

Business First NZ

Workshop Report:

Future Work-Life

***Organizational responses for a(n apparent)
shift in individual practices and preferences
–Navigating a shift or co-creating new norms?–***

17th August 2022, facilitated by Dr Jennifer Scott

from the School of Management

along with

Wayne Macpherson, Kazunori Kobayashi, and James Lockhart

from the Massey Business School

31st August 2022

Executive Summary

This report summarises the third *BusinessFirstNZ* workshop for 2022 hosted by the Massey Business School to engage local businesses. The initiative seeks to assist business leaders to highlight business problems and seek practical solutions in their pursuit of business excellence and sustainable competitive advantage. Information on past workshops, and our industry report which outlines initiative engagement between Massey Business School and local business leaders and titled, "*Business First New Zealand: Advancing engagement among industry and academic communities for business prosperity in NZ*" can be found in our [dropbox here](#).

This face-to-face workshop was attended by 13 business professionals and titled, "*Future Work-Life*." It was facilitated by Dr Jennifer (Jen) Scott, a lecturer in innovation and business development for regional organisations, sustainability for the agri-food sector and agribusiness, and teaching and learning in higher education. Jen focused on navigating the future of work-life and work-life initiatives in SMEs, especially the balancing act between an employee's work demands and their non-work demands (think work-life balance) and then the initiatives or management practices that organisations introduce to facilitate this balancing act.

Attendees heard about what current trends are occurring (the pressures driving visible shifts in practice, the industries being affected, key demographics affected, and various perspectives throughout NZ) and explored how this might impact their businesses. Jen helped attendees identify and explore the tensions and conflicts that might arise, and current practices that organisations are already using to respond; future challenges for their businesses, and possible management practices for responding to the pressures.

The workshop was broken into four sessions, with Jen providing overviews of each before initiating small and large group discussions to allow attendees to explore the following areas:

- Landscape scan – What's happening?
- NZ SMEs - Individual employees' perceptions, practices and preferences (Current and future "work-life")
- New norms – Navigating pressures or engaging with new practices and preferences (Institutional theory perspective)
- Implications for organizations' management practices

1. Businesses in Attendance

Across the *BusinessFirstNZ* workshops to date, the following business have been represented:

Business	Sector	Business	Sector
Advantage	IT Support	Genoese Foods	Food Preparation
AFC Motorcycles	Powersports Products	Gillard Honey	Honey Production
Ali Arc Industries	Structural Metal Fabrication	Gropak	Agricultural Services
Avatar Honey	Honey Production	Henergy	Poultry Products
BakerAg	Agricultural Services	JR's Orchards	Apple and Pears
Betacraft NZ	Workwear	OBO	Sports Protection
Business Central	Business Development	Palliser Estate	Winery
CEDA	Economic Development	Prepack	Packaging
Carousel Confectionary	Confectionery Manufacturing	Property Brokers	Real Estate
NZ Delphiniums	Horticulture	Quest Industries	Plastic Moulding
E&T Consultants	Education & Training (E&T)	Speirs Foods	Food Preparation
ExportNZ	BusinessNZ Division	Steelfort	Machinery & Equipment
FieldAir	Aviation Engineering	Tasman Tanning	Leather Products
Gallagher Fuel Systems	Fuel Dispensing Systems	Turks Poultry Farm	Poultry
Garden Barn	Garden Supplies	UCOL	Education
GasNet	Gas Delivery		

2. Workshop Overview

Jen commenced the session with a landscape scan by drawing on mainstream business knowledge, attendees' views and recent research findings to build a picture of what work-life shifts are occurring at the organisation, industry and national levels. Moving from the employee perspective, Jen reported on research recently conducted by the *BusinessFirstNZ* team of employees' perspectives regarding such shifts. Once we came to understand each side—employers and employees—we contemplated how managers might navigate the pressures and engage with new practices & preferences. Finally, we considered the implications for management practice.

2.1 Landscape scan – what's happening?

To understand what changes are occurring in NZ industry, attendees were asked if they had seen or heard of any (mass) changes in employee behaviour/demands/requests over the past year, and if they noticed any trends by age, job type/level, drivers/reasons, and industry.

To understand what demands for flexibility were being signalled by employees, attendees were asked what they thought employees were asking for when they sought **more flexibility**, why they are asking for this. That is, **what are the driving forces?**

To understand the emerging tensions, attendees were asked to identify the **tensions or conflicts** that might arise with increased demands for flexibility, and why flexible working arrangements might not work **from the employee/individual perspective**.

