

Discussion Questions

Please consider the following questions as you watch the SHRM Foundation DVD, “Ernst & Young: Creating a Culture of Workplace Flexibility.” Your facilitator may ask you to answer these questions in discussion or activity format at the completion of the DVD.

What are the primary reasons for a business to incorporate flexibility?

What types of flexibility arrangements are commonly implemented in today’s businesses?

Why is it important to offer a flexible work arrangement to all employees, not just to those people with particular circumstances?

How does technology enable effective flexibility?

How can flexibility benefit a company’s customers/clients?

How does flexibility enable a more productive global workforce?

Why do employees often value a flexible work arrangement over an increase in salary?

What are some obstacles that could arise when implementing flexibility?

What frameworks have been created to measure the success of flexibility?

How does flexibility help increase diversity?

Ernst & Young Overview

OPERATING INFORMATION

Ernst & Young is one of the largest professional service firms in the world and one of the Big Four accounting firms. Ernst & Young is a global organization of member firms in more than 140 countries, headquartered in London, England. It was ranked by *Forbes* magazine as the eighth-largest private company in the United States in 2011. In early 2012, Ernst & Young had 152,000 employees, including 10,000 in China and Hong Kong (an amount which has quadrupled in a decade), and 11,200 in the United Kingdom.

GLOBAL BUSINESS

Ernst & Young is the most globally managed of the Big Four firms. Ernst & Young Global sets global standards and oversees global policy and consistency of service, with client work being performed by its member firms. Each Ernst & Young member country is organized as part of one of four areas:

- EMEIA: Europe, Middle East, India and Africa
- Americas
- Asia-Pacific
- Japan

Each area has an identical business structure and one management team that is led by an Area Managing Partner who is part of the Global Executive board. The aim of this structure is to cater effectively for an increasingly global clientele, who have multinational interests.

BUSINESS FOCUSES

Ernst & Young has four main “service lines”

- **Assurance Services** comprises Financial Audit (core assurance), Financial Accounting Advisory Services, Fraud Investigation & Dispute Services, and Climate Change & Sustainability Services. (46 percent revenue share)
- **Tax Services** includes Business Tax Compliance, Human Capital, Customs, Indirect Tax, International Tax Services, Tax Accounting & Risk Advisory Services, and Transaction Tax. (26 percent revenue share)
- **Advisory Services** consists of four subservice lines: Actuarial, IT Risk & Assurance, Risk, and Performance Improvement. (19 percent revenue share)
- **Transaction Advisory Services** (TAS) deals with companies’ capital agenda – preserving, optimizing, investing and raising capital. (9 percent revenue share)

STAFFING PRACTICES

Ernst & Young was ranked No. 1 in *Forbes* magazine’s The Best Accounting Firms to Work For in 2012. The firm was ranked No. 1 in *Business Week*’s annual list of Best Places To Launch a Career for 2008. The firm was ranked No. 44 in the *Fortune* list of 100 Best Companies to Work For, and the highest among the Big Four, for 2009. The firm was No. 34 in *ComputerWorld*’s 100 Best Places To Work For in IT for 2009. The firm was also placed among the top 50 places in the Where Women Want to Work awards for 2007. The firm was named as one of the 10 Best Companies for Working Mothers by *Working Mothers* magazine in 2006.

Video Overview

Narrated and presented by Wayne F. Cascio, Ph.D., SHRM Foundation's 10th video examines Ernst & Young's Flexible Workplace. Filmed on location at Ernst & Young offices, and featuring interviews with Ernst & Young officers, managers and employees, this film presents several compelling methods for integrating flexibility into a high-performing workplace.

20-Minute Video Synopsis

VIDEO INTRODUCTION

Wayne Cascio, Professor, University of Colorado Denver

Cascio describes the shift from a one-size-fits-all, 9-to-5 workday to a focus on results and productivity that is driven by a changing workforce.

WHY IS FLEXIBILITY IMPORTANT?

Jim Turley, Global Chairman and CEO; Mark Weinberger, Global Chairman and CEO-Elect;

Wayne Cascio, Professor, University of Colorado Denver

1:30 - Retaining talent

2:40 - Meeting client demands

Professor Cascio describes the reasons for flexibility given a shift in gender roles and family obligations.

THE FLEXIBILITY IMPERATIVE

Jim Turley, Global Chairman and CEO; Wayne Cascio, Professor, University of Colorado Denver

3:20 - CEO Turley's family needs

3:57 - Why not flexibility?

4:50 - Better some than none

Turley explains how he came to realize the need for universal flexibility through a personal experience. Cascio explains the shift from "why" to "why not" and how it affects businesses, and Turley underscores the importance of keeping high-value employees.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Jim Breen, Senior, Tax; Remziye Yamali, Manager, Advisory

5:15 - Technological provisions

5:30 - Cutting travel expenses

The executives explain what types of technology Ernst & Young uses and how to it has provided overall cost savings.

20-Minute Video Synopsis (Continued)

MAKING FLEXIBILITY WORK

Jim Breen, Senior, Tax; Maryella Gockel, Flexibility Strategy Leader; Karyn Twaronite, Partner, Americas Inclusiveness Officer

- 5:55 - Open lines of communication
- 6:18 - Defining expectations
- 6:43 - Different options for different circumstances

Breen discusses the need for employees and employers to have an on-going conversation about flexibility, and Gockel discusses the need to define expectations. Twaronite discusses making flexibility available to everyone while remaining open to new forms that work better for a particular working group.

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TOP TALENT

Remziye Yamali, Manager, Advisory; Maryella Gockel, Flexibility Strategy Leader; Wayne Cascio, Professor, University of Colorado Denver

- 7:50 - The value of flexibility to high-performing individuals
- 8:24 - Overcoming the fears
- 8:50 - Formal flexible work arrangements at Ernst & Young
- 9:15 - Flexibility-created stickiness
- 9:43 - Universally attractive to candidates

Yamali discusses the value that high-performing individuals place on flexibility. Gockel addresses the fears of implementing a flexibility program, and Cascio describes the adoption rate at Ernst & Young. Yamali continues to explain the stickiness that flexibility creates, and Gockel explains why new recruits are so interested in flexibility.

IMPLEMENTING FLEXIBILITY

Jim Turley, Global Chairman and CEO; Mark Weinberger, Global Chairman and CEO-Elect; Jim Breen, Senior, Tax; Remziye Yamali, Manager, Advisory; Wayne Cascio, Professor, University of Colorado Denver

- 10:15 - It's about keeping our people
- 10:30 - Trust
- 10:46 - Believing in flexibility
- 11:00 - Any reason is legitimate
- 11:35 - Helping manage dual-earner family schedules
- 12:12 - Show your commitment to flexibility

Weinberger explains how flexibility keeps employees, and Breen discusses how trust drives flexibility. Yamali discusses how every Ernst & Young executive believes in flexibility. Turley explains that any reason is a legitimate reason for flexibility, not just specific reasons. Yamali discusses how flexibility helps dual-earner families manage their schedules, and Turley explains how Ernst & Young showed its commitment to flexibility to get buy-in at all levels of the company.

20-Minute Video Synopsis (Continued)

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

*Jim Breen, Senior, Tax; Remziye Yamali, Manager, Advisory;
Wayne Cascio, Professor, University of Colorado Denver*

- 12:50 - Team cooperation
- 13:23 - Global cooperation
- 13:43 - High-level employees and flexibility

Breen discusses how flexibility helps build team cooperation, and Yamali explains how Ernst & Young uses flexibility to coordinate meetings with colleagues around the world.

FLEXIBILITY AT ALL LEVELS

Jim Turley, Global Chairman and CEO

- 14:05 - Modeling a commitment to flexibility

Turley describes the latest promotion cycle and how the number of people on formal flexible work arrangements received more promotions than ever before.

FLEXIBILITY AND CULTURE DIFFERENCES

Jim Turley, Global Chairman and CEO; Karyn Twaronite, Partner, Americas Inclusiveness Officer

- 14:45 - Diversity and inclusion
- 15:05 - Diverse people, diverse thinking
- 15:15 - Being the best in everything you do

Turley explains the differences between diversity and inclusions, and Twaronite explains the benefits of both.

ADVICE TO OTHER LEADERS

Jim Turley, Global Chairman and CEO; Maryella Gockel, Flexibility Strategy Leader

- 16:00 - Be humble and transparent
- 16:58 - Let the people bring you ideas

Turley suggests remaining humble and keeping your expectations clear and the outcomes transparent. Gockel suggests that employees should decide what form of flexibility would work best for them rather than a top-down approach.

THE FUTURE OF FLEXIBILITY

Karyn Twaronite, Partner, Americas Inclusiveness Officer

- 17:20 - It is the way of the future

Twaronite explains how 24x7 work environments and globalization will make flexibility an imperative for every company in the future.

FIVE LESSONS IN GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY

Wayne Cascio, Professor, University of Colorado Denver

- 17:55 - The five lessons

Professor Cascio explains the five key lessons in flexibility that are covered in this case study.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is the world's largest association devoted to human resource management. Representing more than 250,000 individual members, the Society's mission is to serve the needs of HR professionals by providing the most essential and comprehensive resources available.

As an influential voice, the Society's mission is also to advance the human resource profession by giving HR professionals tools to be business leaders, such as executive education programming, the SHRM Foundation video series, benchmarking and workplace trends reports, SPHR, PHR and GPHR certification preparation tools, and much more. The Society also works to build recognition in the business community about the role HR plays in organizational success.

