

# FWA Implementation in the Hospitality Sector



Trends, Learnings and  
Recommended Strategies

**Produced by:**



Tripartite Alliance for  
Fair & Progressive Employment Practices

**[tafep.sg](http://tafep.sg)**

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## INTRODUCTION

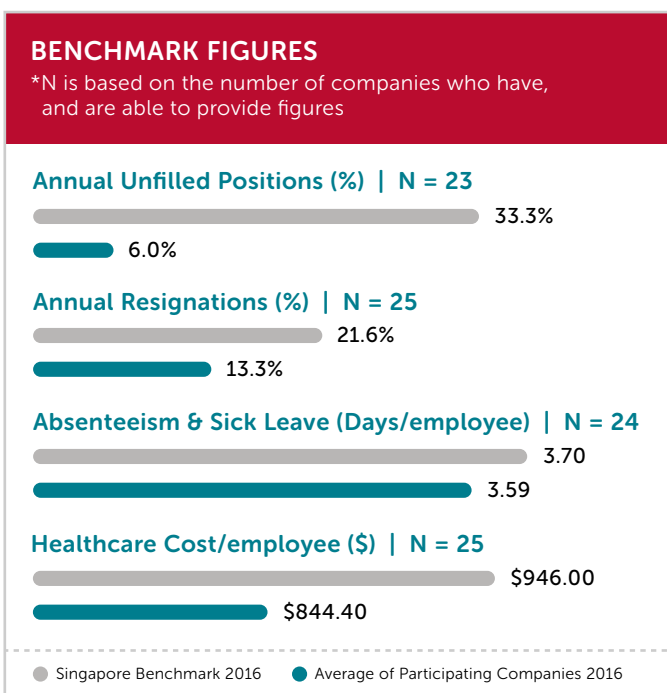
Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) have rapidly gained popularity in recent years, with more organisations recognising the value of supporting a flexible work culture where employees have autonomy over their time and place of work and can effectively manage their careers and personal lives - forming a more motivated, engaged and committed workforce overall.

FWAs are known to contribute to talent attraction and retention, increased productivity, and improved manpower deployment. In a locally commissioned study by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP), organisations that offered FWAs observed the following positive results from employees:



Organisations with positive work-life practices were also found to have higher talent attraction as well as lower attrition, absenteeism and healthcare costs as compared to the national average.

As more employers consider how to successfully adopt FWAs, it is important to recognise the sector-specific challenges they will need to address, as well as the strengths they can leverage for the sustainable implementation of flexible work options.



TAFEP has commissioned aAdvantage Consulting to develop modular sector-specific resources on the implementation of FWAs; to understand the work-life landscape and considerations for individual sectors, as well as identify sectoral success stories and best practices that will help employers to accelerate the flexible working culture in their own organisations.

This module focuses on the hospitality sector and will provide pertinent answers to these common questions from employers:

- How have key sectoral trends affected FWA adoption in the sector? Are some FWAs better suited to certain roles than others?
- What are the challenges for FWA implementation for the sector?
- What are the best practices and proven solutions from other progressive employers in the sector?

Through insights gleaned through research and interviews within the sector, this resource aims to help employers gain a better understanding of the current state of FWAs in the hospitality sector and how to implement them effectively and sustainably in their own organisations.

## KEY TRENDS SHAPING FLEXIBLE WORK IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR

Work trends in Singapore's hospitality sector have been largely influenced by the on-going manpower crunch and an increasing need to find more labour-efficient ways of operating.

Over the last few years, the sector (in particular, hotels), has embraced job redesign as part of its transformation efforts to increase productivity, be more manpower-lean, and attract more local employees into the industry. Through the Hotel Job Redesign Initiative, a tripartite effort between Singapore Hotel Association (SHA), the Food, Drinks and Allied Workers Union (FDAWU), Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and Workforce Singapore (WSG), more than 100 hotels have committed to job redesign initiatives that will refine job roles with

the intention of creating higher value-added jobs, increase productivity and ensure employees are able to adapt in a VUCA environment<sup>1</sup>.

The adoption of smart technology, such as online booking platforms, user experience applications and robotics has also enabled the hospitality sector to allow a greater measure of flexibility in work arrangements, as employees are able to effectively carry out specific tasks away from the traditional office setting. Thus, employers are now also more open to recruiting candidates who require FWAs such as part-time or contract work, and able to tap on traditionally under-utilised talent pools such as back-to-work individuals and mature workers.

