

UNCTAD Guidelines on Flexible Working Arrangements

These Guidelines explain how the flexible working arrangements set out in ST/SGB/2003/4 and IC/Geneva/2003/28 are implemented in UNCTAD. Part-time work is not classified as a flexible working arrangement and is not included in these guidelines.

Background

The introduction of greater flexibility in the workplace empowers managers to assist staff members in meeting their work objectives and achieving optimal performance by balancing the demands of work with personal issues. Flexible working arrangements have been proven to improve staff members' motivation and experience has shown that misuse of such arrangements is minimal, with productivity gains outweighing any potentially negative effects.

In considering possible approaches to the use of flexible working arrangements, it is important to acknowledge the underlying commitment to the employment contract. UNCTAD staff members are required to provide high quality services to the best of their individual abilities, consistent with their assigned functions. Under the traditional concept of the workplace, the delivery of these services is facilitated and to a certain extent ensured by the requirement that staff members work together in physical proximity and during the same period of time.

The effective management of flexible working arrangements requires as a prerequisite the following:

- a sense of trust and responsibility on the part of both staff and management,
- clear communication between all members of the working team - staff member, manager and peers - concerning expected work outputs and the context of this work with the larger team,
- applicability of the guidelines to staff members at all levels in the organization.

I - Guiding principles

The following principles provide a context in which to consider the introduction of flexible working arrangements.

1. ***Flexible working arrangements are intended to facilitate flexible work but do not create an entitlement for such arrangements.*** (The ST/SGB/2003/4 states: "There is no right or entitlement to flexible working arrangements. They require a specific agreement and are purely voluntary for all concerned").

Flexible working arrangements are more easily put in place for some jobs than others.

Whether an arrangement is appropriate for a particular staff member will require discussion between the staff member and their manager and guidance and counseling by Human Resources Management Section (HRMS).

2. ***The introduction and operation of flexible working arrangements cannot represent additional costs for the organization.***

The United Nations does not have specific resources to enable direct financial support to alternative working arrangements. While productivity gains are often realized through the use of flexible working arrangements, the initial impetus for the introduction of such arrangements is to meet the personal needs of a staff member. It is not reasonable that the organization be burdened with additional costs in introducing flexible working arrangements.

3. ***The productivity level achieved under flexible working arrangements must be confirmed by management as being consistent with the level established under the standard structure.***

Staff members have individual work plans in their ePAS, which specify broadly expected outcomes. Productivity levels however are not precisely established. Full time employment is still largely defined through the recording of time and attendance. Under flexible working arrangements, the physical presence of staff members at the workplace during a specific period of time becomes a less important factor. Therefore work planning between managers and staff members becomes critical, and realistic and specific output targets must be established. Ultimately it is the primary responsibility of management to ensure that staff members' performance goals are met.

II - Roles and responsibilities

The implementation of the flexible working arrangements set out in these guidelines requires the engagement of all stakeholders, whose roles and responsibilities are described below.