SHRM serves the profession by providing HR professionals with ready access to the latest information and trends through a series of free and discounted webcasts, *HR Magazine*, sample forms and policies, surveys, and the SHRM Knowledge Center, which fields more than 125,000 requests annually.

Founded in 1948, SHRM currently has more than 575 affiliated chapters in the United States and members in more than 140 countries. For more information visit SHRM Online at www.shrm.org.

The SHRM Foundation is the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizational affiliate of the Society for Human Resource Management. Since 1966, the SHRM Foundation has focused on human resources as a strategic business leader. It advances the profession and increases the effectiveness of HR professionals through research, education, innovation and research-based knowledge.

The Foundation funds strategic research in all areas related to the management of people in organizations. Grant Applications (for up to \$200,000) are available on the SHRM Foundation website (www.shrm.org/foundation).

The SHRM Foundation Board of Directors reviews proposals two times each year. Authors can expect to receive detailed feedback on their proposals. More than 85 percent of Foundation research projects completed since 1998 have resulted in a published article, book or major conference presentation.

In addition, the Foundation funds the dissemination of research-based knowledge through books, videos, DVDs and innovative educational initiatives such as the SHRM Masters Series, Thought Leaders Retreat and scholarships.

The SHRM Foundation is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, comprising distinguished HR academic and practice leaders. Contributions to the SHRM Foundation are tax-deductible. For more information, please visit the SHRM Foundation website: www.shrm.org/foundation.

The HR Certification Institute, established in 1976, is an internationally recognized certifying organization for the human resource profession.

Today, more than 115,000 HR professionals worldwide proudly maintain the HR Certification Institute's credentials as a mark of high professional distinction.

The HR Certification Institute is a global leader in developing rigorous exams to demonstrate mastery and real-world application of forward-thinking HR practices, policies and principles.

QUESTION GUIDE

Recruit and retain talent

The primary reasons to offer flexibility are to recruit and retain top talent. Nearly 90 percent of Generation Y workers and 80 percent of Generation X workers value a flexible work schedule more than an increase in pay. Flexibility also helps boost employee morale and reduce external stress factors and helps employees work when they are best suited to perform at their peak. Flexible work schedules are quickly becoming a standard benefit offered to employees, much like health insurance, retirement plans, and vacation or paid time-off.

Where is flexibility taking off?

Flexible Work Schedules (FWS) are used by nearly 30 percent of all public- and private-sector jobs. The highest rate of FWS use is found among those working in the financial, professional and business services, health services, and information industries. The lowest rates are found in the construction, manufacturing, transportation and utilities, and education industries.

Bilateral benefits

Nearly 80 percent of all U.S. workers say they would like to have a more flexible work schedule and would use the option if there were no negative consequences for their career or employment path. Among the 30 percent of U.S. businesses that offer flexibility, most report a decrease in absenteeism, turnover, tardiness, and unscheduled sick leave; at the same time, they report an increase in job satisfaction, productivity, and company loyalty.

A tertiary benefit of flexibility is a firm's ability to avoid increased overhead costs typically associated with growth. Flexibility allows for the most efficient use of physical-plant facilities, technological resources and other hard-cost items. These efficiencies can also result in soft-cost savings, including overtime expenses, employee head count, training, and benefits or taxes.

Additional Questions

How does flexibility help retain employees?

By offering employees a flexible work schedule, an organization demonstrates its trust in its employees. Trusting an employee to complete his or her tasks at a time when it is most convenient while still within the

What are the primary reasons for a business to incorporate flexibility?

required time frames of the organization shows a level of trust that is atypical in the traditional business world. That trust goes a long way. Nearly 65 percent of workers who are allowed to work on a flexible schedule report an increase in productivity, a decrease in personal stress, and a decrease in unplanned absences. Employees who feel trusted by their employers develop a sense of loyalty and an appreciation for their companies that results in a decrease in turnover.

How does flexibility help recruit high-quality employees?

Because FWS are still relatively rare, employees who are interested in them (which is 88 percent of the working population) tend to gravitate toward those companies that offer flexibility. With dual-income families becoming the standard around the world, people are looking for employment opportunities that allow a healthier work/life balance.

Also, because flexibility is frequently offered in lieu of increased salaries, companies that cannot afford to recruit top talent by offering high-end salaries might be able to draw in talent by offering flexible schedules.

How might a flexible work schedule benefit you in the future?

Flexibility in employment helps employees improve their quality of life. As technology and flexible employment arrangements advance, future employees might find that their work and personal lives could be easily intermingled such that they will feel successful in both aspects.

Also, flexibility requires people to become more accountable for their productivity and to continuously improve their time-management skills. This form of semiautonomous responsibility encourages people to develop an entrepreneurial way of thinking that can benefit their current job as well as set them up for potentially developing their own business in the future.



Jim Turley
Global Chairman and CEO

According to the Experts...

"I think the business case was first around retaining talent. Whatever firm has the best talent wins in our space. So attracting and retaining the best talent is a critical business imperative."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Managing Today's Global Workforce

[www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Managing_Todays_Global_workforce/\\$FILE/Managing_Todays_Global_workforce.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Managing_Todays_Global_workforce/$FILE/Managing_Todays_Global_workforce.pdf)

QUESTION GUIDE

Flexible work arrangements exist in a variety of ways to accommodate both the needs of the organization and the employee. Traditionally, flexible work arrangements were comprised of shift work and part-time employment; however, with advances in technology and globalization, organizations have created other arrangements designed to keep people productive and happy.

Compressed work weeks (CWW) offer employees the opportunity to work longer days in exchange for fewer days in the office. Some typical CWW implementations are 9-by-9 – nine-hour days, nine days in sequence with the tenth day off – or 4-by-10 – ten-hour days, four days in sequence with the fifth day off. These arrangements typically give employees either every- or every-other Friday off to take care of personal business that needs to be done during normal working hours.

Flexible start and stop times help alleviate the typical stresses associated with the daily commute, rush-hour traffic, and beginning-of-day and end-of-day responsibilities. By allowing a shift in start and stop times, employees can avoid rush hour and take care of parental obligations (e.g., transporting their children to and from child care, school or other activities or running errands that have to be completed during working hours) without having to report tardy or use unplanned paid time off.

Scheduled collaboration and workforce availability allows employees across various time zones to work when it is most reasonable for everyone involved. Global organizations can spend a lot of money to bring all parties to the table. Traveling between work sites can be extremely expensive and can delay productivity. With modern teleconferencing technology (such as video conferencing and cloud-based display and file sharing) organizations can schedule offsetting hours to accommodate real-time communication and collaboration between work sites. The shift in work hours can free up some prime hours for people to take care of their personal needs.

Peak performance scheduling offers employees the ability to work when they are most productive. Many employees find that they are more productive in the late-evening or early-morning hours when there are fewer distractions from e-mail, office routines and meetings, whereas others perform better in the middle of the day (the typical lunch-break hour). By allowing people to work when they are most productive and to take time off when they are not operating at their peak, organizations can draw the most out of their employees while preventing burnout and idle productivity.

Job sharing is a less used but increasingly popular method of offering people flexibility. Organizations can provide a level of flexibility without increasing managerial responsibility by allowing two part-time employees to split up a full-time position or by allowing employees to share responsibility for their job with a co-worker. Job sharing is typically somewhat self-regulated, such that successes and failures fall equally on the people covering the role.

What types of flexibility arrangements are commonly implemented in today's businesses?

What are some reasons that a company might require a formalized flexible work schedule?

In job roles that require high-availability, such as customer service, student education and other fixed-schedule coverage operations, companies need to be able to schedule coverage and service availability. These types of jobs can require an organization to establish formal flexible work arrangements with its employees to ensure continuous service to its customers. Other reasons might include: facilitating team cooperation, treating employees fairly, avoiding inconsistent implementation, and scheduling availability of material resources.

How can a company offer flexible work schedules to people whose presence in the workplace is absolutely required?

Not all jobs are eligible for flexible work schedules; however, with a little creative thinking and role analysis, typically some amount of flexibility can be granted. Highly specialized and single-person jobs (where there is only one person who can do the job) can be the most difficult to accommodate (e.g., a television personality whose show is entirely based on his or her presence, such as Oprah or Dr. Phil). However, scheduling down time or allowing a person to complete his or her upcoming work prior to time off, can be an effective way to give people the time they need to accommodate personal matters. In some situations, telecommuting and on-call work schedules can allow these employees some amount of flexibility as well.

What are some of the trade-offs that employees and companies might have to accept as part of a flexible work agreement?

Some employee trade-offs might include flexibility in lieu of an increase in pay, advancement opportunities, and professional development. In most cases, however, organizations that implement flexibility work to avoid asking employees to make trade-offs to increase adoption. More typically, employees who enjoy flexible schedules are the ones who are asked to work additional hours when demand for the organization outpaces the supply of human resources.

Companies with flexible work schedules might have to be willing and able to hire more people to cover the workload. Also, there might be a need to invest in an information infrastructure to support remote communication and collaboration needs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Types of Flexible Work Arrangements

<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/toolkit/flexwork/types/index.html>

Alternative Work Schedules/Flexible Work Schedules

www.opm.gov/oca/worksch/html/awsfws.asp

QUESTION GUIDE

Why is it important to offer flexibility to all employees, not just to those people with particular circumstances?

