![ntuc — National Trades Union Congress logo]

BRIEFING PAPER ON
FLEXIBLE WORK
ARRANGEMENTS IN SINGAPORE
LESSONS AND STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Research Partnership between **National Trades Union Congress (NTUC)** and
The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT)

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CONTENT

Preface

As the way we work becomes increasingly disrupted and changed by new technologies, economic recessions, and businesses going global, flexible work arrangements (FWAs) have become vital for companies to progress in the uncertain times ahead. The global COVID-19 pandemic proved that remote work, hybrid work models, and flexible work hours, etc. are here to stay. Singapore is no exception. With our ageing workforce and growing caregiver needs, we must rethink and reshape how, where, and when we work.

From its year-long #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations, the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) identified FWAs as a key consideration for workers with caregiving responsibilities when deciding whether to stay in a job or return to the workplace. NTUC also found that women, who tend to be the primary caregivers for children, the home, and older adult family members, suffer more career interruptions and hidden obstacles at work due to caregiving responsibilities as compared to men. Under the new workers' compact, NTUC therefore supports policies such as caregiving leave and FWAs to become a workplace norm and not the exception. These policies help working women better balance family and work life so they can continue to advance at work. FWAs also benefit all by reducing stress and burnout, retaining talent, and promoting healthy family and social lives.

While it is possible for all jobs to be made more flexible by redesigning new and innovative work processes and technologies, companies may not yet have the right tools and methods to make FWAs fair and work well for everyone. For example, one area of concern some have raised is how FWAs may affect work appraisals. NTUC is therefore committed to helping workers and companies navigate this process in addressing possible challenges and inequalities. As a tripartite partner, NTUC considers both employers' and employees' needs to build mutual understanding and trust, and prepare for possible challenges to management and communication while supporting workers from being treated unfairly for requesting for or using FWAs.

This briefing paper on FWAs seeks to add to the ongoing discussion on how FWAs can be provided and used effectively and sustainably. It serves as an informational resource on the tried-and-tested operational playbooks of implementing and maintaining FWAs from real-world stakeholders. This briefing paper compiles insights, strategies, and practical case studies from companies[1] across several industries in Singapore that have made considerable progress with FWAs within their organisations. They include Chye Thiam Maintenance, AsiaOne Online, Oriental Remedies Group, Swift Health Food, Aurecon, Scanteak, and West-Street Carrier. Our findings are based on surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions conducted with the employers and employees of these organisations, as well as the Association of Employment Agencies (Singapore).

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[1] Most of the companies highlighted in this Briefing Paper are either unionised or have a working relationship with the Labour Movement. I.e. Chye Thiam Maintenance is unionised under the Building Construction and Timber Industries Employees' Union (BATU), AsiaOne Online is unionised under the Creative Media and Publishing Union (CMPU), West-Street Carrier is unionised under the Supply Chain Employees' Union (SCEU), as well as Oriental Remedies Group, Swift Health Food, and Scanteak which are U Small and Medium Enterprises (U SME) partners.

We sincerely thank the individuals, organisations, and industry experts who have generously shared with us their time and knowledge.

At NTUC, our mission is to help workers earn a better living and live a better life. We believe that FWAs are not just here to stay, but a mindset shift in how we live and work. When done well, FWAs can create a highly adaptable and inclusive workforce that leads to a more well-balanced and meaningful life. I encourage you to use this report as a practical guide to transform your business and workforce for better outcomes, and invite you to get in touch with us to share your best practices.

Ms Yeo Wan Ling
Assistant Secretary-General;
Director, U Women and Family / U Small and Medium Enterprises
National Trades Union Congress, Singapore

Executive Summary

The workplace in Singapore has evolved and work arrangements have shifted away from the traditional on-site, fixed-time, and fixed workload structure. Over the years, the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) has championed flexibility at work as a means of improving welfare for employees as well as supporting individuals with caregiving responsibilities in the workplace. With these changes, more companies in Singapore have begun implementing flexible work arrangements (FWAs).

FWAs can be implemented in a way that is win-win for both companies and employees—companies benefit from improved recruitment, retention, and productivity; employees, on the other hand, experience better work-life harmony, better management of caregiving responsibilities through different phases of life, and reduced commuting time and expenses. For both companies and employees to benefit, we need to:

- Make it easy to work flexibly
- Make flexible working acceptable
- Make the requirements clear

In this paper, we have developed six key behaviourally-informed recommendations for all companies to implement easy, acceptable and clear FWAs. These are:

Recommendations	Action points
Review key operational needs and job outcomes for FWAs to be easy and acceptable	Determine the kinds of flexibility that are feasible based on operational needs
	Redesign jobs with support from government and Labour Movement programmes
Prioritise good management and communication to make FWAs acceptable and clear	Institute an official FWA policy, with fair and practical considerations for requests
	Increase supervisors' readiness to manage employees on FWAs
Adjust workflows and processes to make FWAs easy and clear	Invest in new technology and software
	Seek consultancy and advice on processes

This paper was developed by NTUC and The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), based on existing research as well as interviews, discussions, and surveys with companies and employees in Singapore.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The evolving flexibility of work

Expectations around working arrangements have evolved together with changing economic trends. In the early 1960s and through independence, Singapore focused on rapid industrialisation, with large growth in the labour-intensive manufacturing sector. At that time, work was generally performed on-site in factories, with fixed working hours.

Over time, as Singapore experienced various challenges and disruptions, we have continued to grow and diversify our economy, such as through greater automation, digitalisation and a drive towards a knowledge-based economy. This has given rise to new types of jobs as well as new ways of working that are no longer limited by location or time.

Today, many companies have begun to offer flexible work arrangements (FWAs). FWAs are not just remote/work-from-home arrangements but refer to any form of variation from typical, fixed work arrangements. These include flexibility in terms of time (e.g. staggered working hours), place (e.g. tele-commuting) or load (e.g. part-time work).[2]

What are the different types of Flexible Work Arrangements?
The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) has grouped FWAs into three categories:

Flexi-time
Examples: Staggered working hours, compressed work week

Flexi-place
Examples: Tele-commuting, work-from-home

Flexi-load
Examples: Part-time work, job sharing

Companies implement FWAs in various ways based on their business needs. Companies may implement different **numbers** of FWAs, such as a single arrangement (e.g. tele-commuting only) or offering multiple available options (e.g. offering both tele-commuting and flexible hours). The **extent** of FWAs is also varied. In some companies, FWAs may be used without restriction while in other companies, FWAs may only be used on a limited number of days per week. Lastly, companies also offer FWAs with different degrees of **accessibility**; FWAs could be a default option in some companies, or may involve a request and approval process in other companies.
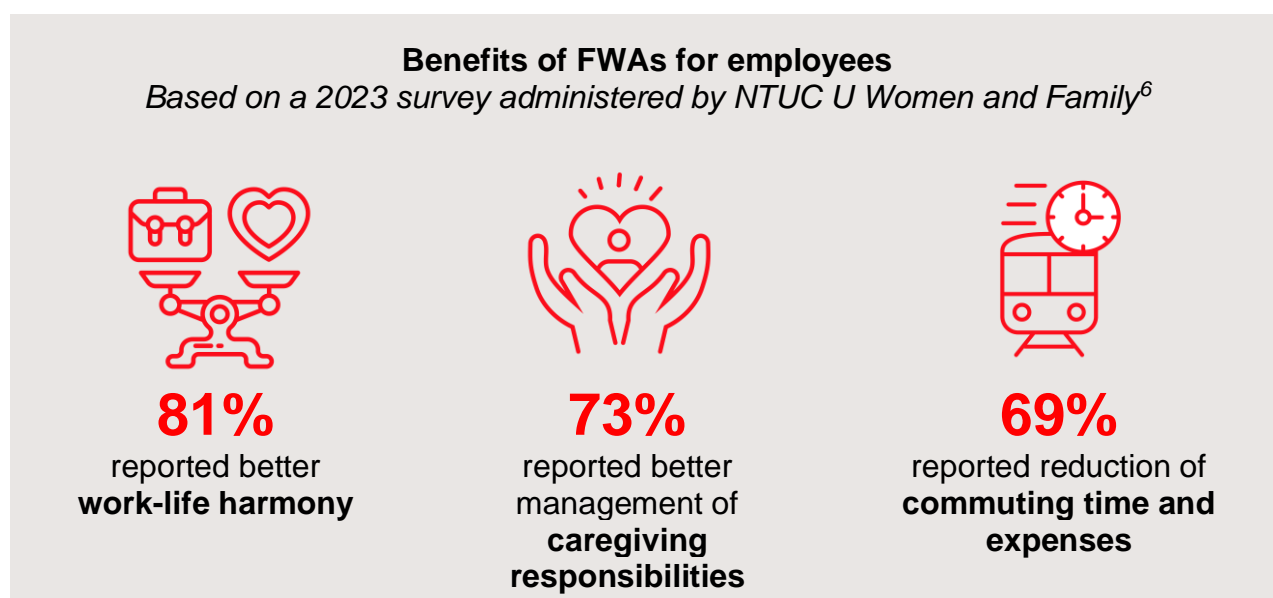
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[2] Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices. (n.d.). *About flexible work arrangements (FWA).*https://www.tal.sg/tafep/employment-practices/work-life-harmony/fwas/about

