supported through legislation as people might think when it comes down to what a regulator could do about it. If they have issues raised with us, we would have a systems based approach. […] My view is that a lot of places are really getting up to speed because they can see the advantages of having these things put in place appropriately.* (P20)

Several participants questioned the preparedness of organisations, with a flexible worker noting that,

> *The organisation that I'm currently working in haven't even articulated the concept of psychosocial. […] Everyone works in a highly regulated environment and their work health and safety framework is very extensive [but] they haven't even considered psychological safety.* (P11)

When asked *Do you do you think that organisations are actively considering the psychosocial risks of flexible work?*, one regulator said,

> *I don't think they are. I think they draw the line at are we connected?* going on to say *many workplaces do not see their role in managing the mental health aspects of safety.* (P10)

There were suggestions that organisations need to consider the language that they are using in relation to psychosocial needs. For example, one WHS professional suggested that when using psychosocial or psychological safety, it is necessary to say,

> *includes, but not limited to, bullying, harassment, discrimination, [etc.]. And then people go, "OK, it's just a new word for what we've been doing for 100 years".* (P14)

There were also suggestions to integrate psychological safety and flexible work into broader organisational strategies, as one line manager explained,

> *we're sort of talking about a silo topic, but a lot of it links into your broader strategic plans or to directions for an organization.* (P4)

While the consensus was that there was a need for a distinct flexible working policy, there was the awareness that such a policy needs to be coherent and coordinated with other organisational strategies and procedures (e.g. social media policy, wellbeing policy, HR policies) to ensure that leaders understand what has changed and how it is impacting employees and to ensure that work is not designed to allow psychological injuries to occur (prevention).

Across all of the focus groups, participants highlighted the importance of leadership, with one regulator commenting,

> *Clear communication managing the expectations. This is how your team is set up. This is what your role requires. These are the touch points. Having agreed ways that you can communicate, and I think managing those expectations from the top level.* (P10)

This is consistent with the view of one of the flexible workers, who noted,

> *If you have leaders who are very inclusive and mature say, authentic leaders or transformational leaders, then a flexible working arrangement is more likely to be successful.* (P11)

This was supported by the negative experience of a flexible worker who was disappointed in their organisation's lack of commitment and leadership in this area, saying,

> *You've got an organisation who you've just literally spent one year keeping afloat by working from home, and actually being more productive, doing it for them. [For the organisation] to come back and say "we get the interest of flexible workplace arrangements, we want to allow you to do this", but make it virtually impossible* [to work flexibly from home]. (P3)

Organisational trust underpinned the success of flexible working as one regulator explained,

> *I guess there's an element of trust there, isn't it? If you want to work from home, these are the rules around it. And then I guess the employer has to put some faith in the employee to do the right thing.* (P16)

Senior Management and organisational commitment are really important for WHS to be effective. It is imperative to have top leadership commitment and for senior managers and supervisors to support flexible work, however, there appears to be inconsistent management commitment across organisations according to participants. The participants suggested that trust impacts how flexible workers accessed the support that was offered to them by the organisation, as one flexible worker explained, an employee assistance program was available,

> *but unfortunately it's not something that everyone used [...] people don't have trust in the fact that it is confidentia*l. (P2)

Both the WHS personnel and the regulators highlighted that the introduction of legislation, policies, procedures and processes would need to be accompanied by education and training for key WHS personnel and managers. As two participants noted,

> *The Health and Safety Representatives, they don't really have any more skills [than the] people they work with. They've got no special training.* (Senior Manger, P1)

> *Working from home might be flushing out underlying anxiety or depression anyway, and I think a lot of health and safety people will just tap out in what they can do about it. And should they?* (WHS Professional, P14).

The regulators suggested that some managers and WHS personnel may be reluctant because they are not psychologists, suggesting a need for,

> *shifting that safety message [and providing an adequate] level of education and encouraging them, to say, well, you can do this'.* (P9)

A WHS perspective was offered by one WHS professional,

> *I think many workplace health and safety professionals and practitioners, probably do tap out when it comes to seeing psychological, psychosocial hazards as part of their remit, either because it's an HR issue, or because of their own skills and capabilities. (P14)*

Across all of the focus groups, there was discussion about the role of the organisation in the mental health aspects of safety, which typically raised concerns, as one senior manager explained,

> *I've found it's actually always been difficult in the office setting to get people to care about work, health and safety. And with a lot of people being remote, it's even harder because they're in their own home'* [going on to say] *'it was hard enough in the office, let alone when they're at home. And that's just not part of the workplace as far as I think most people see it.* (P1)

A related discussion took place in some of the other focus groups about the delineation between psychosocial safety being a HR or WHS issue. One senior manager commented,

> *People don't usually describe that as a work health and safety issue. They just describe it as a bullying issue. So it's more about an HR issue. They don't see it as a health and safety issue … If I was confronted with a situation that with one of my staff my first port of call I suppose would probably be HR, I would probably go to them and expect them to have some kind of tools or to provide the assistance that I need to deal with it. (P1)*

However, the capability of HR in this area is also unknown with one WHS professional saying,

> *I don't even know if my HR Department has any tools. They might be just as confronted as I am*. (P14)

As highlighted above, there are genuine concerns about managing psychosocial risks and the reluctance of some WHS personnel and managers to respond due to concerns about their capabilities. At the organisational level, the data suggests that there is a need for systems that support capacity building, clarity around organisational roles, responsibilities and support

mechanisms, and clearer messaging on expectations focused more on prevention, such as work design to minimise the risk of psychological injury.

5.2.3 Line management

Table 5.2.3: Key themes: line management

Key Themes	Descriptor
Line management trust	There is a perception that it all comes down to trust and everything else is supplemental. Senior management trust (discussed previously) was espoused in policies and resources for flexible workers; this was distinguishable from line management trust, which was more relationship-based.
Increased manager workloads and stresses	There is a perception that maintaining healthy working relationships with flexible workers increases the workload and work-related stresses for managers.
Capacity building for line managers to identify and manage psychological hazards	There is a perception that some line managers may lack the necessary skills and attributes (e.g. self awareness, emotional intelligence) to identify psychosocial hazards and manage vulnerable flexible workers.

A common theme in all of the focus groups was the role of line management trust which was captured in the words of one line manager,

> *Basically it comes down to trust and commitment and all the other tools are obviously supplementary to assist the wellbeing of the employee working from home.* (P12)

Participants suggested that managers need to understand their team and use their emotional intelligence to determine which team members require regular check-ins to see how they are, and which team members may not want to discuss personal stressors and concerns. The narrative around line managers regularly checking in with team members working flexibly from home or other alternative locations emphasised the need to stay connected, but cautioned that too much checking in might be perceived as micro-management (or perhaps surveillance). One regulator noted,

> *Calling me everyday like two times a day to check on me, and then it might be, I guess like from a management point of view, then maybe I'm just checking the health and wellbeing. But to workers they might be perceived differently. So having that almost, like trust, that mutual agreement in terms of that that system.* (P10)

On the same theme, a flexible worker said

> *I don't like to be checked on regularly and I would consider it as a micromanagement*. (P2)

This narrative suggested that a framework is only a starting point, flexible workers have different needs and a one-size fits all approach is not going to work.

For line managers, when a large proportion of their team are working flexibly from home or other alternative locations, there is an additional burden on their workload as they work to remain connected and work inclusively with their diverse teams. While a lot of attention has been given to the needs of flexible workers, including the importance of working inclusively and for managers to remain connected with remote workers, the focus group participants highlighted the impacts on line managers,

> *We need to also consider the psychological impact for managers […] There's a lot of staff that like to have line of sight to their manager. So when you've got a number of staff that keep calling that individual manager because they want that touch point. The stress then is on that manager because they've got their own work to do, but yet there constantly fielding calls from staff as well.* (P15)

As well as workload increases, according to one WHS professional, who said,

> *remote working is pushing so many leaders into an extension of their normal comfort zone*. (P14)

Another WHS professional captured the sentiments of many participants saying,

> *Think how many managers were ill equipped to manage remote workforces because they never had before, and there wasn't even any suggestion that they would need to and then suddenly it happened overnight.* (P22)

Overall, participants identified a potential lack of knowledge in how to identify a psychological risk, and supported the development of a toolbox for flexible working, with one senior manager commenting,

> *I think having a toolbox just around the psychosocial type of issues would be really helpful for a manager because you're not, you're not physically in the same room as these people. So, you're not picking up the signs, so you probably need some guidance around how you can have a conversation with people just to better understand […] what stresses they are under.* (P8)

Some managers could draw from experience, as one WHS explained,

> *If they've had a personal experience, I find a lot of leaders know what to do and do take the bull by the horns and lead appropriately. But if it's never been an experience to them, I think they just need more time.* (P14)

Furthermore, other participants suggested that while some managers may be able to identify a psychosocial risk, many do not know how to manage the risk once identified. As one regulator explained,

> *I've had that feedback from managers dealing with psychosocial issues that they've managed to identify it, but they just don't know what to do from that point, so they get to a certain step and then it's, and it's very difficult, and then it gets put in the too hard basket.* (P15)

This point was illustrated by one senior manager commenting,

> *As a manager, I would have literally no idea how to handle that [staff member in a domestic violence situation]. No idea whatsoever. I wouldn't even know where to begin.* (P1)

Similarly, a line manager said, '*I felt extremely ill equipped to deal with things like mental health'* (P4). This perceived lack of skills and experience was viewed optimistically by one WHS professional who proposed that,

> *It's a missed opportunity if a line manager doesn't actually find their own way forward, particularly if a permanency around remote work is likely, which it is. So I think, and I know, you get to that point where you put all your faith in WHS or HR. One of the things about remote workers is that line managers have got to be much more whole brained around every likely scenario because you're in people's homes and remote working is stretching everybody.* (P14)

At the line manager level, a need for training about identifying psychosocial risks, as well as training for managers in the next steps once risks have been identified, were frequently raised by participants. Along with the co-design of the model in the focus groups, participants contributed to the formation of a toolbox for flexible workers offering suggestions based on their experience and their perspective about best practice ways to provide managers and flexible workers with resources, especially tools that would assist managers and flexible workers to identify psychosocial hazards which are much harder (and less linear) to spot when compared with physical and mechanical workplace hazards. The toolbox for flexible working is described in more detail in 5.3.

