

Problem Description

Question

Description of the problem and purpose of the proposed research

Response

Workplace flexibility is becoming increasingly important as individuals balance work with competing life priorities. Flexible working arrangements typically include changes to the hours, pattern and/or location of work (e.g. working from home, job-sharing, part-time hours, time in lieu, compressed working weeks, telecommuting and purchased leave). According to the Australian Federal Government, flexible working arrangements are associated with a range of benefits, including improved output, effectiveness, job satisfaction, team work and staff retention.

In 2016, the NSW Government announced its commitment to [flexible working arrangements for senior staff](#). However, this flexibility is not readily available for frontline operational staff who are typically required to 'clock on' and 'clock off' via personnel monitoring systems such as Kronos. Although Kronos provides managers with confirmation and assurance of employee attendance, research has shown that the 'clock on/clock off' approach to employee management can reduce autonomy and workplace engagement. A consequence of this disengagement is 'presenteeism', that is, reduced productivity while being present at work.

Although workplace flexibility may increase engagement and productivity, there are several barriers to implementing workplace flexibility and autonomous attendance management for frontline operational staff. These barriers may include:

- Lack of manager trust,
- Lack of knowledge about how to successfully implement and monitor flexibility,
- Lack of knowledge about alternative strategies to attendance management that increase autonomy,
- The potential for flexibility to negatively impact team cohesion,
- The influence of a heavily unionised workforce culture.

In order to improve flexibility and engagement, it is necessary to explore these barriers and determine the most appropriate way forward in terms of autonomous attendance management. This is especially relevant given the potential for our future transport workforce to be comprised of a greater proportion of females than in the past.

Therefore, the purpose of the proposed research is to investigate barriers and solutions for improving workplace flexibility and engagement for frontline operational staff (e.g. train staff, station staff, bus operators). Findings from this research will have implications for the development of future workforce strategies to improve flexibility and engagement across the Transport for NSW (TfNSW) cluster, with the broad aim of increasing productivity.

Hypothesis & Variables

Question

For explanatory research, please describe a clear hypothesis with variables for testing

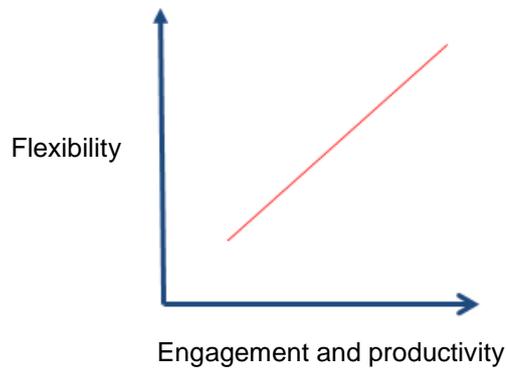
For exploratory research, please describe how the proposed research will contribute to future explanatory research

Response

The purpose of the proposed research is to investigate barriers and solutions for improving workplace flexibility and engagement for frontline operational staff (e.g. train staff, station staff, bus operators). This research is comprised of two phases:

- **Phase 1 (Qualitative):** A series of case studies will be conducted with frontline operational staff and their managers, with qualitative data analysis used to determine potential barriers and solutions to the implementation of workplace flexibility and autonomous attendance management.
- **Phase 2 (Quantitative):** A questionnaire will be administered to a diverse range of frontline operational staff and their managers to evaluate such factors as flexibility, attendance management, engagement and productivity.

It is hypothesised that increased workplace flexibility will increase employee engagement and productivity.



Strategic Criteria & Alignment

Question	Response
<p>Alignment with strategic theme</p>	<p>This Problem Statement is aligned with the Strategic Research theme of 'Future Transport Workforce'. This theme is focused on the evolution of skills and talents required for a Future Transport Workforce.</p>
<p>External driver of change analysis</p> <p>Outline how the research will better position TfNSW to respond proactively to macro drivers of change</p>	<p>This Problem Statement comprises a number of external drivers of change that present challenges and opportunities for TfNSW.</p> <p>Political</p> <p>The proposed research aligns with the NSW Government's commitment to improve workplace flexibility, and also has implications for policies and practices related to TfNSW's future transport workforce.</p> <p>Economic</p> <p>In light of evidence that the 'clock on/clock off' approach to employee attendance management decreases autonomy, engagement and productivity, this research has the potential to identify barriers and solutions to the implementation of more flexible working arrangements which may ultimately impact workplace productivity and presenteeism. It is anticipated that improved productivity has valuable economic cost savings for TfNSW in the long-term.</p> <p>Social</p> <p>The current 'clock on/clock off' approach to managing frontline operational staff has implications for the quality of relationships between frontline staff and their managers. By identifying barriers and solutions to greater flexibility and autonomy for frontline staff, this research has the capacity to improve employee relationships and wellbeing.</p> <p>Technological</p> <p>Frontline operational staff are typically required to 'clock on' and 'clock off' via personnel monitoring systems such as Kronos. However, this approach to employee attendance management reduces autonomy, engagement and productivity. Findings from the proposed research will help to identify a new approach to employee attendance management, with particular focus on technology applications that increase autonomy and flexibility.</p>
<p>Forward looking</p>	<p>In light of the NSW Government's commitment to flexible working arrangements, it is critical to understand the barriers and solutions to implementing flexible working arrangements and autonomous attendance management for frontline operational staff. The Future Transport Workforce will see an increase in female representation, highlighting the importance of successfully implementing solutions that improve flexibility, engagement and productivity.</p>
<p>Potential research impact</p>	<p>By identifying barriers and solutions to improving flexibility and autonomy for frontline operational staff, findings from the proposed research will have a fundamental impact on future workforce solutions that increase workplace engagement and productivity while supporting work-life balance. These findings and solutions can be applied more broadly to the TfNSW cluster to ensure the successful implementation of a flexible workplace culture.</p>