How FWAs benefit both companies and employees

With such diverse ways of implementation, there is much potential to implement FWAs such that they are a **win-win solution** for both companies and employees.

First and foremost, companies benefit from access to a wider pool of labour. As some industries begin to face labour shortages, it is in the best interest of companies to expand recruitment and attract segments of the labour market that are less willing or able to adhere to traditional work arrangements. For example, older workers may prefer to work shorter hours due to health reasons, and many women have caregiving responsibilities that limit their ability to participate in full-time work. Indeed, an estimated 62,400 working-age women in Singapore do not work due to their caregiving responsibilities.[3] Moreover, with Singapore's ageing population, the proportion of employees bearing caregiving responsibilities is likely to grow further. By offering FWAs, companies are able to recruit from these population segments.

In addition, companies offering FWAs are better able to retain existing staff. In recent years, particularly after COVID-19 prompted a rapid shift to work-from-home arrangements, many workers have come to prioritise flexibility in their jobs. Employees are more satisfied when companies offer FWAs,[4] and more willing to stay in their jobs.[5]

Benefits of FWAs for employees
Based on a 2023 survey administered by NTUC U Women and Family[6]

81%
reported better
work-life harmony

73%
reported better
management of
**caregiving
responsibilities**

69%
reported reduction of
**commuting time and
expenses**

On the other hand, FWAs benefit employees by improving work-life harmony, and by extension, mental well-being. 70% of workers in Singapore reported poor work-life

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[3] Ministry of Manpower. (2023). *Labour force in Singapore 2023 (Table L7).* Manpower Research & Statistics Department, Ministry of Manpower. https://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Labour-Force-In-Singapore-2023.aspx

[4] Halpern, D. F. (2005). How time-flexible work policies can reduce stress, improve health, and save money. *Stress and Health, 21*(3), 157–168. https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.1049

[5] Choi, S. (2020). Flexible work arrangements and employee retention: A longitudinal analysis of the federal workforces. *Public Personnel Management, 49*(3), 470–495. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091026019886340

[6] Survey of 2711 employees conducted between 25 May 2023–19 June 2023.

harmony[7] and 17% of Singapore residents reported poor mental health in the National Population Health Survey 2022.[8] This highlights a need to prioritise employee well-being, such as through increasing flexibility at work, which has been found in some studies to reduce burnout and depressive symptoms.[9]

For employees who need to balance work with caregiving responsibilities, FWAs allow them to fulfil caregiving responsibilities such as supervising young children at home or taking sick parents to the doctor while not neglecting work. This is particularly important for women, who often bear a disproportionate share of caregiving responsibilities at home.[10] Without access to FWAs, some employees who struggle to manage their caregiving responsibilities may leave the workforce entirely in order to care for their loved ones. In fact, 23.8% of Singapore residents who had left the workforce cited household and caregiving responsibilities as the main reason for doing so.[11]

Employees on FWAs also save time and expenses on commuting, which translates to increased job satisfaction and well-being. In Singapore, the median time spent commuting by Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) is 45 minutes.[12] When employees spend more time on their commutes, they experience increased stress and have less time available for work, family, and leisure activities.[13] To put that in perspective, the Commuting and Wellbeing Study in the UK found that the effect of every 10 minutes of commuting time on reducing job satisfaction was equivalent to a 19% drop in income.[14] FWAs such as work-from-home arrangements or staggered working hours can therefore improve employees' overall well-being by enabling them to avoid extended peak hour travel times and transport costs.

With the multi-fold benefits of FWAs in mind, NTUC and its tripartite partners aim to support companies in Singapore to implement FWAs. NTUC therefore partnered with The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to conduct this study, which aims to use behavioural science to provide actionable insights that support companies in FWA implementation. This paper is based on existing research as well as interviews, discussions, and surveys with companies and employees in Singapore. NTUC and BIT would like to thank all participants for sharing with us their valuable insights and experiences.

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[7] Lim, P. (2023, September 13). Struggling with work-life balance? Ask what you are working for. *The Straits Times*. https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/struggling-with-work-life-balance-ask-what-you-are-working-for

[8] Ministry of Manpower, Singapore National Employers Federation and National Trades Union Congress (2023, November 20). *Tripartite advisory on mental health and well-being at workplaces*. https://www.mom.gov.sg/employment-practices/tripartism-in-singapore/tripartite-guidelines-and-advisories/tripartite-advisory-on-mental-well-being-at-workplaces

[9] Shiri, R., Turunen, J., Kausto, J., Leino-Arjas, P., Varje, P., Väänänen, A., & Ervasti, J. (2022). The effect of employee-oriented flexible work on mental health: A systematic review. *Healthcare (Basel, Switzerland), 10*(5), 883. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10050883

[10] Qian, N. (2018). In all fairness: Two decades of CEDAW and the state of gender equality in Singapore. *Social Space*. 38–43.

[11] Ministry of Manpower (2023) *Labour force in Singapore: Advance release 2023*. Manpower Research and Statistics Department, Ministry of Manpower. https://stats.mom.gov.sg/iMAS_PdfLibrary/mrsd-labour-force-in-singapore-advance-release-2023.pdf

[12] Tan, C. (2022, April 10). Crowded trains sway people's decision to work from home: Study. *The Straits Times*. https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/transport/crowdedness-on-trains-sways-peoples-decision-to-work-from-home-study

[13] Chatterjee, K., Chng, S., Clark, B., Davis, A., De Vos, J., Ettema, D., Handy, S., Martin, A. & Reardon, L. (2020) Commuting and wellbeing: A critical overview of the literature with implications for policy and future research. *Transport Reviews, 40*(1), 5–34, https://doi.org/10.1080/01441647.2019.1649317

[14] Chatterjee, K., Clark, B., Martin, A. & Davis, A. (2017). The commuting and wellbeing study: Understanding the impact of commuting on people's lives. *UWE Bristol, UK*. https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/880203

"Employers which embrace FWAs can better attract and retain talent, including tapping on a larger pool of talent. Employees can enjoy better work-life harmony and mental well-being."

- Mr Ang Yuit, Vice-President of the Association of Small & Medium Enterprises[15]

Research process

We conducted interviews, group discussions, and surveys with companies and employees to gather their experiences with FWAs, and views on how FWAs could be implemented. We then analysed this data to obtain common themes and areas of feedback.

In total, we conducted interviews and survey with 23 employees, HR staff and senior management personnel across 5 companies. We supplemented this with 6 focus group discussions with 32 female company leaders and a survey with 2,711 Singaporean employees conducted previously.

We also referenced past research studies on FWAs, both local and international, to further enrich our understanding.

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[15] Cheow, S. (2023, June 19). Singapore SMEs encouraged to implement flexible work arrangements. *The Straits Times.* https://www.straitstimes.com/business/smes-in-singapore-encouraged-to-implement-flexible-work-arrangements

Chapter 2: Background of Flexible Work Arrangements in Singapore

NTUC has consistently advocated for flexible working and, together with its tripartite partners, supported companies to adopt FWAs. This is in line with NTUC's mission to **help workers earn a better living and live a better life**, as FWAs contribute to a supportive and conducive work environment that benefits both companies and employees.

