

Implementation Guide for SMEs to Adopt Tripartite Standard on Flexible Work Arrangements

1 Introduction

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) contribute to a supportive and conducive work environment. They benefit both employers and employees as:

- a) Employers can better attract and retain employees, including back-to-work individuals, and become nimbler in manpower deployment.
- b) Employees can become more productive and achieve good work and personal outcomes.

This implementation guide is designed in accordance with the specifications in the Tripartite Standards on Flexible Work Arrangements and it provides the practical references which Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) could consider adopting when implementing effective work-life strategies.

FWAs refer to variations from usual work arrangements. These include:

- i. Flexi-load (e.g. part-time or job-sharing)
- ii. Flexi-time (e.g. staggered hours and compressed work week)
- iii. Flexi-place (e.g. telecommuting)

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2 Checklist for Signing Tripartite Standards on FWAs

- ✔ My organisation has appointed a member of the senior management to champion FWAs
- ✔ Employees are informed about the types of FWAs offered by my organisation, the process to request for them, and the expectations on responsible use of FWAs
- ✔ Outcomes of FWA applications are documented and communicated to the employees in a timely manner
- ✔ If a request for FWA cannot be granted, supervisors should engage employees on the reasons and where possible, discuss suitable alternatives that better meet the needs of both employer and employee.
- ✔ Supervisors are trained to:
 - (i) Objectively evaluate employees' applications for FWA; and
 - (ii) Set work expectations, manage and appraise employees on FWAs fairly based on work outcomes

