Australia – Promoting flexible working hours through behavioural interventions: the case of Australia’s State of New South Wales

Context

The state of New South Wales made working hours more flexible because of diversity concerns, through behavioural insights. A newly developed strategy led to reorganising working hours at the organisational level, impacting all categories of public employees.

Good practice

Driving diversity in the NSW public sector is a key priority of the NSW Government. The NSW Government has committed to: doubling the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in senior leadership roles increasing the proportion of women in senior leadership roles to 50% in the government sector in the next 10 years. The NSW Government also has strategies to increase the participation of mature workers and people with a disability in the public sector.

The BIU conducted trials with the various Departments to encourage staff members to modify their habitual commuting behaviours and avoid travelling to and from work in the peak hours. They did this by encouraging take-up of existing flexible work policy. The trial involved changing workplace defaults that had encouraged employees to work the standard ‘nine to five’, by disrupting informal workplace culture and norms on workplace flexibility. Researchers also incentivised teams to try either arriving earlier and leaving earlier, or arriving later and leaving later. Three interventions were used:

- **Outlook calendars**: Normally, Outlook calendars show staff as available or ‘active’ from 8 am to 5 pm. The trial adjusted the default settings for ‘active hours’ on all staff Outlook calendars to reflect the standard core hours of 9.30 am to 3.30 pm.
- **Manager messages**: staff normally entered the building through electronic turnstiles, which recorded each person’s entry and exit times. Data from the turnstiles showed that employees tended to match the working hours of their directors, over and above their line managers and the rest of the senior executive. Directors were shown this data, and were prompted to speak to their teams about flexible work. The BIU used behavioural insights to improve existing corporate resources, making them easier to access and understand, and thereby reducing frictions and information asymmetry.
- **Competition**: the BIU ran a team-based competition in the workplace to encourage staff to avoid peak-hour travel. The aims were to encourage them to adjust their commuting behaviour and try other forms of flexible work such as working remotely. The competition incorporated several behavioural insights elements, including social comparison, social norms, and incentives through competition points and a competition prize. There was performance feedback through a competition leader board that showed each team’s ranking in comparison to other teams.

Six months after the trial ended, the BIU found that the proportion of work arrivals outside peak hours had increased 8.6 percentage points and that the proportion of work departures outside peak hours had increased by 3 percentage points. Most interestingly, the results were more noticeable among
women. Although both women and men were responsive to the trial’s interventions, the impact was particularly pronounced with female staff. It is likely the competition had a legitimising effect on women’s preferences for flexible work behaviour.

Find out more

Canada – Mobility through the Interchange Policy

Context

Mobility periods in various public organisations can be used to raise awareness about innovation and facilitate communication among different services. An advantage of such programmes can be to support replication of public innovations, if employees who were involved in successful innovation could temporarily move to a similar public institution, are interested in adapting the process, and help the team and the manager achieve it.

Good example

Interchange Canada is a mechanism to facilitate mobility and temporary exchange of skills between the Government of Canada and all other sectors of the economy, domestically and internationally. Assignments are for the purpose of knowledge-transfer, acquiring specialised expertise, and/or professional development. The Interchange Canada Policy has been used to facilitate movement between the federal government and provinces or territories, private business, non-profit organisations, academia, and indigenous organisations both within Canada and internationally.

Interchange assignments can be used to develop leadership competencies through the use of assignments to organisations where specific experience could bridge the skills-building gap. In addition, Interchange Canada can serve as an excellent means of temporarily attaining skills unavailable in the home organisation and for building and transferring knowledge to enhance internal capacity both within government and in other sectors. Furthermore, Interchange Canada directly supports several governments priorities such as recruiting mobile young professionals, attracting mid-career specialists, and increasing interaction with nongovernment organisations.