5.2.4 Team and individual environment

Table 5.2.4: Key themes: Team and individual environment

Key Themes	Descriptor
Regular two-way communication about WHS	There was a perception that regular communication with flexible workers about WHS was important for open communication about psychological safety.

Flexible worker WHS responsibilities	There was a perception that flexible workers themselves needed to also take responsibility for WHS when working flexibly from home or other alternative locations.
Understand yourself and your team	There was perception that the more that the team understood themselves and each other, the better a team with flexible workers will perform, and WHS risks and hazards will be mitigated.

At the team level, regular communication was a key theme, with a clear thread linking communication at the organisational and senior management level with that of line managers, teams and individuals. For this component of the model, the data includes the responsibilities of individuals and teams in communication, which complements the data from previous sections which highlighted the role of regulators, organisations, senior leaders and managers. As one flexible worker noted,

> *We have already identified that there is a challenge with communication when we are working remotely and we are not physically in one space. That's the big step but from there for not only the manager but for the rest of the team.* (P2)

The participants suggested that teams need to know how to work with each other both in the office and remotely, with one senior manager saying,

> *I guess it's really just about getting to know the people you're working with.* (P8)

This was echoed by a line manager who said, that line managers

> *need to know your team very well to understand when they are actually telling you what it is or not*. (P12)

Similarly, participants suggested that the flexible worker also has WHS responsibilities, with one line manager saying,

> *The workers themselves, employees themselves need to see it as important checking with their managers and things because managers don't know what they don't know.* (P13)

On the same theme, a flexible working suggested a need to humanise the working relationship, saying,

> *I think managers are also to be looked after by their team members to put ourselves in the other person shoes and not thinking of this whole thing as a framework. It's about being human and having a good sense of our own feelings to be able to feel other people too. (P2)*

The identification and mitigation of risks needs to involve the line manager, and the flexible worker, talking through (on terms as equal as possible) the challenges and risks that they may face as a flexible worker. Strategies must then be put in place to mitigate the identified risks. With a foundation built on trust and clear communication, the participants suggested that WHS should then be established as a regular conversation, with one senior manager saying,

> *I think probably one of the most important things is probably just to ensure that you are talking about WHS quite regularly with everyone, so it just becomes part of the chat.* (P8)

Participants highlighted that it is a two-way conversation with one WHS professional noting,

> *The good thing, if we could think about risk assessment, is that it is two-way communication … I think the most effective way of actually dealing with something that's on you, [is] putting power in the right place, which is in the hands of the remote worker.* (P14)

This issue of two-way communication was woven through the narrative, with managers saying,

> *I think it's up to the workers too* [(P8), and] *it all comes down to the commitment not only from the top senior management. It comes from the workers as well if they want to have the flexible working from home arrangement* (P12).

5.2.5 Genuine participation between management and flexible workers

The analysis of the data identified that the key theme for *Genuine participation between management and flexible workers* is: working together for WHS. One WHS professional suggested that working together for WHS and flexible working will start with involving our leaders,

> *This is the way of work moving forward and for the next at least two-to-three years it's going to be a fact finding mission, it's going to be information gaining from our workforce to actually make them feel involved and to be actually part of something bigger.* (P23)

For flexible workers to genuinely participate in WHS systems, organisations need a strong culture of WHS, and participation must be meaningful and not just 'lip service' (P23). In other words, it is a capacity-building exercise underpinned by continuous improvement, whereby both the manager and the flexible worker are working together for a psychologically safe workplace. One regulator suggested that with genuine participation, there is a clear line of connection with flexible workers

> *knowing who I go to and what process I use, that clarity as well. Clarity. Transparency. Accessibility.* (P9)

The next section presents the findings of resourcing, highlighting that the flexible workers have varying resourcing needs, as such, genuine participation can be demonstrated through organisational commitment, as one WHS professional suggested,

> *If I'm a person who's been either allowed to be flexible, allowed to be working from home flexibly, what is the organisation actually doing for me to set it up at home appropriately, and second of all, is it just lip service to say, hey, what is it that you need?* (P23)

5.2.6 Resourcing of flexible working at all levels

The analysis of the data identified two key themes for resourcing flexible working at all levels: provision of suitable resources, and resources tailored to the needs of flexible working. In the regulator's focus group, it was noted that:

> *The legislation doesn't prescribe that you need to have a work health and safety management system, it tells you that you must eliminate or manage the risk and what that looks like for any kind of business - small, medium, micro is quite varied so that maturity is really important. [Regarding] resources and tools, I guess, anything, but [it] needs to be tailored towards the audience and then the level of maturity to get the true impact of change*. (P10)

The focus on managing risk in the legislation was discussed further, including the existence of a draft Code of Practice for managing psychological health, which the NSW government had open for comment at the time of the focus group. The regulators suggested that there was a real appetite for stakeholders, workers and those with lived experience to want to know more about psychological health at work, saying,

> *So, the tools in the field are helpful.* (P10)

In terms of whether organisations were meeting the resourcing needs of flexible workers, one WHS focus group member posed the question,

> *Do we provide enough resources for people to be able to be psychologically safe in the workplace*? (P23)

This statement suggests that resourcing psychological safety when working from home and other alternative locations, is an extension of resourcing psychological safety in the office. Another WHS professional noted that,

> *It's hard to suddenly resource people to do, to manage people remotely*. (P22)

Generally, there was consensus that resourcing the physical remote office with equipment was possible if the organisation were committed to flexible work saying,

> *So it's one thing to tell them now you're going to be working from home and we don't want you to fall over but it's also another to put your money where your mouth is and say, well here is the kit or the tool kit that we've followed up with the local Officeworks and this is your Take-Home-Ready-Kit.* (P23)

The amount and type of resources that flexible workers were provided when asked to work from home in 2020 differed greatly across organisations. The one consistent aspect of resourcing in the narrative was the need for senior management commitment, leadership and support if flexible workers are to be adequately resourced, and this will become even more pertinent as more and more organisations operate in a hybrid model where employees are working flexibly from alternative locations and the office. The following section expands on findings from this part of the model, which prescribes resourcing for flexible workers at all levels, to look more closely at what focus group participants would like to see in a toolbox for flexible working.

5.3 Toolbox for flexible working

In the centre of the model (Figure 5.1) is the *toolbox* for flexible working, forming part of the work system that supports psychological safety at all levels of the system, including policy, systems, and practices. Table 5.3 provides a brief descriptor of the tools and resources that participants suggested the toolbox contain, using the systems-level perspectives and key themes discussed in the previous sections to show how the toolbox for flexible working can address some of the concerns raised in the focus groups.

Table 5.3: Key themes: toolbox for flexible working

Key Themes	Descriptor
External environment: macro-level tools for psychological safety at work.	Accessible resources and tools including legislation, guidelines and policy templates. Clarity about roles and responsibilities for psychological safety at work.
Senior management/ Organisation: Flexible working into the future	Given the propensity for hybrid models of home-based and office-based workers to form future working arrangements, organisations and senior leaders need best practice resources and tools for WHS and flexible working.
Senior management/ Organisation: WHS policy, procedures and processes for flexible working	A best practice toolbox for flexible workers should contain tools for managers and employees to ensure that the working conditions are 'adequate' and accessible to remote workers with regard to psychosocial safety systems (e.g. risk assessment, forms, checklists).
Senior management/ Organisation: Training specific to flexible working for managers and employees	A best practice toolbox should contain tools and resources customised to the needs of managers and flexible workers. While some tools would be universally valuable to all managers and employees, participants suggested that there be tools aimed at

	managers and tools aimed at flexible workers to respond to different WHS challenges and responsibilities.
Senior management/ Organisation: Accessing professional assistance	This theme extends on the provision of accessible services for managers and employees, such as Employee Assistance Programs to mechanisms to assist managers and flexible workers to know when to seek professional assistance and the types of professional support services that are available.
Senior management/ Organisation: Communication	Organisations need to provide resources and tools for managers and flexible workers to communicate more effectively, particularly where there is less face-to-face communication.
Senior management/ Organisation: Measuring performance	There is a need for tools that assist organisations in measuring aspects of performance that nurture psychological safety (e.g. KPIs for engagement, indicators of psychosocial health).
Senior management/ Organisation: Collecting, monitoring and using WHS data	Validated surveys and online tools are needed to collect data, and monitor wellbeing, the organisational climate, and engagement with flexible working. Best practice surveys and data collection tools could improve current practices, particularly, for monitoring and how to use the data for aspects of WHS, like psychological safety.
Line managers: Capacity Building and interpersonal skills	There is a perception that capacity building for line managers, as well as training and resources to support the development of the type of interpersonal skills suited to managing flexible workers is needed (e.g. self-awareness, empathy, emotional intelligence).
Team and individual: Team code of practice for flexible working	There was a perception that tools and resources aimed to assist teams to develop their own 'Code of Practice' about the best ways to work together, inclusive of flexible workers with diverse needs, were essential for psychological safety at work.