Remain neutral

Fairness and equality in the workplace goes beyond regulated, protected classes. Implying that one person's needs (say, a parent's needs) are more important than another's (say, a marathoner's need to train) implies a bias that can lead to a corrosion of employee morale. The reason that an employee needs personal time should remain personal.

Protect morale

One of the main intentions of flexibility is to increase employee morale. Stratifying the availability of these arrangements to certain people will likely create a sense of jealousy, animosity, and favoritism within the ranks. It is important to view flexibility as privilege for every valuable employee (and aren't all of your employees valuable?) rather than for a select few.

Make it accessible

During the early stages of implementing flexibility an organization might find that its employees are apprehensive to participate for fear of job stability or decreased worth to the organization. Give all employees a blanket opportunity for flexibility to reduce the implication that one's availability is tied to his or her organizational value. If employees at all levels of an organization are given the option to work on a flexible schedule, there will be a collective sense of security, and managers can send a clear signal that they are committed to flexibility.

Additional Questions

Should a company be concerned with the activities that an employee participates in during his or her flextime? Why?
Simply put, no. Employers need to recognize that everyone has personal needs, and there should be a conscious effort to accommodate them; however, the nature of their personal needs should remain private. Knowledge

of an employee's personal circumstance can expose an organization to unnecessary legal liability – either in terms of a failure to report certain illegal activity or in terms of a perceived bias toward a protected class. It is best that an organization refrain from knowledge of its employees' personal matters.

What industries are more likely to be able to accommodate flexible work arrangements?

In 2012, organizations in the legal, financial, medical, and information fields are most likely to provide flexibility for their employees. Nurses and other medical professionals are commonly offered shift work, compressed workweeks and job-sharing to provide flexibility. The financial sector has also taken to flexibility to help fight attrition and improve recruitment. Information technology naturally lends itself to peak performance and maximized-availability scheduling, as well as remote working and telecommuting.

What industries are less likely to be able to accommodate flexible work arrangements?

For now, organizations that have been slow to adopt flexibility have been in the construction, manufacturing, transportation and utilities, and education industries. In many cases, larger organizations struggle to find a flexibility model that is fair at every level of the company. Typically, flexibility in these organizations is handled differently within each functional area.



According to the Experts...

“You ask yourself, is it better to have a flexible culture and keep all the great talent in the firm and use it as a vehicle to attract and retain more talent or do we want to keep the more rigid ways that we used to operate in and have people walking out the door?”

Jim Turley
Global Chairman and CEO

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Flexible Work Arrangements: A Win-Win for Organizations and Employees
<http://www.bridgestar.org/Library/FlexibleWorkArrangements.aspx>

How does technology enable effective flexibility?

Untether the worker

Technology helps diminish the need for the employee to be tied to his or her desk to be productive. With advances in Internet technologies, such as multiperson video and audio teleconferencing, remote desktop and screen sharing, and advances in cloud-based cooperative productivity, most employees can be nearly anywhere in the world and remain fully productive. Gone are the days of the closed-circuit corporate networks. Virtual private networks and advanced encryption methods have allowed companies to distribute their private information securely to their employees across the Internet.

High availability

Technology allows people to remain available and in contact with customers and co-workers from anywhere in the world. Many companies have adopted so-called on-call arrangements to give employees freedom during slow times, while remaining available to provide on-demand service. In support and advisory roles, employees have turned to their iPhones and Blackberries to give themselves flexibility without reducing productivity.

Shared calendars

Thanks to advancements in electronic calendar systems, many employees have begun to merge their personal and professional calendars. Most systems allow employees to keep the nature of their personal entries private, while blocking out periods of availability so others can schedule in-person meetings. These shared calendars also help eliminate time zone-related issues as well as conflicts with necessary material resources (such as conference rooms and video-conferencing equipment)

Additional Questions

What cost savings exist at the intersection of flexibility and technology?

The areas where technology helps reduce costs are in physical-plant expenses (office space, furniture, utilities, parking) and in managing idle facilities. Technology can also enable extended hours of operation or output capacity. By combining flexible work schedules with technological resources, companies can utilize limited office space in a more efficient way that might enable increased capacity without necessarily having to pay overtime and other overhead expenses.

What considerations might an organization make for remote employees who primarily work outside the office?

It is imperative to include remote employees in all meetings, conversations, and decisions that involve their roles in the organization. All meeting rooms should have teleconference equipment so the remote workers can participate in meetings. Also, companies need to provide advanced electronic calendar systems so meeting planners and project managers can consider the availability of remote employees.

How can technology, shift work, and flexible scheduling help limit the overhead costs associated with an expanding workforce?

Technology-enabled shift work and flexible work schedules make it easier for companies to schedule employee work hours around available overhead-related resources. This model has been traditionally used for skilled-labor positions such as call center customer-service representatives, factory workers, and municipal services. However, advancements in technology have enabled companies to expand this model to include all types of workers, particularly creative, managerial, and sales workers.



Remziye Yamali
Manager, Advisory

According to the Experts...

“It has enabled us to get big groups of people together without having the excessive cost of travel, but also without the burden of that schedule to our people.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Demographic Shifts Transform the Global Workforce

www.ey.com/GL/en/Issues/Business-environment/Six-global-trends-shaping-the-business-world---Demographic-shifts-transform-the-global-workforce

QUESTION GUIDE

Flexibility is universal

The need for flexible work schedules is universal. Increasingly, everyone in the world is becoming affected by the demands of globalization – having extended hours of operation and off-hour employee and client meetings, and hiring high-end talent to execute on demand. Until companies considered flexibility, the typical solution involved outspending the competition to hire the best people, pay overtime, and invest more capital to cover the increased overhead. That solution clearly put small businesses and entrepreneurs, where capital is hard to come by, at a disadvantage. But now that flexibility is becoming more popular at all levels of business, many of the issues can potentially be alleviated with less capital. Flexibility allows companies to cover more hours using fewer people, to attract top talent that might be drawn to a flexible work schedule, and to minimize overhead by more efficiently using physical resources.

A global competitive advantage

As the Internet continues to expand global economics, companies of all sizes are finding that they have to handle requests from customers in different countries and time zones, as well as in different languages and currencies. Flexible work schedules are one of the key solutions to accommodate this expansion and are rapidly becoming a competitive advantage. This advantage becomes particularly obvious in companies that service other companies (B2B). If one organization is providing a service to another, but is rigidly tied to a traditional nine-to-five workday in the U.S. Eastern time zone, it leaves itself open to a competitor who is available when it is not. The key to success is often as simple as being there when your customer needs you, and flexible work schedules are a great way to make that possible no matter where your customer is located.

Be there for your customers

In today's fast-paced business world, a customer's loyalty is harder than ever to maintain. If a customer cannot reach you when they need to, they will find an adequate substitute for your service or product. Being there when your customer needs you is paramount to success. For people-centric companies like Ernst & Young, implementing flexible schedules is a great way to have the best of both worlds – high availability and sufficient work/life balance.

How can flexibility benefit a company's customers/clients?

Additional Questions

What are some benefits of flexible scheduling to the local community?

One of the most obvious benefits to a local community is a reduction in rush-hour traffic. Flexible work schedules allow employees to commute at less popular times, thereby reducing the number of cars on the road at the same time, or in some cases to work from remote locations (home, coffee shop) thereby eliminating a commute all together.

How can flexibility help a company expand productivity in a cost-effective way?

Flexibility allows employees to work when they are most productive. When employees are distracted by personal matters, their productivity decreases significantly. However, when pressing personal matters are settled, employees tend to produce at a level above average. Flexibility, specifically shift work, also allows companies to operate more hours, thereby increasing productivity by using the same physical equipment and facilities.

How does flexibility protect a productive workforce in the face of a bad economy?

When the economy takes a turn for the worse, organizations have often reduced head count to trim costs. This solution, though effective in the short term, leaves companies at a staffing disadvantage when the economy picks up.

Fortunately, flexible work arrangements offer meaningful, strategic solutions to budget deficits. Options like purchasing additional leave, taking unpaid leave, or compressing workweeks offer employees a way to keep their jobs, enjoy more personal freedom, and be available to return to work when demand increases.

Flexible work arrangements are designed to keep experienced talent on hand when new business opportunities arise, minimizing recruiting and training expenses for the organization.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Advantages and Disadvantages of Flexible Work Schedules?

http://humanresources.about.com/od/employeebenefits/f/flex_schedules.htm

QUESTION GUIDE

For multinational companies, flexible work arrangements are the key to avoiding burnout, increasing collaboration among workgroups in different geographic regions, and expediting global decision-making.

Save on cost, burnout

The demands of real-time collaboration in a global workforce can be costly for companies and taxing for individuals who have to participate in meetings outside of their normal business hours. Flexible work schedules help reduce cost and burnout by allowing people to shift their times to be available at hours that are more convenient for their global counterparts without foregoing personal time. This time shift cuts down on overtime – which can be costly for companies and is a leading cause of employee burnout.

