

Alternative Work Arrangements

An Examination of Job Sharing, Compressed Workweeks, and Flextime

Joseph Lutz

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Colleen McLaughlin, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

David Duby, Ph.D.
Committee Member

David Snead, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Brenda Ayres, Ph.D.
Honors Director

Date

Abstract

Alternative working arrangements have become increasingly popular in workplaces across America and the world. One segment of alternative work arrangements is schedule flexibility. The three types of flexible schedules examined include: job sharing, compressed workweeks, and flextime. Each arrangement will be examined individually. First, a definition and background information will be given. Then, the benefits of the arrangement will be discussed. Next, the risks and challenges of the arrangement will be examined. Finally, there will be analysis of what conditions are necessary for the arrangement to be successful.

Alternative Work Arrangements

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In recent years, as businesses have become more focused on employee needs and their own productivity, alternative work arrangements have grown in popularity.

Alternative work arrangements, sometimes known as flexible work arrangements or alternative work schedules, can be explained as any work arrangement that deviates from the standard workweek. To gain a full understanding of alternative work arrangements, an understanding of the standard workweek and its history must first be established.

The standard workweek has undergone a large transformation over the past 300 years. It was not uncommon for workers to work 6 days a week for an astonishing 96 hours, roughly 16 hours a day (Bird, 2010). In the 1800s, the workweek shrunk towards 70 hours per week, and then 60 by the turn of the century (Poor, 2010). In the 1900s labor unions began to fight toward fewer hours until they achieved a six day, 48 hour week. In 1927, Henry Ford's workers became the some of the first to achieve a five-day workweek (Bird). In 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed, establishing the 40 hour week for employees meeting certain requirements. Since then, the act has expanded to cover more types of employees and the 5 day, 40 hour week has become a social norm (Smith, 1986). Although not a matter of law, it has also become a norm to think of the hours typically worked as 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

According to a study by the American Business Collaboration, 64% of respondents acknowledged that they used some type of alternative working arrangement for their job on at least an occasional basis. The chart below shows survey results

depicting the prevalence of different types of arrangements amongst those surveyed (American Business Collaboration, 2007).

TABLE 1
Types of Workplace Flexibility Used
By Job Category

| | Overall | Exempt | Non-Exempt |
|--|----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Flexible start/end times | 33% | 42% | 25% |
| Telecommuting | 14% | 27% | 2% |
| Compressed work week | 6% | 6% | 7% |
| Part-time or other reduced hours arrangement | 8% | 4% | 12% |
| Job share | 1% | 2% | 1% |
| Phased-in retirement | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| Occasionally adjust hours as needed to take care of personal matters | 52% | 59% | 46% |

There are a few different types of alternative work arrangements. The two major categories of alternative work arrangements are schedule flexibility and location flexibility. Within these, there are many types of arrangements, but there are a few that are the most popular. Schedule flexibility allows the schedules of employees to be rearranged to something other than the standard workweek and hours. Examples of schedule flexibility are flextime, compressed workweeks, job sharing, shift work, and part time. Location flexibility allows employees to work from a location other than the normal worksite. Examples include telecommuting, hoteling, and snowbird programs (Bliss & Thornton, 2010). Three types of schedule flexibility will be focused on specifically: job sharing, compressed workweeks, and flextime. First, the details of each type of arrangement will be explained. Then, the benefits of the arrangement will be

presented, followed by some of the challenges and risks involved. Last, some of the conditions for successful implementation of the arrangement will be explained.

Job Sharing

According to the Society for Human Resource Management, job sharing is defined as, “the practice of having two different employees performing the tasks of one full-time position” (Bliss & Thornton, 2010, para. 18). Job sharing is a form of part-time work, but differs from what is traditionally thought of as part time in a few respects. Part-time is often associated with industries such as food service, retail or landscaping. Job sharing, on the other hand, allows for part-time hours in jobs not typically available as part-time positions, such as professional business positions (Bliss & Thornton). For example, in the simplest of setups, two employees would share a typical forty hour position by each working twenty hours. In some situations, workers will each work two and a half days and possibly meet for lunch on the split day. Other options include working two days a week and rotate working alternate Wednesdays, or working four hours a day, every day (Hirschman, 2008). In most cases, the salaries and benefits of the employees participating in the job sharing would be prorated based on the hours each employee worked (Bliss & Thornton). When hours are evenly split, the salary and benefits for the position would be split evenly between the two employees.