Technical Criteria

Question	Response
<p>Innovation</p> <p>Outline how the proposed research will result in new knowledge</p>	<p>The proposed research is innovative for two reasons. First, TfNSW has not previously sought to investigate and remedy barriers to the implementation of workplace flexibility and autonomy. Second, the proposed research is comprised of both qualitative and quantitative phases to capture a broad understanding of the issues surrounding flexibility, autonomy, engagement and productivity for frontline operational staff. Therefore, findings from this research will have significant implications for TfNSW's Future Transport Workforce.</p>
<p>Basis in completed research and/or observed practice</p>	<p>TfNSW is currently transitioning its employees from traditional office spaces to activity-based work (ABW) environments. Part of the overarching program encourages the uptake of flexible work practices. TfNSW and cluster members have developed overarching and localised strategies, policies and procedures on flexible work practices. However, there are inconsistencies between cluster members and within divisions regarding the interpretation and implementation of flexible work practices, and significant barriers and obstacles to flexibility have hindered the adoption of flexible work practices in certain business units.</p> <p>In order to fully realise the benefits of flexible work practices, the chasm between vision and reality needs to be bridged. This includes balancing competing needs for autonomy and flexibility with control and supervision. Challenges that need to be overcome include a low trust culture, past practices, lack of performance management skills and the need to ensure adequate governance and oversight within an organisation accountable to the general public. The implementation of flexible work practices for frontline operation staff is arguably one of the most significant challenges.</p> <p>Therefore, solutions to facilitate the implementation of flexible work practices for frontline operational staff may include organisational, technological, and/or people-related interventions from a holistic systems perspective. There are several data sources currently available regarding current issues (Pulse surveys, ABW surveys, Innovation culture survey), and it may be possible to include relevant surveys as part of the Sydney Trains Accommodation program.</p> <p>Suggested Reading Material and References</p> <p>Flexibility at TfNSW <i>Flexible working at transport</i>, accessed at https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/newsroom-and-events/articles/flexible-working-at-transport-0</p> <p><i>Why flexibility matters for parents at transport</i>, accessed at https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/newsroom-and-events/articles/why-flexibility-matters-for-parents-at-transport</p> <p>Literature on Flexible Work Practices Beauregard, T. A., and Henry, L. C. (2009) <i>Making the link between work-life balance practices and organizational performance</i>. Human Resource Management Review, 19, 9-22.</p> <p>van Koetsveld, R., and Kamperman, L. (2011) <i>How flexible workplace strategies can be made successful at the operational level</i>. Corporate Real Estate Journal, 1, 303-319.</p> <p>Australian Institute of Management. <i>The Management Challenges of Flexible Working</i>, accessed at https://www.aim.com.au/blog/management-challenges-flexible-working</p> <p>Equality Human Rights Commission. <i>Flexible working: how to create and champion a flexible culture</i>, accessed at https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/flexible-working-how-create-and-champion-flexible-culture</p> <p>Sloan Centre on Aging and Work. <i>Barriers to Workplace Flexibility</i>, accessed at http://workplaceflexibility.bc.edu/Barriers</p> <p>Workplace Gender Equality Agency. <i>Employee flexibility toolkit: How to negotiate and manage a successful flexible working arrangement</i>, accessed at https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/Flexibility_employee_toolkit.pdf</p>

Question	Response
Feasible data requirements	This research will rely on access to TfNSW frontline operational staff and their managers to complete qualitative case studies and quantitative questionnaires.

Level of Collaboration & Resource Requirements

Question	Response
Level of collaboration Please select the level of collaboration required to complete the proposed research	1. 'Quick-Fire' Research <input type="checkbox"/> Intense bursts of research activity (e.g. under 8 weeks). Intended to make use of 'hackathon'-type environments, where students/researchers work collaboratively and intensely on particular problems involving data interrogation and visualisation.
	2. Undergraduate Final-Year Research <input type="checkbox"/> Suitable for final-year undergraduate students (e.g. capstone, Honours) as part of the research requirements for their undergraduate degree (i.e. 1 to 2 semesters).
	3. Higher Degree Research <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Project may form whole or part of a postgraduate research degree (i.e. Masters, PhD), and contribute to new knowledge (i.e. 1 to 3 years).
	4. Major Collaborations and Funded Research <input type="checkbox"/> Project may form the basis for a significant collaboration agreement between TfNSW and the relevant research institution, including major competitive grant funding (e.g. Australian Research Council funding with TfNSW as an industry partner).
Comments	This project could form all or part of a PhD or Master of Research.
Supporting TfNSW resources	TfNSW will facilitate access to data requirements and subject matter experts (up to 4 hours per week).