Increase efficiency across borders

One of the leading issues with multinational organizations is preventing “lock waits” – stopping production in one area of a company while it waits for input from another area. Frequently organizations experience a lag in productivity while they wait for global colleagues to come “online” to work together. Flexible work arrangements can help eliminate those waiting periods, allowing people to be “online” at the same time. For example, consider this scenario: People on the West Coast of the U.S. start a full three hours later than their East Coast colleagues. This time difference shrinks the windows of opportunity for collaboration. By shifting start times by an hour in each time zone, companies can expand the window of opportunity, reduce in-office idle time, and increase productivity.

Decisions, decisions

When companies with managers in different time zones are faced with important decisions that require input and consideration from a distant colleague, waiting for that person to begin his or her workday can have a significant impact and delay the decision-making process. Flexible work schedules allow decision makers to be available when needed.

How does flexibility enable a more productive global workforce?

Additional Questions

How can compressed workweeks help increase global cooperation and productivity?

Compressed workweeks create longer work periods in fewer days. These extended hours help increase the overlapping windows of time between workgroups in differing time zones. This increased overlap will likely result in more collaboration, less idle time, and more efficient use of human capital.

How do flexible work schedules help strengthen team relationships?

Flexibility requires that team members build strong connections and relationships with each other, so when one person is out of the office, on vacation, or taking personal time, customers and clients are not left waiting for the person to return to have their needs serviced. The amount of communication and cooperation that is required to choreograph flexible work arrangements dictates that every member keep the team abreast of what is happening with his or her clients, customers, and responsibilities.

How can flexible work schedules negatively affect employees' personal lives?

Technology has blurred the lines between work and personal time. Flexibility at work often translates into people answering e-mails and taking phone calls even when they are not required to be working. The more flexibility becomes ingrained in our work lives, the less likely a person is to ever be out of touch or off the clock. On or off the clock, employees are always representing the organization, viewing – if not responding to – e-mails, and keeping work top of mind. If not managed properly, time away from the office will not have the rejuvenating effect it typically has had in the 9-to-5 business world.



According to the Experts...

“We vary our meeting times, because it’s not fair to one team to always get up at 4:00am or one team always having to attend a meeting at 11:00pm, so we always rotate meetings that one area gets a little more convenient.”

Remziye Yamali
Manager, Advisory

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

People Management

http://tutor2u.net/business/people/workforce_flexible_hours.asp

QUESTION GUIDE

The flexible Generation-Y

According to a recent survey of U.S. workers, 37 percent of Generation Y employees would take a pay cut if it meant more flexibility on the job. To Generation Y, flexibility is a matter of feeling respected. It motivates them to be more productive and loyal to their companies. Generation Y employees look for employers that allow flexibility in the workplace because they believe it demonstrates that the management understands the evolving modern-day work environment and possesses a keen sense of the future.

Outside the U.S.

According to a study conducted in Australia, 29 percent of workers are willing to trade less base pay for more flexibility. A full 42 percent of workers are willing to trade less paid time off for more flexibility.

Not just moms

Though parents of young children were the early adopters, flexible work schedules have become increasingly important to a variety of other populations. According to the AARP, senior citizens are increasingly interested in working flexibly to extend their careers beyond the traditional retirement age. Generations X and Y have also turned to flexibility – either through shifted work hours or telecommuting – as a way to stay loyal to their companies while enjoying more personal freedom.

Additional Questions

Why has flexibility become such an important trend?

Flexibility addresses psychographic and demographic needs as well as the state of the labor market. Working mothers remain the most prominent group that takes advantage of part-time and flexible arrangements. However, fathers are more frequently requesting flexibility, citing the need to provide primary child care or elder care. Generation X employees strongly value flexibility. They are three times more likely to quit a job due to lack of flexibility than their Baby Boomer counterparts.

Why do employees often value a flexible work arrangement over an increase in salary?

Besides employee preference, flexibility is taking off as a result of the changing economy. To compete globally, companies no longer operate only 9 to 5. The costs of commuting are constantly increasing, and technology improvements have made face-to-face meetings inexpensive and easy. Labor markets are tightening, especially the market for skilled labor. The combination of individual needs and economic realities has resulted in a willingness to pursue and accept a variety of flexible arrangements.

With flexibility becoming more popular, do companies even need offices?

In short, yes they do, but not to the extent that has traditionally been thought. According to a survey by Cisco, a global technology firm, 60 percent of U.S. workers believe they do not need to be in the office to maintain a high level of productivity. Globally, that rate approaches 80 percent in Brazil and China and 93 percent in India. That said, face-to-face collaboration is still preferable in many cases to the current batch of technological solutions. Perhaps the future office will be more a place to come together to collaborate and less a place to keep tabs on employees.

Do telecommuting and flexible work schedules decrease productivity?

The vast majority of studies on productivity indicate that flexibility does not decrease productivity. In fact, many studies have found that productivity gains between 15 percent and 40 percent exist in certain industries as a result of increased flexibility – particularly finance, information technology, creative services, and other professional fields.



According to the Experts...

“Fully 89% of Gen Y, and 79% of Gen X, say that flexible work arrangements and the opportunity to give back to society trump the sheer size of the pay package.”

Dr. Wayne Cascio

Professor, University of Colorado Denver

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Beginning of the End of the 9-to-5 Workday?

<http://moneyland.time.com/2011/12/21/the-beginning-of-the-end-of-the-9-to-5-workday/>

QUESTION GUIDE

Adoption difficulties

Nearly 80 percent of employees surveyed in 2010 indicated that they feared adopting a flexible work schedule because they would be perceived as being less committed to their jobs by their supervisors. Additionally, supervisors and managers indicated hesitancy to promote flexibility for fear that it would negatively affect work quality and productivity and create scheduling and office-coverage difficulties. The fact remains that until flexibility becomes more typical in the workplace, people will fear taking advantage of the opportunity. The fear is based on the notion of “out of sight, out of mind.”

Keeping in touch

Access to information is critical for remote employees to be effective. Prior to the most recent advances in encryption technology, proprietary information had to be kept deep behind corporate firewalls and locked away from outside access to guarantee its protection. Advances in virtual private networks (VPNs) and similar end-to-end encryption technologies have made it possible to safely transport private data across the Internet. Yet the fear of intrusion still resonates with executives. In 2010, many remote workers – telecommuters and the like – reported having difficulty accessing corporate information.

Keeping it consistent

One of the largest challenges that surfaces when implementing flexibility centers around consistency. Companies that do not establish an organizationwide policy on flexibility, but rather leave it up to mid-level managers and supervisors, can inadvertently cause frustration among employees. Beyond frustration, not having a corporatewide policy can expose the firm to litigation based on inequity and unfair labor practices.

Additional Questions

Why are Baby Boomers adopting flexibility more slowly than any other generation?

What are some obstacles that could arise when implementing flexibility?

Baby Boomers are stuck in the middle – the generation that has both child care and elder care obligations. It seems as if Boomers would be the best candidates for flexibility, but research has shown that this level of responsibility has driven them to be more risk-averse. They feel more susceptible to the fear that flexible work schedules will diminish their value to their companies, resulting in lower pay and fewer promotions.

What can an organization do to overcome the fears of flexibility?

A great way to overcome the typical fears of flexibility is to encourage managers to participate in the program along with their employees. When managers and supervisors work on a flexible schedule, employees will feel more comfortable using that benefit. Once you reach a tipping point where a significant number of people at all levels of the organization are using the flexibility benefit, the fears will be effectively eliminated and organizationwide adoption will rapidly occur.

What are the pros and cons of not having a companywide flexibility-implementation plan?

The upside of not having a companywide plan is that it allows each department to create a plan that works best for its specific circumstances. It can be difficult to set up a system that meets the needs of all employees, particularly in large-scale organizations. The downside of not having a companywide plan is that it can lead to inconsistent implementations that can lead to morale and legal issues. Department-level plans are more susceptible to favoritism and other unfair practices that can lead to legal disputes.



Jim Breen
Senior, Tax

According to the Experts...

“I think one of the hardest things in implementing flexibility would be being able to trust employees. You want to be able to give those things to your employees – flexibility, respect and things of that nature – but those are all big things to give somebody.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Flexible Work Arrangements: Employer Solutions to Common Problems
www.businessknowhow.com/manage/flex-work.htm

What frameworks have been created to measure the success of flexibility?

The BOLD initiative

An initiative called Business Opportunities for Leadership Diversity (BOLD) has conducted research to show the role of workplace flexibility in promoting a high-performing organization. BOLD has been working directly with CEOs to explore ways of gaining competitive advantage in the global economy. Creating a more flexible workplace was a major consideration of the study. BOLD's pilot programs that introduced and encouraged flexibility resulted in positive bottom-line results across the board. Flexible scheduling reduced unscheduled time off by 50 percent each month and overtime by 40 percent per employee. One organization cut backlogged orders by 81 percent in one month. A major retailer reported improved sales-floor coverage and a 33 percent reduction in the use of sick leave. Overtime costs were reduced by as much as 80 percent, incidents of late sign-ins were cut by 35 percent; and both productivity and quality improved.

The ROWE initiative

The results-only work environment (ROWE) initiative was developed by managers at Best Buy. A results-only work environment is a management strategy where employees are evaluated on performance, not presence. In a ROWE, people focus on results and only results – increasing the organization's performance while creating the right climate for people to manage all the demands in their lives, including work. In a results-only organization or department, employees can do whatever they want whenever they want, as long as the work gets done. Employees make the decisions about what they do and where they do it, every minute of every day.