"We think that flexible work arrangements, structured and flexible, in a more negotiable fashion with employers where both sides have a good understanding of what FWA means (and) how we can tailor needs, would be very helpful."

- Mr Ng Chee Meng, Secretary-General of NTUC[16]

The need to retain women in the labour market led to early governmental support for FWAs in the 1980s. At that time, fewer than half of women in Singapore were in the workforce.[17] The National Productivity Council set up a Task Force on Female Participation in the Labour Force, which recognised the need to provide a wider range of work schedules and arrangements.[18] This was augmented by the Economic Committee's report, which suggested encouraging FWAs such as part-time employment, job-sharing, and work-from-home arrangements in order to increase women's participation in the workforce.[19]

Echoing the concerns about female participation in the workforce, NTUC championed more support for working women in the 1990s, to bolster their financial independence and retirement adequacy. NTUC established a tripartite Steering Committee and Working Committee in 1992, to look into ways to support women. The NTUC Women's Programme Secretariat also launched a study on FWAs in Singapore. The study found that less than half of the 94 companies surveyed implemented FWAs in the form of part-time work, flexible hours or compressed work week. In addition, only 6% of the 428 female employees surveyed were on FWAs. The lower rate of FWA adoption contrasted with women's higher preference for FWAs, as 32% of female employees surveyed wanted to be on FWAs. Furthermore, of women who had left the workforce but intended to return to work, 54% of them preferred FWAs. The study concluded that FWAs would be helpful in

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[16] Lee, C. & Koh, F. (2023, May 4). Flexible work arrangements a key focus of Singapore's new workers compact: Labour chief Ng Chee Meng. *The Straits Times*. https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/flexible-work-arrangements-key-focus-singapores-new-workers-compact-labour-chief-ng-chee-meng-ntuc-3463416

[17] National Trades Union Congress (1993). *Study of Flexible Work Arrangements in Singapore*.

[18] National Trades Union Congress (1993). *Study of Flexible Work Arrangements in Singapore*.

[19] National Trades Union Congress (1993). *Study of Flexible Work Arrangements in Singapore*.

encouraging women to return to the workforce, as it helped them to manage both work and family commitments.[20]

Since then, NTUC has continued to promote flexible working for all employees, regardless of gender, through a variety of initiatives over the years. In 2014, NTUC launched the U Flex Movement which advocated for employers to offer FWAs.[21] In line with this Movement, NTUC held the first FWA Exhibition and Conference in 2014, and also advertised jobs with FWAs through the Flexibility Works! Job Fair. In recent years, NTUC's Better Workplace Campaign has also encouraged and incentivised employers to adopt the Tripartite Standard on FWAs. NTUC has continued to engage employees and working women, such as through the #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations, so as to continue rolling out initiatives that can support their needs.

NTUC, together with the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) and other partners from the public and private sector, formed a new Tripartite Workgroup in 2023 to develop the Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangements Requests (TG-FWAR). The Guidelines will be launched later in 2024, and aim to build mutual understanding and trust between employers and employees as they discuss suitable FWAs that can meet business' and employees' needs.[22]

"My team in the NTUC U Women and Family unit has, over the years, advocated for women's interests in the workplace. We want to garner support for women, especially those shouldering the dual responsibilities of family and a career."

- Ms Yeo Wan Ling, Director of NTUC U Women and Family[23]

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The efforts by NTUC and its partners in advocating for FWAs have been fruitful. Companies in Singapore are now increasingly offering FWAs. While 47% of companies offered at least one formal FWA in 2014, this increased to 78% in 2020.[24] However, many companies still face challenges in adopting and implementing FWAs, and more can be done to support them.

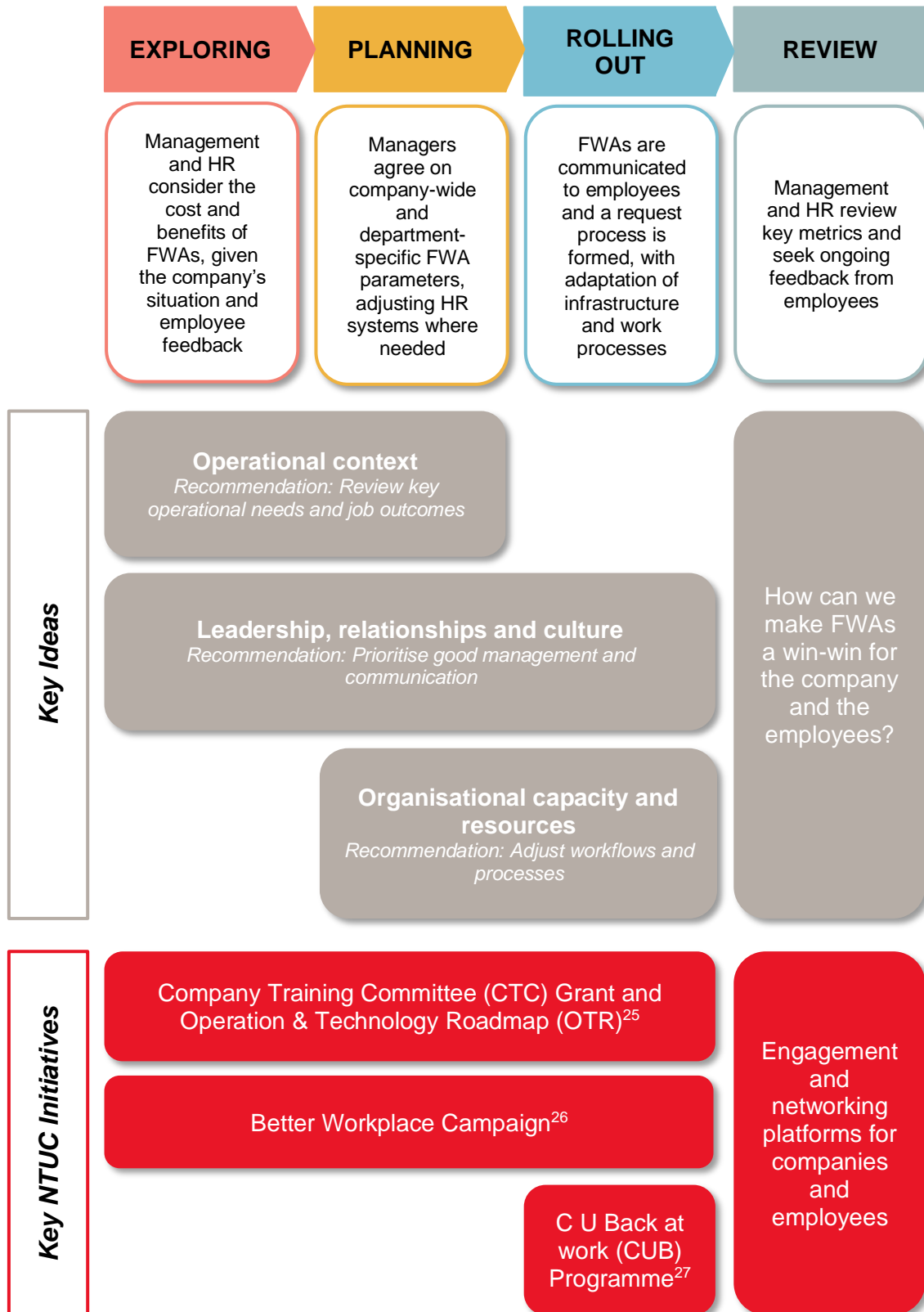[20] National Trades Union Congress (1993). *Study of Flexible Work Arrangements in Singapore*.

