

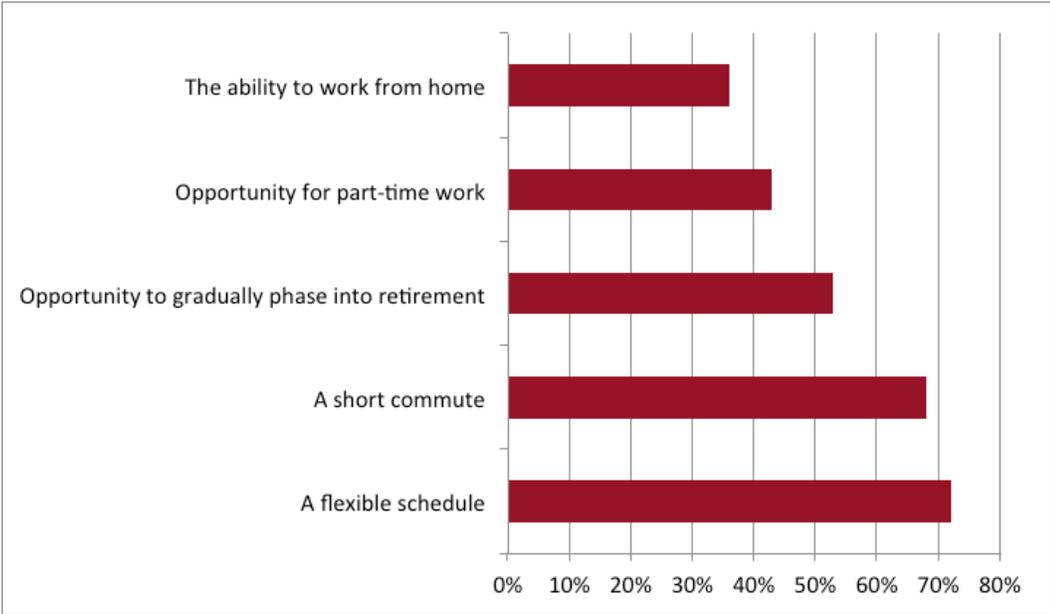
THREE THINGS EMPLOYERS  
NEED TO KNOW ABOUT:  
**FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS  
FOR WORKERS 50+**

You can provide employees with workplace flexibility via a wide range of policies and practices, including where they work, when they work, how much they work, and the chance to take career breaks and leaves.

# 1. WHY SHOULD EMPLOYERS CARE ABOUT FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS FOR OLDER WORKERS (OR IN FACT FOR ANY WORKERS)?

Short answer: because older workers do. More than 7 in 10 workers ages 45 to 64 say that a **flexible schedule** is an essential element of their ideal job. Other important job characteristics related to flexible work options included: a short commute, the opportunity to gradually phase into retirement, the opportunity for part-time work, and the ability to work from home.

Figure 1. Essential elements of an ideal job: Flexible work options.

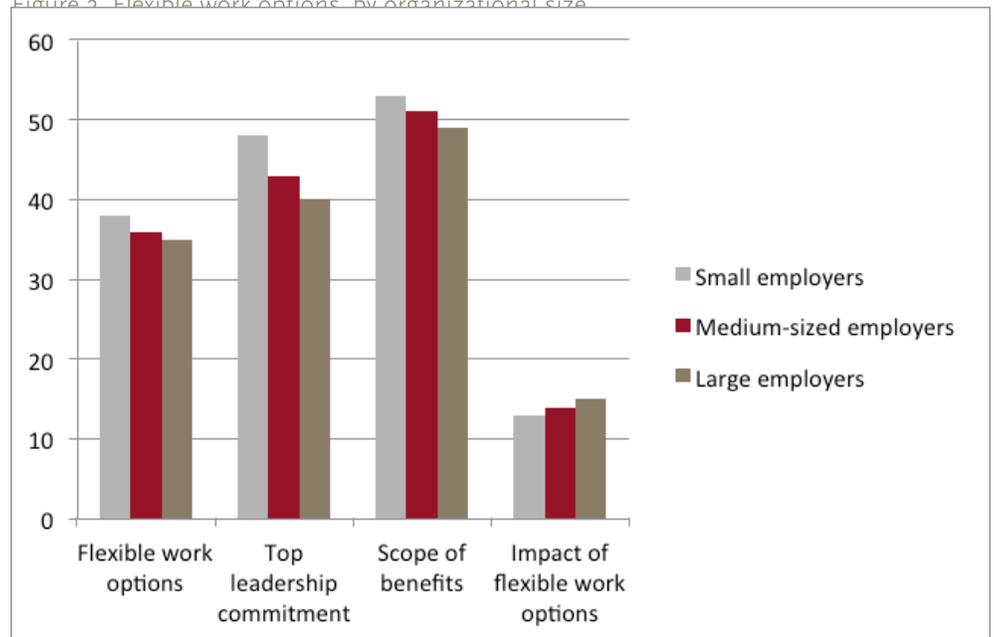


Source: Staying Ahead of the Curve 2013: The AARP Work and Career Study

## 2. ARE SMALL ORGANIZATIONS AT A DISADVANTAGE IN PROVIDING FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS?

Short answer: no, the reverse. While small organizations may face challenges providing other types of benefits due to economies of scale, they may have advantages over larger organizations in their ability to provide flexible work options. While a large organization might need to adapt flexible work options to various subdivisions and branches in order to create a workable set of flexible work options, leadership in smaller organizations may be able to pinpoint flexible work options that work for their employees more quickly. Figure 2 compares the overall flexibility score for the 50+ workforce based on the 2015 Talent Management Study by size.