Finally, to understand challenges, attendees were asked about **challenges their company or industry might face** with increased demands for flexibility, and why.

Most dominantly, attendees noted the current labour shortage as being disruptive to production flow and productivity and that it requires both short-term and long-term solutions. Employee expectations of what their responsibilities are varied between demographics such as age, and also industry and company. Employees' personalities were less and less aligned with company culture resulting in less loyalty. There are also issues with employee mental well-being driven by their home situations, the cost of living crisis, and other outside distractions. Attendees also note that for too long they had been fixated on labour inputs rather than labour productivity when designing working schedules and ways of working. They realise that with shifts in employee preferences for new ways to work, and with the possibilities that 'COVID might happen again', they need to be accommodating and still be operationally sound and at the end of the day, profitable.

2.2 Individual employees' perceptions, practices and preferences

Jen commenced this part of the workshop by giving attendees a definition of work-life, being:

Work-life refers to the integration of work demands, and non-work demands. Flexibility at work refers to working practices that allow employees to adjust the where, when, and how they carry out work demands (in order for determining when/where/how they carry out non-work demands). Work-life initiatives generally refer to organisational practices introduced to facilitate the integration of employees' work and non-work demands. In the past, they have typically included flexible working conditions, leave options, childcare, and dependent care. Research suggests there is an increase in the use of work-life initiatives, and that such initiatives can enhance organisational performance through improved productivity and reduced turnover if managed well.

Moving from the employer's (organisational) perspective to that of the individual employee, Jen drew on recent research undertaken by the *BusinessFirstNZ* team in collaboration with outside researchers to help attendees understand the current and what future "work-life" may look like. An online survey conducted in March 2022 collected responses from 619 individuals employed in NZ small-medium enterprises (SMEs). The research sought to understand the work-life practices, preferences, and perceptions of individual employees, where *practices* are what they employees currently doing or what they can do. *Preferences* are what employees want to do, and *perceptions* are what employees see or think they see happening. Although data can tell us a lot about a group, in trusting the data, we draw only that that is considered 'statistically significant' by specialised testing methods.

The demographics of the group from which the data was collected is reported in the tables below.

Age	Under 30 (32.1%)
	30 – 39 (27.0%)
	40 – 49 (18.1%)
	50 – 59 (13.1%)
	60 –69 (7.6%)
Gender	Over 70 (2.1%)
	Female (54.2%)
	Male (45.1%)
Highest level of education	Diverse (0.6%)
	High School (26.3%)
	Trade School/Apprenticeship (4.6%)
	Undergraduate degree (46.7%)
	Postgraduate degree (Masters) (17.9%)
At what level of your organization do you work?	Doctoral degree (4.6%)
	Executive management (7.3%)
	Senior management (13.2%)
	Middle management (25.0%)
	Senior team member (30.0%)
	Junior team member (20.5%)
Other (4.0%)	

Industry	Primary (5.4%)
	Goods-producing (23.7%)
	Services (70.9%)
Company Size	<10 employees (21.3%)
	11 – 50 employees (39.7%)
	>50 employees (39.0%)
How are you paid?	Salary (44.6%)
	Wage (49.8%)
	Fee/Commission (2.4%)
	Other (3.2%)
Employment type	Permanent (FT or PT) (76.3%)
	Fixed term (FT or PT) (12.6%)
	Seasonal (2.6%)
	Casual (6.8%)
	Other (1.8%)

Children at home	Yes (46.4%)
	No (53.6%)
Ethnicity	Asian (14.2%)
	European (60.7%)
	Māori (16.1%)
	Other (4.6%)
Relationship status	Pacific Peoples (4.2%)
	Single (33.1%)
	In relationship cohabiting (56.8%)
	In relationship living apart (9.0%)
	Other (1.1%)

The survey asked about employees' current and future work-life flexibility and their organisations' responses to requests for flexibility. While employees have significantly more flexibility than before COVID-19, they indicate that they want more. The survey also found that roughly half of employees' companies have made formal policy changes to enable more work-life flexibility since 2020, and that more than 40% of the employees know of employees who have left the organisation because of a lack of work-life flexibility (possibly moving to companies that give their employees more freedom).