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

The onset of the Covid-19 global pandemic has had a heavy impact on many organisations in Singapore, including those in the hospitality sector. With the aviation and tourism sectors slowing down significantly due to border closures, this has had a knock-on effect for hospitality-related businesses; in addition to financial losses, employers have to contend with the shrinkage of the accommodation workforce by 26% to 27,000 at end-2020<sup>2</sup>.

Organisations in the hospitality sector have had to pivot to new business models and ways of working to continue operating in challenging times. This includes serving as Stay-Home Notice (SHN) venues and drawing new clientele with offerings such as staycations and co-working spaces for local residents. To adhere to safe distancing measures, organisations in this sector have also had to implement mandatory work-from-home arrangements for some teams and job roles, as well as staggered time for jobs that require on-site presence.

Interviews with organisations in this sector have shown a general agreement that the pandemic has increased the pace of transformation as employers restructure, reinvent and innovate their work

processes to build a stronger Singaporean Core in the workforce. The rate of digitalisation is also expected to accelerate with funding support. In early 2021, the Job Redesign Reskilling (JRR) initiative was announced, which encourages hotels to redesign and reskill their workforce. As part of this initiative, sixteen roles that require technological know-how have been identified, including rank-and-file positions such as guest-experience designers and food and beverage ambassadors, as well as professional, managerial, executive, and technical roles.

These job redesign efforts in the hospitality sector offer the opportunity to review how FWAs can be further used to improve employee efficiency as well as form part of its overall talent attraction strategy. Employers can consider if job tasks can be uncoupled (i.e., separating into two jobs at the same level) or segmented (i.e., taking portions of different job roles and combining them to form a new job). With such redesign efforts, some tasks can be done off-site or at home to enable remote working. Another possibility is to enable administrative tasks of a job to be managed such that the employee may complete them off-site or at home.

## ACHIEVING FLEXIBILITY ACROSS JOB ROLES

It is highly recommended that organisations conduct a review and analysis of all available job roles to understand how providing greater flexibility in a role can also retain or improve business results. This will also help to persuade leadership that FWA implementation is feasible; leadership buy-in is critical to ensure alignment on the desired outcomes and to mitigate barriers to subsequent changes arising from the implementation process.

Inputs may be sought from various internal stakeholders for a more comprehensive assessment.

Importantly, the organisation should be open to explore possibilities, assess the feasibility of FWAs and objectively address potential constraints.

The job roles in this sector can be broadly categorised in 2 main groups:



### Job Role

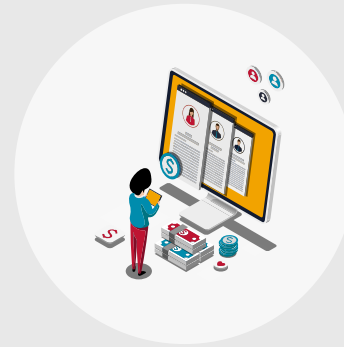
Customer Facing

### Description

Involves various degrees of interaction with customers

### Examples

Front Office (e.g., Reception Staff, Concierge, Bell Captain), Food & Beverage (Serving staff), Housekeeping, Engineering



### Job Role

Back-end Corporate Support

### Description

Provides support for the internal running of the organisation

### Examples

Human Resources, Marketing, Branding, IT Support, Revenue Management, Procurement

As reported in the Ministry of Manpower's Conditions of Employment 2020 report<sup>5</sup> (MOM COE 2020), overall, in the wider Accommodation & Food Services sector, flexi-place options such as telecommuting and remote working have increased from 7.6% in 2018 to 46% in 2020.

However, within the hospitality sector, while the implementation of some flexi-time options such as part-time work and staggered time are relatively

common, employers that were interviewed highlighted that the nature of the business is considered a limiting factor in implementing certain other types of FWAs such as flexi-place options. As most roles in the sector are customer-facing (more than 80%), there is still a preference to introduce options such as staggered shift patterns where employees work set hours in the workplace.

The MOM COE 2020 report also showed that compressed work schedules and job sharing are the least implemented flex options in the Accommodation and Food Services sector. However, it is encouraging to note that implementation of compressed work schedules and job-sharing increased from 6.5 % to 14% and 2.5% to 18.1% respectively, from 2018 to 2020 for the same

sector. This indicates that there is scope to explore how FWAs that are traditionally lesser utilised can be more extensively implemented, as a complement to transformation efforts in the sector.

