**Summary of benefits and challenges of flexible work**

**BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORK**

**Time and costs savings from less commuting**

Workers who engage in flexible working and that are home-based save in terms of time and costs from commuting less to the office.66

**Lower work-home conflict**

A meta-analysis revealed flexible working had small but mainly beneficial effect on work–home conflict.32 They also found that high-intensity flexible working (more than 2.5 days a week) accentuated flexible working’s beneficial effects on work–family conflict (i.e. reduced work-family conflict).

**Increased autonomy and work motivation**

At the individual level, flexible working affords increased job control whereby employees can establish a work arrangement that suits their needs and preferences regarding when and where they engage in work.120 Also, a study found that home-based work or virtual work had a positive influence on job motivation which can be explained by having a greater sense of autonomy in performing your work (Hill, Ferris, & Martinson, 2003).121

**Greater job satisfaction**

A meta-analysis revealed that flexible working is positively associated with job satisfaction.32

**Increased organisational commitment and productivity**A meta-analysis results indicated that there was a positive relationship between flexible work and organisational commitment and productivity.67

**Lower turnover intentions**

Flexible work has been associated with lower turnover intentions.32

**CHALLENGES OF FLEXIBLE WORK**

**Increased home-to-work conflict**

A study found that flexible work had a differential impact on work–home conflict, such that the more extensively individuals work in this mode, the lower their work-to-home conflict, but the higher their home-to-work conflict.118

**Lower levels of psychological detachment (“switching off”)**

Research showed that one’s spatial boundaries between work and home are related to psychological detachment from work.119 Specifically, individuals who reported having an office at home reported lower levels of psychological detachment during nonwork hours. This could also be further exacerbated by poor technological boundaries by responding to work-related issues during non-work hours.

**Lack of social connection**

One of the most cited risks of flexible work arrangements is a lack of social connection as employees are physically separated from the workplace and are more than likely to be excluded from whether it would be formal or informal discussions with colleagues, unless there is a conscious effort to organise regular meetings and informal get- togethers, either face to face or virtually.120

**Increased role ambiguity**

Role ambiguity involves uncertainty about the expectations involved in performing a task or carrying out activities in one’s role.122 One study found that flexible work increased role ambiguity,123 which is perhaps due to being physically away from the office and relying on ICTs to communicate and connect with the workplace.

**Perceived lack of promotion opportunities**

Further to the separation from the workplace in terms  
of from a relational perspective, there is a common perception that this type of work arrangement acts as a threat to career advancement opportunities due to being “out of sight, out of mind.”120

**Individual differences in preferences for flexible work**

This type of work arrangement may not suit everyone in the workplace and different individual differences will need to be taken into consideration prior engaging in flexible working. For example, some employees may have small children who are at home during the day which may not be conducive to working from home productively.120

**Greater worker well-being**

Research has shown that flexible working is associated with greater well-being.62

**Reduced support and feedback**

Flexible work was found to be negatively related to feedback and social support.123 The researchers argued that this could be dependent on the richness of the  
ICT used when working flexibly. By using richer ICTs  
(e.g. videoconferencing) this may mitigate some of the negative effects of flexible work such as a lack of feedback and support.123

Summary from Parker, K., Parker, S. K., & Jarritsma, K. (2020) *How to Make My Flexible Work SMART: A Guide for Workers.* Future of Work Institute. November, 2020.