



Board & Strategy

## Why leaders should encourage 'true flex'

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**Greater flexibility is something that employees have longed for as a work perk to allow them to better manage their work-life balance. And now, due to the coronavirus crisis, employers have had to adopt such methods in order to keep work ticking over seamlessly.**

With working from home becoming the norm amid the pandemic, many employers have had to adapt working schedules to support working parents who are now at home with children. And thanks to these new working arrangements, employees are now more reluctant to return to their workplace.

In fact, research from Huma has revealed that more than half of workers do not want to return to the office. Similarly, data published by Cardiff University and the University of Southampton reported that nine of out ten people who worked from home during the crisis want to continue doing so in future.

These statistics suggest that a huge culture shift is starting to take place regarding the way that people work, so should business leaders now start to adopt truly flexible measures?

**Flexible working for all**



One business who is backing this is building and civil engineering company, Sir Robert McAlpine. The firm has also funded research into the *Forever Flex: Making flexible working work beyond a crisis* report, which is based on a survey of 1,420 employers and in-depth interviews with leaders and decision-makers at 32 companies.

It discovered that 72% wished to continue working from home once the pandemic subsides. It also highlighted some of the benefits of remote work, with 33% of all employers citing an increase in productivity over lockdown, while 34% recorded an increase in employee wellbeing and happiness.

This has prompted Paul Hamer, CEO at Sir Robert McAlpine, to coin the term 'true flex', something he believes that business leaders should practice. "True flex is all about empowerment and giving people real choice. This does not just mean a choice over where they work, but when and how they work too," he explained.

### **How to achieve 'true flex'**

In Hamer's view, achieving 'true flex' that is sustainable will take time as he pointed out "there is no quick fix". However, there are changes that business leaders can implement to ensure flexibility becomes a true part of a company's culture. "Effective changes to working arrangements are done in collaboration with your staff rather than imposed upon them," he said.

"It is critically important to listen to employees to understand the key drivers of flexible working and which roles will present the greatest challenge. A shared solution gains far greater traction than any top-down dictate."

He added that once this has been rolled out, pilot initiatives should be launched with a single team before extending them to the entire company. This in particular resonates with Hamer, who revealed

that the construction sector has witnessed an increase in rates of male suicide and inequality, making the need to introduce 'true flex' even more critical.

"Flexible working is a path to better work-life balance and improved wellbeing which allows our staff to be their very best self and I truly believe that we owe this to our people. In the construction sector, rates of male suicide and inequality have been alarming for some time. If achieving 'true flex' can help us tackle these problems – and I am convinced it can – then it is clearly worth pursuing," he concluded.