Employers in the hospitality sector could consider the following:



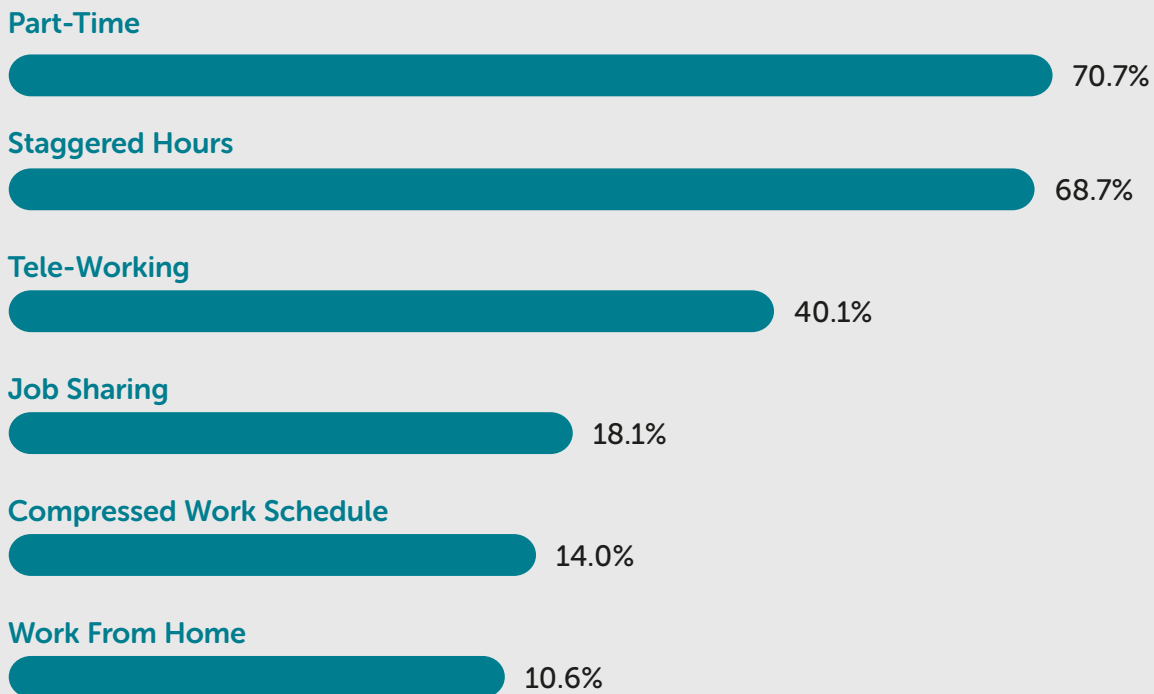
- **Telecommuting** is typically viewed as an option for roles that have little or no direct interface with internal and/or external customers, or those that do not require access to equipment on-site. However, with the deployment of technology, employers can explore ways in which these interfaces can still be maintained, as well as provide remote access to necessary equipment. Employers may review job roles and identify which tasks may be carried out off-site (e.g., from home), and which ones will need to be performed in the office.
- **Job sharing** is gaining some traction in the sector and would be suitable for roles that can be distributed across geography, function, time or workload. In the redesigned job, employees may have shared or divided responsibilities, or a combination of the two.
- **Flexi-shift/hours** may be implemented for employees working in customer facing or operational job roles which require them to work for a specific duration on a shift pattern. Employees can be provided the flexibility to swap shifts with their team members based on established guidelines, e.g., a specified number of times a month. This also offers organisations the opportunity to extend operational hours, as some shifts will end at a later time.
- **Compressed work week** may be suitable for both front-end and back-end roles which are typically characterised by long working hours, and extended pockets of down-time within the workday in some instances. With this flex option, employees work full-time hours within a fewer number of days and have more rest days. Traditionally, such work patterns are common in the manufacturing sector and could be adapted for the hospitality sector.

## A SNAPSHOT OF FWA IMPLEMENTATION IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR

Data from the Ministry of Manpower's Conditions of Employment report<sup>4</sup> shows that FWA implementation across the wider Accommodation and Food Services sector has increased over the past 2 years from 2018 to 2020, likely driven by organisations complying with safe distancing measures that include staggered time and work-from-home options. This trend has been reflected in hospitality organisations as well.

The percentage of organisations, in the accommodation and food services sector offering at least one formal FWA increased from 75.5% to 90.3%.

These are the most commonly implemented FWAs in 2020:



Source: Condition of Employment 2020, Ministry of Manpower, [https://stats.mom.gov.sg/iMAS\\_PdfLibrary/msd-coe-2020.pdf](https://stats.mom.gov.sg/iMAS_PdfLibrary/msd-coe-2020.pdf)





## KEY LEARNINGS, RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND SECTORAL BEST PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABLE FWA IMPLEMENTATION

FWAs for front-line operations service staff in the industry are mainly part-time work or a form of flexi-shift patterns, whilst back-end roles such as corporate services (including HR and Finance) or Sales could avail of a wider range of FWAs e.g., part-time, staggered time or telecommuting.