[21] National Trades Union Congress (2014, March 10). *NTUC Women's Development Secretariat drives Flexibility at Work through U Flex Movement*. https://www.ntuc.org.sg/uportal/news/NTUC-Womens-Development-Secretariat-drives-Flexibility-at-Work-through-U-Flex-Movement/

[22] Ministry of Manpower (2023, September 7). *Tripartite Workgroup convenes first meeting to develop guidelines on FWAs*. https://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/press-releases/2023/0709-tripartite-workgroup-convenes-first-meeting-to-develop-guidelines-on-fwas

[23] Rashid, S. (2023, January 16). *Yeo Wan Ling: Flexible work arrangements can go a long way in solving Singapore's labour crunch*. https://conversations.ntuc.sg/story-detail/?id=29

[24] Manpower Research and Statistics Department. *Conditions of Employment Survey*. Ministry of Manpower

Chapter 3: How Do Companies Typically Implement Flexible Work Arrangements

EXPLORING	PLANNING	ROLLING OUT	REVIEW
Management and HR consider the cost and benefits of FWAs, given the company's situation and employee feedback	Managers agree on company-wide and department-specific FWA parameters, adjusting HR systems where needed	FWAs are communicated to employees and a request process is formed, with adaptation of infrastructure and work processes	Management and HR review key metrics and seek ongoing feedback from employees

Key Ideas

Operational context
Recommendation: Review key operational needs and job outcomes

Leadership, relationships and culture
Recommendation: Prioritise good management and communication

Organisational capacity and resources
Recommendation: Adjust workflows and processes

How can we make FWAs a win-win for the company and the employees?

Key NTUC Initiatives

Company Training Committee (CTC) Grant and Operation & Technology Roadmap (OTR)[25]

Better Workplace Campaign[26]

C U Back at work (CUB) Programme[27]

Engagement and networking platforms for companies and employees

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[25] NTUC Training and Placement Ecosystem. (n.d.). *Company training committee.* https://www.ntuc.org.sg/tpe/how-we-help/ctc
[26] NTUC women and family. (n.d.). *Better workplace.* https://www.ntuc.org.sg/uwomenandfamily/how-we-help/enabling-career-choices#BetterWorkplace
[27] NTUC women and family. (n.d.). *CUB Programme (C U Back at Work).* https://www.ntuc.org.sg/uwomenandfamily/how-we-help/enabling-career-choices#CUBProgramme

Chapter 4: Current Gaps in Flexible Work Arrangements

While much progress has been made in implementing FWAs among companies in Singapore, a few gaps remain that hinder FWAs from being truly win-win for all.

FWAs may not meet employees' and/or companies' needs in a balanced way

A significant proportion of employees in Singapore still do not have access to FWAs. In a 2023 survey conducted by NTUC U Women and Family, 30.7% of survey respondents reported that they did not have any FWAs at their workplaces. In addition, less than half of respondents reported that their company had a well-defined FWA policy in place.

> *"What I've been suggesting is to change a bit of our working hours…now we are currently working nine to seven …probably, we can try to alter a bit of our working hours, from at least eight to six…to be very frank, I really don't have much of a work life balance, because of [current working hours]."*
>
> - Female operations employee in her 20s,
> when asked what she would change about her company's FWAs

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Even for employees who have access to FWAs, the FWAs offered may not meet their needs (e.g. telecommuting may be suitable for some employees but may not be helpful for others). Indeed, 42.5% of survey respondents reported that their company did not offer the types of FWAs they needed or wanted.

> *"[If] I need to print out something, it's very difficult [at] home. Don't have the printer, don't have this, don't have that. Very difficult to do."*
>
> - Female desk employee in her 30s,
> describing how it can be difficult to perform work while on FWAs

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The insufficient range of FWAs in some companies could be partly because not all types of FWAs meet the company's needs. Some arrangements may not match companies' operational requirements (e.g. operations conducted at fixed hours do not allow for flexi-time), or some types of work might be performed less productively off-site (e.g. some projects may benefit from face-to-face collaboration between employees). Accordingly,

among survey respondents who had not utilised FWAs, 58.2% reported that it was because their job responsibilities did not allow them to do so.

"The concern is whether, if they provide work from home [arrangements], will the productivity or the efficiency of the person remain the same, or improve from there? Because if you just deprove, then it defeats the purpose…we're just going to increase costs. It would mean that the company would rather just throw that flexi [work] arrangement away."

- Male HR staff in his 20s,
explaining companies' considerations when implementing FWAs

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Employees may not be empowered to utilise FWAs when needed

Even when FWAs are available and meet employees' needs, they may find it difficult to take them up. Among the companies interviewed for this study, the take-up rate of FWAs ranged from as low as 8% in companies with more operational workers, to 90% in companies with mainly desk-bound employees.

"We have unspoken rules that more than half the team can't FWA on the same day…which gets a bit complicated because not everyone can align their schedules at the same time."

- Female desk employee in her 20s,
describing informal requirements for using FWAs

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It can be challenging for employees to utilise FWAs if there is no clear or standardised policy in place. In the 2023 survey, close to 30% of respondents stated that while their companies offered FWAs, it was not well-defined or the guidelines were limited. When FWA requirements are unclear, employees may find it difficult to follow the unspoken requirements or to apply for FWAs.

Employees may also find it difficult to utilise FWAs if FWAs are not perceived as acceptable within the company. 25.6% of the 2023 survey respondents who had not utilised FWAs reported that it was because their manager did not support FWAs.

"During the change in leadership of the company, we didn't know. We don't have the assurance as part-timers. Maybe the new boss won't want part-timers anymore."

To address these gaps, we aim to support companies to implement FWAs in a way that balances companies' and employees' needs, and empowers employees to utilise FWAs when needed and appropriate, with pragmatic and fair consideration of FWA requests.

Chapter 5: Three Key Principles for Win-Win Flexible Work Arrangements

1. **Make it easy to work flexibly**
2. **Make flexible working acceptable**
3. **Make the requirements for FWAs clear**

Make it easy to work flexibly

Swift Health Food, a wholesale retailer of food products, redesigned jobs so that staff would have flexible and transferable skills between job roles (e.g., warehousing, inventory, and merchandising).

The company also introduced more scheduling options for retail staff to allow them flexi-time options. Staff could choose between a compressed schedule of working fewer days per week with longer hours (e.g. 11 hours per day for 4 days), or to spread their working hours over more days (e.g. 9 hours per day for 5–6 days).

Scheduling arrangements also take into account staff's requests and needs. This has helped to improve employees' job satisfaction and productivity, benefiting them as well as the company.

"Of course, I want to retain staff. How do I get the upper edge over other people in our market? I want to do something more. So I felt that this [FWA] was attractive. And this is why a lot of people like to join us. It's because I only need to work four days, or I only work five days, nine hours."

- Pearline Goh, Business Development Director,
Swift Health Food (Singapore) Pte Ltd

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Employees and managers alike face many day-to-day stressors and have limited **cognitive bandwidth**[28] to manage these preoccupations. This means that making and handling FWAs should impose minimal additional workload or general cognitive load to all involved. It therefore needs to be easy for employees to request for and managers to consider FWAs and it needs to be easy for work to be completed while on FWAs.

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[28] Fiske, S.T. & Taylor, S.E. (1991). *Social Cognition (2nd ed.).* New York: McGraw-Hill.

"I will say quite smooth and easy, because we will just WhatsApp to direct manager [to request for FWAs]"

- Female desk employee in her 30s,
describing her company's FWA request process

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To start off, making it easy for FWAs to be requested and considered means that companies need **a streamlined process**[29] for doing so. One way to do so is to reduce the number of steps and approval layers within the process. For example, an employee could be required to only inform their immediate supervisor, and the immediate supervisor could have the authority to decide whether to approve an FWA request.

Another option is to consider making FWAs the **default**[30] for employees in roles and sectors where this is feasible for both employees and employers. In this case, if all employees are granted FWAs by default, then a request and approval process would no longer be required.

"My work…involves emails and hotline only. So as long as these two I can access anywhere, they are fine with it. And I had never missed any of it."

- Female customer service operations employee in her 40s,
explaining how she can perform her work while on FWAs

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In addition to making it easy to take up FWAs, it also needs to be easy for employees to perform their work while on FWAs. Otherwise, if work processes become more inconvenient for an employee on FWAs, employees and managers would both prefer not to adopt FWAs. In the wake of COVID-19, many companies have adjusted their processes to make it easy for employees on FWAs to complete their work such as shifting to hybrid meetings and storing documents online rather than in hard copy. While this has mostly applied to desk roles, there is scope to make it easy for operational employees to work flexibly too. For instance, for operations roles based in a fixed location, scheduling could be adjusted to allow employees greater choice of operational shifts.