	<u>Yes/ Agree</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>No/ Disagree</u>
Compared to pre-Covid, I now HAVE more work-life flexibility	52.3%	30.9%	16.8%
Compared to pre-Covid, I now WANT more work-life flexibility	66.7%	23.4%	9.9%
My company has made formal policy changes to enable more work-life flexibility since 2020, not including temporary policy change during the COVID-19 pandemic	47.8%	-	52.2%
I know of employees who have left my organization because the organization did not provide enough work-life flexibility to match their needs	41.2%	-	58.8%

Moving from the high-level shifts in work-life flexibility, Jen unpacked the data to report what is meant by flexibility. Of the survey respondents, 62.4% agreed they have enough work-life flexibility to manage their work and life demands while only 12.8% said they didn't. Of those respondents who have enough flexibility, they indicated they have enough flexibility and have *working pattern control* such as:

- ✓ *They can decide how I carry out my work.*
- ✓ *They can decide where I work (home, office, other).*
- ✓ *They can determine how many hours I spend working each day.*
- ✓ *They can change the number of hours I am contracted for.*
- ✓ *They can determine at what time I work each day, including start and finish.*

As noted, while a majority of employees have work-life flexibility, 66.7% now want more work-life flexibility and only 9.9% do not. Of the survey respondents who *want* more flexibility, they are wanting it for, as above, *working pattern control*. This is indicated:

- ✓ *They want to decide how I carry out my work.*
- ✓ *They want to choose the location I work to suit my work-life needs.*
- ✓ *They want to determine how many hours I spend working each day.*
- ✓ *They want to change the number of hours I am contracted for.*
- ✓ *They want to determine at what time I work each day, including when I start and finish.*

When asking *who now wants more flexibility*, we found that it was mainly from senior management and senior team members.

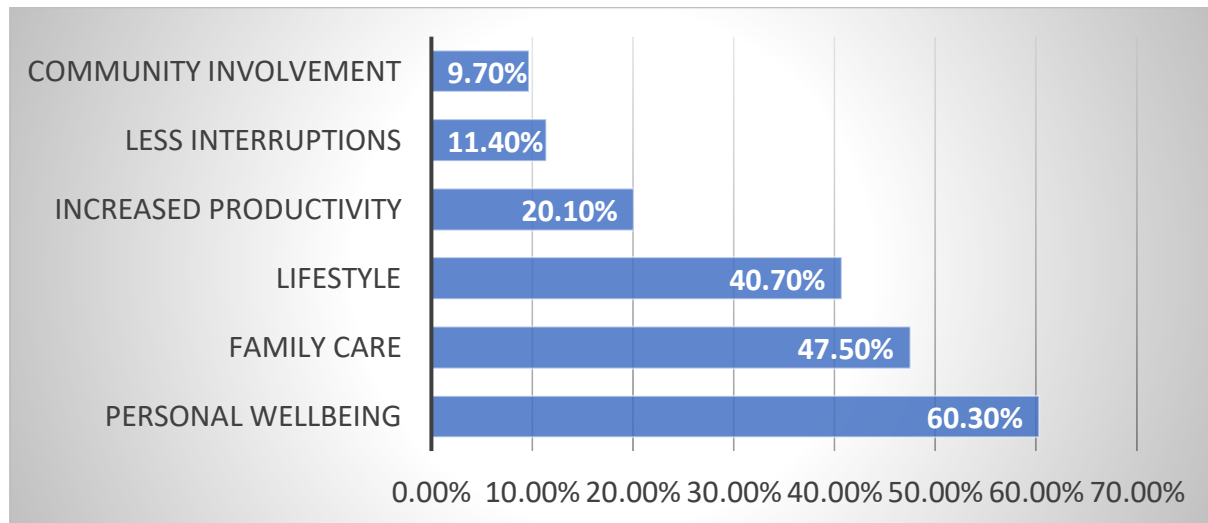
Descriptor/Demographic		<i>"I now want more work-life flexibility"</i>		
		Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Level of company	Executive management	Less likely to agree	--	--
	Senior management	More likely to agree	Less likely to say neither	--
	Middle management	--	--	--
	Senior team member	More likely to agree	Less likely to say neither	--
	Junior team member	Less likely to agree	--	--
	Other	--	--	--
	No or unsure	Less likely to agree	More likely to say neither	--

*All other demographics and employment related factors did not show statistical significance here.

When asking about formal policy introduction, it most often occurred in goods-producing industries and in companies with more than 50 employees, by employees on a fulltime fixed-term contract paid a salary.