An accountability model

An accountability model is based on a universal concept of caretaking roles, a workplace that allows for and accommodates different needs at various points in one's career and life, and an environment where employers and

employees are enabled to create balanced lives while producing desired outcomes at work. An accountability model is similar to a ROWE with the exception that an employee is not necessarily in a fixed role, but rather is responsible for completing whatever tasks are assigned to him or her. This model allows employees and employers to negotiate desired outcomes and time lines.

Additional Questions

What cost savings might an organization experience by implementing flexibility?

Many direct savings typically result from implementing flexible work schedules, including a significant reduction in the cost of employee turnover and recruitment of replacements. The costs associated with unscheduled absenteeism, tardy employees, and overtime pay are cut tremendously. In some cases, flexibility helps reduce base-salary expenses and can cut down on travel and commuting expenses. In situations where flexibility enables reuse of facilities (shift work, job-sharing, etc.) there can be savings on general overhead and utilities expenses.

What expenses might a company incur as a result of implementing flexibility?

Flexibility cannot be implemented without ensuring that the needed support systems are in place to allow people to be productive. This can result in a significant technology investment to make sure the servers, firewalls, and networks systems are prepared to support remote users securely and efficiently. Besides technology, companies will likely have to hire additional administrative staff to manage the technology and administer the flexibility program.



According to the Experts...

“We think about it differently. We have different programs and initiatives on both dimensions and we're accountants, we measure things, so we hold people accountable.”

Jim Turley
Global Chairman and CEO

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Flexible Schedules, Results-Oriented Workplaces Reduce Work-Family Conflict and Turnover

www.asanet.org/press/Flexible_Schedules_Reduce_Family_Work_Conflict_and_Turnover.cfm

QUESTION GUIDE

Women in the workforce

Flexibility removes the need for women to decide between a career and a family. Prior to 2006, nearly half a million women left the U.S. workforce annually, citing a lack of flexibility. In 2010, nearly 40 percent of married women in the workforce were the primary breadwinners for their families.

People with disabilities

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 63 percent of people with disabilities would prefer to be working. Twelve percent of those people say they cannot work without a flexible work schedule.

Employees with cultural obligations

Hiring people of different ethnic backgrounds requires a deep commitment to flexibility to accommodate a diverse array of religious and ethnic traditions, observations, and obligations.

People around the world

Diversity can mean hiring people who do not live within commuting distance of the office – often in different states or countries. Flexible work schedules allow these people to interact with on-site employees in real time. Flexibility also helps with recruitment and retention of remote employees.

Senior citizens working longer

Age diversity is becoming increasingly more important for companies. With a large portion of the workforce nearing retirement, keeping long-time employees beyond their retirement helps retain and pass on institutional knowledge. Fortunately, almost 50 percent of Baby Boomers indicate that they are willing to work beyond retirement if they are given flexibility. Flexibility is becoming an imperative for companies that seek to ease the transition between generations.

Additional Questions

Why is diversity in the workplace important?

Diversity in the workplace helps foster mutual respect

How does flexibility help increase diversity?

among employees. Diversity brings unique perspectives, work styles, and exposures. Finding the harmony in the diversity builds a stronger workforce that is more prepared to service the inherently diverse global population.

Business reputations also flourish when a company shows a commitment to diversity. High-quality talent is drawn to organizations that display fair employment practices.

How does the move from the industrial age to the information age enable diversity in the workplace?

The information age has brought on the need for a new type of worker. Most new, high-paying jobs being created are in engineering, sciences, legal and other professional fields. The focus on “knowledge workers” to create a new economy has opened the door for people of various backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and physical conditions. In a job where thinking is the employees’ main capital, a person’s gender, physical disability, sexual orientation, religion, origin or other status has less of an impact on his or her employability than ever before. How well a person thinks becomes the most important aspect of his or her employment.

If you were given an opportunity to work on a flexible schedule, how do you think you would perform?

Discuss how you would personally perform in various flexible work arrangements. Consider how you think you would perform if given the choice between telecommuting, compressed workweeks, flexible start and stop times, or part-time work.



According to the Experts...

“We want to make sure that we employ as diverse a population as possible to represent not only the global markets and our clients, but the diverse thinking and technical aspects of clients.”

Karyn Twaronite

Partner, Americas Inclusiveness Officer

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Aligning Workplace Flexibility to Business Productivity

www.diversityjournal.com/1165-aligning-workplace-flexibility-to-business-productivity/

PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET

What are the primary reasons for a business to incorporate flexibility?

Participant's Name _____

Follow the facilitator's instructions to complete this worksheet. Comprehensive answers will incorporate information from the video, personal experience and classroom discussions.

How does flexibility help retain employees?

How does flexibility help recruit high-quality employees?

How might a flexible work schedule benefit you in the future?

PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET

What types of flexibility arrangements are commonly implemented in today's businesses?

Participant's Name

Follow the facilitator's instructions to complete this worksheet. Comprehensive answers will incorporate information from the video, personal experience and classroom discussions.

What are some reasons that a company might require a formalized flexible work schedule? _____

How can a company offer flexible work schedules to people whose presence in the workplace is absolutely required?

What are some of the trade-offs that employees and companies might have to accept as part of a flexible work agreement? _____

PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET

Why is it important to offer flexibility to all employees, not just to those people with particular circumstances?

Participant's Name _____

Follow the facilitator's instructions to complete this worksheet. Comprehensive answers will incorporate information from the video, personal experience and classroom discussions.

Should a company be concerned with the activities that an employee participates in during his or her flextime? Why?

What industries are more likely to be able to accommodate flexible work arrangements?

What industries are less likely to be able to accommodate flexible work arrangements? _____

PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET

How does technology enable effective flexibility?

Participant's Name _____

Follow the facilitator's instructions to complete this worksheet. Comprehensive answers will incorporate information from the video, personal experience and classroom discussions.

What cost savings exist at the intersection of flexibility and technology?

What considerations might an organization make for remote employees who primarily work outside the office? _____

How can technology, shift work, and flexible scheduling help limit the overhead costs associated with an expanding workforce? _____

PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET

How can flexibility benefit a company's customers/clients?

Participant's Name _____

Follow the facilitator's instructions to complete this worksheet. Comprehensive answers will incorporate information from the video, personal experience and classroom discussions.

What are some benefits of flexible scheduling to the local community?

How can flexibility help a company expand productivity in a cost-effective way?

How does flexibility protect a productive workforce in the face of a bad economy?

PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET

How does flexibility enable a more productive global workforce?

Participant's Name _____

Follow the facilitator's instructions to complete this worksheet. Comprehensive answers will incorporate information from the video, personal experience and classroom discussions.

How can compressed workweeks help increase global cooperation and productivity? _____

How do flexible work schedules help strengthen team relationships?

How can flexible work schedules negatively affect employees' personal lives?

PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET

Why do employees often value a flexible work arrangement over an increase in salary?

Participant's Name

Follow the facilitator's instructions to complete this worksheet. Comprehensive answers will incorporate information from the video, personal experience and classroom discussions.

Why has flexibility become such an important trend?

With flexibility becoming more popular, do companies even need offices?

Do telecommuting and flexible work schedules decrease productivity?

PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET

What are some obstacles that could arise when implementing flexibility?

Participant's Name

Follow the facilitator's instructions to complete this worksheet. Comprehensive answers will incorporate information from the video, personal experience and classroom discussions.

Why are Baby Boomers adopting flexibility more slowly than any other generation? _____

What can an organization do to overcome the fears of flexibility?

What are the pros and cons of not having a companywide flexibility-implementation plan? _____

PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET

What frameworks have been created to measure the success of flexibility?

Participant's Name _____

Follow the facilitator's instructions to complete this worksheet. Comprehensive answers will incorporate information from the video, personal experience and classroom discussions.

What cost savings might an organization experience by implementing flexibility?

What expenses might a company incur as a result of implementing flexibility?

PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET

How does flexibility help increase diversity?

Participant's Name _____

Follow the facilitator's instructions to complete this worksheet. Comprehensive answers will incorporate information from the video, personal experience and classroom discussions.

Why is diversity in the workplace important? _____

How does the move from the industrial age to the information age enable diversity in the workplace? _____

If you were given an opportunity to work on a flexible schedule, how do you think you would perform?

PARTICIPANT ANSWER KEY

What are the primary reasons for a business to incorporate flexibility?

The following answers are key points in the primary and secondary discussion questions. Use this guide to check the answers on your Participant Worksheet.

Recruit and retain talent

The primary reasons to offer flexibility are to recruit and retain top talent. Nearly 90 percent of Generation Y workers and 80 percent of Generation X workers value a flexible work schedule more than an increase in pay. Flexibility also helps boost employee morale and reduce external stress factors and helps employees work when they are best suited to perform at their peak. Flexible work schedules are quickly becoming a standard benefit offered to employees, much like health insurance, retirement plans, and vacation or paid time-off.

Where is flexibility taking off?

Flexible Work Schedules (FWS) are used by nearly 30 percent of all public- and private-sector jobs. The highest rate of FWS use is found among those working in the financial, professional and business services, health services, and information industries. The lowest rates are found in the construction, manufacturing, transportation and utilities, and education industries.