Using a systems-level approach, the key themes in Table 5.3 show opportunities for supporting the integration of aspects of psychosocial safety in WHS systems, work design and organisational policies, procedures, and processes. In the focus groups, participants identified the need for resources and tools for the psychosocial aspects of WHS for flexible working.

Beyond communicating the need for tools and resources, participants provided pragmatic solutions from their experiences with flexible working in their organisations. This project is tasked with the development of a framework for psychologically safe flexible work and associated tools and resources in line with the needs identified by our study participants. In this regard, some prototype 'flexible work psychosocial risk assessment' type tools are provided in the appendices to this Phase 3 report, while further work will develop a best practice guide with tools and resources for both managers and flexible workers. These two tools were provided in response to a common call for support in assessing psychosocial risks for flexible workers in the organisation (Appendix B), and also to reflect where organisations are in their maturity development in relation to the factors related to WHS engagement by flexible workers (Appendix C). Beyond these prototypes, the richness of the data collected in the study provided an opportunity to report a wide range of tools and resources that participants would like to see a toolbox for flexible workers

comprise. While the initial narrative was about 'a toolbox', it became evident that the participants perceived that managers and employees have different needs, as noted by a line manager,

> *This is for me, a tool kit for managers that I see here. What about the tool kit for employees?* (P12)

This sentiment was repeated in the focus group narrative, hence, section 5.3.1 describes the participants' suggestions for the contents of 'a toolbox for managers' and 5.3.2 describes the participants' suggestions for the contents of a 'toolbox for employees' for flexible working.

5.3.1 Tools for flexible working - Managers

The data analysis suggests that the toolbox for managers should include baseline resources and training for managers which would include onboarding flexible workers, navigating the employee-manager relationship, how to manage feelings of isolation, knowing when to seek professional assistance, knowing the type of services that are available, and resources for team building in ways that are inclusive for flexible workers. There was also a perceived need for capacity building for managers in foundational interpersonal skills and behaviours (e.g. self-awareness, emotional intelligence, empathy). Also, the toolbox should include resources about how to build relationships and have regular communication with remote workers, and ways to,

> [make] *sure that you do have those regular touch points with employees* (HR Manager, P6)

More advanced resources were suggested for aspects of managing flexible workers, such as what to do if a hazard has been identified in a flexible worker's home or another alternative location. The participants suggested resources and tools tailored to the needs of identifying and managing risks for flexible working, including risks assessment checklists and training in how to conduct a risk assessment when an employee is working from home or another alternative locaton, with one HR manager saying, managers needed resources to help them to understand,

> *How do they monitor risks and anticipate them? What are they? How do they identify them?* (P5).

The participants suggested that advanced training and resources should also include managing flexible workers where psychological safety risks and hazards exist in the home or other alterative work locations when they are 'at work', and about how to have necessary (or difficult) conversations (e.g. performance management, boundary setting) when it is not possible to meet with flexible workers in person.

Participants suggested that managers need resources to build their capacity and knowledge about psychological safety for flexible working, know how to access resources within the organisation, and assess the suitability of external services (e.g. confidence that the EAP is

equipped for the needs of flexible workers). One senior manager explained when they would use such resources saying,

> *I'd probably go and talk to a professional and get a bit more advice around what to do. You know if you're starting to get worried.* (P8)

In addition, several participants suggested that the managers need practical tools and resources, such as

> *Mental Health First Aid [which] gives you instructions around* [what to do]. (P14).

Looking to the future, participants suggest that managers will need tools and resources in how to manage hybrid teams, where team members are working in both office-based and home or other alternative locations. The toolkit for managers could include case studies to showcase success stories as some organisations are further along this path, with one HR manager saying,

> *we've actually developed a flexible working toolkit for leaders to use with their teams, and that's all about how you have the conversations about determining flexible working and remote working to make sure that everyone has a say, but also that everyone's needs are met.* (P5)

5.3.2 Tools for flexible working – Employees

The tools suggested for employees were mainly to assist employees with their roles and responsibilities for the WHS aspects of their work environment, and ways in which they could implement strategies and behaviours that supported their own physical and psychological safety.

Several participants suggested that psychological safety was a shared responsibility of both employees and managers, with one senior manager suggesting that organisations need to,

> *arm them [employees] with the tools to manage or start managing their own isolated work. Let's grow it or work it because what I'm seeing here is all around managers. How we need to manage it.* (P12)

The participants in the regulators' homogenous focus group suggested a need for tools and resources for identifying and reporting risks and hazards, because

> *workers need to know how to detect [mental illness] as well sometimes.* (P9)

They also need resources to be looking after themselves and their colleagues, understanding themselves, building resilience, and boundary management which includes,

> *setting your own boundaries as well.* (P15)

When discussing the employee's WHS responsibilities, the focus group, the discussions focused on identifying, reporting and managing psychological safety. Therefore, along with the barriers discussed earlier at the external environment and senior management/organisation systems levels, such as regulation about entering homes for risks assessments and access to WHS systems for reporting, there was also a focus on the responsibility and capability of employees in identifying and reporting risks and hazards when working from home. One WHS professional said that,

> *there is a bit of a reluctance to report issues that arise from home … so it doesn't happen as regularly as it would necessarily* [in the office] (P21)

Other participants described checklists for physical hazards but noted that they did not extend to identifying psychological hazards for flexible workers. In the WHS focus group, there was consensus that ideally, systems need to support managers and flexible workers,

> *to ensure that hazard reports and near-miss reports come through as opposed to incidents and injuries* (P23)

Overall, the inclusion of a toolbox for employees revealed that, where organisations prescribe to the view that there was a shared responsibility for WHS and flexible working, particularly where employees are working from home, there was an awareness that resources will need to be provided. The focus group participants suggested that the tools and resources provided for employees should include how to identify and report psychological hazards in the home and other alternative remote locations and how to promote self-care.

6. Discussion

6.1 Key findings

The key objective for this phase of the study was to develop a model of best practice for flexible working arrangements that is inclusive of flexible workers with diverse demographic characteristics. To address this aim, a series of focus groups were conducted and emerging themes were identified. Based on these themes, the analysis of the focus groups also identified best practice recommendations that organisations can apply to improve their WHS systems, ensuring the inclusion of flexible workers within a psychologically safe work environment.

The present study revealed that current regulations and guidance materials do not adequately reflect the changing nature of work, and particularly the shift to remote working for such a large proportion of the knowledge workers in NSW. However, the original objectives of this project were to consider psychosocial risks associated with flexible working outside of the context of the pandemic. It is likely, therefore, that the COVID-related restrictions on work have accelerated the introduction of new ways of working to such an extent that the limitations in current regulatory guidance are more evident than they would have been under 'normal' conditions.

Further, the findings from this Phase of the study provided a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the emergent challenges. This is illustrated by our conceptual model for WHS engagement for flexible workers (Figure 5.1) which considered the emergent themes from the focus groups and their relationship to each other from the systems perspective. The systems model highlighted the need to consider the problem of how organisations can improve their WHS systems and processes to ensure the inclusion of flexible workers within a psychologically safe work environment from a multi-level perspective. Within our conceptual model for WHS engagement for flexible workers, individual worker engagement with WHS and psychological safety are influenced directly and indirectly by each of the outer layers of the model. The emergent themes from the focus groups for each of these layers were presented in the previous section, and provide a narrative of our findings from the focus groups for each of the layers. In this section, we use the systems perspective to discuss our findings in relation to what is currently known in the existing literature. We then consider the practical implications of our findings for the NSW Government, organisations, and flexible workers, as well as the broader implications for WHS and flexible work in Australia.

6.1.1 Legislation and regulation

The external environment has a significant role to play in building a strong foundation for WHS and flexible work, not only as a driver for change through legislation and regulation, but also in providing guidance about the scope and parameters for key actors in adapting to the emerging challenges of working within traditional WHS systems. These WHS systems were largely

developed for traditional office-based workplace arrangements. Our findings suggest that a more tailored approach may be necessary given the speed at which working from home was implemented, and the subsequent normalisation of flexible work practices as the community recovers from the pandemic.

The overarching system needs to regulate and provide the guidance crucial for organisations with WHS systems of varying maturity, and diverse WHS cultures, so as to deliver psychological safety inclusive of flexible workers. Addressing challenges such as clearly defining the 'workplace' for flexible workers and guidance about the boundary for home and work would go some way towards creating the parameters needed to conduct risk assessments. Implementing legislation and regulation providing the same clarity for psychological risks as has been implemented for physical risks is a priority for WHS and flexible working. However, as Robelski and Sommer (2020), and Johnstone, Quinlan and Walters (2005) note, questions remain about how these regulations could be enforced in a private home.