Find out more

Germany – Demographic HRM strategy at the German Federal Ministry of the Interior

Context

Germany has made a significant effort to assess the demographic changes both within the civil service and across its citizens and residents. This has resulted in a government-driven, but broadly participative effort to develop demographic strategies for its workforce, including in the civil service. The practice detailed below is an example of how one country is integrating workforce planning with much broader societal changes, including ageing and diversity, with a view to securing long-term capacity and capability.

Good practice

"In order to secure a skilled workforce and to recruit the next generation of qualified workers we need a demographics-based jobs and personnel policy, modern and family-friendly working conditions as well as partnership-based staff representation."

This is the wording used in the Coalition Agreement to describe the tasks and objectives for the German federal public service in the coming years. "Demographics-based" actions point to the pressure facing public service employers who must react to demographics-related changes in their personnel structures and in the broader workforce. By 2030, Germany is expecting a 27% increase in population over 67 years old, and a decrease of 6.9% of the working age population. Germany’s population is also becoming more ethnically diverse. Within the Federal Administration, the average age of employees is also rising, and a high level of retirement is expected by 2030. This presents challenges and opportunities for Germany’s labour force and its public employment systems.

The Federal Government of Germany has taken on this challenge: In 2011, it presented a report on demography, and in 2012 it published a comprehensive demographic strategy. The report described the demographic change and its impacts on Germany in the medium and long term. The demographic strategy, “Every Age Counts”, aims to take advantage of the opportunities offered by population trends. It described for the first time all the fields of action that are important for making policy in response to demographic change. On this basis, the Federal Government launched a dialogue with representatives from every level of government, from the private sector, social partners, the research community and civil society. Joint working groups formulated concrete approaches and presented their initial results to the public at the Federal Government’s demography summit in May 2013.

On 14 January 2015, the Federal Government decided to follow up on this approach and further develop its demographic strategy under the heading “Greater prosperity and better quality of life for all generations”. In doing so, the Federal Government increased co-operation with its partners in a total of ten working groups, including one focused on “the public service as an attractive and modern employer”. The key objectives of this working group are:

- Ensuring that the strengthening of knowledge in public administration occurs promptly.
- Expanding family-friendly work practices.
- Ensuring that employees’ ability to work is compatible with different stages in life.

The process has been evidence-informed, drawing on, for example, employee surveys, workforce data and statistics, and surveys of students preparing to enter the workforce. In this context, the following actions, among others, are being advanced with the intention of ensuring the timely transfer of knowledge and promoting the potential of employees, their skills and expertise:
Strategic personnel planning aligned to demographic requirements.

Establishment of a central job pool of all federal ministries and rotation programmes to promote a diversity of assignments, employee development and more workforce agility.

A greater focus on training, opportunities for further education, skills development and information learning through work assignments or e-learning.

Increased recruitment of skilled employees (joint web portal for all three levels of government) with an additional emphasis on increasing the number of employees with migrant backgrounds. This also includes a focus on workplace inclusion policies.

Optimise family friendly work conditions by ensuring flexible working conditions are available (part time, tele and mobile working).

Raise the retirement age to 67, and invest in health promotion at work, including a pilot project on long-term working accounts.

Find out more

Korea – COVID-19 Emergency Response headquarters

Context

In the midst of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Korean Ministry of Personnel Management established its own taskforce that is capable of swiftly responding to emergency circumstances. The MPM COVID-19 Emergency Response Headquarters, headed by the Minister, consists of five sections, including general co-ordination, recruitment, service code, human resources development and occupational accident compensation. With the establishment of the HQ, a 24-hour response system had been set up to tackle COVID-19 with various measures and the status of operations was reviewed twice a week.

