

— **Exclusive**

This is how often we disagree about working from home

Euan Black *Work and Careers Reporter*



Jul 27, 2023 - 3.20pm

Josephine Majewski accepts that Citi's requirement for staff to attend the office at least three days a week forces some employees to come in more often than they would like.

But the bank's chief administrative officer in Australia and New Zealand said it was worth it.

Although the policy might upset some employees, Ms Majewski said the benefits of collaboration, coaching and increased social interaction that come with greater office attendance outweighed any downsides.



Citi's Josephine Majewski reckons the bank has struck a balance between flexibility and in-person collaboration with its hybrid working policy. **Louie Douvis**

“We feel we needed a minimum mass of employees during the week to achieve certain outcomes,” Ms Majewski said.

“And we feel it’s a good compromise in our industry too because, obviously, we could have taken away all of that flexibility and said, ‘guys, we’re back to business, and it’s five days [in the office]’.”

Ms Majewski said Citi had not experienced major pushback from its roughly 880 employees in Australia and New Zealand over the policy, which was introduced in October 2022 [<https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/you-can-t-buy-the-one-thing-most-likely-to-get-workers-back-in-office-20221024-p5bsbq>]. But research conducted by Roy Morgan and the Melbourne Institute, and provided exclusively to *The Australian Financial Review*, suggests 40 per cent of workers want to work from home more often than their bosses will let them.

The research, which was based on responses from almost 4700 Australians who can work from home, found workers and employers agree on how much time staff should spend in the office just 37 per cent of the time – a figure that has remained relatively stable since September 2021.

Report author Ragan Petrie, an applied microeconomist and a professorial fellow at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, said employees had become accustomed to the flexibility of working from home

[\[https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/last-gasp-of-the-status-quo-why-wfh-won-t-die-20230619-p5dhnbn\]](https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/last-gasp-of-the-status-quo-why-wfh-won-t-die-20230619-p5dhnbn) and had demonstrated the office is not the only place to get their work done.

But many bosses want their staff to attend the office more regularly as they are “likely worried that having workers at home will reduce productivity”.

“This is completely understandable,” Professor Petrie said.

“[But] there is differing evidence on whether work from home reduces productivity, keeps it the same or increases it. So, it is not clear if this worry is well-founded.”

Disagreements less stark

Although the survey found bosses and workers are about as likely today to have the same working from home preferences as they were in September 2021, there has been a noticeable shift among the employees keen to stay at home more than their employers would like. They have edged closer to what their bosses want.

In June 2023, these workers wanted to spend two-thirds of their workweek at home, compared to the one-third their employer would permit. For full-time workers, this equated to a difference of 1.75 days a week.

But while that is still a sizeable gap, it is smaller than the difference of 2.1 days that the same survey observed in April 2021, when these workers wanted to spend almost three-quarters of their workweek at home, while employers would let them spend just one-quarter of it at home.

“With a tight labour market and perhaps not too compelling reasons to demand workers back in the office, it is not so surprising that hybrid work has emerged as an agreeable option,” Professor Petrie said. Hybrid working accounted for 60 per cent of reported work arrangements, he said.

“It seems to be sticking around and has grown over the past two years – although workers still want more ‘home’ in hybrid work arrangements than they are currently getting.”

At Citi, Ms Majewski believes the bank’s policy strikes a balance between flexibility and providing sufficient opportunities for mentoring and collaboration. But she

also accepts there is room for improvement and the bank will have to give managers more training on how to get the most out of hybrid working.

“You have to use a very impartial way of measuring performance,” Ms Majewski said, when asked to elaborate on the training required.

“You can’t go back to the old days of, ‘hey, the more hours you do in the office, the better you are’. I think we need to move away from that [focus] on office presence and have better trained managers that can really measure the output of an employee.”

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