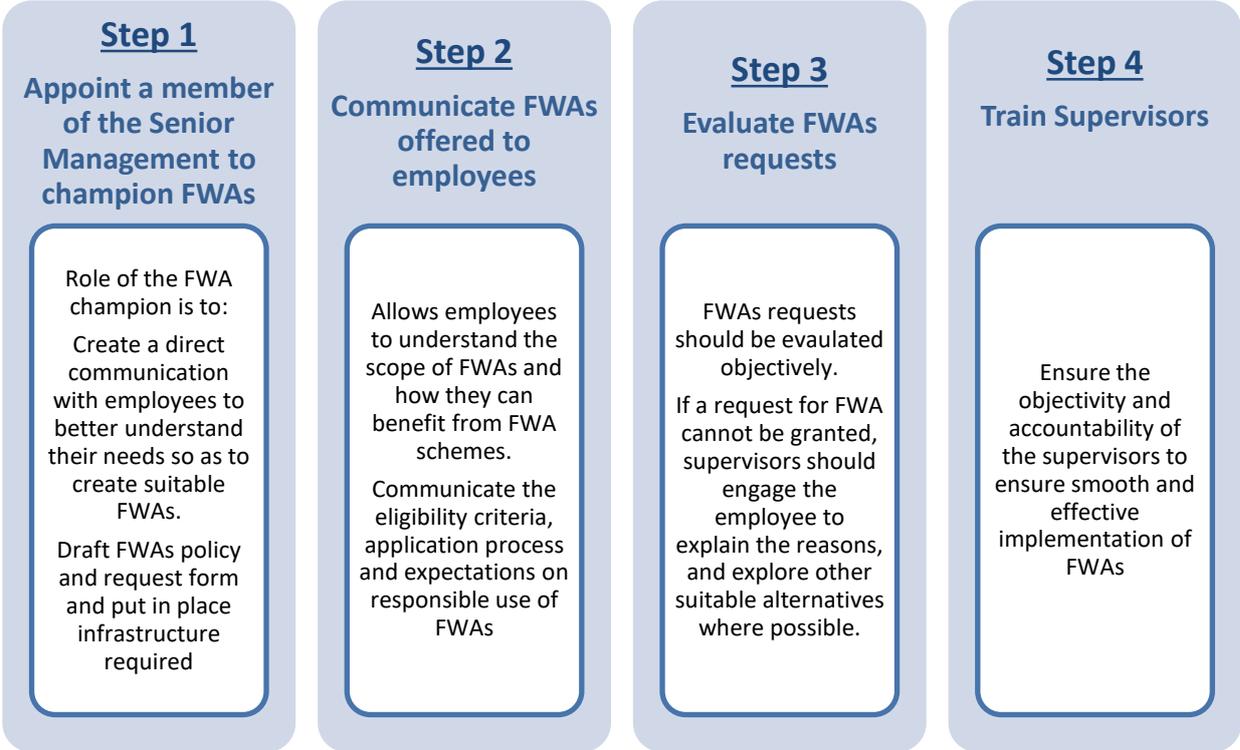
3 Types of FWAs

FWAs	Description
Part-time Work*	An arrangement in which employees work reduced hours on a regular basis. Part-time employees normally work less than 35 hours in a week, including those who work less than a full day all week or only some days per week.
Staggered Time	An arrangement where employees can vary their daily start and end times to suit their work and personal commitments.
Compressed Work Schedule*	An arrangement in which an employee works full-time hours, e.g. 40 hours in a week, in fewer than the normal number of days per time period. There are various types of schedules used for compressed work schedule.
Telecommuting	A flexi-place arrangement in which the job is performed at a location other than the workplace using information and communication technologies. It may be on a situational or episodic basis, i.e. need-based; or core, i.e. a routine, regular and recurring basis.
Job Sharing*	An arrangement that allows two or more people to share the responsibilities of one full-time position, with each of them working part-time. They usually work at different times during the day/week or alternate weeks, and may have a time of overlap to maintain continuity. The work may be divided by function, geography, time or workload etc., depending on the arrangement.
Creative Scheduling	This refers to a work schedule or roster which is a deviation from the industry norm. It may be implemented to accommodate existing employees' personal and family needs and/or to attract potential employees with life stage needs that do not fit into the traditional work schedule or roster practised in that industry.
Employee Choice of Days Off	An arrangement that allows employees to plan their own work schedules and determine their day(s) off. Balloting may be used to ensure that the daily operations run smoothly and to determine fair allocation of day(s) off for employees.
Flexible Hours (Flexi-Hours)	An arrangement where employees are contracted to work a certain number of hours over an accounting period, e.g. a 20-hour workweek, and they can work at any time of the day, as long as they complete the stipulated hours within the workweek.
Flexi-Shift	This refers to an arrangement in which employees specify the days and/or hours they can work, and are scheduled accordingly, e.g. some caregivers of school-going children may opt to work specific hours in the day, i.e. 3-4 hours in the morning or afternoon while the children are at school, or during weekends when other caregivers are available.
Interim Work	This refers to hiring an employee on a part-time or full-time basis for a specific period of time, or to complete a specific project. Interim workers cut across all levels from senior management to rank-and-file employees. Seasonal work and project-based work are some examples of interim work.
Phasing In Or Out	An arrangement in which employees who are joining or leaving an organisation move from a part-time position into a full-time position or vice versa. In some cases, employees are given the flexibility to determine how many hours and when they work to ease their transition into/out of a full-time position.
Phased Retirement	An arrangement to meet the needs of employees nearing retirement age who want to continue working but in a different capacity.
Project-based Work	An arrangement in which someone is engaged to complete a specific project. The contract may be based on a set time frame/duration, or task/KPI-based.
Retirees Cover for Workers On Leave	An arrangement in which organisations engage their retired workers to return to work on an ad hoc or short-term basis when they require manpower.
Seasonal Work	This refers to hiring staff during peak seasons to supplement existing staff strength, or hiring part-time staff to work over a certain period of time to cover the work of existing staff, e.g. hiring more retail staff during festive seasons, or hiring staff to work on weekends to relieve existing staff.
Shift-Swapping	An arrangement that allows shift-workers to trade shifts with one another when the need arises. This enables shift workers to arrange their schedule to meet their personal needs and family responsibilities.
Time Bank*	An arrangement in which the employer and employee agree on a fixed number of work hours over a specified time period (weekly, monthly, quarterly), e.g. 24 hours a week. Additional hours are accumulated in a time bank and taken as time-off in-lieu.
Weekend Work	This arrangement optimises the use of part-timers who may only be available on weekends, e.g. homemakers or students, and is helpful for industries that have difficulty finding staff to work on weekends.