Good practice

As the central personnel authority of the Korean Government, the MPM has taken comprehensive measures to respond to COVID-19. The MPM is establishing and operating the ‘COVID-19 Emergency Response Headquarters’, based on guidelines issued by the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters, which is headed by the Prime Minister. The strategic measures that the MPM has taken are summarised as follows:

- **Staff management:** The MPM established and enforced the Guidelines for Implementing Flexible Work Arrangements and to Prevent COVID-19 spread. It includes 1) granting sick leave, official leave, and teleworking for the COVID-19 confirmed or suspected cases, 2) granting pregnancy leave for pregnant women who are unable to work from home, and 3) taking advantage of flexible working systems. It is now compulsory to have a specified proportion of staff work from home or at one of the Smart Work Centers across the country. Civil servants who need to take care of their children during the day due to lack of childcare or schools are able to work from home or take child care leave or annual leave as part of the government’s parental protection.

- **Business continuity:** The MPM established and enforced a Manual for Preventing COVID-19 and Maintaining Business Continuity. It includes actions to be taken to maintain business continuity in the event of confirmed cases. Especially, while teleworking, the civil servants can use the government remote working portal. In order to maintain human resources development functions, MPM has replaced collective training or education programmes with e-learning or individual task learning.

- **Health measures for civil servants:** The MPM has provided a psychological counselling service to for civil servants suffering from anxiety and stress.

The MPM has streamlined the recruitment of and improved compensation for specialists and experts, including epidemiological investigators, responding to COVID-19 at the frontline. From February 2020, exceptions were made to overtime pay limits, and an overtime work allowance is being paid within budgetary limits, to public officials who work in excess of the prescribed working hours (ref. Article 15 of Regulations On Allowances For Public Officials). When COVID-19 emergency response work is performed, overtime hours are now recognised up to 70 hours per month (57 hours at ordinary times).

The Ministry has also postponed Public Service Examinations.

For communications purposes, public officials use the internal e-Saram system to individually apply for telework. Government-wide guidelines are communicated utilising the On-nara system, which is the primary back-office information system in the government through which Korean public officials
handle tasks and document management on a daily basis. The MPM also utilises its intranet, called *Insaro*, for communication and information sharing.

Under the current circumstances caused by the pandemic, the government and public sector unions are co-operating. The government and unions have delayed bargaining and negotiations until the eradication of COVID-19. The MPM has also implemented requests from the unions related to civil service personnel management, including better compensation and childcare leave.

**Find out more**

United Kingdom – Job weighting and remuneration

Context

Many OECD countries face challenges linked to job classification and the associated remuneration. This translates into situations where job classification systems could be both too specific, and too general, limiting the capacity of public services to adapt and attract. In the United Kingdom, the National Health Service introduced an innovative way of linking job classification to tasks, and their extent to remuneration.

Good example

Job ‘weighting’ is a component of Job Evaluation (JE) used to assign a numerical value to elements of a job (referred to as ‘factors’) in order to determine remuneration. Some form of weighting – the size of the contribution each factor makes to the maximum overall job evaluation score – is implicit in the design of all job evaluation schemes. Most schemes also have additional explicit weighting. The rationale for this is generally two-fold. It is unusual for all factors to have the same number of levels because some factors are capable of greater differentiation than others. This gives rise to weighting in favour of those factors with more levels, which may need to be adjusted. It is also the case that organisations place different values on different factors, depending upon the nature of the organisation.

The model used in the NHS has a maximum of 1,000 points available. The number of points available for each factor is distributed between the levels on an increasing whole number basis. Within the available maximum number of points for the scheme, the maximum score for each factor has a percentage value, the values being the same for similar factors. The allocation of total points to factors is set out below.

- Responsibility: 6 factors: – maximum score 60: – 6 x 60 = 360 – 36% of all available points in the scheme.
- Freedom to act: 1 factor: – maximum score 60: – 1 x 60 = 60 – 6% of all available points.
- Knowledge: 1 factor:– maximum score 240: – 1 x 240 = 240 –24% of all available points.
- Skills: 4 factors:– maximum score for each 60: – 4 x 60 = 240 –24% of all available points.
- Effort and environmental: 4 factors: – maximum score for each 25: – 4 x 25 = 100: – 10% of all available points.

Find out more

OECD (2021), The Public Sector Pay System in Israel