



Providing Flexibility When Presence Is Required

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Chapter 1: Providing Flexibility When Presence Is Required

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Technology has changed the way work is performed, reducing the need for physical presence at work for a wide range of jobs. Employers are focusing on how to improve the employee experience and to make themselves employers of choice. Traditional employment relationships have changed with the increased use of independent contractors and outsourcing. With increasing numbers of people wanting to maintain a positive work-life balance, flexible working arrangements are a potentially key contributing factor. There is a business case that can be made for flexible working arrangements. But there are those jobs for which a physical presence is required, and this chapter will discuss what employers can do to motivate and engage employees in those positions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of whether implementing reduced workweeks without a reduction in pay can be successfully implemented.

Improving the Employee Experience

Having the right people is the key for the success of all organizations. Beyond recruiting and selecting, there is a need to develop, retain, and promote employees. In an era in which applicants and employees approach work with a consumer mindset, wanting a say in where, when, and how they work as well as desiring to perform meaningful, purposeful work, improving the employee experience becomes critical for organizations that want to hire and retain the top talent necessary to succeed.

Employee experience has become a key priority for organizations. The Gartner 2019 Future of HR Survey of 843 HR leaders found that 51% cited employee experience as a top priority, with companies now appointing heads of employee experience. In the book, *The CMO of People: Manage Employees Like Customers with an Immersive Predictable Experience that Drives Productivity and Performance*, authors Peter Navin and David Creelman contend that the Chief Human Resources Officer in an organization should become the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) of People. While the CMO seeks to create a great customer experience, the authors contend that HR should be seen “through the same lens: drawing in talent, getting the most value from talent, and doing so on the basis of a great employee experience.” One of the biggest challenges identified in Deloitte’s 2019 Human Capital Trends Survey is the need to improve the employee experience, with 84% of respondents rating this issue as important, and 28% saying it is one of the three most urgent issues facing their organizations this year.

About the Author



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Prior to IPMA-HR, Mr. Reichenberg worked for a law firm specializing in labor and employment law. A highly regarded speaker and writer on human resources and employment issues, he has given numerous talks at leading conferences and organizations throughout the world, including in North America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Central America, and the Middle East. He has also been asked to speak at United Nations meetings, as well as to testify before the United States Congress.

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Research by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) was cited in the report showing that enterprises with a top quartile employee experience achieve twice the innovation, double the customer satisfaction, and 25% higher profits than organizations in lower quartiles. However, only 9% reported they were very ready to address this issue, making it a large priority for organizations globally. The Deloitte survey found that many employers are focusing on the wellbeing of their employees. Studies have shown that more than 40% of workers face high levels of stress in their jobs that negatively affects their productivity, health, and family stability. Gallup's 2019 Global Emotions Report found that more Americans were stressed, worried, and angry in 2018 than had been at most points during the past decade. This is not just an American phenomenon according to Gallup, with several other countries reporting similar levels of stress. Hourly workers complain about a lack of scheduling flexibility, while salaried workers complain about the difficulty in disconnecting from their jobs. Individuals are working more and taking fewer vacations.

The Deloitte research found that there remains a gap between what employees value and what organizations offer their employees in a variety of areas, including flexible schedules and telecommuting as detailed below:

- Flexible schedules — 86% of employees value it, only 50% of organizations offer it
- Telecommuting — 70% of employees value it, only 27% offer it

The Workforce Institute at Kronos Working Your Way Survey, which polled nearly 3,000 employees from eight countries, found that employers negatively impact the experience of their employees due to outdated beliefs about time off, productivity, and workload. Survey findings included:

- Almost half of employees have had time-off requests rejected by their employers. Nearly half blame their manager when a time-off request is rejected thus potentially damaging a key organizational relationship that can negatively impact both engagement and retention.
- Less than half of employees globally believe preventing employee burnout is a top priority of their organization.

