

Hybrid Working

The story so far..

PREVIEW



Foreword



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The sudden emergence of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 resulted in large numbers of people having to work from home (WFH), many for the first time, and often at very short notice. This period has been widely dubbed 'the world's biggest work-from-home experiment,' and may provide the catalyst for the biggest overhaul of working practices in living memory.

As businesses around the world now enter the post-COVID era, it is widely accepted that many workers will continue to work from home to some degree, and that many of us are unlikely to ever return to the traditional full time office hours of the past. This offers businesses a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to redefine, rethink and reimagine new and better ways of working, by combining the best elements of the two different modes.

As a result, they need to start thinking about the management of a new hybrid work model, with some workers back in the office and others working from home, as being the most likely reality for the future of work.

In February 2020, we set out to understand how Australian organisations are tackling this issue, by interviewing a range of senior business leaders from different industries. These interviews are still ongoing, but this is the story so far..

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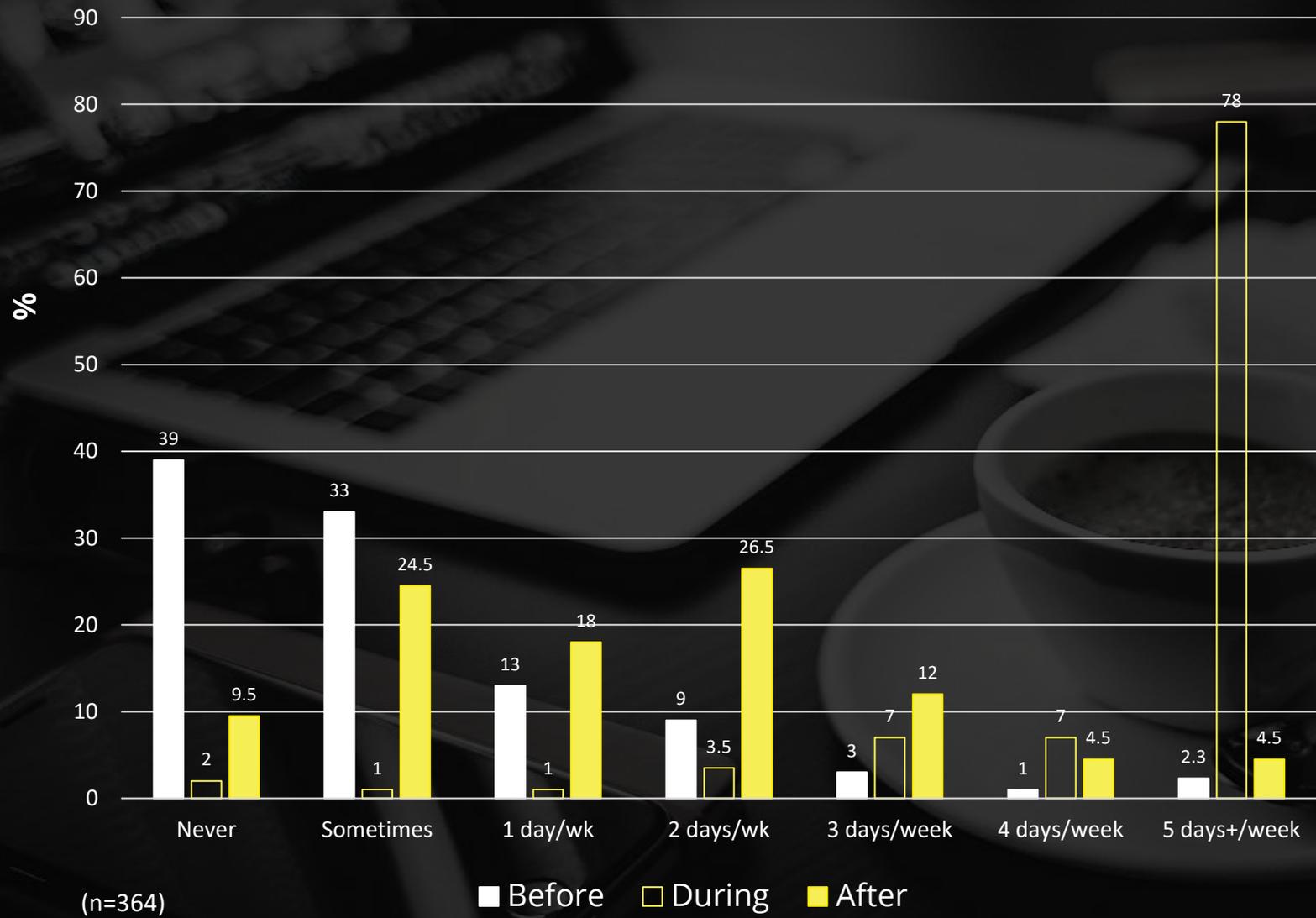
Purpose

In April 2020 we launched a survey, to investigate the impact that the sudden emergence of COVID-19 was having on the Australian workforce, which formed the basis of a report for the Australian Fair Work Commission.