Bilateral benefits

Nearly 80 percent of all U.S. workers say they would like to have a more flexible work schedule and would use the option if there were no negative consequences for their career or employment path. Among the 30 percent of U.S. businesses that offer flexibility, most report a decrease in absenteeism, turnover, tardiness, and unscheduled sick leave; at the same time, they report an increase in job satisfaction, productivity, and company loyalty. A tertiary benefit of flexibility is a firm's ability to avoid increased overhead costs typically associated with growth. Flexibility allows for the most efficient use of physical- plant facilities, technological resources and other hard-cost items. These efficiencies can also result in soft-cost savings, including overtime expenses, employee head count, training, and benefits or taxes.

How does flexibility help retain employees?

By offering employees a flexible work schedule, an organization demonstrates its trust in its employees. Trusting an employee to complete his or her tasks at a time when it is most convenient while still within the required time frames of the organization shows a level of trust that is atypical in the traditional business world. That trust goes a long way. Nearly 65 percent of workers who are allowed to work on a flexible schedule report an increase in productivity, a decrease in personal stress, and a decrease in unplanned absences. Employees who feel trusted by their employers develop a sense of loyalty and an appreciation for their companies that results in a decrease in turnover.

How does flexibility help recruit high-quality employees?

Because FWS are still relatively rare, employees who are interested in them (which is 88 percent of the working population) tend to gravitate toward those companies that offer flexibility. With dual-income families becoming the standard around the world, people are looking for employment opportunities that allow a healthier work/life balance. Also, because flexibility is frequently offered in lieu of increased salaries, companies that cannot afford to recruit top talent by offering high-end salaries might be able to draw in talent by offering flexible schedules.

How might a flexible work schedule benefit you in the future?

Flexibility in employment helps employees improve their quality of life. As technology and flexible employment arrangements advance, future employees might find that their work and personal lives could be easily intermingled such that they will feel successful in both aspects. Also, flexibility requires people to become more accountable for their productivity and to continuously improve their time-management skills. This form of semiautonomous responsibility encourages people to develop an entrepreneurial way of thinking that can benefit their current job as well as set them up for potentially developing their own business in the future.

PARTICIPANT ANSWER KEY

What types of flexibility arrangements are commonly implemented in today's businesses?

The following answers are key points in the primary and secondary discussion questions. Use this guide to check the answers on your Participant Worksheet.

Flexible work arrangements exist in a variety of ways to accommodate both the needs of the organization and the employee. Traditionally, flexible work arrangements were comprised of shift work and part-time employment; however, with advances in technology and globalization, organizations have created other arrangements designed to keep people productive and happy.

Compressed work weeks (CWW) offer employees the opportunity to work longer days in exchange for fewer days in the office. Some typical CWW implementations are 9-by-9 – nine-hour days, nine days in sequence with the tenth day off – or 4-by-10 – ten-hour days, four days in sequence with the fifth day off. These arrangements typically give employees either every- or every-other Friday off to take care of personal business that needs to be done during normal working hours.

Flexible start and stop times help alleviate the typical stresses associated with the daily commute, rush-hour traffic, and beginning-of-day and end-of-day responsibilities. By allowing a shift in start and stop times, employees can avoid rush hour and take care of parental obligations (e.g., transporting their children to and from child care, school or other activities or running errands that have to be completed during working hours) without having to report tardy or use unplanned paid time off.

Scheduled collaboration and workforce availability allows employees across various time zones to work when it is most reasonable for everyone involved. Global organizations can spend a lot of money to bring all parties to the table. Traveling between work sites can be extremely expensive and can delay productivity. With modern teleconferencing technology (such as video conferencing and cloud-based display and file sharing) organizations can schedule offsetting hours to accommodate real-time communication and collaboration between work sites. The shift in work hours can free up some prime hours for people to take care of their personal needs.

Peak performance scheduling offers employees the ability to work when they are most productive. Many employees find that they are more productive in the late-evening or early-morning hours when there are fewer distractions from e-mail, office routines and meetings, whereas others perform better in the middle of the day (the typical lunch-break hour). By allowing people to work when they are most productive and to take time off when they are not operating at their peak, organizations can draw the most out of their employees while preventing burnout and idle productivity.

Job sharing is a less used but increasingly popular method of offering people flexibility. Organizations can provide a level of flexibility without increasing managerial responsibility by allowing two part-time employees to split up a full-time position or by allowing employees to share responsibility for their job with a co-worker. Job sharing is typically somewhat self-regulated, such that successes and failures fall equally on the people covering the role.

What are some reasons that a company might require a formalized flexible work schedule?

In job roles that require high-availability, such as customer service, student education and other fixed-schedule type operations, companies need to be able to schedule coverage and service availability. These types of jobs can require an organization to establish formal flexible work arrangements with its employees to ensure continuous service to its customers. Other reasons might include: facilitating team cooperation, treating employees fairly, avoiding inconsistent implementation, and scheduling availability of material resources.

How can a company offer flexible work schedules to people whose presence in the workplace is absolutely required?

Not all jobs are eligible for flexible work schedules; however, with a little creative thinking and role analysis, typically some amount of flexibility can be granted. Highly specialized and single-person jobs (where there is only one person who can do the job) can be the most difficult to accommodate (e.g., a television personality whose show is entirely based on his or her presence, such as Oprah or Dr. Phil). However, scheduling down time or allowing a person to complete his or her upcoming work prior to time off, can be an effective way to give people the time they need to accommodate personal matters. In some situations, telecommuting and on-call work schedules can allow these employees some amount of flexibility as well.

What are some of the trade-offs that employees and companies might have to accept as part of a flexible work agreement?

Some employee trade-offs might include flexibility in lieu of an increase in pay, advancement opportunities, and professional development. In most cases, however, organizations that implement flexibility work to avoid asking employees to make trade-offs to increase adoption. More typically, employees who enjoy flexible schedules are the ones who are asked to work additional hours when demand for the organization outpaces the supply of human resources. Companies with flexible work schedules might have to be willing and able to hire more people to cover the workload. Also, there might be a need to invest in an information infrastructure to support remote communication and collaboration needs.

PARTICIPANT ANSWER KEY

Why is it important to offer flexibility to all employees, not just to those people with particular circumstances?

The following answers are key points in the primary and secondary discussion questions. Use this guide to check the answers on your Participant Worksheet.

Remain neutral

Fairness and equality in the workplace goes beyond regulated, protected classes. Implying that one person's needs (say, a parent's needs) are more important than another's (say, a marathoner's need to train) implies a bias that can lead to a corrosion of employee morale. The reason that an employee needs personal time should remain personal.

Protect morale

One of the main intentions of flexibility is to increase employee morale. Stratifying the availability of these arrangements to certain people will likely create a sense of jealousy, animosity, and favoritism within the ranks. It is important to view flexibility as privilege for every valuable employee (and aren't all of your employees valuable?) rather than for a select few.

Make it accessible

During the early stages of implementing flexibility an organization might find that its employees are apprehensive to participate for fear of job stability or decreased worth to the organization. Give all employees a blanket opportunity for flexibility to reduce the implication that one's availability is tied to his or her organizational value. If employees at all levels of an organization are given the option to work on a flexible schedule, there will be a collective sense of security, and managers can send a clear signal that they are committed to flexibility.

Should a company be concerned with the activities that an employee participates in during his or her flextime?

Why? Simply put, no. Employers need to recognize that everyone has personal needs, and there should be a conscious effort to accommodate them; however, the nature of their personal needs should remain private. Knowledge of an employee's personal circumstance can expose an organization to unnecessary legal liability – either in terms of a failure to report certain illegal activity or in terms of a perceived bias toward a protected class. It is best that an organization refrain from knowledge of its employees' personal matters.

What industries are more likely to be able to accommodate flexible work arrangements?

In 2012, organizations in the legal, financial, medical, and information fields are most likely to provide flexibility for their employees. Nurses and other medical professionals are commonly offered shift work, compressed workweeks and job-sharing to provide flexibility. The financial sector has also taken to flexibility to help fight attrition and improve recruitment. Information technology naturally lends itself to peak performance and maximized-availability scheduling, as well as remote working and telecommuting.

What industries are less likely to be able to accommodate flexible work arrangements?

For now, organizations that have been slow to adopt flexibility have been in the construction, manufacturing, transportation and utilities, and education industries. In many cases, larger organizations struggle to find a flexibility model that is fair at every level of the company. Typically, flexibility in these organizations is handled differently within each functional area.

PARTICIPANT ANSWER KEY

How does technology enable effective flexibility?

The following answers are key points in the primary and secondary discussion questions. Use this guide to check the answers on your Participant Worksheet.

Untether the worker

Technology helps diminish the need for the employee to be tied to his or her desk to be productive. With advances in Internet technologies, such as multiperson video and audio teleconferencing, remote desktop and screen sharing, and advances in cloud-based cooperative productivity, most employees can be nearly anywhere in the world and remain fully productive. Gone are the days of the closed-circuit corporate networks. Virtual private networks and advanced encryption methods have allowed companies to distribute their private information securely to their employees across the Internet.

High availability

Technology allows people to remain available and in contact with customers and co-workers from anywhere in the world. Many companies have adopted so-called on-call arrangements to give employees freedom during slow times, while remaining available to provide on-demand service. In support and advisory roles, employees have turned to their iPhones and Blackberries to give themselves flexibility without reducing productivity.