Job sharing is still a relatively uncommon practice in some industries. In a study done by the American Business Collaboration, only 1% of respondents said that they used job sharing (American Business Collaboration, 2007). In another study of counselor education’s department chairs and college of education deans, 11.1% of chairs and 15.8% of deans had ever participated in job sharing (Miller, 2007). Part of the reason for its lack

in popularity may be due to some misconceptions regarding the value and feasibility of job sharing. Some of the most common concerns are as followed: job sharing costs too much; job sharing managers will have a difficult time managing the employees; if one person does it, everyone will want to; it is difficult to recruit for; and that it is hard to maintain accountability (Miller).

Benefits

Job sharing presents a variety of benefits both to employees and employers. For employees, job sharing allows for flexibility that can help improve their work-life balance. For parents raising children, job sharing can be extremely beneficial because it allows parents to retain their positions and continue on their path professionally (Collins & Krause, 1984). Having time to spend with family, for women or men, is becoming increasingly important to workers. Where other working arrangements predominantly rearrange time to make it more convenient to spend time with family, job sharing increases time spent with family because it decreases working time. Leaving work mid-career to raise children could hinder future career aspirations, but job sharing allows these aspirations to remain plausible (Hirschman, 2008). While the rate at which ones career develops will likely slow, it is better than the alternative of a career being completely put on hold or potentially lost.

Retention of workers through job sharing benefits the employers as well because it eliminates the need and cost of finding a replacement, which some studies estimate can cost 1.5 times salary (Miller, 2007). When employees are allowed to engage in job sharing, they tend to be grateful for the opportunity, leading to increased loyalty and increased productivity (Hirschman, 2008). In addition, when two different minds are

working together on something, there is more creativity and talent which can lead to better results for both the employee and employer (Pesek & McGee, 1989). The two employees can complement each other's skills and knowledge and potentially solve problems that one person may not be able to solve.

Another benefit for the employer involves overtime pay. According to Collins and Krause (1984), job sharing for positions that occasionally require overtime may potentially save the company from having to pay overtime, assuming one of the individuals does not exceed 40 hours. For example, if position X using one worker requires 50 hours of work one week, the company would owe that worker time-and-a-half for the extra ten hours. However, if position X was a job sharing position, neither individual worker would exceed 40 hours, meaning the employer is not legally required to pay overtime. However, in some case the employees and employer may agree upon a provision in the working contract allowing for additional rates for hours over the normal amount.

Risks/Challenges

For an employee, one obvious disadvantage to job sharing is less pay (Collins & Krause, 1984). For an employee who needs the income associated with a full time job, job sharing cannot be considered an appropriate arrangement. There is also the risk of competing personalities between job sharers leading to a dysfunctional relationship (Collins & Krause).

For the company, there will be some additional expense in the form of increased processing cost due to having more workers (Collins & Krause, 1984). This could also affect certain benefit and insurance costs. Benefits such as unemployment compensation

and FICA cannot be prorated, leaving the employer to pay for two employees in one position. These costs would not be very large in the long run but should still be considered by employers (Pesek & McGee, 1989).

While recounting their time as job sharers, Cunningham and Murray (2005) felt their biggest challenge was not balancing work between each other, but rather their relationship with management and coworkers. They felt that management did not always support their arrangement, even going so far as to say that certain managers were hoping they would fail. Beyond that, they believed they were held to different standards and believed it had some effect on their performance reviews. Occasionally, they would be the target of jokes from coworkers and believe they never were quite as involved in office camaraderie as they would be otherwise.