Descriptor/Demographic		<i>"My company has made a formal policy change to enable more work-life flexibility since 202, not including temporary changes during Covid-19"</i>	
		Yes or in process	No or unsure
Industry	Primary	--	--
	Goods-producing	More likely to agree	Less likely to disagree
	Services	Less likely to agree	More likely to disagree
Company Size	<10 employees	Less likely to agree	More likely to disagree
	11 – 50 employees	--	--
	>50 employees	More likely to agree	Less likely to disagree
How are you paid?	Salary	More likely to agree	Less likely to disagree
	Wage	Less likely to agree	More likely to disagree
	Fee/Commission	--	--
	Other	Less likely to agree	More likely to disagree
Employment type	Permanent (FT or PT)	--	--
	Fixed term (FT or PT)	More likely to agree	Less likely to disagree
	Seasonal	--	--
	Casual	--	--
	Other	Less likely to agree	More likely to disagree

An important question to understand is the reason why employees want more flexibility. Of those people who want more flexibility, the reasons they chose are as follows:



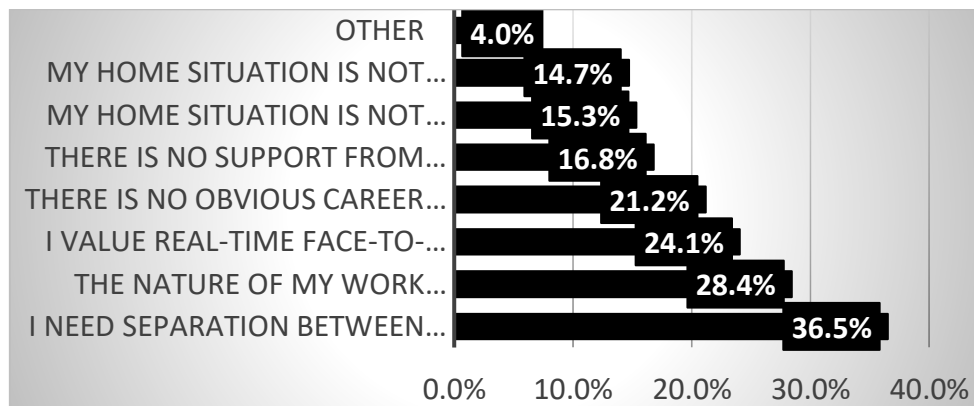
The workshop next moved to small group discussions; attendees were asked how this data fits with their organisations. Trigger questions included:

1. What are the patterns of practice you are seeing? Are there trends based on employment factors or demographics?
2. Has your company introduced/modified policies relating to flexible working arrangements? (why/why not?)
3. How does your company align with the data we've just looked at?
4. What evidence do you have?
5. Are there other themes/patterns you observe?

In groups, attendees considered and discussed how their organisations can respond to the signals from employees that they seek further work-life flexibility, as indicated by our survey. Trigger questions included:

1. How can organizations support future work-life while ensuring productivity and employee wellbeing?
2. How can organizations navigate the apparent institutional shift (patterns of practice) with respect to flexible work-life?
3. How can organizations engage with the shift in employee preferences and desired practices to help 'settle' / create new norms?

When considering tensions associated with navigating the apparent shifts, Jen informed attendees about why flexible working arrangements might not work for employees. Our findings are:

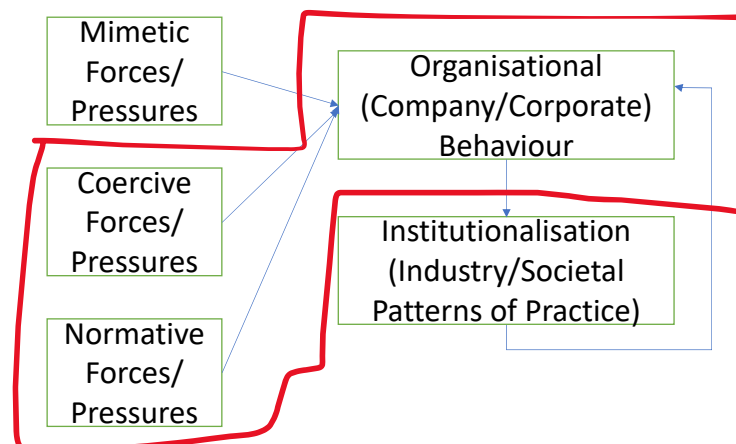


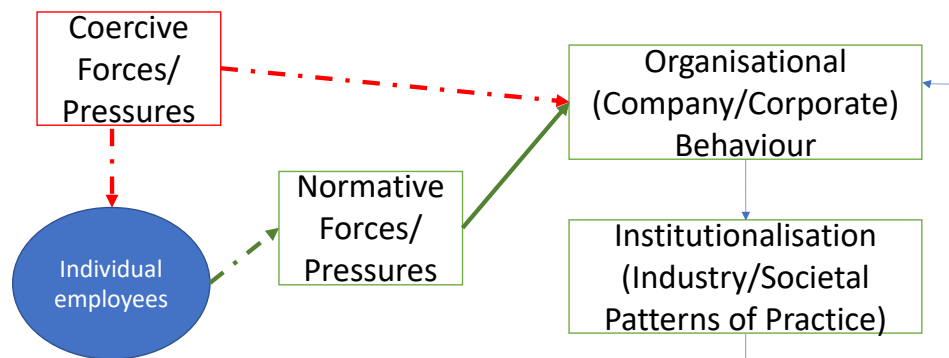
2.3 New norms – navigating pressures or engaging with new practices & preferences