As the hotels have undergone business transformation through the Job Redesign Initiative, management and staff are now more open to

adopt new skills and job roles have been broadened. During the pandemic, the mindset of being more flexible across job roles was a key factor in helping hotels and staff address business challenges. As a result, leaders are more open to FWAs including remote working for some jobs in corporate service and sales.

These are the lessons and best practices gleaned from the sector.

# 1 KEY LEARNING: FWAS CAN BE A KEY STRATEGY TO ATTRACT NEW TALENT TO THE SECTOR, INCLUDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LOCAL EMPLOYEES.

The younger generation of employees is known to prioritise work-life harmony when making career and job choices. However, various studies have also recognised that work-life harmony is valued across all age groups and life stages.

In the competition for talent to build a strong Singaporean core, offering employees a greater measure of flexibility and autonomy at work through FWAs is likely to be a strong 'pull' factor that attracts local talent.



## BEST PRACTICES IN THE SECTOR

- Job redesign initiatives have been implemented to streamline duplicated tasks between two or more functions, thus enabling some roles to be combined across functional areas (e.g., front desk executive with administrative assistant) for greater efficiency.
- Work-Life friendly shift schedules are available to give staff some flexibility to opt for shifts that help them to meet personal and work responsibilities.



## RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- As a first step to job redesign, conduct a job analysis and identify processes that may be refined or eliminated. Consider how technology may be used to perform the newly reconstituted job roles.
- When enabling employees' schedule flexibility, ensure that a clear and transparent formal flexi-shift policy is in place. This should include,
  - guidelines for requesting the FWA (e.g. reasons for request, length of service etc.)
  - guidelines for using the FWA (e.g. number of times a staff can use the flex-schedule or effect a shift-swap per month, etc.)

## 2 KEY LEARNING: SENIOR MANAGEMENT BUY-IN IS CRUCIAL FOR LONG-TERM FWA SUCCESS.

In the service-oriented hospitality sector, direct interaction is viewed as an integral part of the work culture; to provide a 'personalised touch' for guests and customers and build camaraderie amongst employees. For FWAs to be sustainably implemented, the organisation's leadership will need to understand how flex options can add value to the company, and to identify viable alternatives to ensure that the relational aspect of organisational culture will not be eroded.

Leaders will need to explore new strategies to maintain and even enhance employee engagement and the overall customer experience.

For the organisation to fully experience the benefits of flexibility, strong work-life advocates are needed in the leadership, who recognise the value of work-life harmony and harness it as a key talent strategy, helping to drive FWA adoption in the longer term.



### BEST PRACTICES IN THE SECTOR

- General Managers (GMs) personally champion and advocate flexible working (e.g., learning and adopting technologies to facilitate remote working). This has led to other management staff being more open and willing to implement FWAs for their respective teams.

GMs also engage the senior management team to be aligned on the desired outcomes of implementing FWAs.

- FWAs are implemented in an organised manner; the reasons for implementation are consistently communicated, in a downward cascade from the senior management, throughout the organisation. As part of the change management process, avenues to handle employee feedback and queries are available, and there is an emphasis on sharing FWA success stories as well.



### RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- To support business decisions, data analytics should be used to make a compelling business case for FWAs, which can then be communicated to various internal stakeholders. Employee needs can be identified from employee surveys, focus group discussions and exit interviews. Evaluating hiring and attrition rates, employee satisfaction and productivity levels while working flexibly can also provide insights on the effectiveness of FWAs in meeting organisational goals.
- Implement a structured and formalised process of introducing FWAs with defined goals and stakeholder engagement.
- Appoint a Senior Leader in the organisation as an advocate of flexibility and work-life harmony.

### 3 KEY LEARNING: MIDDLE MANAGERS REQUIRE SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT FWAS ON THE GROUND.

Supervisors who are used to managing employees in-person are likely to have concerns about how their department's performance may be compromised if flexible work options are implemented. They may also have concerns that if employees work remotely, or have different time schedules, team bonding and employee engagement may be affected.

In a 2020 study of SMEs, nearly half of the employees felt that additional support was needed from employers to sustain FWAs for the longer run. In line with this, middle managers must be equipped with the tools and skills to effectively manage their teams, including employees on FWAs.

