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FLEXIBLE WORK AND SCHEDULING: MOVING FORWARD

What is the newest thinking in the area of flexibility involving remote work and flexible scheduling, and what can companies do to best apply these practices within their organization?

In recent years, large employers such as Best Buy and Yahoo have eliminated their remote work programs due to the need to "improve collaboration, teamwork and communication" in their companies.[1] However, this is a reactionary approach to declining business outcomes which are most likely *not* caused by flexible work. This approach fails to consider how significantly flexible work now accounts for employee satisfaction.[2] These organizations run opposite to the current trend - the percentage of employees working remotely increased from 39% in 2012 to 43% in 2016.[1] Flexible work arrangements are now a permanent part of the employment landscape, and there is no going back. This document will outline the most recent thinking around remote work and flexible scheduling, by detailing the current research around flexible programs' added value, best practices, and key case studies of companies implementing these programs.

BUSINESS VALUE: FINANCIAL AND EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES

Attracting Top Talent: With 78% of employers reporting difficulty filling highly-skilled jobs and 38% for entry-level, hourly jobs, there is opportunity for employers to differentiate themselves by offering new or enhanced workplace flexibility options.[3] The ability for employees to "personalize their work commitments" is becoming more of a priority with 56% of employees looking for more flexible and personalized work options.[4] Companies that take more of a "whole person approach" and increase the flexible work options offered in their workplace can best attract top talent and increase retention.[5]

Improving Employee Experience: Both employees and employers can benefit from *effective* flexible workplaces. Employees in effective flexible workplaces have higher levels of engagement, higher job satisfaction, higher retention levels, lower stress levels and better mental health than other employees. In addition, these employees in effective flexible workplaces also have lower minor health issues, lower stress levels, high physical health and no indicators of depression.[5] Workplace flexibility has a positive or extremely positive effect on employee engagement, motivation and satisfaction according to two-thirds of companies surveyed (Appendix A).[5]

Impacting the Bottom Line: Recent data shows how improved productivity caused by a better employee experience, as well as operational savings, leads to real financial outcomes for organizations. Estimates show that half-time telecommuting leads to a 25% decrease in real estate costs, 31% decrease in absenteeism, and 10% decrease in voluntary turnover. This and other beneficial factors can save employers over $11,000 per half-time telecommuter per year.[2]

WHAT'S CHANGING AND NEW PRACTICES

Teleworking has shown the most growth since 2013, and it is likely that this trend will continue due to technology making remote work more convenient than ever before (Appendix B).[5] In addition, there has been an increase from 33% in 2012 to 40% in 2016 in the number of employers that allow some of their employees to work from home for some of their regularly scheduled work hours on a regular basis.[3] However, other data shows that less than 26% of an organization's eligible workforce uses flexible work arrangements offered.[6] Therefore it's important to consider what companies offer and how they encourage employees to actually utilize the offerings.

Redesign of Scheduling: To create more productive employees, companies are creating new ways to work such as shift trading, self-scheduling and uninterrupted time which enable both employees and employers to be more successful (Appendix C).[7] Employers in the healthcare industry utilize the following approaches to provide a flexible workplace in a 24 hour environment:

- *Self Scheduling* allows employees to choose their own working hours within predefined guidelines. Research demonstrates that employees experience lower stress levels and have decreased work-life conflicts when they have more control over managing their schedule.[8]
- *Predictive Analytics Software* can be utilized to identify patterns and forecast staffing needs in order to more effectively schedule staff and manage costs.[7]
- *Mobile Scheduling* helps decrease involuntary overtime by filling last minute vacancies more efficiently when there is an urgent staffing need.[8] Only 8% of companies in one survey utilize mobile scheduling, so this is an emerging area of flexible scheduling.[9]

Communication Tools to Ease Transition: Managers and employees fear the consequences of decreased communication, but effective utilization of new tools can keep information flowing (see Appendix D).[10] One company, Zapier, hosts weekly virtual "hangouts" where team members catch up, and has randomly selected "Pair Buddies" who chat for 10-15 minutes via phone.[10]