One of the key findings from that initial research was the low level of participation in working from home (WFH) that existed prior to the pandemic, and the significant appetite to continue WFH to some extent in the future, after all restrictions were removed (see Figure 1).

<https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/sites/clerks-work-from-home/research/am202098-research-reference-list-su-241120.pdf>

Fig 1: Work from home survey (April/May 2020)



How often did you WFH in the past, how many days per week are you WFH during COVID-19, and how many days per week do you expect to WFH in the future (after COVID-19)?

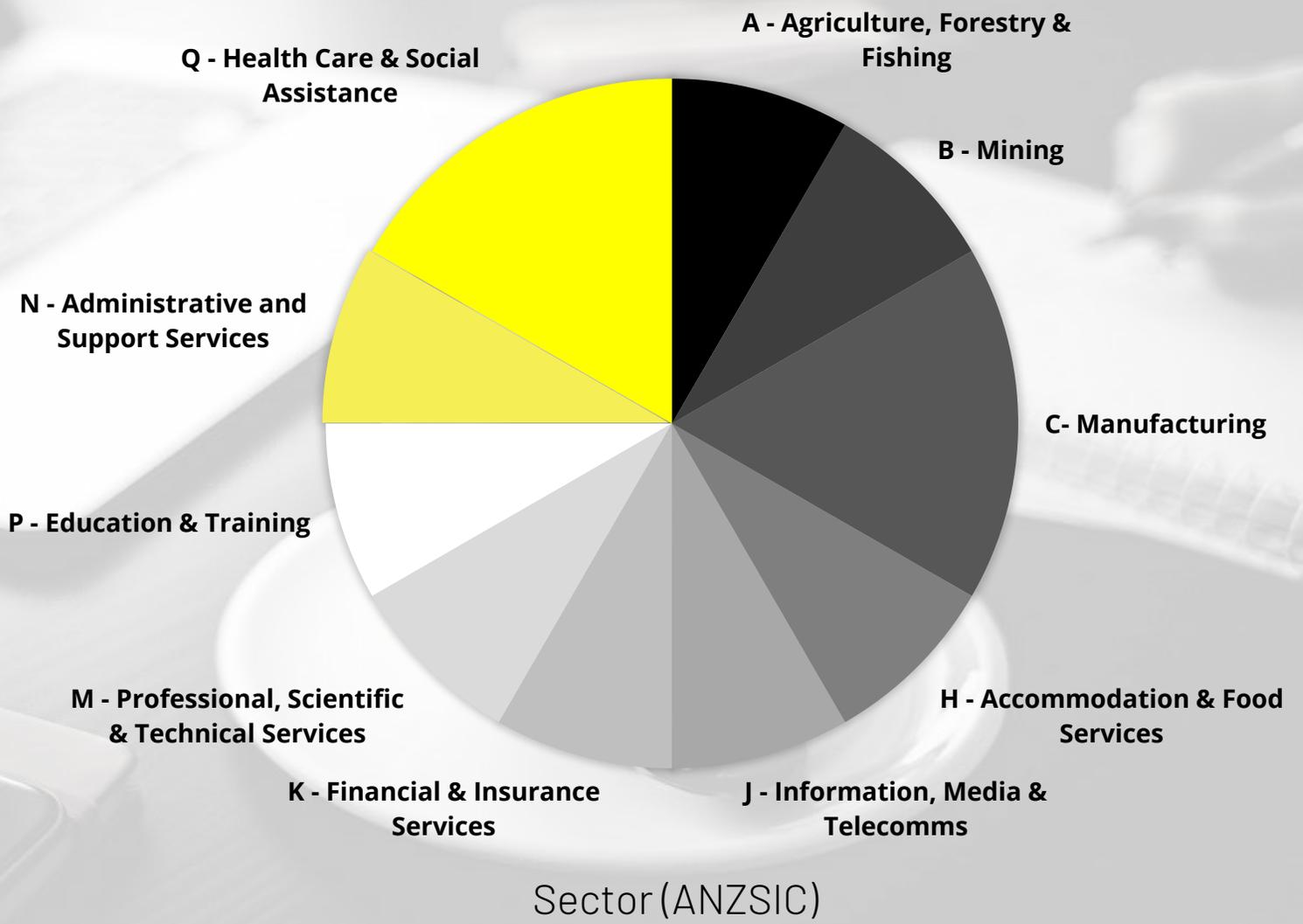
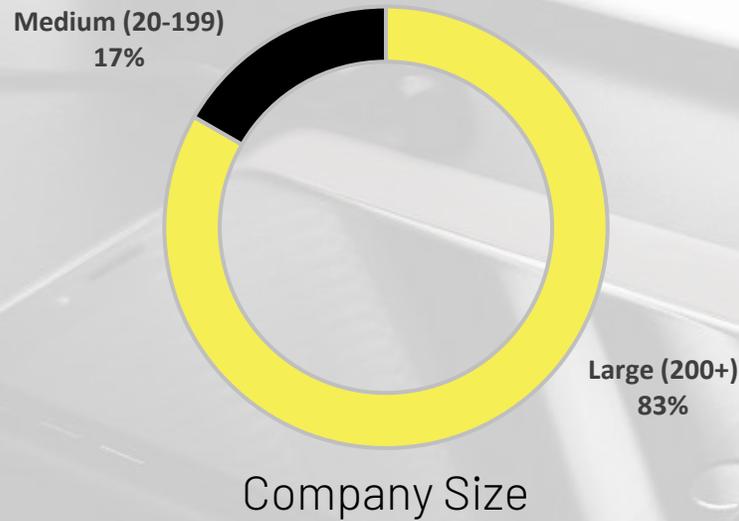
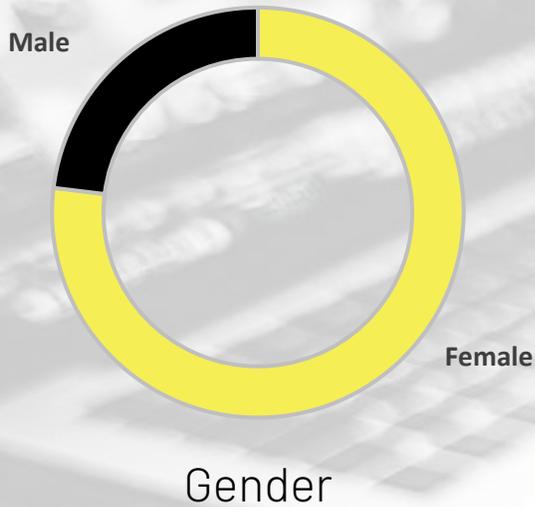
Purpose

