



Embracing flexible working arrangements

WRITTEN BY
BARBADOS EMPLOYERS' CONFEDERATION

Our now available, most updated edition of “The Red Book – A Guide to Employment Relations in Barbados” not only covers things legislative but it addresses areas where legislation is absent. One of these areas in particular is the system of Flexible Work Arrangements. We provide in-depth information on what flexible work arrangements are, the types of flexible work arrangements and what considerations employers should take when a flexible work arrangement is being introduced into the workplace. Essentially, a “flexible work arrangement” can be considered to be as an arrangement that creates a choice as its structure alters the time and/or place that an employee works according to their contracted hours. A flexible work arrangement varies according to the context of the business and can include: flexibility in the scheduling of hours worked, such as alternative work schedules e.g. arrangements regarding shift and break schedules; the number of

hours worked, such as part time work and job shares; and working at home or at a satellite location (more recently coined remote work). A flexible work arrangement ultimately allows employees some measure of choice relative to how their contracted hours are created.

Flexible working arrangements can be beneficial to employers in many ways however to be successful there is a requirement for proficient management of such a system. For example, they often lead to increased productivity as employees are more focused, contented, and committed to their job when they can achieve a work-life balance. Research also shows that companies and teams who offer flexible work have lower employee turnover, higher employee satisfaction and productivity.

Flexible working arrangements may also save employers money as efficiency on the workplace can be attained i.e. use of workplace facilities, retaining your team members and reducing the costs of recruiting and inducting new employees.

Even though flexible working arrangements is being seen as the way forward for organisations, it will require extra planning and communication. For example, when an employee’s work arrangement is

modified from standard full-time hours to a more flexible arrangement, this can have a domino effect which requires other changes to be made to staffing for coverage; this may include assessing your team and the way the business is operating daily i.e. what is the core time for your business compared to the "quiet time". Identifying these areas and introducing flexible working arrangements to accompany them can be mutually beneficial for your business and its employees.

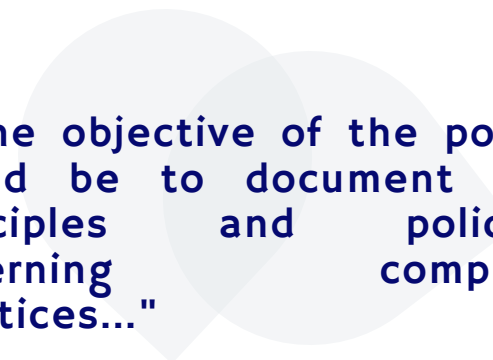
Of course, like anything created, nothing comes simple nor without a challenge. There will be disadvantages that would have to be considered such as:

- the costs relative to the implementation of the initiative,
- the arrangement not working for all organisations given the dynamics therefore employers would have to assess the feasibility and have trials which will be time consuming and,
- the consideration for monitoring the arrangement(s) e.g. will it mean an additional employee who now monitors this and if no will the employee monitoring it really have the time to efficiently monitor the arrangement(s)?

Once these considerations are taken and the pros outweigh the cons, a flexible work arrangement policy can be created for employees to all understand the organisation's practices; this can be included in the employee's policy manual (handbook). In our "The Red Book – A Guide to Employment Relations in Barbados", aspects of flexible work arrangements are addressed for employers to be made aware of what approaches can be taken as all systems cannot be incorporated into the workplace. In trying to incorporate a flexible work arrangement, employers may begin to hear terms such as annualised hours, job-share, time in lieu, compressed hours, flexitime and term-time and as indicated, however with all of these terms and more addressed, employers can attain the clarity and adopt the most suitable approach for their individual organisation.

A policy manual or handbook provides important information on the company's policies relating to its processes, employee, and employer expectations, along with organisational standards for performance. Every organisation must have structure to function effectively; therefore the objective of the policy would be to document the principles and policies governing company practices. When creating a flexible work arrangement policy consultation to the process being implemented should always be at the forefront to ensure that there is also collaboration inclusive of a trade union that is recognised and consultation from an employer organisation that is knowledgeable in such e.g. BEC.

Many things need to be taken into consideration when undertaking policy creation. There are available policy templates created that reflect flexible work arrangements relative to the organisation's operations with consultation from a Labour Management Advisor of the BEC. Having evolved now with many workplaces requiring remote work / flexible work policies in light of the realm of the pandemic which address flexible work arrangements, it now means employers have to consider updating their handbooks with such a necessary policy. It is imperative that employers seek consultation to have their policies updated; though currently there may not be any legislative implementations directly speaking to flexible work arrangements, there would still be the need to ensure the organisation's policy does not in any way contravene the labour legislative framework in Barbados and they operate harmoniously in their industrial relations practices.



"...the objective of the policy would be to document the principles governing and policies company practices..."