The Business Case for Flexible Working Arrangements

The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) in Great Britain issued a Mega Trends report on Flexible Working that includes the business case for working arrangements that allow employees “to vary the amount, timing, or location of their work, usually to the mutual benefit of the individual and organization.” The report notes that flexible working arrangements can impact:

- Attraction of talent — Advertising jobs as offering flexibility can result in access to a larger talent pool, since according to a report, 87% of people want to work flexibly. Additionally, it could help to develop a future talent pipeline, citing a British government study that found 92% of young people want to work flexibly.
- Improved engagement, job satisfaction, and loyalty — Flexible workers have a higher level of job satisfaction and commitment. They will also increase their discretionary effort as compared to those who do not work flexibly.
- Reduced absenteeism and improved well-being — Flexible working arrangements can reduce absence rates and better allow workers to manage health conditions and care giving responsibilities resulting in increased well-being.



Having the right people is key for the success of all organizations.





- Employee retention and progression — Flexible working arrangements result in employees at all career stages being satisfied with their work and staying with their employer. The report cited a study in the US where retailer Best Buy ran a trial giving employees flexibility over working time. They measured productivity and found that voluntary turnover rates were reduced by 90% and productivity increased by 41%. For employees who are parents, flexible working arrangements allow them to continue to work and better balance work and family responsibilities.
- Productivity — Flexible working arrangements increase individual performance with a study showing that 90% of employees consider flexible working to be a key motivator in their productivity, even greater than financial incentives.
- Agility and responsiveness to market change — The report cites the CBI Employment Trends survey finding that 99% of all businesses surveyed believed a flexible workforce is important to competitiveness.

Telecommuting can have a positive impact on the environment by reducing the number of people who are commuting to work. Flexible working arrangements also can show the commitment of employers to the wellness of their employees. The Mercer 2018 Global Talent Trends Survey found that half of employees would like to see a greater focus on well-being at their companies. Employers should strive to create a culture of wellness at their organizations by offering mental health days, flexible working arrangements, as well as wellness programs that include health screening, educational sessions, standing desks, meditation programs, and onsite/offsite gyms.

Flexible/Adaptive Schedules

To truly enjoy their jobs, employees must feel that their employers respect them and will provide them with what they need to be successful in both their professional and personal lives. The 2018 Mercer Global Talent Trends Study collected input from 800 business executives and 1,800 HR leaders, as well as 5,000-plus employees across 21 industries and 44 countries around the world.

Mercer used this data to analyze how both employers and employees are reimagining the future of work. Among the findings, Mercer identified three factors that employees and job candidates are looking for in a company including permanent workplace flexibility, a commitment to health and well-being, and working with a purpose.

The strict nine-to-five workday is becoming increasingly outdated — and it won't help employers attract or maintain today's top talent. The 2018 Mercer Global Talent Trends Study found that 51% of employees wish their company offered more flexible work options. No matter the industry, flexibility is incredibly important to employees and job seekers. Companies that offer employees flexible work options in the form of telecommuting, flexible schedules, and unlimited paid time off (PTO) help employees maintain a positive work-life balance. Flexibility has also been shown to reduce workplace stress, boost mental well-being, and encourage productivity. Similarly, a 2016 survey by FlexJobs found that working parents ranked workplace flexibility ahead of salary. An overwhelming 84% of working parents said work flexibility is the number one most important factor in a job, with work-life balance ranking a close second at 80%.

While flexible hours and schedules are an important aspect of a flexible workplace, the 2018 Mercer study also noted that flexibility comes in more forms than just work arrangements. Flexibility also involves rethinking what work is done, how it is done, and by whom. The trouble with these types of flexibility is that many employers still require employees to ask permission to act on these flexible benefits. Mercer claims that companies need to adopt a more permanent arrangement to workplace flexibility. To do this, employers need to reinvent their flexibility policies and address the barriers surrounding flexible working. For workplace flexibility to become a

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permanent solution, employees need to know that they are encouraged to act upon all flexible benefits. Mercer suggests that employers work on developing a culture of trust, as well as support remote working by providing the technology that remote workers need to get their job done.