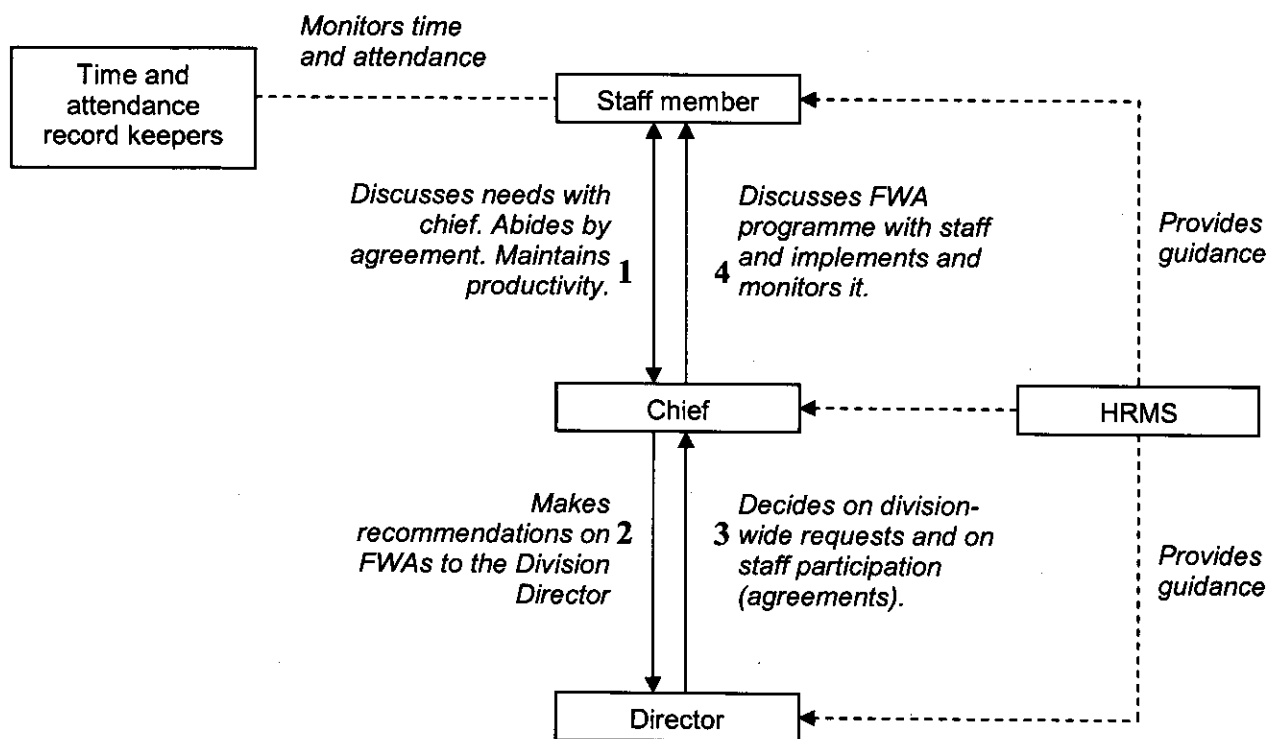
Staff members: Staff members must undertake to abide by the agreements signed and to participate with professionalism, integrity and teamwork, and ensure that their productivity level is not adversely affected.

Supervisors (Branch/Service/Section/Unit): The supervisors are responsible for discussing the work programme with their staff, implementing and monitoring the programme to ensure that the staff members' productivity, quality of work and delivery of service to clients are not compromised; and to make recommendations to their Director, through their own supervisor where applicable, as to whether a particular agreement should be entered into.

Directors: Directors will be responsible for introducing, continuing or terminating flexible working arrangements in their respective Divisions.

Time & Attendance record keepers: Time and attendance record keepers are responsible for monitoring and recording time and attendance, including in IMIS. They will provide copies of all agreements on flexible working arrangements to HRMS within one week of their approval. As in current practice, prior approval is required for annual leave.

Human Resources: The Human Resources Management Section will provide guidance on and monitor the implementation of flexible working arrangements.



III - Forms of Flexible Working Arrangements

The guidelines set out four forms of flexible working arrangements:

- a) Staggered working hours;
- b) Compressed work schedule: ten working days in nine;
- c) Scheduled break for external learning activities; and
- d) Work away from the office (telecommuting)

Staff members who choose option “a” may also avail themselves of options “b”, “c”, or “d”. The other options may not be combined. Lunch hour or technical break cannot be used for all these options to gain additional time with flexible working arrangements.

A) Staggered working hours

UNCTAD's core working hours in Geneva are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. During these hours, staff members must be present, except for one hour for lunch. Core hours are intended to guide managers in organizing activities, such as meetings, where the input of all staff members may be required. Outside of the core hours, staff members may complete functions which will not require interaction with other staff. Staff members are expected to work the number of hours per day which have been established under the common workweek i.e. eight hours plus a

break of one hour for lunch. Starting and ending times are permitted to vary to meet the personal needs of staff members.

