



Workplace Flexibility: Ensuring Success for the 21st Century

A National Challenge for Business

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES ON FLEXIBILITY WITH AN HOURLY WORKFORCE

Summary, February 2011

As global competition, technology, economic and workforce demographic changes create the impetus for greater workplace flexibility to improve business and financial performance, the need to document how flexibility benefits U.S. employers and employees has grown as well. In conjunction with the U.S. Department of Labor’s Women’s Bureau, Corporate Voices for Working Families, WFD Consulting, WorldatWork, the Society for Human Resource Management and the Twiga Foundation conducted focus groups with employers in specific sectors of the economy to understand their experiences and results with implementing flexibility. The information below summarizes the findings from four companies in the Los Angeles area concerning flexible work practices with hourly employees including the business drivers, practices, business impacts and critical success factors within the context of an hourly workforce and the regional economy.

Flexibility Spectrum

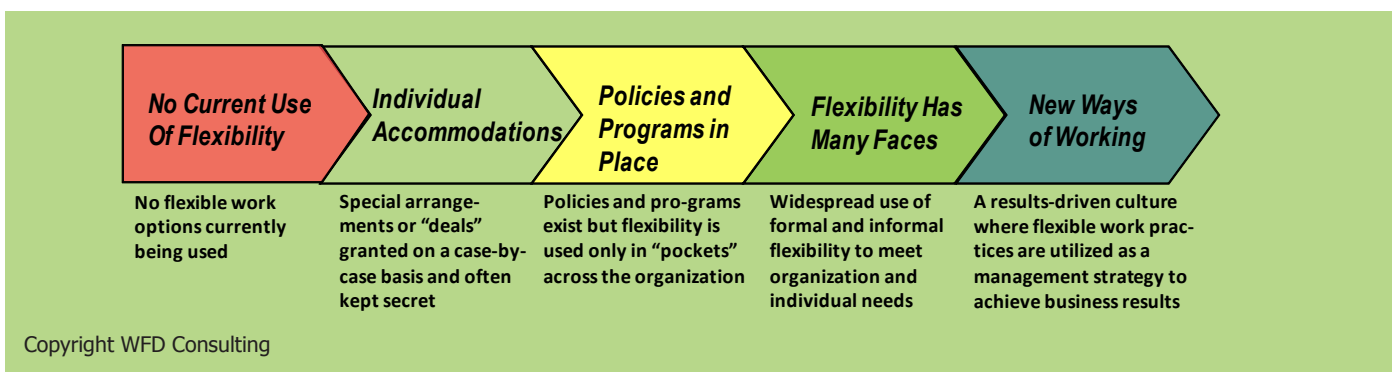
All companies in this study report being at the same stage of the flexibility spectrum: *Policies and Programs in Place*—flexibility policies and programs exist, but flexibility is used only in “pockets” across the organization. In some of the companies, hourly workers use flexible work options only on an occasional, case by case basis. In others, hourly employees have access to specific flexible work

options like flextime, part time and compressed 9/80 work week schedules. One company utilizes a variety of flexible work options where employees can choose their starting and quitting times within a range of hours and they can change that schedule on a daily basis if needed.

Business Drivers

Employers are motivated to utilize flexible work practices with hourly employees for a variety of reasons: to attract, motivate and retain employees in a competitive labor market, to respond to employees’ requests for flexibility to better manage work-life responsibilities, to increase employee satisfaction and engagement and to increase customer service through a more effective staffing model.

- During the recent recession, employers leveraged reduced hours and part-time work schedules as an alternative to layoffs. One employer offered part time work schedules on a rotating basis so employees did not feel the impact every week.
- To improve recruitment and employee satisfaction, and to reduce turnover and meet customer needs, a retail employer without a formal policy encourages stores to use flexible work practices on a case by case basis.



- To reduce turnover, ensure staff coverage, high quality customer service and to enhance work-life effectiveness for employees, one employer uses flextime schedules that can be changed daily, and employees can apply for various types of positions and work schedules that fit with their responsibilities.
- One employer in a production facility provided the option of working a compressed work week on a 9/80 schedule on a pilot basis, which resulted in 99 percent of employees moving to a 9/80 schedule. This helped motivate and retain employees in a competitive labor market.

Flexibility Work Practices

Hourly workers in non-production functions have access to a broader range of both regular flexible work arrangements and occasional flexibility than workers in production functions. However, employers have successfully adopted the following practices (in order of frequency) for a variety of jobs and functions with positive results:

- Ability to take paid time off on short notice and in hourly or partial-day increments.
- Occasionally taking paid sick time to care for a sick child or family member.
- Occasionally adjusting work hours to take care of personal or family matters.
- Flextime at the beginning or end of shifts with the ability to change schedule on a daily basis.
- Part time either on a permanent or rotating basis.
- Compressed work weeks, either 4/10 or 9/80.
- Telework--working at home or off site up to four days a week on a regular basis.

Impacts

Employers in this study echo national research findings on flexibility as a critical management tool to meet core business goals with an hourly workforce. They report similar business impacts through process measures, employee surveys, customer feedback systems and HRIS metrics. The business impacts of flexibility include:

- Increased efficiency
- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased employee satisfaction and engagement
- Increased staffing and coverage leading to enhanced customer service
- Increased ability to attract talent
- Reduced turnover

Success Factors

Companies in this study learned that successful implementation of flexibility with hourly workers depends upon **leadership commitment in words and action, formal policies, guidelines and request processes to ensure consistent, equitable use, clear communication and training** on flexible work options, guidelines and business objectives, **empowerment of different areas of the business to implement flexibility in ways that meet their specific business needs** and to ensure customer and business needs are met.

The National Flexibility Campaign

Corporate Voices for Working Families is leading a national workplace flexibility campaign, at the request of the White House, to create a broader awareness of the positive business and employee benefits of workplace flexibility. Through this campaign, Corporate Voices is spotlighting the leadership of businesses that sign its Statement of Support for Expanding Workplace Flexibility, and is encouraging the wider business community to modernize their workplaces to become more competitive in the global economy. To learn more about the campaign, visit: www.corporatevoices.org.

About the Organizations

Corporate Voices for Working Families, WorldatWork, Society for Human Resource Management, WFD Consulting and the Twiga Foundation are part of the national workplace flexibility campaign. By engaging the business community and conducting research about the business impacts of workplace flexibility, these organizations are raising awareness about how flexibility can catalyze success for working families and businesses in the 21st century.