Conditions for Success

While there are many benefits to job sharing, these only occur when it is set up correctly. In order for job sharing to succeed, certain conditions must be met. The first condition that should be met is the right people for the job. It is important for potential job sharers to be very skilled. Specifically, employees who are well organized, have a track record of good performance, outstanding communication skills, and have a personality that is willing to share failures and successes (Hirschman, 2008). Because the job involves two workers, it is also important that the employees are not only a good fit for the job, but also the other person. In reflecting on their experience, Cunningham and Murray (2005, p. 130) state, "It's important to find the right job-share partner, because you're utterly dependent on each other. If the fit isn't perfect, it's not going to work." It is also advantageous if one worker's strengths complement the other's weaknesses, and vice

versa (Collins & Krause, 1986). Their schedules should also coincide so that all necessary hours are being correctly covered.

Job sharing generally works best for a few demographics. The career-oriented mother is generally the most common fit for job sharing. As mentioned earlier, these mothers would like to retain their positions and would like to keep the career from being derailed due to an extended time out of professional work. Students are also a group that can benefit from job sharing. Since part-time professional work is not extremely common, job sharing may provide an alternative that can give students a chance to begin their professional careers while not committing to many hours. On the other end of the spectrum would be older workers phasing out of their careers (Job Sharing, 2006). Employers would be able to retain knowledgeable and experienced workers, while the older workers would avoid exhaustion from a normal 40 hour week.

The next important component is the right position for job sharing. According to Hirschman (2008), “Although it can work for positions from administrative assistant to executive vice president, it works better with jobs that have specific duties and regular hours than with those involving less clearly defined tasks or substantial travel” (para.3). Business organizations tend to be good fits for job sharing, again provided the company supports the initiative. In the case of Cunningham and Murray (2005), Fleet Bank provided the opportunity for job sharing.

In teaching, job sharing can allow teachers to split the workweek and workload. It is not uncommon for universities to have two professors assigned to one class in which they may alternate between teaching days. Flight attendants also have been known to use job sharing by alternating between working a month and taking a month off (Collins &

Krause, 1984). Healthcare industries provide opportunities for employees to participate in job sharing as well. Hospitals tend to be staffed predominantly with women who are interested in a career more than basic part time work, making it a place where job sharing has the opportunity to thrive. In a study done analyzing hospital worker's feelings toward job sharing, most workers were more satisfied with their job sharing schedules and felt there were less work schedule problems (Pesek & McGee, 1989).

Managerial support also plays a big role in the success of job sharing. As discussed earlier in the case of Cunningham and Murray (2005), a lack of managerial support can become a hindrance and potentially be discouraging. Before anything is implemented, it would be beneficial for a company to make sure the affected managers are made aware of the benefits of job sharing, trained on how to best manage a job sharing situation, and ultimately have a positive attitude toward the arrangement. If the managers are looking for the arrangement to fail, it will make to job much more difficult for the employees. The organization and managers would also be wise to establish specific expectations and protocol for each job sharing partnership. This will help to avoid confusion and inefficiency down the road (Hirschman, 2008). According to Kane, a leader in workplace solutions, "It requires a leap of faith that the work will get done" (as cited in Hirschman, para. 4). However, if the proper precautions and preparation are taken, that leap of faith can pay off for employers.

In summary, job sharing provides a myriad of benefits, provided the task is not taken lightly. Most of the negatives to job sharing can be eliminated by careful planning and finding the appropriate people for the job. The organization should be fully behind the arrangement and should foster an environment of acceptance and success. While job

sharing can work for any demographic, it is especially useful to working mothers, students and aging workers. Fields where job sharing can thrive include but are not limited to business, healthcare, and education.

