

Shifting to hybrid work: An evaluation of flexible work arrangements in the library

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Purpose & Goals

In Fall 2021, the University of Texas Libraries (UT Libraries) participated in a university-wide pilot of Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) for staff. FWAs in this instance are defined as “a variation in where a job is performed (e.g., teleworking) or the time the work is performed (e.g., flexible schedule).” The pilot included a mandate to assess the impact of FWAs on the organization but did not specify goals or metrics. With the latitude to decide what success of FWAs meant for UT Libraries, we devised a two-prong approach to answering the following questions:

• What challenges and opportunities accompany a shift to more flexible work arrangements in an academic library?
 • How can supervisors best implement these changes?

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Methodology

To thoroughly explore perceptions and experiences around the implementation of FWAs, we designed two surveys to gather feedback from both supervisors and staff.

1. The first survey consisted of open-ended questions designed to illicit information about how supervisors decided which FWA options would be available to their staff, what methods they used to roll out the implementation, what (if anything) they were considering changing, and their perceptions of how work in their unit was or was not affected by the changes.
2. The second survey went to all library staff and consisted of a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions designed to learn about how FWAs affected job satisfaction and staff abilities to achieve their work goals.

The survey analysis was shared with the entire staff through brief reports and a set of data visualizations designed to spur discussion on how the pilot implementation of FWAs could be improved upon.

Findings

Findings suggest that FWAs are largely working well for individuals who have them and for teams overall. Work goals are not being hindered, and staff remain productive. It was repeatedly expressed how much staff appreciated and benefitted from the flexibility that FWAs offered. Staff and supervisor comments articulated the thankfulness and excitement from staff around the implementation of FWAs and shared how FWAs have improved staff morale, well-being, and productivity. Below find an in-depth exploration of staff survey results on the left and supervisor survey results on the right.

Library Staff Job Satisfaction and Overall Thoughts on FWAs

- A clear disparity emerged between hybrid staff who had the benefit of setting up FWAs and on-campus staff who did not have the option for an FWA
 - Hybrid staff overwhelmingly saw an increase in their job satisfaction and felt UT Libraries' FWA implementation works well for them
 - On campus staff were either neutral or saw a decrease in their job satisfaction and felt the FWA implementation did not work well for them
- Staff most frequently commented on their appreciation for FWAs, closely followed by advocating for increased flexibility. Staff desired more flexibility for public service staff, an increase in the time allowed for remote work, and general flexibility for units and individuals



Perceptions about the Impact of FWAs on Achieving Work Goals

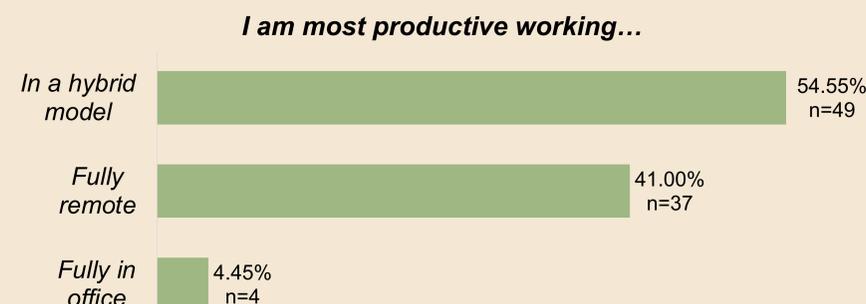
- A majority of supervisors found FWAs had a positive impact on the efforts of their teams to achieve their work goals
- The most frequently cited changes supervisors made to FWAs throughout the initial part of the pilot were allowing for more flexibility with schedule changes or remote work
- There was a desire from supervisors to see what more we could do with FWAs, such as continue increasing this flexibility and think more creatively about how we could use FWAs – especially for public service staff

On average, have Flexible Work Arrangements helped or hindered your team's efforts to achieve your work goals?



Library Staff Productivity in Different Work Arrangements

- The majority of staff stated they can adequately achieve their work goals and communicate with colleagues since FWAs went into effect
- Staff reported being the most productive working within a hybrid model, especially in comparison to a model that requires working fully in the office



Top Pieces of Advice for Supervisors around Implementing FWAs

1. Be flexible
2. Set clear expectations and standards
3. Get staff input
4. Put trust in staff
5. Monitor how things are going
6. Think creatively about FWAs and work schedules – especially with front line and public facing staff
7. Can be difficult to manage when some reports are onsite, and others are work from home reports
8. Plan ahead
9. Work to strike a realistic and equitable balance
10. Start with a conservative pilot approach to give yourself room to add or subtract flexibility