6.1.2 Identifying and reporting psychological hazards

In both Phase 2 and Phase 3, there was a perception among participants that the intangible nature of psychological safety would be one of the biggest challenges to overcome. As such, implementing WHS systems and processes to assess and monitor psychological risks at work is hindered by a lack of suitable tools and understanding about how to identify and monitor psychological hazards. Robelshi and Sommer (2020) highlighted the difficulties associated with the scarcity of adequate instruments highlighting, as our study also found, that traditionally WHS systems are still focused on identifying, assessing and controlling physical hazards. In our study there was a general understanding that the risks may be greater for flexible workers, particularly when they are regularly working at home in isolation, and that these risks may go unidentified. Indeed, there was a sense that if there was a lack of motivation to address an issue that could be more readily 'seen' in a workplace, there would also be a lack of motivation to address an issue which, at this point in time, is largely 'unseen'. Interestingly, some of the feedback in focus groups indicated that psychosocial hazards associated with flexible work have received fresh attention, particularly because of the pandemic, although these hazards were not well managed under normal circumstances. This suggests the need for cultural change where psychological health and safety is given equal prominence to physical risks in hazard management. To support this cultural shift, awareness strategies should focus attention throughout the organisation on the importance of psychosocial risks in the mental health of employees and for all employees to participate in psychological health and safety.

It is also important to note that some of the arguments that are evident in relation to psychosocial risks (independent of flexible work) were also evident in the findings of this study. For example, concerns about the degree of work-relatedness of psychological outcomes were raised (ie., rather than focusing on the sources of harm (hazards) that may be a feature of the system of work).

Furthermore, psychological safety was considered beyond the expertise of non-psychologists; a common reason given for non-engagement in psychosocial risk detection and management.

The Phase 3 findings highlighted some of the barriers to effective hazard management for flexible working, which are shown in Figure 6.1. Interestingly, many of the issues for flexible work, are consistent with the issue of WHS generally. In the quadrants: Competencies in psychosocial risks, Barriers to reporting, and Tools for hazard assessment; the barriers for flexible working are extensions of existing barriers for WHS systems and processes. Thus, competencies in psychosocial risk, reporting issues, and tools for hazard assessment are broad issues affecting WHS performance generally, and particularly affecting psychosocial risks. In the first quadrant (top left) there is a focus on the barriers specific to remote workplaces.

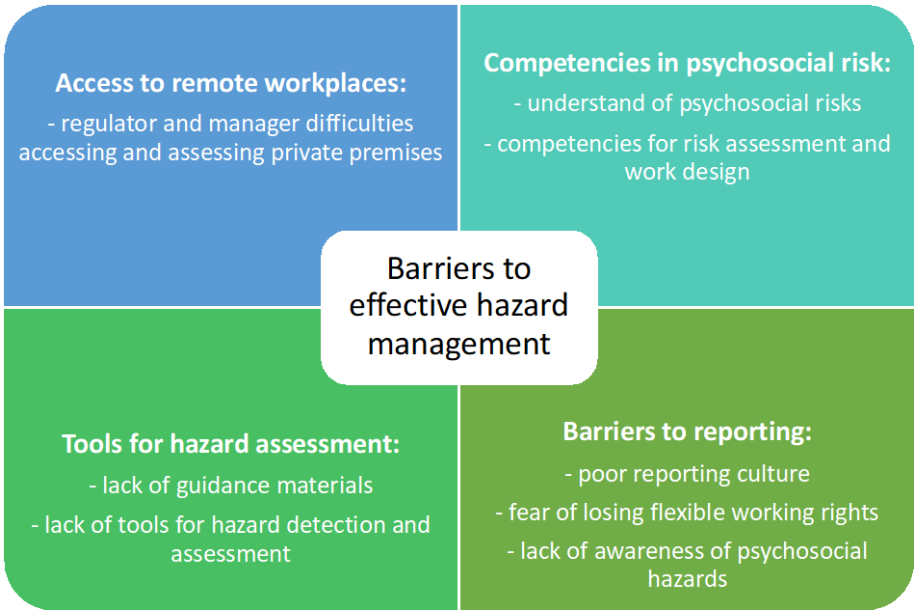

Figure 6.1 Barriers to effective hazard management for flexible work

6.1.3 WHS participation and compliance

In this Phase of the study, we found that there was a narrative describing the challenges with WHS participation and compliance which were consistent with the findings from Phases 1 and 2 of this study and previous research summarised elsewhere (Robelski and Sommer, 2020; Johnstone, Quinlan and Walters, 2005). The findings reflect poor engagement with, and awareness of, psychosocial hazards relative to other hazards, and generally reflect the common refrain that psychosocial hazards are "too complex". Thus, the findings support the growing awareness of the need for education, training, tools and resources to identify, report and manage psychological hazards in the workplace, and that these need to be inclusive of flexible workers.

6.1.4 Commitment, trust and culture

Effective WHS systems are driven by a WHS culture where there is senior management commitment to, and resourcing of, flexible working. Where there is a high level commitment from

senior management, line managers are supported, who in turn support and provide resources for their teams engaged in flexible working. In Phase 3, our findings highlight that commitment and trust from senior management are critical for the psychological safety of flexible workers. A point echoed in the Phase 2 findings from this project, and in studies such as Lee's (2021) study which found that socio-emotional resources, such as trust, had implications for maintaining high psychological safety. Further, at the line management level, trust was one of the most important aspects for flexible working highlighted in Phase 3, which is consistent with the findings in Phase 2, and with the current literature (e.g. Lee, 2021). Furthermore, in Phase 3, there was a perception that hazard identification and reporting may be impacted by the willingness of flexible workers to report hazards in their homes. Thus, our findings from Phase 3 are consistent with those of Phase 2, and reinforce the need for trust, commitment and processes supportive of an inclusive WHS system, where hazard identification and reporting is not at odds with employee access to flexible working.

6.1.5 Capacity and capability

In Phase 3 of this study the narrative highlighted that, in some organisations, there was a lack of clarity about where the responsibility for psychological safety rests, with some participants saying they would go to HR and others saying that it is a WHS responsibility. The lack of clarity was further confounded by a lack of confidence about whether HR or WHS personnel are sufficiently trained to identify and manage psychological risks and hazards for flexible workers. The Phase 3 findings were consistent with the findings from Phase 2 of our study, and were supported by comments from participants working in managerial, WHS and HR positions who confirmed that their organisation did not have a clear policy or process on what they should do if they identified a psychological hazard, particularly for vulnerable flexible workers, such as those working from home where there may be domestic violence occurring. The narrative about the capability within the organisation to identify and monitor psychological hazards suggests a potential gap in awareness and skills training for managerial and WHS personnel. The gap in skills and awareness in relation to psychosocial risks has been referred to by many researchers including Leka, Wassenhove and Jain (2015), Kyunk et al (2016) and Johnstone, Quinlan and McNamara (2011).

6.1.6 Workloads and work stresses

An increase in flexible working was associated with an increase in workload and work-related stress for line managers, which was reported in Phase 3, and is consistent with the findings from Phase 1, and Phase 2. Other studies have also reported that flexible working significantly increased the workload and work-related stress for employees and line managers (Eurofound, 2020; NSW Productivity Commission 2021). The rapid uptake of flexible working, and the focus on line managers to stay connected with their team when working flexibly from home or other alternative locations added responsibilities for line managers that, for many, were in addition to their pre-

COVID-19 pandemic work role. For many, these additional responsibilities associated with remote working were absorbed into existing workloads, which often led to extended work hours, and increased the emotional burden of supporting remote team members (NSW Productivity Commission 2021). In Phase 3 we found that there was a perception that where line managers were more self-aware, had higher levels of emotional intelligence, or were more reflective in their leadership approach, they were more effectively managing flexible workers. This extends on our findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2, where there was evidence that the capability and capacity of line managers to manage the additional workload associated with flexible working varied. This suggests that it may be advantageous for organisations to consider interpersonal skills training adapted to the flexible work environment, as well as WHS systems-focused training, on how to identify and monitor the psychological risks for flexible workers.

Similarly, in both Phase 2 and Phase 3, we found that there was a perception that individual characteristics impacted the ability of individual workers to be effective when working flexibly. Further, there appears to be a commonly held belief by the participants, which is supported by the literature, that the more people understand themselves and their teams, and the more open and regular the communication, the more likely it is that a team with flexible workers will be performing (Lee 2021). In both Phase 2 and Phase 3, flexible workers, reported that the increased workloads, together with poor boundary-management practices and remote working led to extended work days, which the literature suggests can increase workplace stress and impact their psychological health (Eurofound, 2020; NSW Productivity Commission 2021).

The Phase 3 findings, as with those of Phase 2, highlighted areas where baseline skills and abilities, particularly with regard to leadership, line management, WHS systems engagement, and teamwork, that we would expect to be in place in normal circumstances, were absent. In fact, for some organisations, flexible working exposed limitations in how they are operating in relation to supporting workers and WHS engagement.

6.1.7 Resourcing of flexible working

Resourcing of flexible working filters through each level of the four systems levels in our systems model for effective flexible worker engagement in WHS within a psychologically safe environment (Figure 5.1). From a systems perspective, adequate resourcing from the organisational/senior management level has a flow through effect to line managers, teams and individuals. In this Phase, we found that there needs to be a provision of suitable resources, and the resources need to be tailored to the needs of flexible working. This is consistent with the findings from Phase 2. Further, in Phase 3, the findings suggest that WHS systems that facilitate genuine participation for flexible workers, include adequate resourcing, suitable tools and a shared responsibility, lead to a safer flexible working environment. This reinforces the need for adequate tools and resources tailored to the need of flexible workers, as reported by Robelski and Sommer (2020) in their recent study.

In this Phase, we found that for WHS systems to be inclusive of flexible workers they must be accessible to flexible workers, and they must be tailored to meet their needs. In both Phase 2 and Phase 3, there were varying degrees of access to physical resources across organisations, such as complete home office fit-outs provided by the employer, approval to take some office equipment home, or being fully responsible for purchasing the home office furniture. In contrast, resourcing for psychological safety appeared to be limited to Employee Assistance Programs and activities that created social connections to minimise social isolation for remote workers.