Getting Buy-In: Management's support for flexible work arrangements has decreased from 31% in 2005 to 14% in 2016 (Appendix E), and few employers (14%) reward managers for supporting flexible work arrangements. This demonstrates the need for greater organizational support for optimal effectiveness of flexible workplaces (Appendix F).[3] Manager buy-in towards workplace flexibility is imperative for success. However, fewer than 1 in 5 companies offer training for managers of remote employees and for those who work remotely.[5] Ryan, a tax services firm, assigns training modules to managers and employees addressing flexibility concerns and overcoming resistance, helping managers and individuals find flexibility solutions that work for the whole team.[11]

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) ran a pilot program within its HR department of a new flexible work structure with four distinct rules:
- Everyone is encouraged to work remotely at least two to three days per week
- Wednesdays are 'work in the office if you physically can' days
- Employees don't need to work a strict 9-to-5 schedule, but they should be mindful of regular business hours and shouldn't expect others to match their unique working hours
- Employees shouldn't feel that they need to be connected 24/7

Results show employees were less stressed, more productive (by avoiding long commutes during inclement weather), and increased feelings of trust (62% of staff).[12] The interesting aspect of this pilot is that the rules set clear expectations, establishing flexibility as the norm not the exception.

HealthONE, a hospital service alliance, discovered that employees found it difficult to manage hours around the Colorado school district's year-round rotational schedule. To meet the need, HealthONE offered employees the same rotation on their work schedules, a solution that stemmed expensive attrition in a competitive healthcare talent market.[13]