Moving from the employee’s perspective to the employer’s perspective, Jen introduced attendees to (just a little bit of) the institutional theory perspective. She made a point of not being theory-heavy 😊

Institutional theory helps us understand the forces being exerted on a company to do something, such as when an organisation feels pressure from customers to reduce prices or offer new product features, or from competitors to adopt practices or compete on price. We heard that there are coercive forces (mandatory forces) such as government regulations, that you just have to follow such as emissions standards for automotive. There are also mimetic forces (to mimic) where a company may respond if a competitor decides to adopt certain practices or prices. While we don’t know if these pressures become real shifts, it may become company strategy to save cost and time by following others. Normative forces, on the other hand, push towards norms or consciousness change, when the customer’s mind is changing, and this exerts puts pressure on how we behave.

The following diagrams outline how the coercive, mimetic and normative forces influence organisational behaviour and eventually become institutionalised patterns of practice. Remember, institutions are not the bricks and mortar institutions such as companies, but larger constructs such as the legal or medical system or religion or the ‘institution of marriage.’





2.4 Implications for organizations' management practices

To wrap up this session on the future of work-life and work-life flexibility it becomes important for organisations to decide if and how they will navigate the shifts in perceptions, practices, & preferences being signalled by employees. Again in small groups, attendees discussed how they and their organisations would move forward in the new environment they find themselves in. Attendees pondered:

1. What are organizations currently doing (management and decision-making practices) in response to pressures?
2. What practices are currently used to navigate tensions/conflict/contentions?
3. What are the different perspectives of actors in terms of effectiveness of existing management practices/policies?

Attendees noted that they have a variety of tools and means to try and manage the issues raised. In response to the current labour shortage, it becomes important to trust the employees to do their jobs and allow them space for self-management. Where necessary, employers may need to make alternative work arrangements such as job sharing, have clarity about which employees suit what jobs, provide benefits such as incentives and allowances, provide opportunities for employees to upskill, and enable equality and fairness in the workplace. One attendee noted that providing unlimited sick leave and paid discretionary leave had built an environment of trust and staff loyalty in their company. Another noted their company had successfully moved from a 5x8 hour shifts weekly to 4x10 hours.

3. Key Takeaways

The key takeaways from this session on the future of work-life were that New Zealand is now in an employee-led market with staff shortages resultant of the impact of COVID-19 and the status of border crossing. Also, employers are facing disruption to production flow due to staff being absent because of sickness or leaving their jobs for 'greener pastures.' In this labour market, employers are moving to navigate, and even negotiate, future work styles taking into consideration needs of the company and those of employees. Instead of concentrating on the inputs of labour (hours worked) they should target productivity outcomes to drive how employees work, develop their skillsets, and secure future employees whose personalities and skills match the requirements of the future company and industry.

Jen closed the session by asking attendees to consider putting their organisations forward as case study companies for the *BusinessFirstNZ* team to take on for student-led investigations and feedback and for teaching. Specific areas of study could include:

- Exploring specific management practices that have been trailed
- Unpacking “personal wellbeing”
- Delving into employee motivations
- Delving into management decision-making

3. Proposed Next Steps

The following workshop is planned for the remainder of 2022:

Workshop	Overview	Logistics
Research and Internship Engagement and Opportunities	<p>Come along to this final session for 2022 to discuss how your business might ‘fit’ with ongoing research projects or frame up a research project with Massey academic staff (and possibly other businesses in the room).</p> <p>We will also explore what opportunities are available for future internship placements with Massey students and your business.</p>	<p>Tuesday 1 November</p> <p>1:00 – 5:30pm, with nibbles and drinks provided</p> <p>Massey University Student Enterprise Centre</p>

Thank you

We would like to thank you for your continued participation in these workshops, and welcome any feedback, comments, ideas, or questions you may have. Please note, if there are any issues or amendments required, we would greatly appreciate your feedback on this report. Feel free to contact the group via Dr Wayne Macpherson, W.Macpherson@massey.ac.nz.