

SCHEDULE FLEXIBILITY IN THE WORKPLACE: IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTIVENESS

Several recent surveys show that the majority of employers offer at least some forms of flexible scheduling options to their employees, and that the availability of many flex options has increased in recent years. Business executives report that offering flexible scheduling options has a positive impact on recruitment, retention, employee satisfaction and other business outcomes, but most organizations do not take steps to optimize the effectiveness of their flexibility programs through such activities as training, marketing, or measuring ROI.

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Are employers offering schedule flexibility to their workers?

Yes. According to three recent large surveys of employers in the US and globally, the majority of employers report that they offer various types of schedule flexibility, including flex time, time off when needs arise, part-time schedules, compressed workweeks, shift flexibility, flexibility in scheduling breaks and mealtimes, and other arrangements.

According to the 2012 National Study of Employers:¹

- “between 2005 to 2012, employers have increased their provision of options that allow employees to better manage the times and places in which they work. These include flex time (from 66% to 77%); flex place (from 34% to 63%); choices in managing time (from 78% to 93%); and daily time off when important needs arise (from 77% to 87%).”
- “87% of organizations allow at least some employees to take time off during the workday to attend to important family or personal needs without loss of pay, while 55% of organizations allow most or all employees to do so.”

According to a 2011 report on the WorldatWork survey of managers from over 500 different business organizations:²

- “flex time is the most commonly cited option available to all employees, if available. 53% of organizations offer flex time to all employees, compared to 24% that only offer it to some of their employees.”
- “part time schedules (with or without benefits), flex-time (flexible start/stop times) and telework on an ad-hoc basis (meet a repair person, sick child, etc.) are offered to some or all employees in more than 80% of companies, with more than two-thirds of organizations (68%) offering all three programs.”
- “compressed workweeks, or work schedules that condense a typical workweek into fewer than five days, are available at 52% of organizations.” A 4/10 schedule (work four days with one day of the workweek off) is most common,

reported by 78% of organizations that offer this type of flexibility. 50% of organizations with compressed workweeks offer 9/80 schedules (work nine, nine-hour days over a two-week period, with one day off every other week).

According to the 2012 SHRM Employee Benefits Research Report:³

- “the majority (53%) of organizations offered some form of flextime, which allows employees to select their work hours within limits established by the employer. 51% of respondents reported that their organizations offered flextime during their core business hours and 25% indicated flextime was provided outside of their core business hours.”
- “more than one-third (35%) of organizations offered compressed workweeks, where full-time employees are allowed to work longer days for part of a week or pay period in exchange for shorter days or a day off during that week or pay period.”
- “22% of organizations offered shift flexibility, where employees are allowed to coordinate with co-workers to adjust their schedules by trading, dropping or picking up shifts.”
- “other types of flexible working benefits offered by organizations included seasonal scheduling (19%) and alternating location arrangements (5%), allowing employees to work part of the year in one location and the rest of the year in another location (e.g., snowbird employees—those who move from colder climates to warmer climates in the winter).”

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Do employers recognize a business case for offering schedule flexibility?

Yes, recent surveys show that managers and business executives believe that the availability of workplace flexibility benefits are important in recruitment and retention, although not as important as health care and retirement benefits. Schedule flexibility is also perceived as important for enhancing employee engagement and job satisfaction.

“Workplace flexibility is believed to have an overwhelmingly positive effect on engagement, motivation and satisfaction. 7 to 8 of every 10 respondents believe their workforce would say there is a positive or extremely positive effect of flexibility programs on employee engagement (72%), employee motivation (71%) and employee satisfaction (82%)”, according to a 2011 report on the WorldatWork survey of managers from over 500 different business organizations.²

When asked to rank the top factors that create company loyalty as well as attract new talent, 26% and 28% of employers cited flex time as a benefit to retain and attract new talent, respectively. In contrast, top-ranking benefits were: health care benefits (73% and 79%), retirement benefits (58% and 59%) and having a good manager

(60% and 31%), according to the Bank of America Merrill Lynch 2011 survey of business executives and benefit administrators.⁴

“The main reason cited by employers for developing workplace flexibility, caregiving leaves and dependent care initiatives is the retention of employees in general (37%), with fewer mentioning the retention of highly-skilled employees (12%). The second most important reason is helping employees manage work and family life (16%), followed by improving morale—important in a period of economic uncertainty—and legal mandates (both 12%), recruiting employees in general and ‘it is the right thing to do’ (both 11%),” according to the 2012 National Study of Employers.¹

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Are employers taking steps to improve the effectiveness of their flexible schedule strategies?

Yes, to a limited extent. Few organizations report that they measure the ROI of their schedule flexibility options. Most do not incorporate their flex programs into their marketing and recruitment activities, and few offer training of managers and supervisors on how to implement flex programs effectively. Some managers report perceived barriers to offering flexible schedules in their organizations.

According to a 2011 report on the WorldatWork survey of managers from over 500 different business organizations:²

- the ROI of workplace flexibility is not being measured. Only 7% of organizations attempt to quantify the ROI of flexibility programs by measuring productivity, customer satisfaction, product quality, etc.”
- “the majority of organizations (39%) do not choose to market their flexibility programs as a key employment benefit when attempting to attract new talent,” while 35% use flexibility occasionally to attract talent, and 26% of organizations always use their flexibility programs as a tool to attract new employees.
- most organizations (83%) do not specifically train employees to be successful with flexible work arrangements, nor do they provide training to managers of employees using flexibility programs;” only 21% of

organizations offering flexible work options provide such training to managers.

According to the 2012 National Study of Employers:¹

- in regard to implementing workplace flexibility initiatives, “the main obstacle cited by employers is cost (25%). The second most frequently cited obstacle is that job requirements and workload don’t allow these programs (12%) followed by a lack of staff to implement such programs (11%), a potential loss of productivity and difficulty supervising staff (both 10%). Interestingly, 5% state that there are no business obstacles.”
- “51% of employers report considering how well supervisors manage flexible work arrangements when making job performance appraisals and compensation decisions, while 44% report training supervisors in responding to the work and family needs of employees.”

References

¹ Matos, K., & Galinski, E. (2012). *2012 National Study of Employers*. New York, NY: Families and Work Institute. Retrieved from http://familiesandwork.org/site/research/reports/NSE_2012.pdf

² WorldatWork. (2011). *Survey on workplace flexibility*. Washington, DC: WorldatWork. Org. Retrieved from <http://www.worldatwork.org/waw/adimLink?id=48166>

³ SHRM. (2012). *2012 employee benefits report: The employee benefits landscape in a recovering economy*. Alexandria, VA: Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Retrieved from http://www.shrm.org/research/surveyfindings/articles/documents/2012_empbenefits_report.pdf

⁴ Bank of America Merrill Lynch workplace benefits report. (2011). *USA: Bank of America*. Retrieved from <http://www.benefitplans.baml.com/Publish/Content/application/pdf/GWMOL/Executive-Summary-BofAML-Workplace-Benefits-Report.pdf>