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[29] Sunstein, C. (2022). Sludge audits. *Behavioural Public Policy*, *6*(4), 654–673. https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2019.32
[30] Jachimowicz, J., Duncan, S., Weber, E., & Johnson, E. (2019). When and why defaults influence decisions: A meta-analysis of default effects. *Behavioural Public Policy*, *3*(2), 159–186. https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2018.43

Make flexible working acceptable

BIT conducted a research study with **Zurich Insurance** in the UK. Review of internal HR data and interviews with staff revealed that part-time staff were 35% less likely to apply for promotions as they thought that their FWA would hinder their career progression, and feared being perceived as having lower commitment to work.

To normalise flexible working, BIT tested a new way of advertising promotion opportunities in 2019–2020, where vacancies were explicitly indicated as being open for staff on FWAs. This led to a significant increase in part-time staff's sense of organisational belonging, and also increased the proportion of female job applicants by 16.4%.[31]

Organisational Belonging Index

N=553
Exploratory analysis
** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1
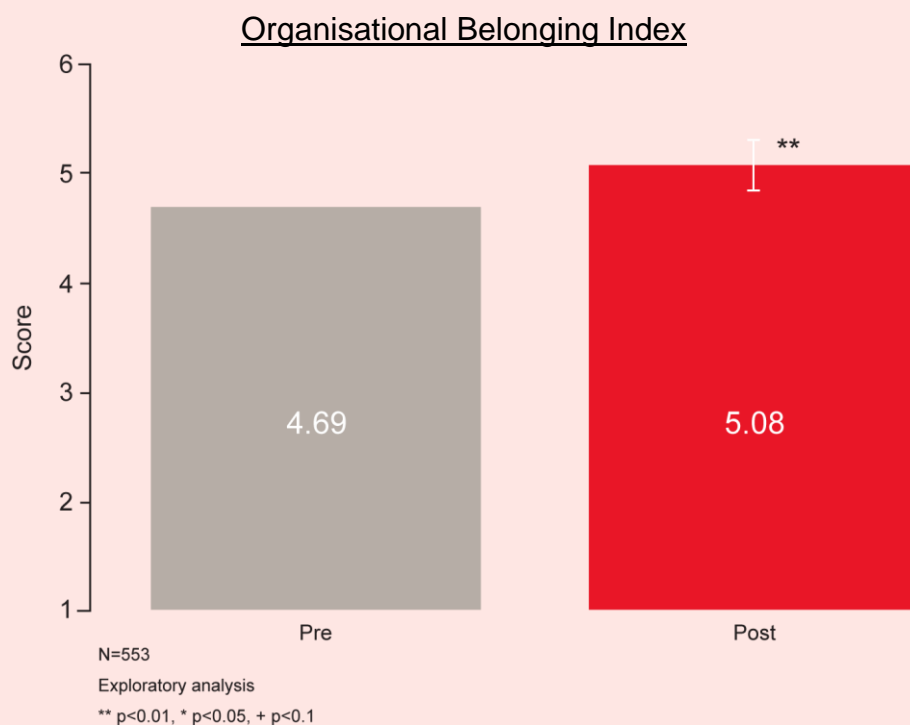
FWAs need to benefit the company from a business standpoint in order for the company to implement them. However, even when the company recognises the benefits of FWAs, employees may not fully realise this; instead, they may believe that the company does not support FWAs. This phenomenon is termed **"pluralistic ignorance"**[32], where individuals mistakenly believe that everyone else is unsupportive of FWAs. As individuals follow these misperceived social norms, employees might therefore be hesitant to request for FWAs, and managers might refrain from publicly supporting FWAs.

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[31] Government Equalities Office and Behavioural Insights Team (2020). *Changing the default: A field trial with Zurich Insurance to advertise all jobs as part time.*
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/988393/Zurich_trial.pdf

[32] Prentice, D. A., & Miller, D. T. (1996). Pluralistic ignorance and the perpetuation of social norms by unwitting actors. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *28*(1), 161–209. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60238-5

"So if we need help, we would just Slack message. Even if we're in the office, we also Slack message. Even if we're next to each other, we still Slack message. So I think in that sense, [FWAs] doesn't really make a difference."

- Female desk employee in her 20s,
explaining how FWAs do not affect work processes

❝

In order for FWAs to be perceived as acceptable at all levels (i.e. employees, line managers, and senior management), FWAs first need to fit with the company's processes and needs. This requires companies to have a clear sense of their business landscape and evolving needs. For example, companies may need to find out more about the expectations of current and potential employees, in order to understand if FWAs would improve recruitment and retention. Companies may also need to conduct research into how their ways of working may change, such as how technology may affect manpower requirements. These will help companies to come to an informed decision around FWAs, and determine whether FWAs are appropriate and acceptable within their company.

"[Manager] say oh, you work from home, try then you also got salary and you don't stress, then you also can spend more time with your family. Because…in [overseas company] side already all work like this."

- Female desk employee in her 30s,
describing how her manager and company supported FWAs

❝

Once a company decides that FWAs are beneficial, there is a need for management at all levels to clearly express their support for FWAs, to reduce pluralistic ignorance. It is important to communicate such support for FWAs through a variety of channels:

- **Formal communication methods**, such as conducting town halls and adjusting company policies, to show that the company takes FWAs seriously;
- On the other hand, **informal communication**, such as how managers talk to their staff about FWAs, is key in showing that support for FWAs is truly embedded in the company beyond a "paper exercise"; and
- **Role-modelling** at all levels is another important element—a C-suite level leader on FWAs shows that there is strong support from the top, while a middle manager on FWAs shows that FWAs is accessible to all rather than just a privilege for top leaders.

Make the requirements for FWAs clear

AsiaOne Online, a privately held digital media platform, has developed and instituted clear FWA policies since the end of 2021. Upon confirmation, AsiaOne's employees are granted 6 FWA days every calendar month. Certain categories of employees, such as caregivers, parents and skills upgraders are also granted additional FWA days, up to a maximum of 12 days per calendar month. Each employee's FWA allotment and usage is automatically tracked using the company's digital HR system, which allows for greater visibility and forward planning. This standardised policy framework was developed through obtaining feedback from employees, and consulting the Tripartite Standard on FWAs. The consultative process adopted in developing the FWAs, with management both encouraging and adopting the use of FWAs, helped build trust between management and employees. With a clear policy in place, there is transparency and clarity regarding FWAs for all employees, and employees' specific needs can also be accommodated. This has benefited employees, with over 60% of employees utilising their basic FWA privileges. The company has also seen an improvement in overall business performance.

"All our businesses are unique and different. I think you can only look at the practices and ask ourselves, what am I prepared to change for my business? What am I prepared to change based on the employees that I have? The FWA customisation is quite important because every worker matters, but every worker is different. And only you as an employer will know what kind of employees you have, how they're different, their stories, their backgrounds."

- Sean Ler, Chief Executive Officer, AsiaOne Online Pte Ltd

It is natural for us to dislike uncertainty, and to prefer choosing a "safer" option where we know what is likely to happen. Because of this **uncertainty aversion**[33], employees may be cautious about taking up FWAs if there is any ambiguity around the FWA options available, request process, or potential impact on career progression.

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[33] Ellsberg, D. (1961). Risk, ambiguity and the savage axioms. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *75*(4), 643–669. https://doi.org/10.2307/1884324

"We introduced this thing called a team charter…a one pager that gives the team a framework to discuss and to deliberate…what flexibility looks like."

- Female HR staff in her 30s,
describing how FWAs were rolled out

❝

Companies can reduce the level of uncertainty around FWAs by instituting and communicating clear conditions and guidelines for FWAs. FWA policies should be clearly stipulated within official company policies. These policies should include information on the scope and type of FWAs available, eligibility requirements for FWAs, process for requesting for FWAs, and criteria for approval. All formal and informal communication about FWAs need to be consistent with the official FWA policy. Otherwise, employees across different departments may receive differing information, leading to confusion.