The 2019 Mercer Global Talent Trends Report titled “Connectivity in the Human Age” found that one thing that nearly all workforce segments agree on is the growing importance of adaptive schedules. The report noted that 54% of employees said that managing their work-life balance is one of the top five things their company can do to help them thrive at work. This is up from 40% in 2018 and 26% in 2017. 82% of employees overall said they would be willing to consider working on a freelance basis in order to achieve greater work-life balance. This percentage is even higher in some countries: Mexico (94%), China (93%), and the Middle East (92%). “The ability to manage my work-life balance” was cited globally as the top factor that would help employees to thrive at work. By country, this was ranked #1 in the US, Italy, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Australia.

The pharmaceutical company Sanofi was cited in the report for making adaptive working a key component of its strategy to attract top talent. The company identified its policies as well as the mindsets of managers as barriers. They established guidelines for flexibility at work such as compressed workweeks, adapted hours, remote working, and flexing away from work (i.e., parental leave, study sabbaticals). One key element was eliminating managerial approval for flexible arrangements, thus placing more responsibility on employees to make it work. In the year since its implementation, Sanofi has seen a boost in productivity. Raytheon is another company that has implemented flexible work schedules as part of its corporate culture. The company offers a variety of flexible work arrangements that include compressed work weeks, flextime, job sharing, reduced hours, and telecommuting. The options depend on the type of work performed and the work location. The program can consist of:

- Every other Friday off by working 80 hours over nine days resulting in Fridays off in the second week of the schedule.
- Every Friday afternoon off by working nine hours Monday through Thursday and four hours on Friday morning.
- Modified work week by working either more or less than eight hours in any day of a pay period provided the balance of hours worked at the end of the pay period is 80 hours.

In Great Britain, a Flexible Working Taskforce was established in 2018 to increase the use of flexible working. The taskforce includes government, business groups, trade unions, and charities. Employers are encouraged to advertise their jobs as being flexible by using the tagline “Happy to Talk Flexible Working” in their job advertisements regardless of level or pay grade. It was noted that the number of employees using formal flexible working arrangements such as part time working, term-time working, compressed hours, and job sharing has not increased since 2010 despite the right to request flexible working being extended to all employees in 2014. Similarly, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics in its annual time use survey found that working from home for either all or part of their work has remained between 22% – 24% of the workforce during the past several years. The reasons for encouraging flexible working arrangements include:

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- Allowing more control over work-life balance.
 - Reducing commuting time.
 - Allowing more time for leisure and study.
 - Providing time to care for children and other dependents.
 - Improving the environment.
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By contrast, there have been several large companies such as Yahoo, Bank of America, Aetna, and IBM that have reduced or eliminated their telecommuting programs. Increasing collaboration, teamwork, and innovation were among the reasons cited. Other research conducted by Global Workplace Analytics found that telecommuting in the United States grew by 140% during the past 10 years. Of those who telecommute, 31% do so full-time. It is important to remember that telecommuting is just one component of flexible working arrangements.

The ROI Institute conducted a study with an insurance company which allowed two job groups to work from home — claims processors and claims examiners. The employees volunteered to work from home under several prescribed conditions. The work from home program was seen as a win for the insurance company which realized an ROI of 299% based on improved productivity, office expense reduction, turnover reduction, and a reduction in unplanned absences. It was a win for the employees since they were much more satisfied, experienced less stress, reported improved work-life balance, and saved on commuting costs.

The biggest barrier to remote employment can be managers who believe that employee presence is needed to ensure that employees are working. Managers need to be trained on how to manage teams remotely.

Working from home does require discipline and organizational skills. People with a need for high levels of social contact may not like teleworking. Some also are concerned about career progression if they work from home.