Shared calendars

Thanks to advancements in electronic calendar systems, many employees have begun to merge their personal and professional calendars. Most systems allow employees to keep the nature of their personal entries private, while blocking out periods of availability so others can schedule in-person meetings. These shared calendars also help eliminate time zone-related issues as well as conflicts with necessary material resources (such as conference rooms and video-conferencing equipment)

What cost savings exist at the intersection of flexibility and technology?

The areas where technology helps reduce costs are in physical-plant expenses (office space, furniture, utilities, parking) and in managing idle facilities. Technology can also enable extended hours of operation or output capacity. By combining flexible work schedules with technological resources, companies can utilize limited office space in a more efficient way that might enable increased capacity without necessarily having to pay overtime and other overhead expenses.

What considerations might an organization make for remote employees who primarily work outside the office?

It is imperative to include remote employees in all meetings, conversations, and decisions that involve their roles in the organization. All meeting rooms should have teleconference equipment so the remote workers can participate in meetings. Also, companies need to provide advanced electronic calendar systems so meeting planners and project managers can consider the availability of remote employees.

How can technology, shift work, and flexible scheduling help limit the overhead costs associated with an expanding workforce?

Technology-enabled shift work and flexible work schedules make it easier for companies to schedule employee work hours around available overhead-related resources. This model has been traditionally used for skilled-labor positions such as call center customer- service representatives, factory workers, and municipal services. However, advancements in technology have enabled companies to expand this model to include all types of workers, particularly creative, managerial, and sales workers.

PARTICIPANT ANSWER KEY

How can flexibility benefit a company's customers/clients?

The following answers are key points in the primary and secondary discussion questions. Use this guide to check the answers on your Participant Worksheet.

Flexibility is universal

The need for flexible work schedules is universal. Increasingly, everyone in the world is becoming affected by the demands of globalization – having extended hours of operation and off-hour employee and client meetings, and hiring high-end talent to execute on demand. Until companies considered flexibility, the typical solution involved outspending the competition to hire the best people, pay overtime, and invest more capital to cover the increased overhead. That solution clearly put small businesses and entrepreneurs, where capital is hard to come by, at a disadvantage. But now that flexibility is becoming more popular at all levels of business, many of the issues can potentially be alleviated with less capital. Flexibility allows companies to cover more hours using fewer people, to attract top talent that might be drawn to a flexible work schedule, and to minimize overhead by more efficiently using physical resources.

A global competitive advantage

As the Internet continues to expand global economics, companies of all sizes are finding that they have to handle requests from customers in different countries and time zones, as well as in different languages and currencies. Flexible work schedules are one of the key solutions to accommodate this expansion and are rapidly becoming a competitive advantage. This advantage becomes particularly obvious in companies that service other companies (B2B). If one organization is providing a service to another, but is rigidly tied to a traditional nine-to-five workday in the U.S. Eastern time zone, it leaves itself open to a competitor who is available when it is not. The key to success is often as simple as being there when your customer needs you, and flexible work schedules are a great way to make that possible no matter where your customer is located.

Be there for your customers

In today's fast-paced business world, a customer's loyalty is harder than ever to maintain. If a customer cannot reach you when they need to, they will find an adequate substitute for your service or product. Being there when your customer needs you is paramount to success. For people-centric companies like Ernst & Young, implementing flexible schedules is a great way to have the best of both worlds – high availability and sufficient work/ life balance.

What are some benefits of flexible scheduling to the local community?

One of the most obvious benefits to a local community is a reduction in rush-hour traffic. Flexible work schedules allow employees to commute at less popular times, thereby reducing the number of cars on the road at the same time, or in some cases to work from remote locations (home, coffee shop) thereby eliminating a commute all together.

How can flexibility help a company expand productivity in a cost-effective way?

Flexibility allows employees to work when they are most productive. When employees are distracted by personal matters, their productivity decreases significantly. However, when pressing personal matters are settled, employees tend to produce at a level above average. Flexibility, specifically shift work, also allows companies to operate more hours, thereby increasing productivity by using the same physical equipment and facilities.

How does flexibility protect a productive workforce in the face of a bad economy?

When the economy takes a turn for the worse, organizations have often reduced head count to trim costs. This solution, though effective in the short term, leaves companies at a staffing disadvantage when the economy picks up. Fortunately, flexible work arrangements offer meaningful, strategic solutions to budget deficits. Options like purchasing additional leave, taking unpaid leave, or compressing workweeks offer employees a way to keep their jobs, enjoy more personal freedom, and be available to return to work when demand increases. Flexible work arrangements are designed to keep experienced talent on hand when new business opportunities arise, minimizing recruiting and training expenses for the organization.

PARTICIPANT ANSWER KEY

How does flexibility enable a more productive global workforce?

The following answers are key points in the primary and secondary discussion questions. Use this guide to check the answers on your Participant Worksheet.

For multinational companies, flexible work arrangements are the key to avoiding burnout, increasing collaboration among workgroups in different geographic regions, and expediting global decision-making.

Save on cost, burnout

The demands of real-time collaboration in a global workforce can be costly for companies and taxing for individuals who have to participate in meetings outside of their normal business hours. Flexible work schedules help reduce cost and burnout by allowing people to shift their times to be available at hours that are more convenient for their global counterparts without foregoing personal time. This time shift cuts down on overtime – which can be costly for companies and is a leading cause of employee burnout.

Increase efficiency across borders

One of the leading issues with multinational organizations is preventing “lock waits” – stopping production in one area of a company while it waits for input from another area. Frequently organizations experience a lag in productivity while they wait for global colleagues to come “online” to work together. Flexible work arrangements can help eliminate those waiting periods, allowing people to be “online” at the same time. For example, consider this scenario: People on the West Coast of the U.S. start a full three hours later than their East Coast colleagues. This time difference shrinks the windows of opportunity for collaboration. By shifting start times by an hour in each time zone, companies can expand the window of opportunity, reduce in-office idle time, and increase productivity.

Decisions, decisions

When companies with managers in different time zones are faced with important decisions that require input and consideration from a distant colleague, waiting for that person to begin his or her workday can have a significant impact and delay the decision-making process. Flexible work schedules allow decision makers to be available when needed.

How can compressed workweeks help increase global cooperation and productivity?

Compressed workweeks create longer work periods in fewer days. These extended hours help increase the overlapping windows of time between workgroups in differing time zones. This increased overlap will likely result in more collaboration, less idle time, and more efficient use of human capital.

How do flexible work schedules help strengthen team relationships?

Flexibility requires that team members build strong connections and relationships with each other, so when one person is out of the office, on vacation, or taking personal time, customers and clients are not left waiting for the person to return to have their needs serviced. The amount of communication and cooperation that is required to choreograph flexible work arrangements dictates that every member keep the team abreast of what is happening with his or her clients, customers, and responsibilities.

How can flexible work schedules negatively affect employees' personal lives?

Technology has blurred the lines between work and personal time. Flexibility at work often translates into people answering e-mails and taking phone calls even when they are not required to be working. The more flexibility becomes ingrained in our work lives, the less likely a person is to ever be out of touch or off the clock. On or off the clock, employees are always representing the organization, viewing – if not responding to – e-mails, and keeping work top of mind. If not managed properly, time away from the office will not have the rejuvenating effect it typically has had in the 9-to-5 business world.

PARTICIPANT ANSWER KEY

Why do employees often value a flexible work arrangement over an increase in salary?

The following answers are key points in the primary and secondary discussion questions. Use this guide to check the answers on your Participant Worksheet.

The flexible Generation-Y

According to a recent survey of U.S. workers, 37 percent of Generation Y employees would take a pay cut if it meant more flexibility on the job. To Generation Y, flexibility is a matter of feeling respected. It motivates them to be more productive and loyal to their companies. Generation Y employees look for employers that allow flexibility in the workplace because they believe it demonstrates that the management understands the evolving modern-day work environment and possesses a keen sense of the future.

Outside the U.S.

According to a study conducted in Australia, 29 percent of workers are willing to trade less base pay for more flexibility. A full 42 percent of workers are willing to trade less paid time off for more flexibility.

Not just moms

Though parents of young children were the early adopters, flexible work schedules have become increasingly important to a variety of other populations. According to the AARP, senior citizens are increasingly interested in working flexibly to extend their careers beyond the traditional retirement age. Generations X and Y have also turned to flexibility – either through shifted work hours or telecommuting – as a way to stay loyal to their companies while enjoying more personal freedom.

Why has flexibility become such an important trend?

Flexibility addresses psychographic and demographic needs as well as the state of the labor market. Working mothers remain the most prominent group that takes advantage of part-time and flexible arrangements. However, fathers are more frequently requesting flexibility, citing the need to provide primary child care or elder care. Generation X employees strongly value flexibility. They are three times more likely to quit a job due to lack of flexibility than their Baby Boomer counterparts.

Besides employee preference, flexibility is taking off as a result of the changing economy. To compete globally, companies no longer operate only 9 to 5. The costs of commuting are constantly increasing, and technology improvements have made face-to-face meetings inexpensive and easy. Labor markets are tightening, especially the market for skilled labor. The combination of individual needs and economic realities has resulted in a willingness to pursue and accept a variety of flexible arrangements.

With flexibility becoming more popular, do companies even need offices?