There also needs to be proper handling and consideration of FWA requests that take into account both employees' and business' needs. With a formal FWA policy in place, managers should abide by the stipulated criteria when considering requests. Managers should also provide clear and unambiguous reasons for rejecting any requests. This will ensure **fairness, consistency, and transparency**[34] in the process. To achieve this ideal, HR departments may need to help in rolling out the FWA policy, and training and supporting managers in the consideration process.

Finally, performance management is crucial to FWA implementation success. Many employees are concerned that being on FWAs might negatively impact their performance evaluation and hinder their long-term career progression. They perceive that their work might be less visible to their managers, or their managers may penalise them for having less face time at the workplace. To mitigate this, companies should ensure that **performance management is based on outcome-based metrics**[35], independent of an employee's work location or work hours. There should also be a clear and transparent process[36], with employees understanding exactly how their work outcomes have been measured, and how these contributed to their final performance grading.

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[34] Brandes, L. & Darai, D. (2017). The value and motivating mechanism of transparency in organizations. *European Economic Review*, *98*, 189–198. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euroecorev.2017.06.014

[35] Oldham, G. R. (1976). The motivational strategies used by supervisors: Relationships to effectiveness indicators. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, *15*(1), 66–86. https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(76)90029-5

[36] Lau, C. M., Wong, K. M., Eggleton, I. R. C. (2008). Fairness of performance evaluation procedures and job satisfaction: The role of outcome-based and non-outcome-based effects. *Accounting and Business Research*, *38*(2), 121–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/00014788.2008.9663325

"Because of my years of experience in the industry, I should be promoted one level up. But because I'm not in the office, often I'm on extended FWA, there was a concern about whether I would still be able to be promoted...if the CEO feels that staff should be in office most of the time, who's going to change his mind? [If] he still feels that it's more important for staff to be in the office, for the face to face [interaction], who am I to challenge it?"

- Female desk employee in her 40s,
describing concerns about how being on FWAs might impact her promotion

Chapter 6: Recommendations for Implementing Flexible Work Arrangements

Based on the findings from this study, NTUC and BIT have developed the following recommendations for implementing FWAs:

REVIEW KEY OPERATIONAL NEEDS AND JOB OUTCOMES FOR FWAs TO BE EASY AND ACCEPTABLE

- Action point 1: Determine what kinds of flexibility are feasible based on operational needs

- Action point 2: Redesign jobs with support from government and Labour Movement programmes

PRIORITISE GOOD MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION TO MAKE FWAs ACCEPTABLE AND CLEAR

- Action point 1: Institute an official FWA policy, with fair and practical considerations for requests

- Action point 2: Increase supervisors' readiness to manage employees on FWAs

ADJUST WORKFLOWS AND PROCESSES TO MAKE FWAs EASY AND CLEAR

- Action point 1: Invest in new technology and software

- Action point 2: Seek consultancy and advice on processes

Review key operational needs and job outcomes for FWAs to be easy and acceptable

Action point 1: Determine what kinds of flexibility are feasible based on operational needs

> **Scanteak**, a furniture store, provided different forms of FWAs based on job scope. For retail staff who need to be physically present on-site, the company provided different shift options (e.g. 8.15am to 5.15pm, or 9am to 6pm). Rostering and alternate off-days also allowed the company to provide employees with a 5.5 day work week, while still enabling retail operations to run 6 days a week. For employees in desk roles, the company leveraged technology to enable greater FWAs.

Each company faces its own unique operational needs, based on its external environment and sector demands. For example, a retail company might require its employees to be on-site at a physical store, while a call centre might require operational support during fixed timings.

Nonetheless, flexible working is not just limited to employees in desk-bound roles. There is still scope to offer some level of flexibility for employees in more operational roles, where their work locations or timings may be more restricted. Operations employees who work at fixed locations may, for instance, be offered the flexibility to choose between different shifts. On the other hand, employees who have to provide customer services at specific hours might be provided with flexi-place arrangements instead.

"If it's for the [operational] site, then they obviously can't work from home. But if we're talking about flexible hours, that's the best we can do. If it's the one or two hour difference [in work hours], of course we can give [the FWAs], because I don't think the impact [to operations] is that huge."

- Male HR staff in his 20s,
describing how operational needs can limit the type of FWAs available

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Even when operational needs technically allow for FWAs, service buyers and clients may still expect traditional, fixed work arrangements. This is because clients experience **status quo bias**[37], where they prefer to persist with pre-existing work arrangements that they are familiar with. This particularly applies to client-facing operational roles or to

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[37] Kahneman, D., Knetsch, J. L., & Thaler, R. H. (1991). Anomalies: The endowment effect, loss aversion, and status quo bias. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *5*(1), 193–206.

companies providing services. In fact, employers may actually be keen on implementing FWAs but their hands are tied as their contracts with clients limit their ability to do so.

"They [clients] will feel that all the quality is not there. This person is only coming in three days a week. Then what does he or she know? What can she learn about the site?"

- Male manager in his 30s,
describing concerns that company's clients have about FWAs

As such, service buyers and clients have to play an integral role to support outcome-based contracts as well. It is important for companies to review their operational needs, including managing client expectations where relevant, to determine the type of FWAs that might be most suitable.

Action point 2: Redesign jobs with support from government and Labour Movement programmes

Chye Thiam Maintenance (CTM), which offers environmental services, partnered NTUC U Women and Family for the C U Back at work (CUB) programme. Under the CUB programme, 500 roles are offered that cater to women returning to the workforce, for which FWAs—comprising flexi-time, flexi-load, and flexi-place—are available (e.g. employees may choose their work hours in 4-hour time blocks). Returners undergo a 6-week career trial, which comprises curated training modules and on-the-job training, with monetary incentives for completing each module. The job scopes for these returners were also redesigned to tap on their higher skill levels, such as the use of robotics, in contrast with traditional cleaning roles. This has allowed CTM's predominantly female workforce to return to work while balancing caregiving responsibilities, and helped the company expand recruitment by making the job roles more attractive.

In addition to job redesign, CTM also underwent a cultural redesign. To better engage new pools of workers (e.g. women returners who have been out of the workforce for some time), CTM hired HR staff dedicated to support the recruitment and retention of talent under the CUB Programme.

"We have an attractive package for [women returners]. Actually, if you say you want them to come back to be cleaners, they won't be interested at all…We wanted them to use foundation skills, plus what they have learnt, to come and lead a team of cleaners…It's a very different job scope from a normal cleaner. That's why I said we'd have to redesign the whole job itself for this group of employees."

- Edy Tan, Chief Executive Officer, Chye Thiam Maintenance Pte Ltd

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In recent years, we have seen shifts in Singapore's labour market across many industries. A number of industries are facing a shrinking labour pool—in 2022, the Transportation & Storage and Accommodation & Food Services industries experienced a higher share of vacancies unfilled for at least six months.[38] This has prompted a need for companies facing labour crunches to offer FWAs in order to expand recruitment from more segments of the workforce, such as returning women and older workers. Moreover, in the wake of COVID-19, many employees have begun to expect flexible working, and may consider

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[38] Ministry of Manpower. (2023). *Job Vacancies 2022*. Manpower Research and Statistics Department, Ministry of Manpower. https://stats.mom.gov.sg/iMAS_PdfLibrary/mrsd_JV2022.pdf

quitting if a company removes FWAs.[39] With these labour market shifts, companies can no longer stick to the status quo of the past where fixed work arrangements were the norm.

"This industry is not getting any younger. It is so difficult to find workers…even if they're willing to work four hours, I'm happy to take them."

- Male manager in his 30s,
describing recruitment challenges for operations roles

In addition, external client demands in some industries are evolving which is particularly relevant for companies providing contracted services. Some companies are experiencing a shift to outcome-based contracts which helps in enabling FWAs. Formal stipulation of outcome-based deliverables in the contract rather than traditional contracting by number of man hours utilised allows companies to be flexible about their manpower resourcing.