B) Compressed work schedule: ten working days in nine

Through working an additional amount of time each working day during nine days, staff members can take an additional day off every other week. To the extent possible, Friday is designated as the day off for compressed work schedules at UNCTAD. Use of this arrangement requires managerial discipline to ensure that meetings are not scheduled on a staff member's designated day off.

Supervisors are encouraged to discuss the possible introduction of compressed schedules on a section-wide basis. It is important that the impact of implementing such an arrangement takes into account the distribution of work with colleagues and the staggering of days off, particularly if more than one staff member within the section has entered into a compressed work schedule. Discussions regarding work schedules to ensure coverage at all times are essential to the smooth integration of flexible working arrangements into the work programme of the section or unit.

In order to avail themselves of this arrangement staff members will be required to work an additional fifty-three minutes per day, on average, for the nine day period.

There may arise occasions where work demands prevent a staff member from enjoying a specific alternate day off. For example:

- In the case of unforeseen events or emergencies, staff members will be required to come to work on the day that would otherwise be a day off. Under this option, days off cannot be deferred, carried forward or accumulated to be enjoyed at a future time;
- If an official holiday observed by the United Nations falls within the 10-day period, the staff member may have the option to suspend the arrangement or to work on a nine in eight days' basis, subject to the agreement of the manager/supervisor. The hours of the ninth day should be distributed among the eight days;
- If the designated day off falls on an official holiday observed by the United Nations, the staff member may take the designated day on a different day during the same 10-day period, subject to the agreement of the supervisor;
- If a staff member is sick on the designated day off, that day will still be considered as the day off for purposes of this option. No sick leave will be granted.

C) Scheduled break for external learning activities

As a knowledge-based organization, UNCTAD recognizes the need to support the continuous learning of its staff. While staff members have access during working hours to courses provided by UNOG SDLS and other internal learning providers, it is recognized that staff may benefit from external learning courses.

Under a scheduled break for external learning, staff members will be permitted breaks of up to three hours per day, two days per week to pursue an external learning activity. The up to six hours away from the office would be compensated by adding two hours per day to the remaining three days per week, or alternatively one hour per day for all five days with the sixth hour added to one selected day.

Staff members are not permitted to sacrifice lunch hours in lieu of additional work hours. The break from the working day must follow a scheduled pattern for a specified period and be agreed by the immediate manager before formal commitments to an external learning activity are made. Staff members must meet their work commitments and managers must ensure that the scheduled break does not present a significant disruption to operational activities.

D) Work away from the office (telecommuting)

Under the arrangements for scheduled periodic work away from the office, a staff member may work from an alternative site, for up to two days per week. This work must be supported by a telecommunications platform that includes a PC installed with the relevant office software, a broadband internet connection and telephone. The cost for the computer equipment and related telecommunication connections must be borne entirely by the staff member. Similarly, telecommunication costs incurred by the staff member in support of the telecommuting arrangements also must be met by the staff member.

A schedule for work away from the office, setting out times when the staff member will be in the telecommuting mode and available for communication with their manager and colleagues, must be agreed between the staff member and their manager.

IV - How to enter into a flexible working arrangement.

The mechanism to enter into a flexible working hours arrangement is briefly described in the above section III and graph I.

An agreement between the staff member and her/his supervisor is required for all arrangements. Model agreements are provided in Annex 1 (you may also refer to circular IC/Geneva/2003/28).

All agreements should clearly specify their duration and, to the extent possible, establish specific output/productivity criteria in order to ensure a fair and objective performance appraisal of staff members using flexible arrangements.

The recommended maximum period for any arrangement is one year, at which time the arrangement will be reviewed.

Copies of all flexible working arrangements should be provided to HRMS within one week of their approval.

It is not permitted to use lunch hour or technical break for the purpose of gaining additional time with flexible working arrangements.

The guidelines for flexible working arrangements will be reviewed on an annual basis as part of staff-management consultations.