In short, yes they do, but not to the extent that has traditionally been thought. According to a survey by Cisco, a global technology firm, 60 percent of U.S. workers believe they do not need to be in the office to maintain a high level of productivity. Globally, that rate approaches 80 percent in Brazil and China and 93 percent in India. That said, face-to-face collaboration is still preferable in many cases to the current batch of technological solutions. Perhaps the future office will be more a place to come together to collaborate and less a place to keep tabs on employees.

Do telecommuting and flexible work schedules decrease productivity?

The vast majority of studies on productivity indicate that flexibility does not decrease productivity. In fact, many studies have found that productivity gains between 15 percent and 40 percent exist in certain industries as a result of increased flexibility – particularly finance, information technology, creative services, and other professional fields.

PARTICIPANT ANSWER KEY

What are some obstacles that could arise when implementing flexibility?

The following answers are key points in the primary and secondary discussion questions. Use this guide to check the answers on your Participant Worksheet.

Adoption difficulties

Nearly 80 percent of employees surveyed in 2010 indicated that they feared adopting a flexible work schedule because they would be perceived as being less committed to their jobs by their supervisors. Additionally, supervisors and managers indicated hesitancy to promote flexibility for fear that it would negatively affect work quality and productivity and create scheduling and office-coverage difficulties. The fact remains that until flexibility becomes more typical in the workplace, people will fear taking advantage of the opportunity. The fear is based on the notion of “out of sight, out of mind.”

Keeping in touch

Access to information is critical for remote employees to be effective. Prior to the most recent advances in encryption technology, proprietary information had to be kept deep behind corporate firewalls and locked away from outside access to guarantee its protection. Advances in virtual private networks (VPNs) and similar end-to-end encryption technologies have made it possible to safely transport private data across the Internet. Yet the fear of intrusion still resonates with executives. In 2010, many remote workers – telecommuters and the like – reported having difficulty accessing corporate information.

Keeping it consistent

One of the largest challenges that surfaces when implementing flexibility centers around consistency. Companies that do not establish an organizationwide policy on flexibility, but rather leave it up to mid-level managers and supervisors, can inadvertently cause frustration among employees. Beyond frustration, not having a corporatewide policy can expose the firm to litigation based on inequity and unfair labor practices.

Why are Baby Boomers adopting flexibility more slowly than any other generation?

Baby Boomers are stuck in the middle – the generation that has both child care and elder care obligations. It seems as if Boomers would be the best candidates for flexibility, but research has shown that this level of responsibility has driven them to be more risk-averse. They feel more susceptible to the fear that flexible work schedules will diminish their value to their companies, resulting in lower pay and fewer promotions.

What can an organization do to overcome the fears of flexibility?

A great way to overcome the typical fears of flexibility is to encourage managers to participate in the program along with their employees. When managers and supervisors work on a flexible schedule, employees will feel more comfortable using that benefit. Once you reach a tipping point where a significant number of people at all levels of the organization are using the flexibility benefit, the fears will be effectively eliminated and organizationwide adoption will rapidly occur.

What are the pros and cons of not having a companywide flexibility-implementation plan?

The upside of not having a companywide plan is that it allows each department to create a plan that works best for its specific circumstances. It can be difficult to set up a system that meets the needs of all employees, particularly in large-scale organizations. The downside of not having a companywide plan is that it can lead to inconsistent implementations that can lead to morale and legal issues. Department-level plans are more susceptible to favoritism and other unfair practices that can lead to legal disputes.

PARTICIPANT ANSWER KEY

What frameworks have been created to measure the success of flexibility?

The following answers are key points in the primary and secondary discussion questions. Use this guide to check the answers on your Participant Worksheet.

The BOLD initiative

An initiative called Business Opportunities for Leadership Diversity (BOLD) has conducted research to show the role of workplace flexibility in promoting a high-performing organization. BOLD has been working directly with CEOs to explore ways of gaining competitive advantage in the global economy. Creating a more flexible workplace was a major consideration of the study. BOLD's pilot programs that introduced and encouraged flexibility resulted in positive bottom-line results across the board. Flexible scheduling reduced unscheduled time off by 50 percent each month and overtime by 40 percent per employee. One organization cut backlogged orders by 81 percent in one month. A major retailer reported improved sales-floor coverage and a 33 percent reduction in the use of sick leave. Overtime costs were reduced by as much as 80 percent, incidents of late sign-ins were cut by 35 percent; and both productivity and quality improved.

The ROWE initiative

The results-only work environment (ROWE) initiative was developed by managers at Best Buy. A results-only work environment is a management strategy where employees are evaluated on performance, not presence. In a ROWE, people focus on results and only results – increasing the organization's performance while creating the right climate for people to manage all the demands in their lives, including work. In a results-only organization or department, employees can do whatever they want whenever they want, as long as the work gets done. Employees make the decisions about what they do and where they do it, every minute of every day.

An accountability model

An accountability model is based on a universal concept of caretaking roles, a workplace that allows for and accommodates different needs at various points in one's career and life, and an environment where employers and employees are enabled to create balanced lives while producing desired outcomes at work. An accountability model is similar to a ROWE with the exception that an employee is not necessarily in a fixed role, but rather is responsible for completing whatever tasks are assigned to him or her. This model allows employees and employers to negotiate desired outcomes and time lines.

What cost savings might an organization experience by implementing flexibility?

Many direct savings typically result from implementing flexible work schedules, including a significant reduction in the cost of employee turnover and recruitment of replacements. The costs associated with unscheduled absenteeism, tardy employees, and overtime pay are cut tremendously. In some cases, flexibility helps reduce base-salary expenses and can cut down on travel and commuting expenses. In situations where flexibility enables reuse of facilities (shift work, job-sharing, etc.) there can be savings on general overhead and utilities expenses.

What expenses might a company incur as a result of implementing flexibility?

Flexibility cannot be implemented without ensuring that the needed support systems are in place to allow people to be productive. This can result in a significant technology investment to make sure the servers, firewalls, and networks systems are prepared to support remote users securely and efficiently. Besides technology, companies will likely have to hire additional administrative staff to manage the technology and administer the flexibility program.

PARTICIPANT ANSWER KEY

How does flexibility help increase diversity?

The following answers are key points in the primary and secondary discussion questions. Use this guide to check the answers on your Participant Worksheet.

Women in the workforce

Flexibility removes the need for women to decide between a career and a family. Prior to 2006, nearly half a million women left the U.S. workforce annually, citing a lack of flexibility. In 2010, nearly 40 percent of married women in the workforce were the primary breadwinners for their families.

People with disabilities

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 63 percent of people with disabilities would prefer to be working. Twelve percent of those people say they cannot work without a flexible work schedule.

Employees with cultural obligations

Hiring people of different ethnic backgrounds requires a deep commitment to flexibility to accommodate a diverse array of religious and ethnic traditions, observations, and obligations.

People around the world

Diversity can mean hiring people who do not live within commuting distance of the office – often in different states or countries. Flexible work schedules allow these people to interact with on-site employees in real time. Flexibility also helps with recruitment and retention of remote employees.

Senior citizens working longer

Age diversity is becoming increasingly more important for companies. With a large portion of the workforce nearing retirement, keeping long-time employees beyond their retirement helps retain and pass on institutional knowledge. Fortunately, almost 50 percent of Baby Boomers indicate that they are willing to work beyond retirement if they are given flexibility. Flexibility is becoming an imperative for companies that seek to ease the transition between generations.

Why is diversity in the workplace important?

Diversity in the workplace helps foster mutual respect among employees. Diversity brings unique perspectives, work styles, and exposures. Finding the harmony in the diversity builds a stronger workforce that is more prepared to service the inherently diverse global population. Business reputations also flourish when a company shows a commitment to diversity. High-quality talent is drawn to organizations that display fair employment practices.

How does the move from the industrial age to the information age enable diversity in the workplace?

The information age has brought on the need for a new type of worker. Most new, high-paying jobs being created are in engineering, sciences, legal and other professional fields. The focus on “knowledge workers” to create a new economy has opened the door for people of various backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and physical conditions. In a job where thinking is the employees’ main capital, a person’s gender, physical disability, sexual orientation, religion, origin or other status has less of an impact on his or her employability than ever before. How well a person thinks becomes the most important aspect of his or her employment.

If you were given an opportunity to work on a flexible schedule, how do you think you would perform?

Discuss how you would personally perform in various flexible work arrangements. Consider how you think you would perform if given the choice between telecommuting, compressed workweeks, flexible start and stop times, or part-time work.

Five Lessons in Flexibility

1. **Flexibility is a two-way street.** Yes, employees have to make their needs and concerns known to their managers, but managers need to let employees know that it is OK. They need to support them as they strive to find sensible solutions that work for the individual, his or her team and the clients he or she serves.
2. As a leader, **it is up to you to initiate a conversation** to discuss how accessible and connected you want your team or direct reports to be. Staff members are unlikely to begin that conversation because they do not want you to misinterpret their question to mean, “I don’t want to work hard” or “my career is not important to me.”
3. Call a meeting or have a 30-minute conference call to **develop a “contract”** with your fellow team members or direct reports that addresses clients’ expectations and deadlines as well as team-members’ needs.
4. Encourage teams to **use team calendars** to track key personal appointments, commitments, client deadlines, and other flexibility needs.
5. As a leader, always remember that **people will watch your behavior closely** – perhaps more closely than you may expect. If your public perspective on flexibility is inconsistent with your actions, people will imitate what they see.