6.1.8 Future of flexible work

In Phase 3, there was a perception that attitudes towards psychological safety and flexible work were changing, particularly as organisations were planning hybrid models for future work, where employees worked part of their time in the office and part of their time from home. The hybrid model described by focus group participants has been widely discussed by industry and proposed as potentially being a viable model of working into the future (NSW Innovation and Productivity Council, 2020; Swinburne University, 2020). In fact, NSW Innovation and Productivity Council (2020) reported that 67% of NSW workers expected to continue to work from home after the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is a momentum towards the hybrid model of flexible working, in Phase 3 we found that the inevitability of a hybrid model of working was not universally accepted, with a perception that some organisations and employees preferred work models where everyone was working in the same building (NSW Innovation and Productivity Council, 2020). Regardless of whether organisations have already moved towards hybrid work models of flexible working or not, many employees have voiced a preference for hybrid models. Moreover, it is likely that NSW businessses will need to support flexible working in response to future unforeseen events, just as we have observed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, it makes sense to ensure that WHS systems and processes are providing for psychological safety, inclusive of flexible workers.

In this study, we have focused on the ways in which the barriers and enablers affect WHS engagement for flexible workers. Using a systems approach to psychological hazards, we have considered the home-work interface for flexible workers, the competencies of managers and employees in regard to their WHS responsibilities, and the complexity of identifying, reporting and monitoring psychosocial hazards for employees working flexibly from home or other alternative locations. In terms of identifying and reporting psychological hazards, in Phase 3 of this project we identified a need for tools tailored to the needs of flexible working and have provided sample assessment and benchmarking tools suitable for flexible workers. These tools have been created through the co-design process by researchers and WHS personnel, flexible workers, managers of flexible workers, regulators and HR professionals; however, they have not yet been validated in an industry setting.

6.2 Practical implications

The key contribution of this study includes insights gained over the three distinct, yet related, Phases of the project. In Phase 1, our findings from a broad survey of more than one thousand NSW-based remote workers revealed that higher reported levels of psychosocial safety climate (which comprises senior management commitment to and prioritisation of psychological safety, support for workers and effective communication regarding psychological safety, and employee involvement in psychological safety) were associated with improved psychosocial conditions and better psychological health outcomes for flexible workers. Building on the findings from the Phase 1 survey, in Phase 2 our findings from interviews with NSW-based flexible workers and managers of flexible workers revealed that through the lens of the job demands and job resources model, individual workers have a range of both positive and negative experiences, some of which are associated with personal circumstances, many of which are associated with the work environment. Further, in Phase 2, the perspectives of flexible workers and managers of flexible workers revealed that for WHS engagement, the following areas warranted further investigation: regulatory and social environment, WHS engagement, WHS culture, safe egonomics design, responsibility for WHS, and WHS Management systems and processes. Hence, in Phase 3 the focus groups comprised knowledge leaders with expertise in these specific areas: Regulators, WHS and HR personnel, senior managers, line managers, and flexible workers, to gain a more nuanced understanding of psychological safety and flexible work.

Therefore, the practical implications described in this section are based on a sequential and iterative research design where we started with a broad brush approach, learning and refining the model over time until a draft model was co-designed by academics and industry representatives with experience and expertise in this area. In this report, we have presented the resultant model, *A systems model for effective flexible worker engagement in WHS within a psychologically safe environment* and provided a summary of the types of resources that would comprise a toolbox for flexible workers. Further, we have provided some protoype assessment tools, as these were considered a priority by participants. While they are based on robust research and sound models, it is important to note that these tools will require evaluation prior to adoption.

Our Phase 3 findings highlight the need to consider a multi-level systems approach if WHS systems and processes are to be inclusive of flexible workers within a psychologically safe work environment. Within these levels, consideration must be given to regulation and legislation that adequately protect organisations and flexible workers, particularly if hybrid models of flexible work are to continue into the future. Further, effective WHS systems should comprise resources and tools tailored to the needs of flexible workers for: identifying and reporting psychological hazards, WHS participation and compliance, fostering a WHS culture of trust and open communication, and integrated capacity and competence building mechanisms (e.g. training and education). Futher, organisations will need to provide adequate resourcing, monitor workloads and boundary management for flexible workers, and ensure that WHS systems and processes support a psychologically safe working environment inclusive of flexible workers.

7. Limitations

In conducting this research we encountered several limitations. Firstly, the study was conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions on in-person working have significantly altered and accelerated new ways of working and brought to the fore many of the shortcomings in current regulatory, organisational and management strategies and approaches to manage psychosocial risks associated with flexible work and working from home in particular. This backdrop to the study strongly influenced the study findings which is a major limitation and should be taken into account when considering the implications from this report. However, the timing of the study has also presented a unique opportunity to examine the difficulties engaging flxible workers in WHS during a period of forced flexibility, and many of the study's findings and recommendations have implications for the so called 'new normal' of a greater uptake across NSW in flexible working arrangements.

Another limitation of note is the possibility of a self-selection bias where NSW workers interested in the topic may have been more likely to participate in a focus group, although our recruitment strategy was purposeful for some components of our sample, and sought out people working in relevant positions (WHS personnel, regulators). Secondly, the aim of this phase of the study was to recruit participants with expertise from the pre-selected target groups to gather deeper insights into the challenges discussed in the focus groups. While this was achieved, it is noted that when recruiting participants to voluntarily participate in a focus group, it was not possible to obtain a sample that included participants with a wide range of demographical considerations, particularly diverse and vulnerable workers. Due to the ethical and practical considerations, as well as the voluntary nature of participation, we sought a diverse participant sample, and acknowledge that it may not be representative for diverse and vulnerable flexible workers.

Lastly, we note the use of an online platform for the facilitation of focus groups as a limitation for the study. Given, the frequent and rapid changes to travel and social distancing protocols for face-to-face meetings at the time this research was conducted, the online focus group format was deemed to be the most ethically, socially and financially responsible approach for this phase of the study. We acknowledge the perceived limitations of group communication using online meeting platforms; however, given the social and environmental impacts of COVID-19, and the impetus of using online platforms, such as the one used in this study to communicate with flexible workers, we do not believe that this approach impacted the type, depth or quality of the data collected.

8. Conclusions

This study utilised a co-design process, working collaboratively with key stakeholders through a series of focus group sessions, to develop a model of best practice for flexible working

arrangements that promotes participation in WHS by flexible workers, and psychologically safe flexible work environments. A key outcome of the study is a conceptual model for WHS engagement for flexible workers which incorporates the emergent themes from the focus groups and their relationship to each other from the systems perspective. The conceptual model is multi-level. From a systems perspective, the external environment has a significant role in building a strong foundation for WHS and flexible work, not only as a driver for change through legislation and regulation, but also for guidance related to emerging challenges of working within traditional WHS systems, largely developed with traditional office-based workplace arrangements in mind. At the organisational level, our findings highlight that commitment and trust from senior management is critical for the psychological safety of flexible workers, consistent with Phase 2 findings from this project, and the extant literature. According to our findings, implementing WHS systems and processes to assess and monitor psychological risks is hindered by a lack of suitable tools and understanding about how to identify and monitor psychological hazards, and in agreement with the literature, the study found that WHS systems are still focused on identifying, assessing and controlling physical hazards. Aligned with this gap, poor capability within organisations to identify and monitor psychological hazards suggests a potential shortcoming in awareness and skills training for managerial and WHS personnel. Resourcing of flexible work was another major barrier to employee wellbeing and performance. From a systems perspective, adequate resourcing from the organisation has a flow through effect to line managers, teams and individuals. In this Phase, we found that there needs to be a provision of suitable resources, and the resources need to be tailored to the needs of flexible working. The study also found that tools were required as resources to support both line managers and employees engaged in flexible work. Tools for managers should include baseline resources and training for managers on a wide range of aspects related to relation-oriented leadership. Tools for flexible workers are required to assist with their role and responsibilities for the WHS aspects of their home-based environment. Tools to support psychosocial risk detection and hazard management were a major concern, and the researchers have developed a number of protoype assessment tools as a further output of this study.

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Appendix A

Flexible work and Psychological Safety, Focus Group Question Schedule

This focus group question schedule is to be delivered with reference to the focus group Powerpoint™ presentation; with focus group members receiving an extended brief (approximately 10-15 minutes) concerning the topic area and the reason for their involvement.

The questions are designed as open-ended, and the responses to the first question may be relevant to latter questions (and hence, every subsequent question after the first may be deployed as a prompt to seek further information if required).

Focus group responses should be discussive in nature, and respondents are encouraged to provide examples, hypotheticals, narratives of their previous experiences etc., so as to build a broad response. Focus group facilitators may ask different participants if they would wish to provide contrary perspectives, so as to build a clarity and a consensus of responses.

Questions:

1. How can organisations improve their Work Health Safety (WHS) systems to ensure the inclusion of flexible workers within a psychologically safe work environment?
2. What are the key challenges for involving remote workers formally and informally in WHS?
3. How can line managers monitor and anticipate WHS risks and stressors to remote workers' safety and health?
4. How can risk assessment best cover the home workplace?
5. How can formal WHS representations be best enabled among flexible workers – including WHS Committees and WHS representatives?
6. How can processes be enhanced to facilitate two-way communication on psychological safety when working remotely?
7. What would be best practice for systems and processes for ensuring mental wellbeing of remote workers?
8. What would be best practice for systems and processes for ensuring the physical and mental wellbeing of vulnerable flexible workers (e.g. people with a disability, carer responsibilities, living alone)?
9. How can the reporting of WHS problems when working remotely be best facilitated?