These findings were the catalyst for an investigation into how organisations would manage this expectation for greater WFH and workplace flexibility, and what hybrid work models were emerging.

So, in February 2021, we starting interviewing senior business leaders from around Australia to ask them what the likely post-pandemic work arrangements would be for their organisations.

At the time, Australia was leading most of the world in the 'return to office' movement, with much of the west still under harsh lockdown conditions.

Fig 2: Interview Participants



Early Findings

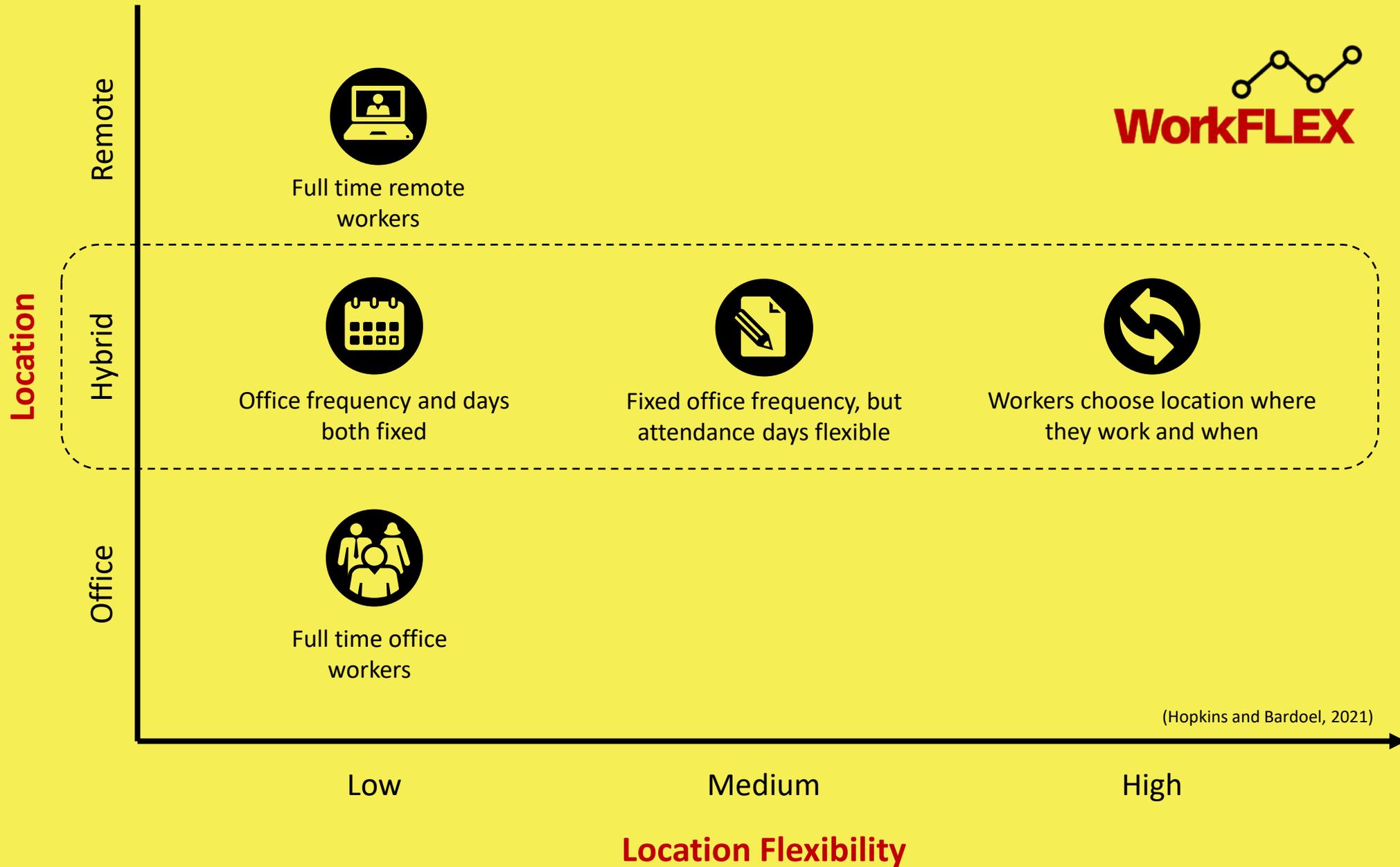
Emerging work models

Even at an early stage in our research, it was clear that many organisations were heading in different directions, in terms of how they thought the future of work would look for them (see Figure 3).

So far, we have identified five different types of work models emerging, based on variations in place and flexibility:

1. Full time office workers – *working from the office on a full time basis,*
2. Full time remote workers – *working remotely all of the time,*
3. Office frequency and days both fixed – *it is mandated that workers attend the office for a specific number of set days (e.g. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays),*
4. Fixed office frequency, but attendance days flexible – *it is mandated that workers attend the office for a specific number of days, but workers have the flexibility to choose which days (e.g. 3 days per week)*
5. Workers choose location where they work and when– *workers have the choice to come to the office full time, work remotely full time, or anything in between.*

Fig 3: Future work arrangements



Early Findings

Successful hybrid work

One of the other key findings from this research has been the emergence of what we call the 'six pillars for successful hybrid work' (see Figure #). We have identified these themes throughout our interviews, when discussing what the priority areas are, for managing a hybrid workforce:

1. **Operations** – first and foremost, however organisations might work in the future, it is essential their focus stays aligned with the needs of their customers and their own vision and mission,
2. **Culture** – building and maintaining the right workplace culture might pose a different challenge when all your workers aren't under one roof at any one time, purpose, community, connection and equity must all be considered,
3. **Communication** – having the right protocols in place to support synchronous and asynchronous communication and knowledge sharing,
4. **Wellbeing** – the mental, physical and social health of employees has become a priority area since the pandemic, and will continue to be so,
5. **Future skills** – a focus on upskilling, recruitment and training, to address gaps,
6. **Technology and Infrastructure** – investing in the technology, tools and infrastructure, required to successfully support a hybrid workplace.



Fig 4: The 6 pillars of successful hybrid working

Next Steps

Hopefully you have found this preview of our early research findings interesting. We plan to continue with this program of interviews until the end of 2021, with an aim of publishing the final results in an academic journal sometime after that.

If you have any questions or feedback, or would like to discuss potential future research projects, please feel free to reach out to us on: contactus@workflex.com.au



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