

A Study on Working Women: Family Related Concerns and Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA)

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Abstracts

Flexible work programs are work arrangements wherein employees are given greater scheduling freedom in how they fulfill the obligations of their positions. The most commonplace of these programs is flextime, which gives workers far greater leeway in

terms of the time when they begin and end work, provided they put in the total number of hours required by the employer. Other common flexible working arrangements involve telecommuting, job-sharing, and compressed work weeks.

Keywords: Flexi Timing, Reduced Work Schedule, Flexi work and Compressed work arrangements.

INTRODUCTION

Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) alter the time and/or place that work is conducted on a regular basis - in a manner that is as manageable and predictable as possible for both employees and employers. FWAs provide:

Flexibility in the scheduling of hours worked, such as alternative work schedules (e.g., non-traditional start and end times, flex time, or compressed workweeks) and arrangements regarding overtime, predictable scheduling, and shift and break schedules;

- Flexibility in the amount of hours worked, such as part time work, Job shares, phased retirement or part year work; and
- Flexibility in the place of work, such as working at home, at a satellite location or at different locations.

Many employees today have ongoing, predictable demands on their time outside of work. These demands may include dependent children, an ill family member, a long commute, a desire for increased education, or a commitment to community or religious activities. To meet these demands, and to get a paying job done, such individuals often need to work at a different time or in a different place than the traditional “9 am to 5 pm, five days/week, face time at the workplace” rubric.

In response to employee and employer needs and preferences, some employers provide what we call “Flexible Work Arrangements” (FWAs). An FWA is an alteration of a work structure that alters the time and/or place that work gets done on a regular basis. An employee may arrange to have an FWA for only a select period of time or an employee may be hired with the understanding that an

FWA will be on a permanent basis until it is changed by mutual consent.

FWAs differ from STO (Short Term Time Off) or EPTO (Episodic Time Off) – both of which refer to time off that does not occur on a regular basis. Often, an employee will seek an FWA when his or her needs are such that neither STO nor EPTO are adequately meeting those needs.

FWAs include (but are not limited to) arrangements that provide:

- Flexibility in the scheduling of hours worked (e.g., non-traditional start and end times, compressed workweeks),
- Flexibility in the amount of hours worked (e.g., reduced hours schedule, job shares, part-year work)
- Flexibility in the place of work (e.g. telework, work at home).

Strategies of Providing FWAs (Flexible Work Arrangements)

Flexible work arrangements can take any number of forms, from basic flextime programs to innovative child-and elder-care programs.

- Flextime—This is a system wherein employees choose their starting and quitting times from a range of available hours. These periods are usually at either end of a "core" time during which most company business takes place. Formerly regarded as a rare, cutting-edge workplace arrangement, flextime is now commonly practiced in a wide variety of industries.

- Compressed Work Week—Under this arrangement, the standard work week is compressed into fewer than five days. The most common incarnation of the compressed work week is one of four 10-hour days. Other options include three 12-hour days or arrangements in which employees work 9- or 10-hour days over two weeks and are compensated with an extra day or two of time off during that time.
- Flex place—This term encompasses various arrangements in which an employee works from home or some other non-office location. Telecommuting is the most commonly practiced example of this type of flexible employment.
- Job Sharing—Under these arrangements, two people voluntarily share the duties and responsibilities of one full-time position, with both salary and benefits of that position prorated between the two individuals.
- Work Sharing—These programs are increasingly used by companies that wish to avoid layoffs. It allows businesses to temporarily reduce hours and salary for a portion of their workforce while maintaining the number of employees.
- Expanded Leave—This option gives employees greater flexibility in terms of requesting extended periods of time away from work without losing their rights as employees. Expanded leave, which can be granted on either a paid or unpaid basis, is used for a variety of reasons; including sabbaticals, education, community service, family problems, and medical care (the latter two reasons

are now largely covered by the terms of the Family and Medical Leave Act).

- Phased Retirement—Under these arrangements, the employee and employer agree to a schedule wherein the employee's full-time work commitments are gradually reduced over a period of months or years.
- Partial Retirement—These programs allow older employees to continue working on a part time basis, with no established end date.
- Work and Family Programs—These programs are still relatively rare, although some larger companies have reported good results with pilot initiatives in this area. These programs are ones in which employers provide some degree of assistance to their employees in the realms of child-care and elder-care. The best-known of these programs are in-house facilities providing care for the children of employees, but even basic flex-time programs can ease child-care logistics for employees.

Research Methodology

Methodology is the key to any kind of research. It helps to maintain a track of what to do and not to do. It has various approaches to it. A good methodology works as a strong plan for collecting both primary and secondary data.

