

## MEDIA RELEASE

### BUSINESS URGED TO ACT NOW TO BUILD ON THE 'NEW NORM' OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

**13 August 2020:** A new report released today by Chief Executive Women (CEW) in partnership with Bain & Company and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) is urging businesses to start planning now to ensure long-term and sustainable flexible working options are available for employees beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report – *Flex for Success: Five Practices That Build a Flexible Workforce* from CEW in partnership with Bain & Company and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) – highlights how business leaders have a unique opportunity to permanently embed flexibility to fully realise its benefits.

“Flexible work supports diversity and inclusion, particularly gender equality and gender balance, which we know results in better business profitability. COVID-19 has radically accelerated the acceptability of flexible and remote work, resulting in more leaders and employees embracing the benefits of working flexibly than ever before,” said Sue Morphet, President, Chief Executive Women.

“This report shows that while progress to date has been significant, leaders need to take action now to ensure benefits continue to outweigh any perceived challenges in the longer term. Companies must ensure that senior management personally embrace flexible and remote working, so that it is normalised throughout employee ranks, regardless of seniority or gender.”

The report highlights case studies showing how corporate Australia is implementing and learning about flexibility for employees to drive business results.

A key feature of the report is a diagnostic tool to help businesses assess their current flexible working arrangements to ensure it remains central to their long-term strategy.

“Since COVID-19 ushered in greater flexibility, employee productivity and engagement have increased, dispelling the myth that flexibility undercuts results. Where organisations had existing flexible policies and a degree of flexible working, the transition during the COVID-19 pandemic has been quicker and easier. In the future, as COVID-19 restrictions ease and tighten in cycles, having

a foundation in place to support organisational agility will be a competitive advantage,” said Bain & Company Partner and report co-author, Agathe Gross.

The report outlines five effective ways companies across corporate Australia have built a flexible workforce before and during the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. **Ensure flexibility is flexible** – allow employees to drive what flexible working options they want (for example, empowering them to switch shifts without formal management approval) and understand that flexibility means different things for different people.
2. **Link flexibility to strategy and the customer** – use flexibility to empower teams to identify their own ways to achieve their organisation’s strategic goals.
3. **Model flexibility** – set a cultural example with senior leaders as role models and eliminate the emphasis on flexibility only applying to women as traditional primary caregivers.
4. **Encourage and enable team flexibility** – encourage teams to create their own standards (such as avoiding in-person meetings on days or times that are popular for working from home) and seek regular feedback to establish what’s working and what needs to change.
5. **Support individuals to work flexibly** – invest in training to help leaders get the best out of teams that have some or all members working flexibly; understand that working remotely, for example, doesn’t suit all employee; and increase resources to build employee resilience.

The *Flex for Success* report highlights one of the biggest shifts has come from the changing attitudes of the most senior ranks of leadership teams towards flexibility.

“This new report offers clear and practical advice for all employers so they can ensure that flexible working becomes the lived reality for all their employees in a way that suits the individual needs of their organisation. It is important to remember that flexible working is not just about working from home or working remotely. There are many ways to work flexibly and there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach,” said Libby Lyons, Director of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

The report is a joint initiative of Chief Executive Women; global consultancy firm Bain & Company; and the Federal Government’s Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA).

It is part of a series of thought leadership studies by Chief Executive Women and Bain & Company to advocate further for gender inclusion and gender equality in leadership.

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