Source: <https://www.worklifeworks.sg/ToolsResources/Work-LifeMenu/FlexibleWorkArrangements/Pages/Default.aspx>

*Employers administering these FWA would have to take note on the compliance to the Employment Act– Time banking, compressed workweek, Part-Time, JSI, annualised hours

4 Steps to Implement FWAs



5 Step 1 - Appoint a Senior Management to Champion FWAs

Who can be appointed as a FWA champion?

- Preferably a member of the organisation's senior management (e.g. Director or equivalent)
- Companies with a flat hierarchy could appoint an employee who can influence decision-making for FWAs and implement the FWAs strategies in the company

What are some of the expectations of the appointed FWA champion?

- Advocate adoption of FWAs at the workplace;
- Understand employees' work-life needs, identify suitable FWAs and implement FWAs;
- Ensure employees are informed of available FWAs and application procedures;
- Ensure system is in place for employees to apply and for evaluation to take place; and
- Ensure supervisors are equipped with adequate knowledge regarding FWAs.

Some work areas that the appointed FWA champion can lead include:

- Implementing and reviewing organisation's FWA policies and processes; and
- Planning and organising events and activities to educate employees on FWA usage

5.1 Review Employees' Needs and determine FWAs to be offered

- Perform profiling to understand the demographics of the workforce
- Understand the needs of employees through one-on-one discussions with employees, surveys or focus group discussions
- Review suitable FWAs and be open to suggestions on FWAs that could meet the employees' needs

Workforce Profiling

Workforce profiling refers to mining information within an organisation, especially its existing employee records. It provides organisations with an indication of the areas of priority for work-life programmes and can yield information on trends and changes which could be used to adjust work-life programmes. Some questions may include:

How many employees are/have	No. of Employees	Proportion of Workforce
near retirement?		
young parents?		
parents of more than one child?		
single parents?		
elderly parents?		
dependants with healthcare needs?		
men or women?		
married or single?		
pursuing further education?		

- Which part of the business has greatest difficulty recruiting employees? What could be the reasons?
- What are the existing health problems and costs?
- What is the absenteeism rate?
- How much medical leave is being consumed?

Source: <https://www.worklifeworks.sg/ToolsResources/GuidetoWork-LifeImplementation/Pages/Step-2.aspx>

Suggested Employee Survey Questions		
Work-life Needs	Yes	No
I need to send my children to be cared for by others /childcare centres/school.		
I need to fetch my children home.		
I need to occasionally take care of my parents at home.		
I need to take care of my new-born at home.		
I wish to spend more time with my family while maintaining my work responsibilities.		
I have to attend classes after work.		
I prefer working day shifts due to personal health considerations and commitments.		
I require occasional time-off to attend to personal needs.		
I would like to have more time to attend to my personal needs during weekends.		
I have health conditions and I am in the midst of recovery.		
I am pregnant with some conditions (e.g. morning sickness) and I would need to go for medical checks occasionally.		
My wife is pregnant and requires my assistance at times.		
I would like to start/end work earlier/later.		
I need to occasionally attend to my child with conditions at home. E.g. autism, overactive, etc.		
I am taking work related part-time studies and may need to complete assignments or have meetings with group mates for group projects at times.		
I liaise with overseas clients or stakeholder at times. Due to time-zone difference, I have to be available after working hours and have to sacrifice the time spent with my family.		
Others (please specify):		

5.2 Pilot FWAs (Optional)

- Consider conducting a smaller-scale pilot to assess effectiveness of the FWAs
- During the pilot, provide a channel of engagement with employees (e.g. feedback channel) to make refinements if necessary

5.3 Draft Policy

- Policy should include:
 - (a) Purpose of FWAs
 - (b) Types and definition of FWAs to be offered to employees.
 - (c) Guidelines of eligibility, application and usage
 - (d) Any other special requirements pertaining to company's policy that employee should take note

Flexible Work Arrangements Policy (Sample)

1. Introduction

Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) offer employees with greater flexibility to manage both their work and personal commitments, while offering the organisation a smart and efficient way to achieve business goals.