Focus group participants are to be thanked for their participation at the conclusion of the session.

Appendix B

Designing Healthy Flexible Work Assessment Tool

Healthy flexible work, where employees experience positive wellbeing and performance, can only be achieved by effectively detecting and managing the psychosocial risks (PSR) within the work environment. This assessment sheet asks the user to rate their work role/unit/ department/process/organisation on each of 11 aspects of PSR (10 of which are derived from the World Health Organisation (2010) list of psychosocial hazards). The descriptors for each of these PSR aspects have been adapted from those used by the WHO (2010) to fit the context of flexible working, including factors identified in research with New South Wales flexible workers and their managers. The assessment sheet also includes three additional potential risk areas: PSR awareness, PSR competencies, and resourcing of flexible work, that add to the total PSR risk exposure for individuals within an organisation.

The Designing Healthy Flexible Work Assessment Tool can be used by the person responsible for WHS and job design, or by a range of organisational members, including managerial and non-managerial staff from different areas in the organisation. The assessment should be the rater's assessment of the organisation, division, department, or work unit, depending on the scope of their assessment.

Once the assessment sheet is completed, an overall rating score of between 13-65 will result. This score is then used to determine the PSR risk level and recommended actions (see Score assessment sheet).

When multiple participants use the assessment sheet, total scores are aggregated and an overall average total score for the organisation/division/department (or whatever unit of analysis is of interest) is calculated.

Designing Healthy Flexible Work Assessment Tool

Psychosocial risk (PSR) category*	PSR Descriptor for Flexible Work	Your ratings Circle the number which best reflects your view, considering the descriptors collectively for each of the 10 PSR categories Strongly disagree = 1 Neither agree nor disagree = 3 Strongly agree = 5
Job content	▪ Flexible workers' roles are designed to provide variety and avoid short work cycles. ▪ Flexible workers' roles are designed to be meaningful. ▪ Flexible workers' roles require full use of skills. ▪ Flexible workers' roles are designed to avoid over-exposure to customers and clients.	1-2-3-4-5
Workload & work pace	▪ Flexible workers' roles are designed to avoid work overload or underload. ▪ Flexible workers' roles are designed to avoid high levels of time pressure. ▪ Flexible workers' roles are not continually subject to deadlines. ▪ Flexible workers do not routinely extend their working day. ▪ Line managers monitor flexible team workloads to ensure a good balance of effort and rest.	1-2-3-4-5
Work schedule	▪ Flexible work arrangements reflect preference for a hybrid model, incorporating a balance of work time in the office and working remotely. ▪ Flexible workers' roles are designed to minimise shift working, night shifts. ▪ Flexible workers' roles have reasonable autonomy in work scheduling. ▪ Flexible workers' roles are designed to avoid unpredictable hours, long or unsociable hours. ▪ Flexible workers can take breaks when needed.	1-2-3-4-5
Control	▪ Flexible workers participate effectively in decision making that effects their job. ▪ Flexible workers have reasonable control over workload and work pacing. ▪ Flexible workers participate in decisions about when they can work remotely and how much remote work they do. ▪ There is genuine participation between management and workers in the design and implementation of flexible work.	1-2-3-4-5
Environment & equipment	▪ Flexible workers have ergonomically suitable workstations/workspaces (adjustable, comfortable, etc.). ▪ Flexible workers have adequate equipment/technology to function effectively. ▪ Flexible workers have good maintenance and technical support for equipment/technology.	1-2-3-4-5

	▪ Flexible workers have sufficient space to do their work. ▪ Flexible workers have good lighting. ▪ Flexible workers are not exposed to excessive noise or interruptions.	
Organisational culture	▪ Top leadership prioritises psychological health and safety for flexible workers. ▪ Top leadership communicate strong support for flexible worker wellbeing. ▪ There is effective two-way communication with flexible workers. ▪ All organisational members are encouraged to be involved in psychological health and safety. ▪ Organisations recognise the increased demands of flexible work, including greater workload, isolation and work-family boundaries, and have systems to monitor and manage these demands.	1-2-3-4-5
Interpersonal relationships at work	▪ Flexible work is designed to minimise social and physical isolation. ▪ Line-managers support social connectedness within flexible work teams. ▪ Flexible workers have good relationships with their supervisors. ▪ Managers and co-workers provide good social support to flexible workers. ▪ Line managers regularly check-in with their flexible work team to assess the effectiveness of current arrangements and associated wellbeing. ▪ Line managers exhibit trust in flexible workers. ▪ Flexible workers are not exposed to bullying and harassment from managers or co-workers.	1-2-3-4-5
Role in organisation	▪ Flexible workers have good role clarity (their roles are designed to avoid role ambiguity). ▪ Flexible workers understand their role and responsibilities as a flexible worker. ▪ Flexible work roles are designed to avoid role conflict.	1-2-3-4-5
Career development	▪ Flexible workers do not experience career stagnation and uncertainty as a consequence of working remotely. ▪ Flexible workers have good job security. ▪ There is strong support for flexible workers' personal career development. ▪ The work of flexible workers has high social value.	1-2-3-4-5
Home-work interface	▪ Work and home demands are not in conflict for flexible workers. ▪ Flexible workers are able to manage work/home boundaries effectively. ▪ Support is provided to flexible workers who have difficulties managing the boundary between work and non-work life.	1-2-3-4-5
Workplace inclusion	▪ Line managers understand the unique needs of their flexible workers. ▪ Line managers are aware of the specific vulnerabilities that may impact the wellbeing of their team while working flexibly (e.g. flexible workers living alone, with carer responsibilities, disability, younger workers, new and less experienced workers). ▪ The organisation recognizes that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work and that employees	1-2-3-4-5

	experience flexible working differently and have unique needs. ▪ Flexible work arrangements are negotiated with consideration of employees' individual needs. ▪ All flexible workers have opportunity to collaborate in the design and implementation of their flexible work.	
Capability and resourcing aspects	Descriptors	Your rating
PSR competency	▪ There is a high level of competency for managing psychosocial risks within my organisation. ▪ There is a high level of competency for managing psychosocial risks within my work group/department. ▪ WHS personnel at my organisation have a high level of competency for managing psychosocial risks. ▪ Line managers are competent in identifying and managing psychosocial risks within flexible work teams and for individual flexible workers. ▪ Training and development in this organisation targets awareness of psychosocial hazards and maintaining positive wellbeing and mental health. ▪ There are appropriate systems and tools for detecting and assessing psychosocial hazards and line managers have the competency required for applying these tools.	1-2-3-4-5
Resourcing of flexible work	▪ The organization has adequately invested in its flexible work arrangements. ▪ Resources for flexible working are applied equitably across the organization. ▪ Flexible working is adequately resourced across all levels of the organisation. ▪ Line managers and flexible workers have necessary tools and resources to support effective remote working. ▪ There is adequate planning, budgeting and resourcing of flexible work by the organisation.	1-2-3-4-5
		Total rating (adding all rating scores (1-5) together. Your score should be between 13-65) Total score:

*PSR hazards adapted from WHO (2010)

PSR Score Assessment and Action Sheet:

Score range	Assessment	Action needed
13-31	The unchecked presence of psychosocial hazards threatens the mental health and wellbeing of flexible workers.	1. Immediate implementation of psychosocial hazard detection and management: identify, assess and manage psychosocial risks across the 13 aspects. 2. Top leadership need to prioritise psychological health and safety and communicate this effectively.

		3. Line managers need to actively support flexible workers. 4. Provide awareness and competency training for key organisational members. 5. Involve all flexible workers in hazard identification and reporting. 6. Continue to regularly monitor exposure to psychosocial risks for flexible workers using the assessment tool with different cohorts of workers.
32-51	Flexible workers are exposed to some or all of the psychosocial hazards in the assessment sheet. This will impact their wellbeing and performance.	1. Top leadership need to prioritise psychological health and safety and communicate this effectively. 2. Line managers need to actively support flexible workers. 3. Identify areas of psychosocial risk from the assessment sheet that require attention and put in place measures for their control. 4. Continue to regularly monitor exposure to psychosocial risks for flexible workers using the assessment tool with different cohorts of workers.
52-65	PSR appear to be well understood and managed.	Continually monitor and improve the design of jobs to minimise PSR.

Appendix C

Capability Maturity Model for Psychological Health and Safety in Flexible Work

Introduction and Methodology

This psychosocial safety capability maturity tool for flexible work has been developed as a direct output of CWHS-funded research on flexible working within a psychological safety environment project. The model will help organisations to self-assess the maturity (strengths and weaknesses) of their psychosocial culture, structure and practices as they relate to flexible working against current and future objectives. The model has both descriptive (what is) and prescriptive (what ought to be) functions. Through this analysis, organisations can make better-informed decisions about their psychological health and safety culture, systems and practices, analyse gaps and barriers, and prioritise steps for improvements.

The six aspects of flexible worker psychological safety relate to the different levels and aspects of influence on flexible worker engagement within a psychologically safe work environment identified in the research. The goal of this assessment exercise is to increase awareness of how the organisation stands in relation to its level of capability advancement for psychological health and safety for flexible workers. The six different aspects of flexible worker psychosocial safety can mature at different rates, meaning that more progress may have been made in some areas

over others. Regardless, the goal is to take action that moves the organisation to the next rung of the capability maturity ladder for each aspect.