Figure 2. Flexible work options by organizational size



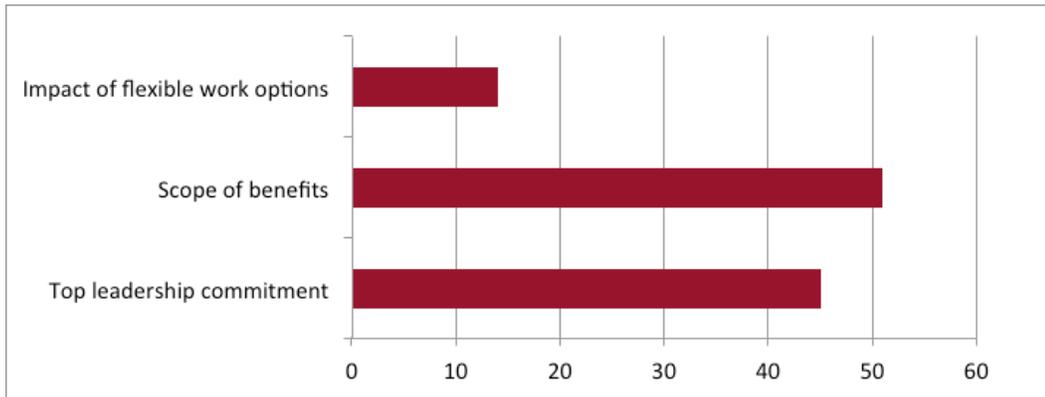
Source: 2015 Talent Management Study.

Small organizations (<100 employees) rate the top leadership commitment to flexible work options for older workers highly, and say there is greater scope of benefits, when compared to large organizations. Keep in mind that the impact of flexible work options — as measured by the percentage of employees who actually use the options — is comparable or slightly higher among large organizations. This indicates that employees of large organizations want and will use flexible work options, even if there are fewer benefits available to them currently.

### 3. WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN PROVIDING FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS?

Short answer: it depends. While there is no simple answer to this question, one of the biggest challenges is understanding all the factors that impact the ROI in offering those benefits. For example, what if you see a gap between the scope of flexible work options offered and the number of employees actually using them?

Figure 4. Flexible work options: Comparing impact, scope, and top leadership commitment



You'll likely always have a small gap between scope and impact based on how an employee's need for flexibility changes over time. However, if the gap is particularly large:

1. Consider whether the work is structured to discourage the use of these options. For instance, if you offer employees the ability to reduce their hours but don't reduce their workload, it may be impractical for them to make use of the benefit.
2. Consider whether supervisors and work group culture support the use of these options. Many employees fear that if they use flexible work options, they will be passed over for promotions and advancement opportunities.

**Want to find out where you stand on flexible work options relative to similar employers? Visit our Workforce Benchmarking Tool. Developed in collaboration with AARP ([www.aarp.org/employerbenchmarking](http://www.aarp.org/employerbenchmarking)), the tool rates your workforce practices in flexible work options and 7 other areas against the national average and provides practical next steps via a customized report.**

## About the Center on Aging & Work

Established in 2005, the Center on Aging & Work at Boston College promotes quality of employment as an imperative for the 21st century multi-generational workforce. We integrate evidence from research with insights from workplace experiences to inform innovative organizational decision-making. Collaborating with business leaders and scholars in a multi-disciplinary dialogue, the center develops the next generation of knowledge and talent management. Since our founding, we have conducted more than 20 studies in collaboration with employers, including the Age & Generations, Talent Management, and Generations of Talent studies.

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**For more information about the Center, please visit:**

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## APPENDIX. Types of flexible work options

### Type of Options

### Some examples of flexible work options

#### **Schedule Flexibility**

Options that give employees more choice and control over when they work

- Choose a work schedule that varies from the typical schedule at your worksite
- Request changes in starting and quitting times from time to time
- Request changes in starting and quitting times on a daily basis
- Compress their work week by working longer hours on fewer days for at least part of the year

#### **Flexibility Regarding the Number of Work Hours**

Options that give employees more choice and control over how much they work

- If working full-time, reduce their work hours and work on a part-time basis while remaining in the same position or at the same level
- Structure their jobs as a job share with another person where both receive proportional compensation and benefits
- Phase into retirement by working reduced hours over a period of time prior to full retirement
- Work part year; that is work for a reduced amount of time on an annual basis (e.g., work full-time during the fall, winter, and spring and then take the summer off)

#### **Career breaks and leaves**

Options that give workers more choice and control over paid or unpaid time away from work, beyond what is required by law

- Take sabbaticals or career breaks– that is take leave, paid or unpaid, for six months or more and return to a comparable job
- Take paid or unpaid time away from work for education or training to improve job skills
- Take leave (either unpaid or paid) for family caregiving or other personal or family responsibilities (e.g., parental or elder caregiving responsibilities, beyond what is required by FMLA)

#### **Place Flexibility**

Options that give employees more choice and control over where they work

- Work part (or all) of their regular workweek at home or some other off-site location, possibly linked by telephone and computer
- Work for part of the year at one worksite, and then part of the year at another worksite.

#### **Other Types of Flexibility**

Options that give employees more choice and control over other aspects of their jobs

- Transfer to jobs with reduced pay and responsibilities if they want to
- Request changes in their work responsibilities so that the job is a better fit with their skills and interests
- Make choices about which shifts they work, if they work on a shift
- Have input into the decisions about the amount of paid or unpaid overtime hours they work