Compressed Workweeks

A compressed workweek can be defined as an alternative work arrangement that allows employees to work the traditional 40-hour workweek in less than five days a week, or ten days in two weeks (Bliss & Thornton, 2010). Traditionally, when people think of a compressed workweek they think of four days of ten hours per day, which can be annotated as “4/40,” and three days off (Poor, 2010). While the 4/40 is the most common structure, there are many different variations of the compressed workweek. In a four day system, variations such as the 4/39, 4/38, and even a 4/32 setup have grown in popularity in recent years (Poor). However, in some instances there are also three day workweeks. These typically are in the form of three twelve-hour days (3/36), but other variations do take place (Bird, 2010). There is also a mixed setup where workers work four day during one week and three days the next (Poor). A 9/80 schedule is also a possibility in which a worker has one extra day off every other week (Bliss & Thornton). Despite so many possibilities, the 4/40 is the most significant and will receive most of the focus.

There are also some different variations in which days of the week a worker receives off. Typically, using a 4/40 schedule, employees will receive Friday off as well as the normal weekend days of Saturday and Sunday (Woodward, 2000). However, there are really a multitude of schedules that can be arranged. Some schedules may have the extra day off in the middle of the week while others may have a Monday off. There is

also the possibility to have two days off in the middle of the week and only receive one weekend day off. In some companies, it is common to have a rotating schedule if there are many people on compressed schedules (Bird, 2010). For example, one week a worker may have Friday off, Monday the next week, Wednesday the week after, and then back to Friday. This avoids a situation where the majority of the workforce is all off on the same day, potentially hindering operations.

The idea of a four-day workweek is not a completely new concept. As explained earlier, work schedules have been constantly evolving over the centuries. The first documented case of a four-day workweek took place in 1940, when Gulf and Mobil Oil used the arrangement for truck drivers (Bird, 2010). There was some experimenting with the schedule in the 1960s, but it was not until the 1970s that it gained attention. During the 1970s four-day weeks become incredibly popular and more and more businesses began to use them. Companies claimed great results and soon after, academics began studying the topic (Bird). The excitement led many to believe the five-day workweek would be completely replaced. Bird (p. 1062) comments, “One academic characterized the shift to a four-day work week as ‘inevitable.’” However, the hype soon began to die down and the five-day week was no longer in danger. In recent years, compressed workweeks have regained attention and popularity. While there is no major movement calling for a four-day workweek nation-wide, the topic still deserves analysis. The potential benefits, potential risks, and conditions for success will all be analyzed.

Benefits

There are a variety of workplace benefits that have been tied to compressed workweeks through various studies. One commonly reported benefit is increased worker

productivity. In a study of manager's perceptions on compressed workweeks, the managers believe that productivity and job satisfaction increased while absenteeism decreased (Bird, 2010). Molloy, director of HR at Marcel Dekker Inc., echoed similar sentiments. The professional states, "It improves employee moral; it heightens productivity; it creates a more people-centered corporate environment; and, I think ultimately, it increases profitability" (Woodward, 2000, para. 33). Other studies also confirmed reductions in sick time and personal leave time as a result of compressed schedules (Hyland, Rowsome, & Rowsome, 2005). A study conducted, in 1997 also found that productivity increased, while a different study revealed less definitive results, showing that in four out of seven previous studies examined, productivity increased (Hyland et al.). There have been some studies showing negative performance effects, however the majority of research shows there to be some increased productivity on the part of workers.

Productivity is often a factor of other variables such as job satisfaction, another benefit to compressed workweeks. Some employees reported being "substantially more satisfied with their jobs" after a compressed workweek was implemented (Bird, 2010, p. 1066). In some cases, compressed workweeks have helped to retain employees as well as attract workers. In the experience of HR manager Lisa Vervantz, "We would have lost employees who would have found another position where they could have this type of flexibility," (Woodward, 2000). Having this increased flexibility is attractive to many employees and many tend to be pleased with the new arrangement. One study showed that as many as 80% of workers were pleased with their compressed schedules (Poor, 2010).

Employees using compressed schedules have been shown to have reduced levels of work/family conflict compared to other workers (Bird, 2010). In one case, patrol officers in Texas were moved to a compressed workweek. Research showed that after at least a year of working the compressed schedule, 85% of officers felt that it was easier to devote time to family members, while 76% felt it was “easier to conduct family and personal activities,” (Travis, 2010, p. 1230). Other research in industries such as manufacturing, service, healthcare, energy and retail also showed similar results (Travis, 2010).