CONCLUSION

Flexibility in the workplace is here to stay, despite hiccups in implementation and utilization. To improve remote work outcomes, it is critical to educate all employees on how to transition effectively and what positive benefits can be gained. For flexible scheduling, new tools enable better matches for businesses and employees. The outcomes of these shifts reap benefits for all those involved, if managed correctly.
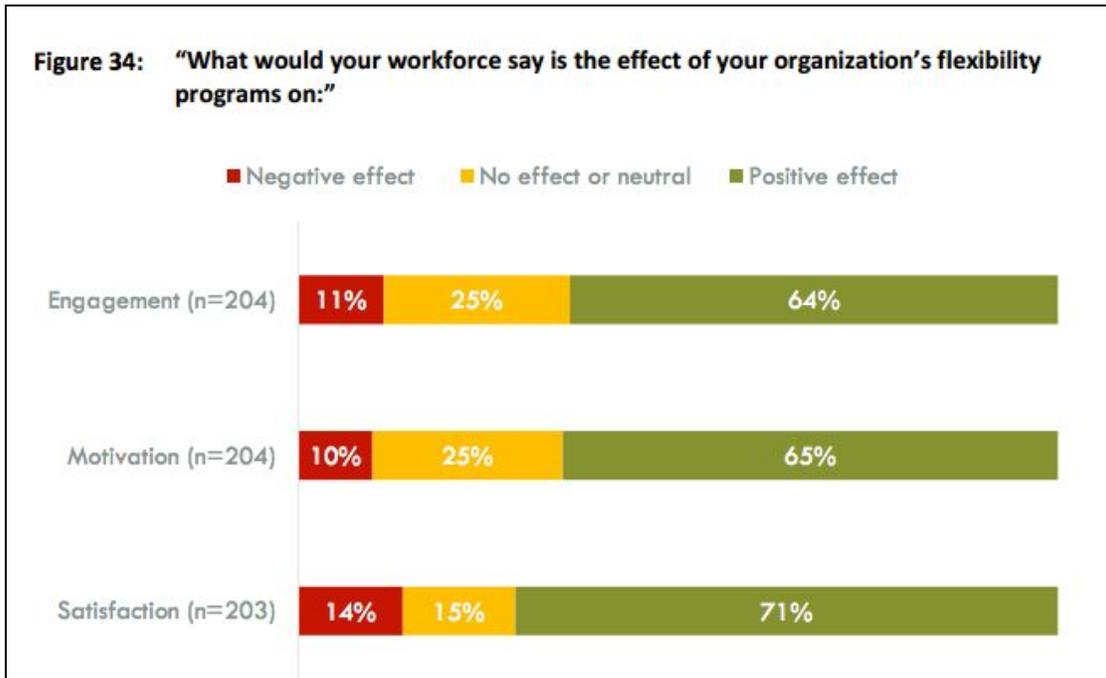
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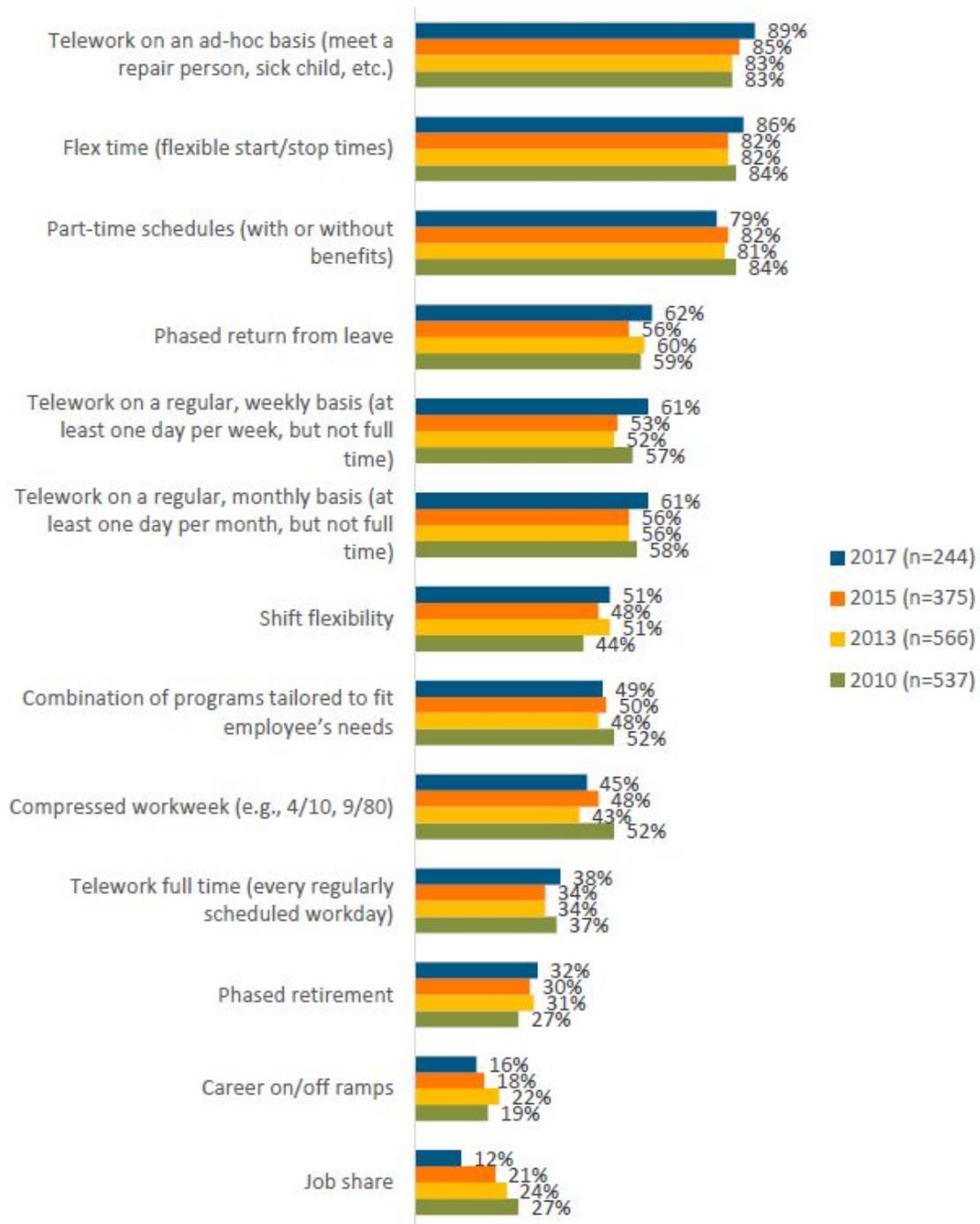
Appendix A