This self-assessment sheet (Part 1) asks participants to rate the organisation from their own perspective on each of the six aspects of psychological safety developed from the research. The descriptors for each of these six aspects should be used to rate the level of advancement or cultural maturity of the organisation.

This self-assessment can be completed by the HR or WHS manager as a standalone task.

Alternatively, multiple organisational members, including managerial and non-managerial staff from a range of areas in the organisation, can separately complete the assessment sheet, and the results of those assessments aggregated. When all assessments are aggregated, an overall maturity level can be assigned for each aspect for the organisation/division/department (or whatever unit of analysis is of interest).

Guide for intervention

The intervention required to promote advancement on the maturity ladder for each aspect of flexible working psychological safety should be developed in collaboration between those with expertise on psychosocial risk, senior managers, HR and/or WHS personnel, line managers and flexible workers. The nature of interventions should be informed by the descriptors for higher levels of advancement in the maturity tool. Part 2 of the tool is used for recording strategy, actions responsibilities and measures.

The psychosocial safety capability maturity assessment tool for flexible work: PART 1

Flexible working psychosocial maturity aspect	**Flexible worker Psychosocial Safety Maturity Descriptor**	**Your maturity level rating** *Circle the maturity level which best reflects your view for your organisation 's level of advancement*
Senior management prioritisation of psychological health and safety of flexible workers	**Pathological:** Top leadership leads a culture that is only concerned with performance, regardless of the consequences for flexible workers.	Pathological
	Reactive: While top leadership are principally concerned with productivity, they will promote the importance of psychological health and safety and physical safety of flexible workers in the event of a problem impacting the mental health of flexible workers or where performance is deemed to be negatively affected.	Reactive
	Calculative: Top leadership delegates responsibility to WHS personnel to ensure the organisation meets its duty of care towards	Calculative

	flexible workers. Psychological health and safety is prioritized by WHS personnel.	
	Proactive: Top leadership has established initiatives to ensure psychological safety is well-managed within the organisation. Messages of support for flexible workers from top management are evident. Senior managers role model healthy flexible working.	Proactive
	Generative: Top management lead a culture where psychological health and safety is prioritized and all staff are committed to continually improving wellbeing and psychological safety of flexible workers within the organisation.	Generative
Communication regarding psychological health and safety across the organisation	**Pathological:** There is no communication regarding psychological safety and wellbeing associated with flexible working within this organisation.	Pathological
	Reactive: WHS personnel communicate with flexible workers about psychological safety whenever there is an incident or they are required to by senior management. Communication is always top-down.	Reactive
	Calculative: WHS personnel communicate with flexible workers about their physical and psychological safety in order to meet their duty of care, although this is largely one-way.	Calculative
	Proactive: There is effective two-way communication throughout the organisation on psychological health and safety pertaining to flexible workers. Efforts are made to ensure all employees have voice and are included. Flexible workers are encouraged to communicate any concerns related to their wellbeing to line managers.	Proactive
	Generative: Top leadership communicate their support for flexible working. Communication on psychological health and safety when working flexibly is regularly updated and improved. Line managers understand the unique needs of their flexible workers and communicate with them accordingly. Flexible workers always have ready access to information resources that relate to their work.	Generative
Line manager support	**Pathological:** Line managers take an 'out of sight, out of mind' approach to staff who are working away from the office/at home. There is an absence of trust of staff working remotely	Pathological
	Reactive: Line managers will try and support flexible workers only where a major problem arises or a request for help is made. There is little in the way of proactive support. Managers rely on surveillance and monitoring of flexible workers' output.	Reactive

	Calculative: Line managers follow the organisational policy on flexible working to ensure staff working remotely are safe and productive. Care to the work team is provided on a general bases rather than understanding the unique needs of individual flexible workers.	Calculative
	Proactive: Line managers actively check-in on their flexible workers and support them to ensure they are psychologically safe. Flexible workers know they have the trust and support of their line manager.	Proactive
	Generative: Line managers understand the different needs of their flexible workers and are always trying to develop better ways to support them. Managers and staff work together to continuously improve psychological safety for flexible workers.	Generative
Flexible worker responsibility	**Pathological:** Flexible workers are uninterested in taking personal responsibility for their flexible working and personal psychological safety.	Pathological
	Reactive: Flexible workers are interested in their psychological safety only where they experience stress or burnout, or workloads increase to an unmanageable level. They report psychosocial hazards only when they are impacting their health and wellbeing.	Reactive
	Calculative: Flexible workers look after their personal wellbeing and report hazards to their psychological safety as a matter of compliance with their line management directives.	Calculative
	Proactive: Flexible workers take care to look after their personal wellbeing while working flexibly. They proactively discuss any psychological safety concerns with their line manager.	Proactive
	Generative: Flexible workers are committed to a work system that promotes wellbeing and psychological safety over all other considerations. Wellbeing if the first priority for flexible workers and they are actively involved in designing healthy flexible work.	Generative
Resources for flexible working	**Pathological:** There is no specific resourcing of flexible work within this organization. Flexible workers may lack the tools to do their work effectively and safely.	Pathological
	Reactive: Attention to the resourcing of flexible work occurs only where it is clear that productivity will be impacted without doing so. There is no specific resourcing consideration for flexible work, unless a problem arises.	Reactive
	Calculative: Flexible work is resourced where there is a legal or policy requirement to do so. The orgnaisation ensures flexible workers receive resources equitably in relation to office-based employees.	Calculative

	Proactive: Resourcing to ensure safe and productive flexible work is prioritized across the organisation. Tools to support safe and effective flexible working have been provided to workers and their managers.	Proactive
	Generative: The organisation continually monitors the resource needs for safe and productive flexible working across the organisation, and ensures resources are applied in a timely way. Flexible workers collaborate with managers in developing tools to support flexible working.	Generative
Training and development for competencies in supporting flexible working	**Pathological:** Flexible working is implemented without training or development support for managers or flexible workers.	Pathological
	Reactive: Training and information for flexible workers is provided only where that has been problems or where it is clear that productivity is being impacted.	Reactive
	Calculative: Training is provided for flexible workers, as for all employees, in accordance with HRM and WHS requirements. Content does not purposely relate to healthy and effective flexible work.	Calculative
	Proactive: Training and development to ensure safe and productive flexible work is prioritised across the organisation. Line managers and flexible workers have good competencies to support safe and productive flexible working.	Proactive
	Generative: Training needs for managers and flexible workers are continually assessed in light of new knowledge. Line manages are taught competencies in providing relational leadership. Flexible workers have competencies in understanding their wellbeing needs and those of others. Flexible workers and their managers know how to get the best from working collaboratively in both a face-to-face and on-line environment.	Generative
Work design for flexible working	**Pathological:** There is little or no consideration of work design principles in the design of flexible work. As a result, flexible work roles are subject to additional job demands that risk impacting employee physical and psychological health and safety, and flexible workers may feel isolated and work under high pressure without adequate support or resources to manage such demands. Flexible workers do not have input into the design of their work nor in decisions that affect them.	Pathological
	Reactive: Work design is considered only where problems have manifested or productivity is impacted. There is a lack of proactivity in considerations about how work	Reactive

	is designed and the risk to flexible workers are not assessed or addressed routinely.	
	Calculative: Work design is applied to ensure work is safe and free from potentially harmful exposures to physical and psychological hazards. The specific hazards and risks associated with flexible work are not considered in the design of work.	Calculative
	Proactive: Good work design principles are applied to the design of flexible work, ensuring flexible workers have an input to decisions about the design and scheduling of their work. Managers monitor physical and psychosocial hazards associated with flexible working, Flexible workers are not over or under-loaded and do not operate under high pressure or other job demands. Jobs are designed to ensure social isolation is minimised, ideally through a hybrid flexible working model.	Proactive
	Generative: The organisation continually strives to promote healthy and sustainable work, and managers take pride in providing a meaningful, varied, and motivating work experience for all staff, including flexible workers. There is genuine collaboration between managers and flexible workers in work design and scheduling.	Generative

The psychosocial safety capability maturity assessment tool for flexible work: PART 2

Flexible working psychosocial maturity Aspect	Where are we now?	What is needed to advance?	Where do we want to be?	Measures of advancement
Senior management prioritisation of psychological health and safety of flexible workers				
Communication regarding psychological health and safety across the organisation				
Line manager support				
Flexible worker responsibility				
Resources for flexible working				
Training and development for competencies in supporting flexible working				
Work design for flexible working				

Appendix D

Case study - good practice for managing flexible work

Kathryn Peters – Deputy Director, medium-sized public sector organisation

Kathryn has built her career on being responsive to change. Prior to taking on the role of Deputy Director of a medium-sized public sector organisation five years ago, Kathryn worked in senior project roles across several community and disability service organisations. Kathryn's organisation is located in Parramatta; and while it services the whole state, the vast majority of work conducted outside of the metropolitan area is undertaken by contractors.

As a member of a number of professional organisations over the last decade, Kathryn remained well-informed about the demographic and workforce-expectation changes that were shifting norms regarding 'how we work best'. In 2018, she was instrumental in setting-up a working party to develop a flexible work policy for her organisation.

Having consulted with a number of stakeholders in order to calibrate the flexible work policy to achieve collective gain and a balance of needs, in 2019 the policy was implemented. The policy that Kathryn championed was hybrid in design; meaning that different divisions within the organisation would determine a set of days, during the working week, where staff would be together in the office; with the remaining days open for staff to choose to work from home, in the office, or from another alternative location.

To monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the flexible work policy, Kathryn set up a reoccurring bi-monthly evaluation committee meeting with more junior managers across the business, and also with a representative group of employees, Work, Health and Safety (WHS) operators, and Human Resources (HR) personnel.

Within the first few months, those who took up the opportunity to work remotely for a portion of the week were limited to staff with caring responsibilities, particularly those with young children. The feedback from the evaluation committee was that there was a fear, on the part of many employees, that they would be perceived as 'slacking off' if they weren't in the office. To counter this negative perception, Kathryn requested that all junior and senior managers take up the practice of regularly working from home as long as it was safe to do. Kathryn role-modelled this also by working from home two days a week, and by conducting at least one staff meeting a week using a remote communication platform.

Over the subsequent months, the number of subscribers to the flexible policy grew to 60% of the entire staff. While some staff members preferred to continue working in the office, there was a general sentiment that the flexible work policy was giving autonomy to employees to decide how to structure their working week – getting the most from collaborative time in the office, and then focussed time from home.

While the organisation had a flexible work policy in place, when the first COVID-19 associated lockdown hit in early 2020, it wasn't 'completely smooth sailing.' Line managers were reporting that some staff, particularly those with children at home (who could not attend school) were really struggling to undertake work in 'normal' work hours. Also, there were complaints from several staff who had preferred to work completely in the office – they were somewhat unfamiliar with the online technology that was in place.

Kathryn called an online meeting with all of the line managers across the business. She encouraged them to conduct regular, online 'check-ins' with their staff – in most instances this could be done as a group 'teams/online' meeting, but in some cases, it would require one-on-one online meetings to discuss individual circumstances. Knowing that this 'person-centred' approach would create additional workload for line managers, Kathryn took time to schedule a meeting with each of the staff who reported to her, to discuss and reprioritise work goals. She requested that this same process of reprioritisation be passed down the line from senior to junior managers, to alleviate managerial stress during the shift to online.

Over the coming weeks, staff adapted to new ways of completely online work. In the middle of the year, senior managers met to discuss the impact of the lockdown on productivity. There was general consensus that the lockdown created a 'blip' where productivity dipped for a brief period, but this was more than made up by increases in productivity over the subsequent months.

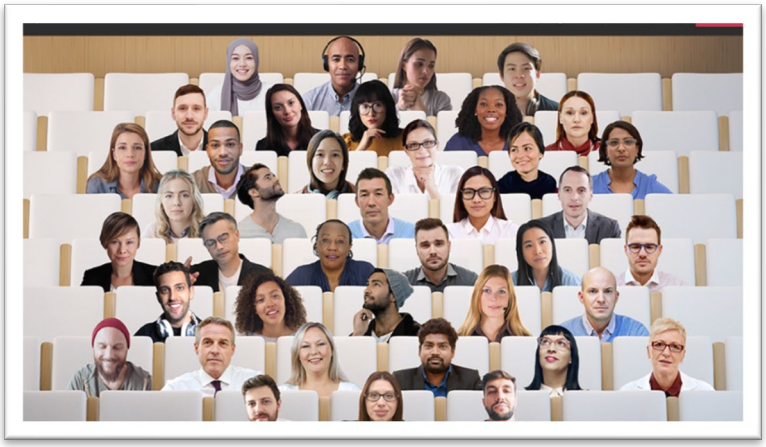
Analysis

The case presents Kathryn as advancing a generative approach to senior managers prioritisation of psychological health and safety of flexible workers. To this end, Kathryn championed a flexible work policy that is hybrid in design, but also enabled different work groups to have autonomy to determine which days in the week staff would work together in the office. She undertook regular

monitoring of the effectiveness of the program, and put in place subsequent actions to encourage a higher take up of the policy, and discourage a culture of untrustworthiness. When the effects of the Pandemic hit, she was quick to role model a person-centred approach to staff management.

In the case, Kathryn also adopted a generative approach to communication regarding psychological health and safety across the organisation. In this way, she set up regular meetings with an evaluation committee comprised of an adequate cross-section of the organisation.

Max Baros – Team Leader, Information Technology company



Max (41) graduated from his MBA three years, and landed a junior-management position in a multinational information technology (IT) company that had its national headquarters in North Sydney. Having previously worked as a software programmer, and then in software technical support for high-value clients, Max knew the value of being able to communicate effectively between groups of highly-skilled technicians, and with those who were not.

When the first lockdown hit in 2020, Max's team were quick to navigate the technological challenges of working from home. That said, several members of his programming team were reliant on having large, curved computer monitors that were (at the time) locked away within the office. While the internal all-of-staff memos communicated that staff should have all they need in the form of a company-provided laptop, Max knew that his programmers really relied on their curved monitors for their productivity, as well as for their eye-health.

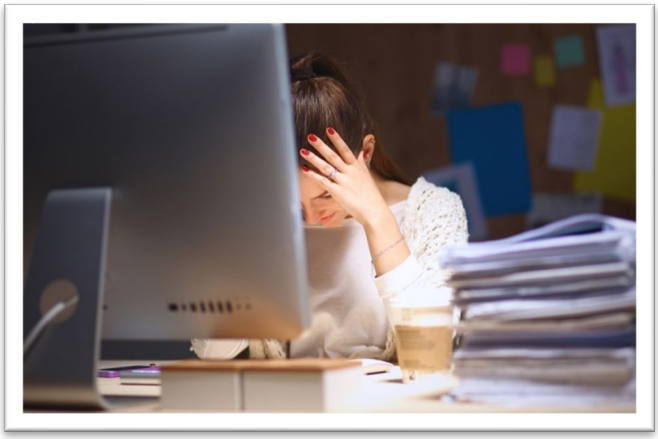
To address the need of his programmers having access to their curved monitors, Max organised a meeting with his direct manager, who subsequently referred him to the Senior Operations Manager. Max outlined his case, and received permission for his programming staff to access the work site, and collect their necessary materials (this was organised so that only one person would be on site at a time, and 24 hours would pass before the next person had access). After the week passed, all seven members of his programming team had collected their curved screens. The staff

felt supported as a result of Max's actions – and they were able to work comfortably and productively from home.

Analysis

The case presents Max as advancing a generative approach to line management of flexible workers. Max understood the different needs of his staff, and particularly the programming team. Working with other stakeholders across the business, Max devised solutions that prioritised the wellbeing of his staff.

The case also evidences a generative approach to resourcing for flexible workers. The resource needs of the programming staff who were working from home were identified; to avail the staff of their equipment needs, Max championed a solution involving considerable consultation with other organisational stakeholders.



Josephine had grown up on the Central Coast of New South Wales, and after completing her Bachelor of Business, studying mostly online, she was happy to get her first job working as an administrator for the South Coast Local Health District (hypothetical) in 2019. She moved south in 2019, and found share house accommodation located within walking distance of work, the beach, and the main stretch. The two people that she shared the house with worked for a local tourism operator, and while things were amicable in the house, social interactions between all members were irregular because of the different hours worked.

At times during 2019, Josephine felt isolated from her family, but was buoyed by the positive relationships she was forming at work. When the lockdown hit in early 2020, Josephine received an email from her employer, instructing her to work from home. She received that email on the Friday, and by Wednesday the following week, she had converted her bedroom in the share house, into a make-shift workspace, and was comfortably undertaking her duties.

Josephine's supervisor was proactive, and a true 'people person.' Her supervisor made a point of 'checking-in' on her, at least once a week – this was done in the form of a 15-20 minute phone call, usually on Mondays. Her supervisor also organised 'tea and chat' sessions, that would occur each week on a Friday, and enabled all staff within Josephine's team to connect socially – and let 'others into their lives.'

Notwithstanding these positive actions, Josephine was really struggling with the isolation she was feeling. Moreover, the two people that she shared the house with had lost their employment as a result of the pandemic, and were stuck at home. The social environment in the house was deteriorating, with one member of the household becoming increasing irritated, and occasionally lashing out verbally to Josephine and the other member of the house.

Josephine was beginning to feel depressed, constantly tired, and sorely missing positive social interaction. Moreover, she was feeling unsafe in her house, particularly during the long days that she was working in her room. At her weekly 'check-in' session with her supervisor, Josephine was

open and honest about the way she was feeling. Josephine's supervisor (with Josephine's permission) took notes from the session, and set in train a number of actions to help alleviate the strain. The supervisor did this, knowing full well that if nothing was done, it would ultimately have a dramatic negative impact on Josephine's ability to maintain her high standard of workplace performance.

Immediately after the 'check-in' session, Josephine's manager emailed her the Employee Assistance Package (EAP) details, and highlighted the counselling service that is freely available to all staff. Josephine promptly took advantage of this service. The supervisor also realised that the office space where Josephine would typically work from was completely unoccupied. Realising that if Josephine occupied this space while completing here work, that she would not be in breach of the lockdown procedure, Josephine's supervisor contacted the site manager, and received permission for Josephine to work from the office instead of working from home. This proactive action meant that Josephine could work away from the destructive home environment that surrounded her, and things began to improve as a result.

When the lockdown lifted, Josephine found alternative accommodation. Moreover, she was happy to have interaction with other people in the office, albeit at a reduced capacity at first.

Analysis

The case highlights Josephine adopting a generative approach to flexible worker responsibility. While facing significant emotional hardship, Josephine was courageous in expressing her concerns to her line manager. As a result, the psychological hazard that she was facing by working at home was identified, an appropriate solution was enacted by her supervisor.

The case also presents Josephine's supervisor as adopting a generative approach to her line management role. In this regard, Josephine and her line manager forged a relationship that was focussed on the continuous improvement of Josephine's work environment.