1.1 Purpose

This policy aims to ensure that staff and supervisors are aware of the types of FWAs available in the organisation and understand the roles and responsibilities involved in the application and approval process. However, employees should understand that the availability of such arrangements is subjected to the organisation's operational requirements and individual circumstances.

2. Types and definition of FWAs Offered

The following FWAs are offered to staff. Should a staff wish to apply FWAs that are not available in the list, you may wish to discuss with your supervisor to explore alternative arrangements.

[To list the FWAs and its definition from 3 – Definition of Types of FWAs]

3. Guidelines of Eligibility Application and Usage

3.1 Eligibility

FWAs are only offered to staff that have passed their probationary period.

[Optional: Due to the job nature, the FWAs on e.g. telecommuting shall not be made available to xx department.]

3.2 Application

All FWAs requests must be made [by email or letter/by filling in an application form that is available from HR department/line manager/name of individual/the intranet].

Any request made must include:

Types of FWAs, the changes that the employee is seeking to their terms and conditions (e.g. hours of work), date from when the proposed change to come into effect and its duration, reasons for request and ways to stay contactable etc.

Supervisor shall evaluate and inform the outcome of the request within 21 days of application.

3.3 Usage Rules

[To select the relevant rules]

- Staff is required to seek permission or discuss with their supervisor before starting FWAs
- Supervisors who approve the FWAs for their staff should ensure that their department is adequately covered and the needs of internal and external stakeholders can be satisfied without adverse impact to the organisation
- Staff must possess the appropriate equipment to allow the job to be performed away from principal place of employment
- Staff must work in their regular office hours, have a contact telephone number and be available to remain contacted for the regular business day
- Staff will be in compliance with all applicable IT, security, privacy and confidentiality policies and procedures
- Staff is required to take reasonable care of their own health and safety
- The organisation's operational needs shall take precedence over FWAs
- The organisation reserves the right to withdraw or refuse staff request to FWAs at any time

5.5 Put in place infrastructure required

- Ensure the relevant infrastructure e.g. IT are in place to administer the selected FWAs

5.6 Review FWAs Effectiveness

- Regularly review the effectiveness of FWAs and make adjustments where necessary to meet business and employees' needs
- This can be done by seeking regular feedback from supervisors and employees
- Fine-tune the policy and usage guidelines