This chapter explains the methods used to carry out the study, giving special emphasis to the treatment and techniques used to analyze the data.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research has been conducted with a view to find out:

- ✓ to what extent FWAs are being adopted across organizations
- ✓ to find out the factors that necessitate provision of FWAs for women
- ✓ to pin point the opinion of working women towards types of FWAs suitable to them

RESEARCH DESIGN : DESCRIPTIVE

SOURCES OF DATA : Primary and Secondary.

The data to be collected can be of two types –Primary sources consisted of:

1. Questionnaire- Structured questionnaire. Part A consists of general personal information along 15 parameters. Part B consists of 15 questions in all, 13 being framed on a three point rating scale and 2 questions on a two point rating scale. no open ended questions have been used.
2. Personal Interviews- 5 employees were interviewed personally. Questions related to the questionnaire were asked. Other than that points which were not clear from the responses in questionnaire were asked.

Secondary sources consisted of various research papers, books, and web resources. the details of these sources have been mentioned in the bibliography.

SAMPLING FRAME

A sample is a subgroup of the elements of the population selected for participation in the study.

Sample size: Sample size : 100.

Sample unit: The sample unit includes only women. Employees of various government & Private Organizations are a part of the research.

SAMPLING METHOD : Convenience sampling

DATA ANALYSIS TOOLS

The data is analyzed by using the Pie Charts, which were a suitable tool for analysis as percentage responses have been analyzed.

ADVANTAGES OF FLEXIBLE WORK PROGRAMS

Defenders of flexible work initiatives point to the competitive advantages that such programs bring to companies that offer these sorts of programs. Perhaps the single most cited reason for introducing a flexible work environment is employee retention. Indeed, many businesses contend that the recent trend toward flextime and other programs has made it necessary for them to introduce their own programs or risk losing valued employees. *"Another business argument for flexible work arrangements is that they allow companies to match the peaks and valleys of activity"* wrote Elizabeth Sheley in *HRMagazine*. *"More organizations have shifted their focus to how potential changes in schedule will affect the product. Reduced absenteeism, though often overlooked, is also a legitimate business rationale; flexible options not only strengthen commitment, but also give employees more time to handle the*

very situations that sometimes lead to absenteeism."

Proponents also note that, in many respects, flexible work programs provide a way for businesses to increase employee loyalty without resorting to making fundamental changes in their operations. Indeed, Sheley observed that *"the most popular flexible work options are those that involve the least change. Flex-time and compressed work weeks, for example, call for the same number of hours, at the same workplace, as in traditional work arrangements."*

In addition, some supporters of flexible work arrangements argue that such programs can actually have a positive impact on the productivity of employees. They contend that employees who are better able to attend to family needs through flex-time are more likely to be contented and productive, while good employees who telecommute may get even more work done if they are freed up from office interruptions.

Business can also use flexible programs to address institutional problems. For instance, a small- or mid-sized business that is crammed into a small facility or office may want to explore telecommuting programs in order to relieve the situation without resorting to an expensive relocation or expansion. Finally, proponents say the flexible work programs can be beneficial to companies by enhancing their public image and expanding the number of hours during which customers can be serviced.

DISADVANTAGES OF FLEXIBLE WORK PROGRAMS

Flexible work programs have many apparent advantages, but critics point out those ill-conceived programs can have a negative impact on businesses, and they add that even

good programs often present challenges that a business has to address.

First of all, business owners and managers need to recognize that flexible work arrangements are not always appropriate for all people, jobs, or industries. Telecommuting and other "flexplace" arrangements, for example, can be disastrous (or at the very least a productivity drain) if used by employees who are unwilling or unable to put in a full day of work amid the non-work temptations (television, pleasure reading, housecleaning, etc.) of a home setting. Other companies, meanwhile, find that employees "flex" in and out of the business at such different hours that overhead costs increase, customer service suffers (i.e., no one comes in until 9:30 a.m., a state of affairs that forces customers and vendors to cool their heels until then), and manufacturing output suffers. The latter makes flex-time a difficult fit for many manufacturing facilities. In a manufacturing setting, many of the factory operations depend on a single set of operational hours across operations. When one is dealing with a firm that uses a work-cell team manufacturing concept, flex-time is not an option.

Finally, many observers argue that businesses launch flexible work plans without adequate preparation. "I know that flex is a basic element of family-friendly and that family-friendly is a requisite for competitive companies," stated Peak. "But it takes more than a statement in the policy manual to institutionalize flex. It takes new methodologies to measure job success and investment in technologies to keep employees in constant communication."

INSTITUTING A FLEXIBLE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Research the pros and cons of instituting a flexible work program in your company. Every company's needs and operating environment are different; just because a flex program worked for a neighboring business that does not necessarily mean that it will work for your company. Conversely, a program that fails in another firm may work in yours. Detailed research into the needs and pressures of both the operations and the employees of each business, then, is a necessary component of any decision. So is an honest assessment of the qualities of the business's work force.