For employees, a compressed workweek allows them to spend more time with their families, enjoy leisure time, take weekend vacations, and participate in a variety of other activities. Other opportunities include time for furthering education or working overtime for additional income (Poor, 2010). For example, a worker works ten hours-a-day, Monday through Thursday. The employee may then have the opportunity, should the employer provide it, to work overtime hours on Friday, and still maintain a two day weekend.

Cost saving is another potential benefit of a compressed workweek. Employees can potentially save the cost of a round trip of gas each week due to having the extra day off (Society for Human Resource Management, 2008). With gas pricing being high, saving money on commuting is an appealing benefit to workers. In theory, this reduces driving and its related costs by 20%, although employees may still drive places besides work instead (Bird, 2010). Costs can also be cut when employers decide to have the whole business work off of a compressed schedule and close business an extra day (Society for Human Resource Management). Of course, businesses cannot be completely

shut down, still needing basic amounts of energy and heating. Nevertheless, in Utah, where a state-wide, four-day work week has been in effect from 2008-2009, energy consumption costs decreased by 13% as a result of the initiative (Bird).

Risks/Challenges

Despite many benefits for compressed workweeks, there are also some risks and challenges involved with them. While many companies have had success with compressed workweeks, some have not received positive results. In the government, compressed workweeks are one of the most common alternative working arrangements. However, compressed schedule programs receive some of the most complaints according to study by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (Woodward, 2000). In some cases, workers threatened to quit when employers tried to enforce mandatory four-day workweeks (Woodward). When an organization-wide switch to compressed workweeks is mandated, employees often have difficulties in rearranging their schedules outside of work to fit the new arrangement. Some employees had difficulties in caring for their pets due to the prolonged time away from home on work days, while others ran into challenges when picking up spouses from work or children from daycare (Woodward).

Despite evidence of cost savings for businesses using compressed schedules, employers may not save as much as they think. Although the cost of commuting an extra day will be negated, it does not guarantee employees will not drive elsewhere with their newfound time. Having a three-day weekend increases the chances of a short vacation which may potentially lead to more driving than a commute. Also, there are the costs of home electricity, water, and heat that otherwise might not have been in use during a standard work schedule (Bird, 2010).

Employers also have some legal considerations if they require switching to a compressed week. Older employees and workers with disabilities may have a difficult time adjusting to the longer hours. Employers may be expected to create reasonable accommodations for any worker who may be negatively affected by the change due to health reasons (Woodward, 2000). Another important legal consideration is that some states require overtime for any time worked over eight hours a day (Woodward). This could severely hinder the advantages in cost savings.

Fatigue may be one of the biggest downsides to a compressed workweek. In one company, those who worked 10 to 12 hours in one day were shown to have lower levels of alertness, as one might expect (Woodward, 2000). A separate study found a strong correlation between the four-day workweek and complaints regarding fatigue and lack of focus. It is argued that employees personal lives away from work are improved, but work performance can be negatively affected because of fatigue (Bird, 2010).

Another consideration is the managerial role in a company that uses compressed work schedules. If all workers, including managers, are on a compressed schedule, there may not be many difficulties. However, if it is the employee's choice, it may create a problem for managers. If employees under a manager are working 10 hours during days they work, but the manager is on a 5/40 schedule of eight hours per day, there will be time in which there is no managerial supervision (Woodward, 2000). While this issue can be overcome, it still could be a problem for some organizations.

There is also the risk that the novelty of the four-day workweek may wear off over time. Typically, implementation yields positive results and enthusiasm, perhaps as a result of the Hawthorne Effect (Bird, 2010). After time, the newness of the arrangement

may wear off and employees will no longer be affected by its benefits. In modern society, no one is enthused about the five day workweek despite the fact that a six-day work week was common not too long ago (Bird). In another survey, employees engaged in a four-day workweek were polled six months after the program was implemented. The results showed that only 56% would like the program to continue (Bird). Similar studies supported this information, also showing a decline in satisfaction as months went on.