6 Step 2 - Communicate FWAs Offered

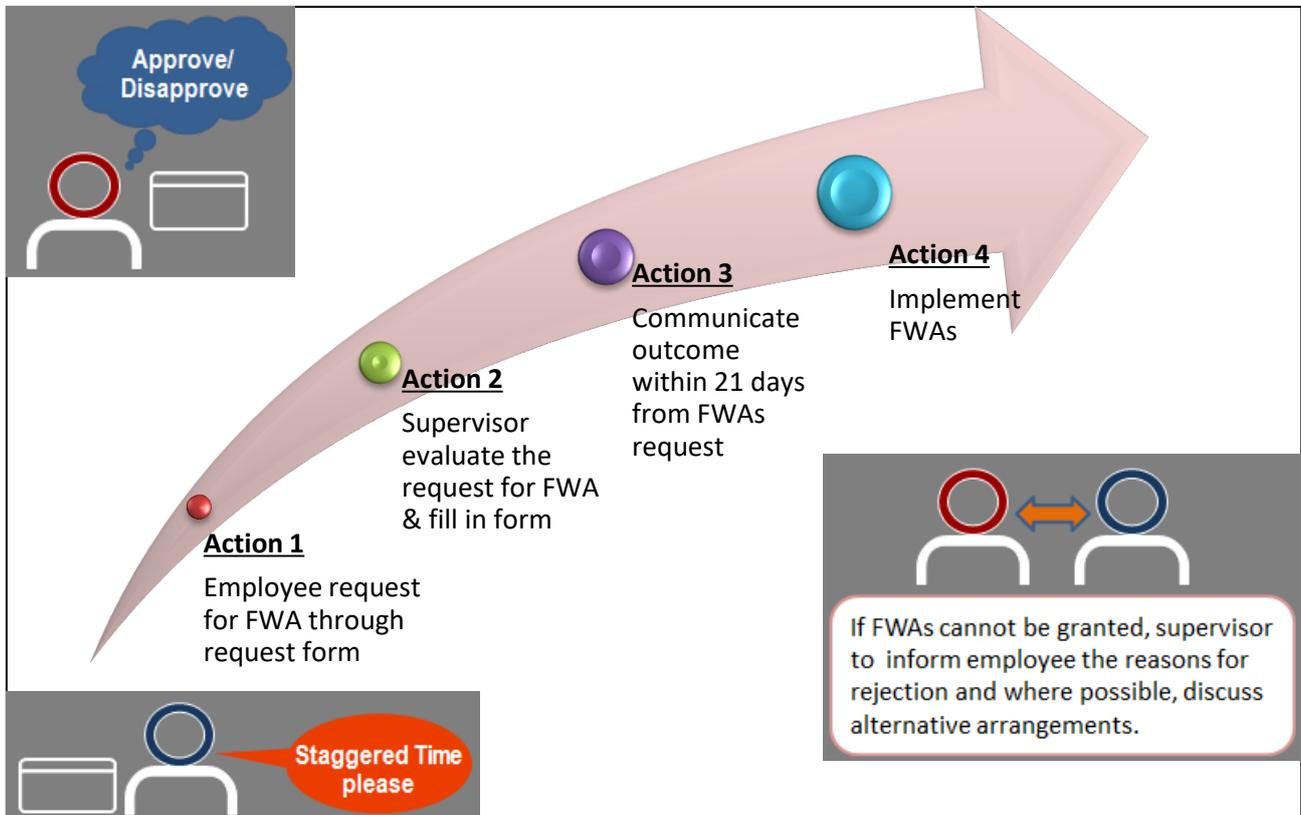
6.1 Communicate FWAs Policy (in 5.3) to Employees on:

- Eligibility criteria
- Application process
- Expectations on responsible use of FWAs
- Evaluation criteria (for supervisors' use) and
- Timeline for supervisors to respond to such applications

6.2 Communication Channels include:

- Email / Memo
- Department briefing / staff meeting
- Staff handbook/ HR or intranet portal

Illustration of the process of requesting and implementing FWAs.



7 Step 3 - Evaluate FWAs Requests

7.1 Use the form after evaluating request for FWA (in 5.4) to document outcome of evaluation.

Pointers for Supervisors to Consider When Evaluating FWA Requests

Suitability of Job for Proposed FWA

1. Can the required work deliverables and standards be met under the proposed FWA?
2. Does the proposed FWA allow the employee to interact with his/her supervisor and/or peers?

Suitability of Employee for Proposed FWA

3. Can the employee work independently in the absence of supervisors/ co-workers?

Work Performance and Requirements

4. Is there mutual agreement on how the employee's performance will be evaluated on the proposed FWA? [Performance evaluation and development plan sample form can be downloaded from <https://www.tafep.sg/performance-evaluation-development-plan>]
5. Is there mutual agreement on the expected work deliverables and standards?

Compensation, Benefits and Overtime

6. Is the proposed FWA likely to affect the compensation, benefits, and/ or overtime of the employee? If so, does the employee understand and accept any changes that are likely to result due to the proposed FWA?