Providing Flexibility in Jobs that Require Physical Presence

Even in occupations such as law enforcement and emergency dispatch where there is a need for employees to be present most of the time to perform their jobs, it is possible to provide employees with flexibility. For example, in Great Britain, police officers can request alternative work schedules that meet the needs of both the employees and the police force. Examples of flexible work arrangements can include:

- Job sharing where a full-time job is divided between two or more workers.
- Term time work in which pre-determined periods of time off is provided such as during school holidays.
- Compressed hours, including a shorter week of longer days.
- Variable shift arrangements that allow for shifts to be worked that are longer or shorter than the normal eight hours.
- Zero hour contracts in which an employer does not guarantee the worker a fixed number of hours per week. The worker agrees to be on-call for designated periods but does not receive pay unless they work.
- Flexibility to work from home on an occasional basis, for example to write reports.

Telecommuting in the United States grew
by **140%** during the past 10 years



Motivating/Engaging Employees in High Stress Positions Requiring Physical Presence

Some positions in organizations such as public safety and emergency communications are very stressful, yet workers in these positions are required to be present. The challenge for employers is finding a way to reduce burnout and high turnover, while ensuring high morale, engagement, and improved employee health. It is a continual struggle to staff emergency communications centers because the jobs are so stressful and provide limited opportunities for flexibility. Here are examples of some initiatives that have been implemented:

Charleston County, South Carolina

In Charleston County, significant investments were made in developing wellness facilities for law enforcement and providing leadership training above and beyond law enforcement training. Many officers expressed interest in other occupations outside of law enforcement and corrections work, especially if they had served sufficient years to retire but wanted to continue to work for the County. Engaging law enforcement in focus groups, committees, projects, and other work assignments outside of their law enforcement work has been very effective, breaking down many silos and opening their understanding about other services essential to operating a County. Other steps implemented include:

- Supplemental retirement allowances.
- Lump sum bonuses.
- Separate police and fire pay plans.
- Incremental stipends or certification increases for added skills/knowledge for 911 center employees, exercise facility, and a therapy dog to support stressed staff.
- For emergency medical services effective electronic timekeeping tools were essential to improving tracking time and ease of use for employees.

New York City, New York

New York City opened a new 911 communications center that includes additional amenities such as a new locker room that gives dispatchers greater space, and quiet areas where they can rest and gather their thoughts after a difficult call. The new center also includes entire rooms for dispatchers to use for exercise and a cafeteria.

Billings, Montana

Billings, Montana has a new 911 communications center with a workout facility, sleeping rooms for staff who have to work additional hours during emergencies or storms, a kitchen and break room, and other amenities. The sleep rooms also allow a place for dispatchers to go after difficult calls. The workstations rise and lower to allow both sitting and standing on the job. The dispatchers can take time away from their workstations and use available exercise equipment.

Hancock County, Indiana

Hancock County recognized that 911 dispatchers cannot leave their desks for most of their workdays and have taken steps to improve their physical health and emotional well-being by purchasing workstation bikes for their use while on duty. The bikes fit under desks and allow exercise to be undertaken while handling calls. The County also has added workstations with desks that automatically adjust to a person's height to allow dispatchers to stand if they prefer. A moveable treadmill also was purchased to allow dispatchers to turn any workstation into a walking desk.

Other initiatives being implemented by organizations include:

- Making structural changes in the areas of recognition, pay, providing supervisors with overtime due to the demands of the job, and longer shifts with additional days off, which were based on the results of an employee engagement survey.
- Establishing part-time dispatcher positions to provide more work-life balance.
- Reducing the use of seniority as a basis for determining vacations and weekends off in unionized environments. One organization cited that it can take five years to get weekends off and qualify for summer vacations.
- Moving dispatchers to nicer facilities.
- Giving pay increases, using 4/10 schedules, and providing 10 hours of pay for holidays.
- Using per diem dispatchers who are retirees.
- Redesigning emergency dispatcher shifts to provide more days off rather than working more overtime.



