

You are going to listen to part of a radio programme. On last week's programme the guest gave a lecture on flexibility in the workplace. This week he is back in the studio answering questions from listeners.

Optional activity:

While you listen, decide whether the following sentences are true or false.

Sentence	True or false?
1 It is difficult to implement flexibility in the workplace.	
2 It is a good idea to try out flexible practices for a short time to see if they work.	
3 All employees in a workplace should be offered the same flexible working conditions.	
4 A lot of managers are afraid that flexibility will cause productivity to decrease.	
5 Flexibility usually causes productivity to increase.	
6 No workers will abuse flexibility in a workplace.	
7 For flexibility to be effective there has to be trust.	
8 Setting up flexibility in the workplace involves no extra work for the employer.	

Host: First of all, welcome back to the studio Michael. Lots of our listeners have written in after last week's lecture on flexibility in the workplace. You certainly sparked a lot of interest.

M: Thanks. It's good to be back.

H: So, are you ready to answer some of our listener's questions about flexibility?

M: Yes, fire away!

H: Ok, our first question is from the manager of a small company in Norwich. He wants to know how he should go about implementing flexible work practices into his company. He doesn't know where to begin.

M: Well, implementing flexibility isn't difficult. First take a bit of time to plan your approach. Understand your options and hold a meeting with your staff with an open mind. They might have something useful to say. Then experiment. Try something for a limited period of time and see how it goes. If things don't work out, try something else.

H: Ok. We had an email from an employer who is worried because he thinks flexibility could work for some members of his staff but not for others. And he's afraid of treating people differently. What should he do?

M: Be flexible! Every job is different so the employer has to sit down with each employee and customise a flexible solution. He shouldn't be afraid of treating people differently as long as he treats them fairly. And being fair means looking at each situation and working out what's best.

H: Ok, let's move on to a question from Sue, in Manchester. She's afraid that flexibility will have a negative effect on productivity. What do you say to that?

M: A common concern, yes. But the experience of most managers is that flexibility actually increases productivity. This is because the energy levels and commitment of workers in a flexible environment are usually higher. If she is worried she could consider doing her own short-term evaluation on the impact of introducing flexibility. She might have a pleasant surprise!

H: Here's a letter from Simon, a manager in York. He says "flexibility is all well and good in theory but I'm afraid that if I introduce it into our company some workers might abuse it".

M: That's the question that most managers ask me (laughing). There are always people who will take advantage and there is no reason why this shouldn't be the case with flexibility. But it shouldn't be a reason not to

implement flexibility. He can minimise the risk of abuse by making sure that everybody is clear about the company's commitment to flexibility and by pointing out the importance of mutuality. And, of course, by regularly reviewing the system to make sure it's working. The basis of any flexible working agreement is trust. And trust is something that has to be nurtured.

H: Ok, one last question. I don't have a name. "Will introducing flexible practices in the workplace mean more work for me?" I guess that's from another manager.

M: A good question. At first yes, you might have to invest time in setting up communication systems, especially when we are talking about job-sharing or employees working different timetables. But, I'd say that the benefits gained from increased productivity – not to mention the retention of experienced employees outweighs the initial work.

H: Thank you Michael. I'm afraid that's all we've got time for. We'll be back at the same time...

Answer key: 1F; 2T; 3F; 4T; 5T; 6F; 7T; 8F.