Safety and Equipment

7. Is the proposed alternative workplace location safe for the employee?
8. Is there mutual agreement on the extent of provision of work tools, equipment (e.g. laptops), and reimbursement of work-related expenses (e.g. broadband subsidies)?

Source: Tripartite Advisory on Flexible Work Arrangements by Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy - Annex B-1- Pointers for

7.2 If a request for FWA cannot be granted, supervisors should engage the employees and explain the reasons for not being able to grant them the request. Where possible, explore and discuss suitable alternatives.

Examples of alternative arrangements if FWAs cannot be granted.

EXAMPLE 1:

In the manufacturing industry where machines run at specific times, it is often not feasible for employees to work on a staggered time schedule. In such cases, companies may choose to retain employees (e.g. older employees who are considering retirement) by choosing a part-time strategy instead. Some companies may allow part-time employees to work five shorter days covering lunch breaks or peak periods. This also allows companies to economise during off peak hours.

EXAMPLE 2:

In the retail sector where weekends are often peak periods with highest customer traffic. More salespeople would be needed to meet customers' demands. However, the potential pool of employees willing to work on weekends is usually small and often demands higher remuneration. Such industries could consider creating different schemes that allow for weekend work targeting at specific groups of workers (e.g. students and housewives).

8 Step 4 - Train Supervisors

8.1 Train supervisors to:

- Objectively evaluate FWA applications based on the needs of the job and employees
- Communicate application outcomes within a stipulated timeline
- Set work expectations, manage and appraise employees on FWAs fairly based on work outcomes
- Manage agile, flexible and mobile workforce by changing mindsets, building trust, rapport with and empathy for employees
- Maintain code of conduct, accountability and effectively help to resolve employees' challenges and personal commitments through implementation of FWAs

8.2 Examples of training programmes/resources on evaluating FWA requests and implementing FWAs at the workplace

- Supervisors may be trained on-the-job, or preferably in a structured setting. Such training can be in the form of workshops, courses or briefing sessions and can be held in-house or taught/facilitated by an external vendor.

8.3 Content of FWA training programmes for supervisors can cover:

- Features and benefits of common types of FWAs;
- How to evaluate a FWA request fairly and objectively, including key factors for consideration;
- How to establish suitable work arrangements (e.g. working hours, reporting arrangements) and clear, performance-based work targets or deliverables for the employee; and
- How to assess the performance of the employee fairly based on the agreed deliverables

8.4 Employers can approach the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) and TAFEP for more information on FWA workshops for supervisors.

SNEF	TAFEP
Enquiries Website: www.snef.org.sg Phone: 6827 6927 Email: trg@snef.org.sg	Enquiries Website: tafep.sg Phone: 6302 7114/6302 2770 Email: ts@tafep.sg

8.5 Employers may also refer to the following resources for more guidance:

- The [Tripartite Advisory on Flexible Work Arrangements \(FWAs\)](#) provides a step-by-step guide for organisations, supervisors and employees on FWA implementation and management.
- [Work-Life Works!](#) is a one-stop integrated portal containing extensive content and knowledge resources including the various types of FWAs and leave schemes available, and the range of key benefits offered by work-life programmes. The portal also offers case studies of companies that have successfully implemented FWAs.
- The [WorkPro Work-Life Grant \(WLG\)](#) provides funding support for employers to implement and sustain FWAs.

CASE STUDY 1: Melaleuca Southeast Asia (S) Pte Ltd

Background

Melaleuca is a Health and Wellness company that manufactures and distributes nutritional, pharmaceutical, personal care, facial care, home hygiene, and other wellness products. The company delivers superior-quality products directly to their customer through a full-service catalogue and Internet shopping system. This revolutionary system changed the way hundreds of thousands of people shop, by eliminating the need for a middleman and reducing marketing and distribution costs. This enables the company to spend more on research and high-quality, ecologically sensible ingredients, while maintaining reasonable prices.

Since 1985, the company's mission is to enhance the lives of those they touch by helping people reach their goals. Melaleuca deeply cares for its employees and customers, and is committed to making their employees happy in their workplace. Having happy employees to serve customers would mean that the customers too would be happy and satisfied.