These changes within the external environment mean that jobs cannot stay static and instead need to evolve in tandem. Job redesign is important and involves reconfiguration and restructuring of job tasks and responsibilities. For example, employees can be cross-trained to cover multiple roles and skill sets, or technology can be used to reduce manpower required for routine work and assign employees more complex tasks.[40]

Such rethinking of job scopes and tasks can allow for greater flexibility at work by enabling better coverage of duties or allowing employees to perform their work off-site or at their own time. Companies seeking to redesign jobs can participate in NTUC's Company Training Committee (CTC)[41] initiative and tap on the CTC grant which co-funds proposals to raise productivity, redesign jobs and improve work prospects for employees. Companies can also explore the Job Redesign Centre of Excellence[42] by Workforce Singapore and the Institute of Human Resource Professionals. This centre is a one-stop touchpoint that provides industry-relevant expertise and resources for companies to engage in job redesign. In addition, the Support for Job Redesign under Productivity Solutions Grant (PSG-JR),[43] administered by the Singapore National Employers Federation, provides funding for consultancy support to implement job redesign initiatives.

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[39] Sudhakar, K. (2023, October 15). Why Singapore employers think they offer more flexibility than what staff experience. *The Business Times*. https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/working-life/why-singapore-employers-think-they-offer-more-flexibility-what-staff-experience

[40] Ng, J. (2022, September 29). Why job redesign continues to be relevant in the post-Covid world. *The Business Times*. https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/singapore/smes/why-job-redesign-continues-be-relevant-post-covid-world

[41] NTUC Training and Placement Ecosystem. (n.d.). *Company training committee.* https://www.ntuc.org.sg/tpe/how-we-help/ctc

[42] Institute for Human Resource Professionals. (n.d.). *Job redesign centre of excellence.* https://www.ihrp.sg/jrcoe/

[43] Workforce Singapore. (n.d.). *Support for job redesign under productivity solutions grant.* https://www.wsg.gov.sg/home/employers-industry-partners/workforce-development-job-redesign/support-for-job-redesign-under-productivity-solutions-grant

Prioritise good management and communication to make FWAs acceptable and clear

Action point 1: Institute an official FWA policy, with fair and practical considerations for requests

In 2019, BIT interviewed **20 HR professionals** across a range of organisations, to understand more about barriers and facilitators to implementation of FWAs. Corporate policies were found to be an important factor in implementation, such as how the request process was designed and whether FWAs were discussed with new employees during onboarding. Organisations that had a formal FWA policy also had different ways of sharing the policy with employees, such as via their intranet or through a staff handbook. These established policies and processes help to overcome hurdles that companies may face when managing staff on FWAs, or that employees may face in requesting for FWAs.[44]

It is important to ensure that expectations are aligned between employees and management regarding the scope and parameters of available FWAs, and that employees understand the underlying rationale for the company's decisions. Setting clear expectations from the start ensures consistency and also reduces likelihood of perceived unfairness between departments and employees, which can be a concern particularly for larger companies with heterogeneous job roles, as certain employees (e.g. employees in desk roles) might have access to more extensive FWAs than other employees (e.g. employees in operations roles).

> *"We don't want double standards where certain managers pull the whole group back and certain managers are a lot more flexible."*
>
> - Female HR staff in her 30s,
> describing potential concerns surrounding FWAs

"

It is therefore helpful to institute official, **company-wide policy on FWAs**[45]. Under the policy, the request process and approval criteria should also be clearly documented and standardised. This reduces employees' dependence on hearsay to obtain information on FWAs and ensures managers' decisions regarding FWA requests are transparent and accountable. When developing company policies on FWAs, companies may refer to the

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[44] Behavioural Insights Team (2019). *Flexible working qualitative analysis: Organisations' experiences of flexible working arrangements.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/790354/Flexible-working-qualitative-analysis2.pdf

[45] Butts, M. M., Casper, W. J., & Yang, T. S. (2013). How important are work–family support policies? A meta-analytic investigation of their effects on employee outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 98*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030389

Tripartite Standard[46] on FWAs for help. Apart from FWAs, the Tripartite Standards cover various aspects of employment such as fair recruitment practices, grievance handling processes, age management and more.*

Companies that are Tripartite Standards adopters[47], can use the Tripartite Standards logo in publicity and recruitment materials, giving a competitive edge as an employer of choice and helping to better attract and retain talent.

Action point 2: Increase supervisors' readiness to manage employees on FWAs

Aurecon, an advisory company, used a structured change management process to roll out FWAs. The senior management first discussed the scope and parameters of FWA policies, before conducting a town hall to discuss FWAs with the wider organisation. Each department then conducted team meetings, and developed team charters where managers and employees agreed on what flexible working would look like. As part of the change management process, the HR department engaged managers who had concerns about FWAs, to support them in managing staff based on outcomes rather than physical presence in an office. The company currently offers flexi-time and flexi-place arrangements for employees, and employee recruitment and retention have improved.

"Some of the managers initially told us…they felt uncomfortable…[that] productivity and team dynamics will start to suffer. We then need to say, we manage performance by outcome and not by physical presence."

- Shandy Lay, HR Business Partner, Aurecon Singapore Pte Ltd

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Social relationships govern the way we behave[48]. We take our cue from influential figures (e.g. leaders and managers) as well as our peers. This means that managers' acceptance of FWAs, including any role-modelling by personally taking up FWAs, exerts a strong **messenger effect**[49] by encouraging employees to do likewise.

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* The Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangement Requests (TG-FWAR) will be effective from 1 December 2024. Consequently, the Tripartite Standards on FWA will cease to apply as of the same date. Employers may refer to the TG-FWAR for more information and resources on FWA implementation.

[46] Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices. (n.d.). *Implementation Guide to help employers adopt the Tripartite Standard on Flexible Work Arrangements*. https://www.tal.sg/tafep/resources/tools-and-templates/2019/implementation-guide-for-ts-flexible-work-arrangements-adoption

[47] Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices. (n.d.). *Adopt the tripartite standards.* https://www.tal.sg/tafep/getting-started/progressive/adopt-tripartite-standards

[48] Deutsch, M., & Gerard, H.B. (1955). A study of normative and informational social influences upon individual judgment. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, *51*(3), 629–636. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0046408

[49] Wilson, E.J., Sherrell, D.L. (1993). Source effects in communication and persuasion research: A meta-analysis of effect size. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *21*, 101–112.

An outcome-based and people-centred approach to management is most helpful in boosting acceptance of FWAs within an organisation. Under this approach, managers prioritise work outcomes and deliverables directly, rather than through unreliable proxy measures such as the number of hours an employee works or how often an employee is present at the workplace. For instance, managers could centre any discussions with employees about performance around work outcomes. This enables employees to perceive that they may work flexibly, as far as it is suited to their specific role, and would not be penalised for doing so. In addition, when managers actively promote staff welfare (e.g. checking in on their well-being, allowing employees to attend to family matters), this also conveys support for employees to work flexibly if needed.

"It's a mindset shift in performance appraisal...There was a period of time when supervisors said, this staff, I think she should be [performing] better. But our internal analytics serves that function of performance measurement. We went back to them [and said], contrary to your impression of her, she has a consistent performance across seven out of 12 months...please review your performance appraisal factors."

- Sean Ler, Chief Executive Officer, AsiaOne Online Pte Ltd

Unfortunately, when employees are on FWAs, managers and supervisors are often concerned about declines in productivity and performance. This arises from **availability bias**[50], where managers' perceptions of staff rely on information that most readily comes to mind. However, reduced face-to-face contact with staff may make staff's work less salient to managers. They may therefore fear that staff misuse FWA privileges or have poorer work quality.

"Because you also don't know what he's doing at home…the laptop just there and he goes to sleep or something."

- Male HR staff in his 20s,
describing potential concerns surrounding FWAs

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[50] Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1974). Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases. *Science*, *185*(4157), 1124–1131. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.185.4157.1124

This highlights the importance of **trust**[51] **and reciprocity**[52] for effective FWA implementation. Managers need to trust that employees on FWAs will deliver work to an equivalent or higher standard than usual. This trust can be bolstered by the presence of effective communication channels (e.g. digital messaging platforms), which allows managers to check in with employees even when they are off-site or working asynchronously.

