



## **A process to support flexible working for a senior team**

A desire to work more flexibly on the part of one team member will impact on the rest of the team. Traditionally, the assumption is made that others will be faced with “picking up the slack” to help their colleague. This frequently leads to resentment and in the long run is likely to result in the collapse of the flexible arrangement.

It doesn't have to be like this.

Where an entire team is able to negotiate flexible working arrangements, a greater commitment to supporting everybody's work-life balance is likely to emerge. I'm a great believer in employing Positive Psychology in this process. (An excellent book on the Topic is “Positive Psychology at Work” written by Sarah Lewis and published by Wiley-Blackwell.)

### **Proposing a process**

My potential client was keen for me to run a one day workshop for the team. While I was happy to do this, in my experience it can prove more effective to run a short series (say 2 or 3) of brief meetings (around 90 minutes each) over an elapsed period of 2-3 weeks. This structure is often more easily accommodated in the diaries of senior people, and the periods between meetings allow time for reflection and for the exploration of possibilities.

I suggested running three facilitated sessions along the following lines:

#### **Session 1**

The team answers the following questions:

- What would be the benefit to us of supporting more flexible working arrangements for everyone?
- Who do we know (inside or outside this organisation) who's already working similar jobs more flexibly? What can we learn from them?
- What, in terms of our working practices, would we need to change if we chose to support flexible working?

*Essentially, this first session is an “information gathering” one, allowing participants to reflect on what they already know, and what sources of expertise they have around them.*

## Session 2

The team now turns its attention to individual jobs, and identifies how these might be worked more flexibly. *For this session I recommend using materials such as the two “change one job” documents which can be downloaded from the Sustainable Working website.*

## Session 3

Finally, the team answers the following questions:

- What would efficient flexible working look like for this team?
- What do we need to change – both in the recruitment process and our day to day working practices – in order to achieve this?

*In this final session, I recommend adopting a “solutions focus” approach that enables the team to develop a clear picture of what the new, more flexible working arrangement(s) will look like.*

Where the organisation has an equality/diversity expert it can be useful for them to participate in the process as part of the team, but solely for the purpose of sharing information, and without attempting to influence the outcome of discussions.

In addition to team outcomes, the process may result in one or more members identifying a personal need for coaching around flexible working/work-life balance issues.