Challenges faced

The company recognised that they have a multi-generational workforce. Each employee has their own work-life needs, be it taking care of their children and elderly parents, or taking on part time studies. Some employees can arrive at the office early, while others may find it difficult to be on time due to traffic conditions or the need to settle personal matters before work. Melaleuca believes that it is important to ensure that employees' well-being and work-life needs are met.

Implementation of Flexible Work Arrangement

After being briefed and informed by SNEF on the Tripartite Standards, Melaleuca reviewed the employees' profile and their needs and implemented a few types of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) such as staggered hours. The company believes that staggered hours provides better work-life balance which enable employees to be able to adjust their reporting time according to their lifestyle needs. For employees that needed to send their children to school, they could choose to report to work earlier and get off work earlier to pick up the children. For younger employees, they could prefer to report to work at the later time to avoid traffic congestions at peak hours.

However, in order to avoid the abuse of the FWAs, the company put in place a biometrics system for tracking reporting time and for security purposes, and had communicated the work expectations of using the FWAs and the trust that the company has placed on every employee to deliver their work outcome.

Outcome

Melaleuca recognises that with the implementation of staggered hours, there would be a shorter period when all employees would be present, but the management was able to accommodate the timing and only call for meeting after the last staggered hour. Besides staggered hours, the company was able to grant other FWAs requests when employees' need arises. Melaleuca identified that when employees were able to meet their private commitments, they were able to focus and perform even better at work.

CASE STUDY 2: Skillsforce Management Consultancy Pte Ltd

Background

Skillsforce Management Consultancy Pte Ltd was established in 1998 as a placement agency and a professional HR consultancy firm offering recruitment and human capital solution services. Its services include recruitment/executive search, human resource outsourcing/support and receptionist resource centre.

Skillsforce emphasizes on the passion, commitment and competency of its staff to deliver reliable quality services to their clients and candidates. The company is committed to building long-term relationships with their clients, therefore they rely on a dedicated, professional and trustworthy team to ensure that they develop an in-depth understanding of the clients' businesses, corporate culture and are attuned to the challenges they face.

Challenges faced

Skillsforce recognises that every employee has unique needs that may require different solutions to effectively manage their work and personal lives. There are employees with childcare or eldercare arrangements and there are employees who stay in the western and northern part of Singapore where commuting time takes longer especially during peak hours.

Implementation of Flexible Work Arrangement

After been informed by SNEF about the Tripartite Standard on Flexible Work Arrangements and how to implement effective flexible work arrangements, the company decided to embark on this work-life journey. Skillsforce devised a menu of types of flexible work arrangements that include staggered time which gives the employees the flexibility to choose a timing that most suit their lives without compromising the organisational needs.

Due to its relatively small workforce, the Skillsforce is extremely nimble and flexible to customise FWAs to fit employees' specific work-life needs. For example, an employee who has young school going children was granted flexible working hours beyond the usual flexible work arrangement. The company allowed her to work on flexible hours such as reporting to work later than the staggered starting hour to settle her children and going off work earlier when she needed to pick up her children from school as and when required. At times, when her children are not well, the company granted her request to work from home.

Outcome

Feedback from employees was positive as employees are better able to balance working hours requirements and family commitments. This work arrangement is most favourable among employees with young schooling children.

Skillsforce understands that managing a mobile workforce may not be an easy task and there could be potential misuse of FWAs. However, the company puts their trust in the employees to work more effectively and productively when flexibility is granted to the employees to manage their personal commitments.

This implementation guide is designed to be aligned with the specification in the Tripartite Standard on Flexible Work Arrangements and references are made from the following sources:

- Tripartite Advisory on Flexible Work Arrangements by Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy
- Flexible Work Arrangements for Better Business Results by Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Practices (TAFEP)
- Work-Life Works! portal by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP)
- Flexible Work Arrangements by Ministry of Manpower (MOM)