When employees perceive that they are trusted by their managers, they also tend to feel a sense of reciprocity[53]. This strengthens their commitment to the company, and they are likely to perform better. In addition, they are more likely to accommodate the company's operational needs (e.g. taking an extra shift to cover a coworker when needed). This, in turn, further boosts managers' trust in their employees and overall acceptance of FWAs.

> *"The company already saves you from the one and a half hours [of] transport in the morning and in the evening…So giving back to the company while they grant you work from home is perfectly fine."*

- Female customer service operations staff in her 40s,
explaining her sense of reciprocity to her company

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To effect real organisational change, senior management must be the first to set the directive in implementing FWAs. Senior management and HR can then work together to engage managers prior to the roll-out of FWAs, to increase supervisors' readiness for managing employees on FWAs. Group discussions, one-on-one conversations, as well as success stories of other companies using FWAs can be used to facilitate such engagement. This can help to address any concerns that managers may have. Further training in management skills may also be helpful for some supervisors, which could include ways to communicate with employees who are not physically present, or methods of measuring performance by outcomes.

Adjust workflows and processes to make FWAs easy and clear

Action point 1: Invest in new technology and software

West-Street Carrier, a logistics company, upgraded internal systems to allow greater visibility of workers' productivity, which enabled them to carry out tasks and to work from home.

[51] Nienaber, A.-M., Romeike, P.D., Searle, R. & Schewe, G. (2015). A qualitative meta-analysis of trust in supervisor-subordinate relationships. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *30*(5), 507–534. https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-06-2013-0187
[52] Regan, D.T. (1971). Effects of a favor and liking on compliance. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *7*(6), 627–639.
[53] Martínez-Tur, V., Molina, A., Moliner, C., Gracia, E., Andreu, L., Bigne, E. & Luque, O. (2020). Reciprocity of trust between managers and team members. *Personnel Review*, *49*(2), 653–669. https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-08-2018-0319

Companies with operational roles, where manpower needs to be available at fixed times, can sometimes face difficulties covering complex scheduling requirements on the ground. There is greater administrative complexity in arranging such scheduling, which also necessitates sufficient manpower levels. Leaner or newer companies might find this more difficult to achieve.

"Store opens at 10 or 11[am], then they…want to work from 3pm until night. I mean, that one too much."

- Male HR staff in his 20s,
describing schedule limitations for operations staff

❝

To overcome the challenges of implementing FWAs, support infrastructure and technology can play a valuable role. Companies can adopt new technologies, to **change default operations and workflows**[54]. For example, digital scheduling and attendance-tracking systems can assist in operations staff deployment, and digital platforms for document-sharing can enable employees in desk roles to work flexibly. It could be helpful for companies to participate in discussion and sharing platforms within and outside the industry, so as to keep up-to-date with the latest technologies available.

For example, as part of NTUC's Company Training Committee (CTC) process, an Operation & Technology Roadmap (OTR)[55] is co-created with senior stakeholders and relevant specialists across functions, on how their organisation can grow and workers can transform by capitalising on the right drivers, services, technologies, capabilities and manpower. Regular meetings are convened with management where updates on not just technologies but market conditions, industry changes, and industrial relations are shared too.

"Initially, there was a lot more focus on certain hard copies, paper signatures and whatnot. But over that two years of COVID, everybody started using e-signature."

- Female HR staff in her 30s,
describing digitalisation of work processes

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[54] Jachimowicz, J., Duncan, S., Weber, E., & Johnson, E. (2019). When and why defaults influence decisions: A meta-analysis of default effects. *Behavioural Public Policy*, *3*(2), 159–186. https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2018.43
[55] NTUC Training and Placement Ecosystem. (n.d.). *Operation and technology roadmap.* https://www.ntuc.org.sg/tpe/how-we-help/otr

Action point 2: Seek consultancy and advice on processes

Oriental Remedies Group, a Traditional Chinese Medicine provider, participated in the Company Training Committee (CTC) initiative by NTUC. Under the CTC process, the company leveraged the Operation & Technology Roadmap, facilitated by NTUC's Industry Training & Transformation and U Small and Medium Enterprises teams, to chart a business transformation plan. One of the transformation initiatives was to improve their Human Resources (HR) system by streamlining HR tasks, boosting productivity, optimising job functions, and enhancing employee satisfaction. This was done by enhancing their existing HR system through a combination of improved access metrics and the automation of existing administrative functions.

The resources and training provided by the CTC supported the company in their FWA implementation journey, a prime example being in flexi-time for physicians (e.g. choice to work longer hours over fewer days). This has helped to improve employee well-being and retention for the company, which is particularly important in retaining long-term customers who prefer to see the same physicians.

"To roll things out like flexible arrangements and family care leave, it's very easy to set the policy right, but the implementation and nuances need a very experienced person."

- Beatrice Liu, Chief Executive Officer, Oriental Remedies Group

It can be daunting for companies to begin implementing FWAs. This is particularly so for companies which are newer to FWAs, or for smaller companies that lack experienced HR personnel. Companies may be unsure of the process for implementing FWAs, such as how to adjust job scopes or performance appraisal systems.

"I don't know whether other SMEs tell you this, it's very hard to find good HR."

- Beatrice Liu, Chief Executive Officer, Oriental Remedies Group

If companies have minimal experience or knowledge on FWAs, they may benefit from seeking consultancy and advice. For instance, companies may seek advice from specialised organisational or HR consultants. NTUC offers the Company Training

Committee[56] initiative, where union leaders work with company management to help companies and employees transform for the future, such as through workforce upgrading plans. This could include enhancements to HR systems and processes, which could help in FWA implementation. In addition, the tripartite work group on FWAs will launch the Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangements Requests (TG-FWAR) in later 2024, as well as develop a resource package to support companies in following the guidelines. This can be an added resource for companies seeking to implement FWAs.

"[Overseas HQ] worked with an external consultant in Australia to come up with a team charter…We took that and we cascaded it locally."

- Female HR staff in her 30s,
explaining how FWAs were implemented with external consultancy

[56] National Trades Union Congress. (n.d.). *Company training committees.* https://www.ntuc.org.sg/uportal/programmes/company-training-committees

Chapter 7: Conclusion

It is a reality that employees want FWAs. Employers that do not offer FWAs will lose out on attracting and retaining talent. Senior management therefore needs to be a first mover and ensure that the directive for FWAs is cascaded to line and middle managers to effect real organisational change. Further to that, job and cultural redesign are both important especially if companies are keen on attracting new profiles of workers (e.g. women returners). On top of implementing FWAs, companies must conduct regular reviews of their effectiveness to ensure that their FWA policies are still relevant, applicable, and flexible for employees.

> *"Do not be afraid of this change. Have trust in your employees and they will appreciate it."*
>
> \- Candyse Lum, Sales & Marketing, NSP Tech Pte Ltd

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Companies may face various challenges in implementing FWAs, depending on their sector, size, operational context, and business situation. The behaviourally-informed recommendations in this paper aim to help companies to overcome potential challenges, and implement FWAs in a way that is easy, acceptable and with clear requirements for all.

While Singapore is still at an infancy stage of expanding and embracing all categories of FWAs, NTUC, together with tripartite partners, are on a journey to eventually realise a Yes Flex[57] culture where FWAs are no longer something employees opt into but are embedded in every firm's culture and ethos. A crucial first step in this journey will be the launch of the Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangements Requests (TG-FWAR) in later part of 2024.

> *"Be flexible to your team and they will give their decent best to you."*
>
> \- Connie Chen, Founder and Director, Green Sproutz Singapore

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[57] Practised by Aurecon in Australia and New Zealand. https://work180.com/en-au/blog/how-aurecon-raised-the-bar-on-flexible-working

To support companies in implementing FWAs, NTUC serves as a **nexus of best practices** through three main approaches:

1. Providing platforms for companies to discuss and collectively chart the way forward.
2. Providing grants, advice and support for all companies regardless of size or industry, at each step in their FWA implementation journey.
3. Supporting companies in redesigning jobs and developing systems and processes that enable flexibility.

By partnering with NTUC and the Labour Movement on their implementation journey, companies can have more confidence and capability in implementing FWAs in a way that is win-win for everyone.

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