A company that is blessed with a work force of dedicated and conscientious employees is far more likely to be productive in a flex environment than is one that is saddled with a heavy sprinkling of unmotivated employees. A thorough and honest assessment of a company's existing workforce as well as future labor needs is important in determining whether a flexible work program is likely to succeed for that company.

GUIDELINES

Create guidelines and systems of flex program administration that: 1) address all business needs, and 2) stand up to tests of fairness and comprehensiveness. The process used to create guidelines for a flexible work program should include steps to ensure that new policies are compatible with existing company objectives. Issues like eligibility, application processes, reversibility, and changes to employee status should be plainly addressed. Finally, companies should formalize guidelines to head off complaints about favoritism or unfair treatment. Because a balanced and equitable treatment of all employees is important, the terminology used in the formal guidelines should be as general as possible—family obligations may be used instead of child-care obligations, for example.

TRAINING

Employees should be educated about policies and feel comfortable using them. This can only happen if the company actively promotes the program. Employees need to know that participation in such initiatives will not hurt their career. Indeed, *HR Magazine* noted that a mid-1990s report by the Catalyst research organization indicated that this can be a significant deterrent: "Many of the options for flexible scheduling are perceived as being bad for one's career by management and by co-workers who have more traditional working arrangements. A job-share partner or part-time employee cannot be as committed, the thinking goes. A positive experience with less than full-time work depends on the cultural values of the employee's organization. In some organizations, people who have taken less traditional schedules have been perceived as committing career suicide."

Employees are not the only workers who need to be reassured. Companies instituting flex work plans must also develop resource materials and training programs for managers. In fact, in many respects, managers of personnel and projects are the people who must make the biggest adjustment to a flexible work environment. "Workplace flexibility requires managers to develop a new set of skills," wrote Sheley. "Managers used to manage by sight, and defined work by hours on site. If a worker was in the office for eight hours, the boss assumed that person did eight hours of work." With flex-time and other developments, however, managers need to develop new skills that emphasize work flow and productivity. Managers and employees will need to be flexible themselves in order to make these arrangement successful.

CONTROL

Ultimately, a flexible work program is only worth keeping if it benefits your company's financial, strategic, and production goals. A key to making sure that those needs are met is to maintain control of the program. Employees and work teams can be very helpful in shaping flexible work guidelines, but business owners and managers should be wary of handing over too much control. Indeed, they need to make sure that business considerations remain paramount in any discussion of flex-time and other options, and that ultimate control over flexible work programs rests with them. Dysfunctional work teams, for example, will reduce flex-time to a shambles if they are left to institute and supervise it themselves.

Recommendations

The research shows that in many cases (30%) the employer is not aware of the requirements of employees with respect to home care. employers need to pay attention to such facts. what is needed at the very outset is initiation of communication for this purpose, as without it most female employees will not be able to take this initiative on their own.

Organizations need to take steps to develop a healthy work culture, which has a very important bearing on the work of employees, more so in challenging times. FWAs need to become an integral part of culture of an organization. If aligned well with other policies and limitations faced by the employees, FWAs are bound to work well. What is suggested here is the introduction of FWAs on a fair, just and equitable basis for all employees, rather than some special cases. if only some employees are given such benefits it is bound to cause resentment in minds of others. Hence,

FWAs need to become a part of the culture itself.

Since women are becoming more ambitious, money is not the only factor important for them. They are driven more by empowerment, which comes from education. The trend from western countries shows that women cannot and should not be expected to be who they were 20 years back. If issues affecting women are not considered on a quick basis, the trends of western countries are sure to become a part of India also. For e.g. deciding to get married relatively late and either having children late or deciding not to have children.

Women also expect support from spouse in household chores. Strangely, this is one trend which has not caught pace and if such development can take place it will surely imply great support for women.

Conclusion

It is rightly said that change is the only constant thing in today's time, be it in any sphere of life. If organizations want to retain the best of their female employees, it is evident that FWAs have a very important role to play for the same purpose. Rather than avoiding such welcome changes organizations need to study the tradeoffs carefully. The additional costs incurred on such policies are expected to pay off. If tracked on a regular basis, benefits such as employee retention, higher morale and better productivity. From the point of view of female employees, FWAs are greatly valued and needed. Knowledge workers who want to continue with their careers despite family responsibilities are bound to add value to the organizations that they work for. Since

knowledge and experience are acquired only in a long time organizations cannot afford to lose such employees.

At last, the pace of this change which must come now needs to increase and the implementation of FWAs needs intense effort and unfailing commitment.

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