Figure 34: "What would your workforce say is the effect of your organization's flexibility programs on:"

Source: https://www.worldatwork.org/waw/adimLink?id=81907

Appendix B

Figure 6: Prevalence of Flexibility Programs Offered to All or Some Employees, Year-Over-Year Comparison[1]

Source: https://www.worldatwork.org/waw/adimLink?id=81907

Appendix C

CHOICES IN MANAGING TIME

ARRANGEMENT	DESCRIPTION	BENEFIT	EXAMPLES
Shift Trading	Trading work shifts with coworkers to adjust your schedule	Gives you more control over your time	Employees swap shifts directly Employees drop shifts into a pool where they can be picked up by coworkers
Self-Scheduling	Selecting your own shifts based on pre-set criteria	Gives you more control over your time i.e., when you take breaks or work overtime	Using scheduling software, employees set their own schedules without the need for supervisor intervention
Uninterrupted Time	Specific days or blocks of time when no meetings are scheduled or when coworkers don't interrupt you	Creates uninterrupted time for concentrated work Enables you to schedule your vacations when you know you won't miss important events or meetings	Regular set-aside time when you are free to concentrate No meeting days No meetings after 3 pm, for example

Source: http://www.whenworkworks.org/downloads/workflex_employee_toolkit.pdf

Appendix D

Tech Tools for Remote Teams

Here are seven tools recommended by GrooveHQ founder and CEO Alex Turnbull that his remote workforce uses to stay connected and productive:

Slack *(slack.com)*
Turnbull describes this team chat app as his company's "headquarters." His workforce uses it to brainstorm, ask questions, share files, compare notes and more.

Zoom *(zoom.us)*
GrooveHQ uses this videoconferencing, Web-conferencing and screen-sharing tool for daily team meetings, as well as for one-off calls throughout the day.

World Time Buddy *(worldtimebuddy.com)*
Want to schedule a conference call with Suzie in South Africa and Delores in Duluth? This tool allows workers in dispersed locations to find optimum times to schedule calls and collaboration sessions across time zones.

Trello *(trello.com)*
This project management solution helps workers stay on top of important deadlines.

It can be used to track individual tasks that need attention or to manage multiperson ongoing projects.

Teamweek *(teamweek.com)*
This platform provides an "at a glance" view of what everyone on the team is working on, giving users a high-level perspective on the group's resources.

Groove *(groovehq.com/overview)*
A customer support collaboration tool made by Turnbull's company, this solution enables teams to exchange private notes (that customers can't see) on support tickets.

Google Drive *(www.google.com/drive)*
Google's document repository is collaborative, easily organizable and instantly searchable with practically unlimited storage.