Another potential danger is the effect of the arrangement on career development. While workers may still be working 40 hours, it may not always feel like that to superiors. The lack of face-time due to having Friday can potentially hinder an employee's chances of moving up the corporate ladder. Using the compressed workweek can also sometimes be perceived by managers as a lack of commitment (Bird, 2010). Beyond potential managerial bias, there is also the risk of resentment between employees. This would only occur in situations where some employees work compressed weeks while other work traditional weeks (Society for Human Resource Management, 2008).

Conditions for Success

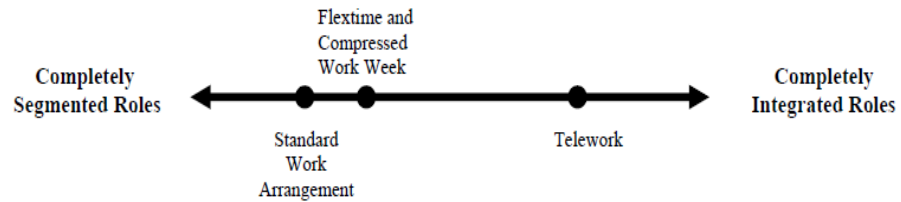
With many benefits and risks involved in compressed scheduling, it only makes sense that achieving success when using compressed workweeks will largely depend on circumstances, proper research, and smooth execution. One of the most important things a company can do is to gauge employee interest in having a compressed workweek. If there is not sufficient employee interest in the program, it may not be worth the time and effort it takes to make it work. Similarly, if an employer does decide to proceed and make available a compressed workweek, it is typically best to make it voluntary for employees. In addition, employees should be given plenty of warning when a switch is being made so

they can see if their schedules can be adjusted to make the arrangement possible. A slow process with heavy employee involvement should ultimately work out best for employers as employees will not feel caught off guard or feel the program was forced upon them (Woodward, 2000). If a company is in a situation where they feel an eligibility criterion is in order, it is important for those criteria to be applied consistently and fairly so no employees feel discriminated against (Society for Human Resource Management, 2008).

It is also important to inform insurance companies and workers' compensation carriers of any switches to compressed workweeks. Due to the longer hours, they will likely have an interest due to potential fatigue and ergonomic issues that may arise. Also, as mentioned earlier, it is important for companies to educate themselves on any laws that may pertain to the new arrangement (Woodward, 2000). It is also important to have a system in place for dealing with paid holidays. While there are a variety of different ways to handle this situation, it is essential to have a method in place before the situation arises so that there is no confusion or trouble that ensues (Society for Human Resource Management, 2008).

Unlike job sharing, there is not necessarily a specific type of person who is more suited for a compressed workweek. Older workers and those with disabilities may have a hard time with the longer hours and potential for fatigue associated with compressed schedules. This may not always be the case, but it should certainly be taken into consideration, especially if there is going to be an organization wide switch to compressed schedules. When examining the Role Segmentation-Role Integration Continuum, as can be seen below, a compressed workweek is better for people who prefer to keep their work and home lives relatively segmented (Hyland et al., 2005).

Figure 1. Work Arrangements on the Role Segmentation-Role Integration Continuum (adapted from Rau and Hyland, 2002).



A compressed workweek can work well in a variety of different industries.

Industries such as trucking, retail, banks, business offices, and government offices have all used compressed workweeks in some form. In certain manufacturing and production jobs where there is long set-up and clean-up times, a compressed workweek may help in decreasing costs. By having the organization open four days instead of five, the costs of setup and cleanup should decrease by roughly 20% (Poor, 2010). Even in industries where the companies are open, 24/7, compressed workweeks can be helpful. Naturally, the whole organization could not switch to a compressed schedule. However, as was the case in the study on patrol officers, making the option available to employees may increase employee morale.

