



Flexible Working

Case Study: *Microsoft, Reading*

Advanced Workplace Associates (AWA) has undertaken a number of projects in partnership with Microsoft at their European HQ in Reading. These began with research into flexible working experiences with other leading organisations, and progressed to the development of a flexible working policy along with the development of specific tools to assist with:

- Job/role assessment
- Home circumstances review
- Self assessment.

Initially, Microsoft sought to understand how other organisations with significant numbers of sales and marketing staff had undertaken flexible working. The main conclusions from AWA's research, were as follows:

- Pre-existing organisational culture and climate play an important part
- Most commonly, flexible working has been introduced as a result of space and cost of space issues, and the desire for increased flexibility
- If used in isolation, hot desking is not popular, but if introduced as part of a package, where other benefits are delivered, it is more acceptable
- There are a whole range of 'people' issues that must be addressed
- It is a good idea to run a pilot first and involve people in decision making.

AWA was subsequently asked to design, co-ordinate and implement a flexible working policy across the entire 1,000 workers based at Reading. This involved a thorough review of pre-existing flexible working processes and human resource policies and the development of an integrated web-based flexible working policy.

This project involved home and office based workers across all business sectors. As well as having regular contact with Microsoft's internal staff, we also worked with a number of advisers and suppliers. Using web-enabled tools, jobs were assessed for flexible working suitability, and people were offered a 'self assessment' to determine their personal suitability for home working, recognising that there are many issues to be explored before a decision can be made. Home environments were also assessed from a number of perspectives, including individuals' safety, well-being and personal performance.

A six month pilot programme allowed the processes and environment for both home and office workers to be reviewed – this included an assessment of the effects of flexible working upon performance. Following the pilot phase, AWA evaluated flexible working with individuals, their managers, colleagues, customers and families. The main feedback was:

- Generally people felt that flexible working had improved their productivity and effectiveness
- An improvement in home/work life balance was indicated by most respondents
- Managers were supportive of the flexible working initiative
- Time saved from less travel was largely being spent on client facing activities
- Mixed response from families – some found home working supported family life, while others still had some issues.

Flexible working has since been made available through the rest of the UK operation, and interest in the UK approach has been expressed by Microsoft's operations in Europe.



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