Source:
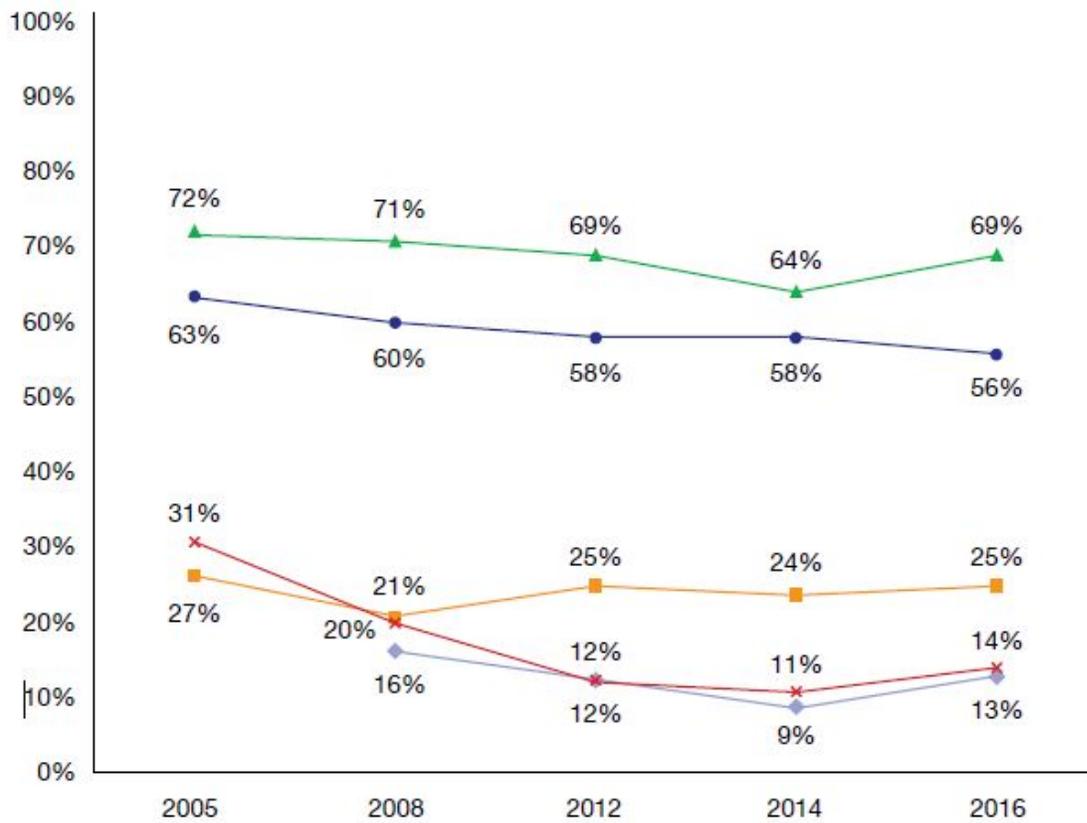https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/1017/pages/how-to-use-technology-to-support-remote-teams.aspx?widget=mostpopular2

Appendix E

Figure 8: Culture of Flexibility and Supportiveness: 2005 to 2016

Legend:
- —●— Supervisors are encouraged to be supportive of employees with family needs and by finding solutions that work for both employees and the organization.
- —■— The organization makes a real and ongoing effort to inform employees of available assistance for managing work and family responsibilities.
- —▲— Supervisors are encouraged to assess employees' performance by what they accomplish and not just by "face time" — that is, the number of hours they spend at the workplace.
- —✕— Management rewards those within the organization who support effective flexible work arrangements.
- —◆— Our organization's personnel policies and practices (such as penalties for unscheduled absences, onsite time requirements, strict headcount policies, etc.) sometimes stand in the way of providing workplace flexibility.

Source: http://whenworkworks.org/downloads/2016-National-Study-of-Employers.pdf

Appendix F

Table 14: Culture of Flexibility and Supportiveness

Organizational Representatives' Statements about Culture of Flexibility	Total Sample "Very True"	"Very True" by Employer Size		
		Small (50 to 99 employees)	Sig.	Large (1,000 or more employees)
Supervisors are encouraged to be supportive of employees with family needs and by finding solutions that work for both employees and the organization.	56%	55%	NS	49%
The organization makes a real and ongoing effort to inform employees of available assistance for managing work and family responsibilities.	25%	24%	NS	33%
Supervisors are encouraged to assess employees' performance by what they accomplish and not just by "face time" — that is, the number of hours they spend at the workplace.	69%	72%	NS	69%
Management rewards those within the organization who support effective flexible work arrangements.	14%	16%	NS	14%
Our organization's personnel policies and practices (such as penalties for unscheduled absences, onsite time requirements, strict headcount policies, etc.) sometimes stand in the way of providing workplace flexibility.	13%	12%	NS	19%

Source: National Study of Employers (2016)
Sample sizes: total = 884-912; small employers = 469-483; large employers = 78-81.
Read percentages left to right. Percentages do not always add to 100% because of rounding errors.
Statistical significance: *** = p < .001; ** = p < .01; ns = not significant.

Source: http://whenworkworks.org/downloads/2016-National-Study-of-Employers.pdf