One last consideration relates back to the idea of the four-day workweek becoming the norm. Should the four-day workweek gain tremendous popularity and become the norm throughout most of society, there is a fair chance many of the perceived benefits for employees would begin to disappear since it is no longer unique (Bird, 2010). Bird concluded “Just as workers no longer celebrate the reduction of the work week from six to five days, so will employees in time take the four-day work week simply for

granted” (p. 1070). However, as long as employees recognize the compressed workweek as something relatively unique to them, they will continue to appreciate its benefits to their family and social lives.

In order for a compressed schedule to be successful for employers and employees, careful planning and research is required. Employers must ensure that the schedule fits into their organization without becoming a disruption or distraction. It is also essential to gain employee feedback on the idea before anything is implemented. If the proper precautions are taken, the compressed workweek can be a success for an organization and its workers.

Flextime

According to Hicks and Klimoski (1981), flextime is “a policy in which the traditional fixed times that employees start and finish the working day are replaced by a framework or set of rules within which employees are allowed some freedom to choose their starting and quitting hours.” There are usually two components to flextime. The first is core time. Core time is a period during the working day where all employees are required to be at work, usually the busier hours in the middle of the workday. Flextime is the hours before and after the core time in which the employees have the choice of arriving at or leaving work (Hicks & Klimoski, 1981). When the core times and flextime’s start will vary depending on company, however there are some common arrangements. One company has core hours between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. The employees then have the choice to start anytime between 6:30 a.m. and 9 a.m., and the choice to leave anytime between 3:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., provide they work eight hours. They also have a lunch break of between one-half hour to one hour (Ralston, 1989).

Another variation has employees arrive 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., have a minimum one-half hour lunch break between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., and finish between 3:30 and 6:30 p.m., again provided eight hours are worked (Hicks & Klimoski). There are many other variations and ultimately it will be up to an employer to decide which one fits their company the best.

Benefits

Originally, one of the purposes of flextime was to reduce absences and also reduce vehicle congestion (Eldridge & Nisar, 2011; Hick & Klimoski, 1981). As it was implemented, other benefits began to be seen. One of the benefits is work-family balance. Work-family balance is “a measure of an individual’s attitude toward their ability to meet job and family demands experienced in life” (Rocerto, Gupta, & Mosca, 2011, p. 58). In recent year this balance has become more and more important to employees, leading to more policies on the part of employers to accommodate these desires. There has generally been a strong correlation between flextime and a strong or improved work-life balance. In a study by Rocerto, Gupta & Mosca (p. 63), their research supported this correlation leading them to state, “those employees who desire flextime, and have access to such job flexibility programs, enjoy higher levels of work life balance.”

Decreasing commute time and stress is also a potential benefit of flextime arrangements. Research indicates that 90% of American workers commute between home and work in their car (Lucas & Heady, 2002). In Ralston’s study, he found that the large majority of those survey felt that their commute was easier as a result of flextime (Ralston, 1989). Lucas and Heady found that flextime commuters in their survey had less stress and time urgency than those without flextime. A less stressful commute can

translate to a better attitude at work and at home, as well as reduce the chances of sickness.

Another benefit of flextime is that it leads to improved job satisfaction and morale among employees. Employers showing trust and support for employees will generally have employees who are more satisfied with their job and work harder (Eldridge & Nisar, 2011). Other studies have shown an increase in leisure satisfaction as well as work satisfaction for those in a flextime arrangement (Hicks & Kliminski, 1981). Ralston (1989) also reported there to be a strong correspondence between using flextime and job satisfaction.

Flextime also has shown to lead to reduced tardiness, absenteeism, and work missed due to sickness (Eldridge & Nisar, 2011). Giving employees a say in their schedule allows them to customize it so that it fits their lifestyle. People who typically has trouble waking up early can adjust their schedule so that they do not come in until later in the day, avoiding being late. Ralston (1989) found that there was a strong correlation between flextime and low levels of tardiness as well as the ability for employees to co-ordinate their responsibilities inside and outside of the workplace.