A 2017 British study by Vouchercloud of nearly 2,000 full-time office workers found the average time spent working is two hours and 53 minutes each day, with workers also spending time on social media and websites, personal calls and texts, talking to co-workers about non-work related matters, searching for new jobs, and taking smoke breaks. A predicted boom in flexible working could contribute \$10.04 trillion to the global economy by 2030 based on an analysis commissioned by Regus and conducted by independent economists who studied 16 countries. Given this, can we reduce the workweek, providing employees additional time off with no loss of productivity? Here are two examples that will show that there is not a definitive answer to this question.

Gothenburg, Sweden

In February 2015, the City Council in Gothenburg, Sweden voted to have an 18-month pilot program at an elder care home in which the staff would move from working an 8-hour day to 6 hours per day, without taking a pay cut. The study was designed to see if reducing the number of hours per shift would lead to improved patient care. The results were positive with interaction with patients improving and the staff being more engaged. The number of sick leave days taken also was reduced significantly. The pilot will not be made permanent due to concerns about the cost, since the elder care home had to hire 17 additional staff. One successful example of the use of six hour working days, is Toyota's Swedish service center. A number of years ago, shifts were cut resulting in a boost to productivity and increased profits. The company has kept the shorter shifts ever since.

Perpetual Guardian's trial was successful, since employees were able to accomplish in four days of work what they were previously accomplishing in five days. Employees were motivated to work more efficiently in order to get an extra day off per week while not suffering any reduction in pay. By contrast, the Gothenburg, Sweden pilot resulted in extra costs due to the need to hire additional staff in a facility that requires 24-hour staffing. Being more efficient during reduced hours of work did not change the fact that there needed to be round the clock staffing in the elder care home. Therefore, the nature of the work may dictate whether a reduced workweek will be financially sustainable.

Perpetual Garden, NZ

Perpetual Guardian, a New Zealand company, embarked on an eight-week trial in 2018 for its 240 employees that changed the work model to give everyone a paid day off each week. All other employment conditions, including pay remained unchanged so the staff worked 30 hours per week but were paid for 37.5 hours, and were asked only to deliver the same amount of output as in a standard week. Perpetual Guardian engaged academic partners, The University of Auckland and Auckland University of Technology, to measure the outcomes of the employee engagement and publish the results. What was unique about this trial is that it reduced work hours while maintaining full-time pay.

The results of the trial were positive with team engagement levels increasing, output remaining the same, work-life balance improving significantly from 54% at the start of the trial to 78%, and stress levels being reduced from 45% at the start of the trial to 38%. The analysis concluded that the trial "showed employees were ready to embrace change — empowering teams to be actively involved in the set-up and review of the trial and trusting employees to consider the possible impacts upon customer service and others around them. A key to success is empowering staff to come up with solutions under the guidance and coaching of leaders."



Conclusion

The use of technology and artificial intelligence will continue to expand and change the way work is performed resulting in the creation of new jobs and the elimination of others. The boundaries between work and life are blurred. Having a motivated, engaged, and committed workforce will remain crucial to organizational success. Improving the employee experience will be emphasized by those employers that want to hire and retain the skilled workforce that they need. Employees will want meaningful work that provides flexible working arrangements that contribute to healthy work-life balances. Those organizations that want to be successful will need to make flexibility part of their culture with a commitment from senior leadership and the development of policies supporting flexibility. Managers will need to be trained on how to manage remote workers in order to ensure high levels of performance and accountability.

Focus On The Frontline

1. Remember to focus on the “employee experience” of all your employees, regardless of how high or low they rank in the company.
2. Eighty-six percent of employees say they value flexible work arrangements – so it’s safe to assume that your employees do too, even if they haven’t felt comfortable asking for them.
3. Don’t immediately assume that an employee can’t work flexibly because he or she has a role that requires presence – remember that flexibility also involves rethinking what work is done, how it is done, and by whom.
4. Compressed work weeks, flextime, job sharing, and reduced hours are all flexible work arrangements that can be deployed in roles that require presence.
5. A key part of making flexibility a part of your culture is training managers on how to manage it.

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