Organisations will need to review how to maintain a culture of teamwork, collaboration, and innovation when they enable employees to work more flexibly. With the necessary structures and measures in place to address these concerns, the middle management will then have the confidence to empower staff to utilise FWAs.<sup>5</sup>



#### BEST PRACTICES IN THE SECTOR

- GMs lead the review of HR practices and policies to closely align them to the organisation's core values such as trust and accountability (e.g., eliminating the need to record time attendance).
- Managers who have built a strong rapport with employees will trust them to work with minimal supervision. As such, they are more open to FWAs such as remote working. A culture of trust coupled with a performance-driven culture ensures that work outcomes are not compromised even when employees are not physically in the office.
- Managers have communicated clear and measurable performance goals to their team members. This enforces a culture of trust where employees are managed and appraised based on the achievement of outcomes rather than merely time spent in the office.



#### RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- Include middle managers in strategic decision-making conversations that identify the desired behaviours aligned to the organisation's core values, to get their insights and buy-in. They will then be able to translate strategic goals into tactical actions that reinforce positive behaviours on the ground.
- Include training and coaching on people management skills as part of the development plan for middle managers. Having a clear and open management style will enable managers to build rapport and communicate expectations with their teams, well.
- HR can work with managers to refine the performance management system. A balance of outcome-based performance measures and expected behaviours aligned to the desired company culture, will ensure that employees understand expectations. Supervisors should be trained on outcome-based performance management, as well as managing remote teams.

## 4 KEY LEARNING: TECHNOLOGY SHOULD BE LEVERAGED AS A KEY ENABLER IN THE FWA IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS.

Technology can be used to enhance the customer experience as well as improve overall organisational efficiency, for example, through automation and the streamlining of processes.

In the FWA implementation process, employers should explore the feasibility of technological tools such as Cloud-based services and remote access to operational systems. This can help to improve productivity and work efficiency by enabling employees to work flexibly at different times and/or locations. Security controls are also needed to ensure flexible working can be carried out without compromising the organisation's compliance posture.



### BEST PRACTICES IN THE SECTOR

- Adoption of technologies for virtual meetings, online and asynchronous learning and collaborative work.
- Employees have been trained on the importance of technological tools and how to use them effectively (e.g., Zoom, WhatsApp chats). A shift in mindset and openness to learning were key success factors in achieving this outcome.



### RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- Review and setup the technology infrastructure and invest in collaborative tools to facilitate remote work (e.g., setup of VPN, utilisation of cloud service applications).
- Provide employees with opportunities to learn new, higher-order skills as part of business continuity and workforce resilience. Train employees, particularly those with minimal exposure to tech tools, on the use of new technologies that facilitate communication while working flexibly.
- Formalise policies and processes on how to address cybersecurity concerns, compliance, and governance matters. Invest in cybersecurity tools such as firewalls and anti-virus software to facilitate remote working.



## THE FUTURE OF FWAS IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR

Transformation efforts continue to be a priority for organisations in the hospitality sector, in order to achieve greater efficiency and productivity. In line with this, employers should also recognise that FWAs can be part of the solution to the manpower crunch in the sector and take the opportunity to expand the flexible working options offered in their organisations; this will better engage existing employees and attract quality talent in a bid to build a strong Singaporean Core.

Over the past two years, more organisations have embarked on flexible working and experienced the benefits. A 2021 YouGov survey conducted for Channel News Asia, found that 60 per cent of the workers who took part in the survey preferred a hybrid working arrangement with a mix of working remotely as well as at the office.<sup>6</sup>

To continue to attract potential employees to the hospitality sector, employers should consider

building on this interest, to expand existing FWAs to more roles such as corporate services and sales, as well as pilot lesser-known flexi-time options such as compressed work schedules and job sharing where suitable. With the growing gig economy where more skilled workers are open to work on a flexible work schedule and short-time project assignments, organisations may be able to hire part-timers or skilled individuals more easily, if they offer flexible work options.

However, in order to sustainably implement FWAs, organisations will first need to ensure strong leadership buy-in to drive the work-life culture through the wider organisation. With the backing of the senior management, the organisation can then make the necessary investments in technology, infrastructure, training and other tools to enable FWAs, and ultimately reap the benefits of talent attraction and increased employee efficiency.

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### About Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) was set up in 2006 by the tripartite partners (Ministry of Manpower, National Trades Union Congress, and Singapore National Employers Federation), to promote the adoption of fair, responsible and progressive employment practices.

TAFEP is one of three agencies under TAL, along with the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) and the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council.

TAFEP helps employers build workplaces where employees are respected, valued and able to achieve their fullest potential, for the success of the organisation. Employers can approach TAFEP for tools, resource materials and assistance to implement fair and progressive practices at their workplaces. Employees or individuals who encounter workplace discrimination or harassment can seek assistance and advice from TAFEP.