Studies have also shown that a flextime program can lead to bottom-line results. Research by the Department of Trade and Industry revealed that 49% of companies using flextime saw a positive increase in productivity. Greater employee commitment, less turnover, and high motivation were believed to be major factors in this (Eldridge & Nisar, 2011).

Risks/Challenges

There are not as many risks involved in flextime as there may be in other alternative work arrangements. Because flextime is a less dramatic shift from the standard workweek than some of its counterparts, the risks are limited. Nevertheless, there are still some risks and challenges to be considered.

While many studies do say that flextime improves work-home balance, there are some stipulations. For example, one study showed that the groups that benefitted the most from flextime were fathers with unemployed wives or workers without children. These are groups that likely did not have as much conflict as a working mother might have. The researchers for the study concluded that those with the least conflict to begin with were often helped the most (Travis, 2010). Even though working mothers have the most to gain from flextime, it does not always work out that way. While not every study shows the same results as the aforementioned, simply having a flextime option does not guarantee that the stress of a working mother will disappear.

Another challenge with flextime deals with teamwork. Having employees coming and going at different times throughout the day can make it difficult for co-workers to collaborate on projects. Meeting times are limited to core times where all necessary workers will be present. There also can be dilemmas if clients are involved and need to schedule meetings during hours outside the core time (Mun & Yonekawa, 2006). While these challenges are not insurmountable, there is still the potential for teamwork and collaboration to be hindered, which could lead to decreases in productivity.

Conditions for Success

Flextime has shown to be a very appealing option to many types of people. In one study 88% of respondents were strongly drawn to the idea of flextime. (Gainey &

Clenney, 2006). Flextime can be especially appealing to employees who have children living at home. Parents with young children, especially females, will generally be very pleased with the opportunity to use flextime at usually take advantage of the opportunity (Rocerto, et al., 2011). With working mothers and dual career couples becoming more and more common, flextime will be perceived as more and more valuable (Ralston, 1989).

Flextime is similar to the compressed workweek in that it would be preferred by those who like a level of segmentation between home and work life. However, also like compressed workweeks, flextime still is more integrated than the standard workweek, as the boundaries between work and home are bent slightly (Hyland et al., 2005). Flextime would also be very beneficial to those who are time urgent (always in a hurry) as it can relieve the rushed feeling that may come from having to arrive at work at a time decided by someone else (Lucas & Heady, 2002).

It is very important for employers to have a good understanding of the nature of their employee positions. Some positions are not well suited for a flextime arrangement. For example, some positions, such as receptionists, require being at a job site for certain fixed hours where flexibility is not a good option. On the other hand, some positions may be better suited for more flexibility like that which is available through compressed workweeks and job sharing (Eldridge & Nisar, 2011).

Flextime can fit well in most industries. Typically, it is office work positions that use flextime, often in the banking, technology, or business industries (Hicks & Kilminski, 1981). It has also great experienced success in the accounting industry (Greenhouse, 2011). Even positions such as engineers, scientists and technicians have begun to use

flextime arrangements (Eldridge & Nisar, 2011). If an industry normally uses standard hours, flextime should work provided the other variables point toward a successful flextime arrangement.

Conclusion

Alternative work arrangements, specifically job sharing, compressed workweeks and flextime, have their share of benefits as well as risks. While most research points toward the arrangements being a positive for organizations, it cannot be understated that each company and its employees are unique, and therefore each situation must be considered carefully. The people, the job, and the industry are all important considerations to examine before any judgment is made as to whether flexible work arrangements should be utilized. However, if an employer carefully examines the benefits and risks of an arrangement, and takes the time to see how the arrangement would fit with the organization, job, and employees, the results can be very positive for employers. They can experience a boost in employee morale and satisfaction, which in many cases leads to greater loyalty. When employees are satisfied with their jobs, they tend to work hard, often meaning more productivity and in turn, higher profits for employers. Alternative working arrangements will only continue to grow and, if used correctly, both employees and employers will be the benefactors.

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