

Flextime policies achieve better work life balance management essay



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The increased attention of issues relating to the implementation of flexible time arrangements to support work-life balance reflects significant economic and social changes at the individual and organizational level. Since 1950s, there has been a significant change of the standard working time (Bittman and Rice 2001; Blyton, 1994), resulting from the demand to increase flexibility without undermining cost factor. As a result of the extended operating hours, businesses have experienced a much wider range of working hour arrangement, especially in the case of part-time and hourly workers.

The changes in the profile of labor market due to the increase in female participation in the workforce, the rise of single-parent and dual-income families and the increased number of workers in sandwich generation , the growth on expenditure and debt levels, and the prospect of boundary-less work organizations in the future – pose critical questions about people’s current and future ability to satisfactorily integrate their work and home-lives, the support system available to facilitate that integration, and ” more broadly, the role and value of work and consumption in contemporary society” (Ransome, 2005; and Schor, 1999).

There is no ‘ one that fits for all’ solution to the issue of implementing flexible time policy in the workplace. The case study demonstrates that different policies, practices, and strategies will be needed to address the issue of flex-time conflict. Furthermore, we will analyze the role of communication, monitoring, and information sharing to achieve optimal benefit from flextime. By using flexible work arrangements, employers give employees a sense of control and empowerment. This will lead to reduced

cost from absenteeism, lower level of productivity, increased stress level, increased turnover and replacement.

Introduction

We have seen the images of working adults, trying to balance the burden of having a spouse, children, or elders to support, and work-related issues, usually coping with deadlines and increased work pressure, on the other. The balance is brittle, if they spend too much time at work, their family will suffer and vice versa.

The role of work has changed, from zero-sum game to win-win interactions largely because of changing economic and social conditions (Harris & Marmer, 1996). Win-win situations can be achieved by arranging work-schedules to meet work-family demands, making priorities, using employment-related resources, and having access to behavioral and emotional support from others especially employers (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000).

One of the biggest challenges for organizations has been how to respond to the economic and social changes that alter the working environments. In response, many work organizations are introducing a variety of innovative approaches to cope with the changes in working roles and structures. Once perceived as a matter of necessity and survival, work is now seen as a source of personal satisfaction. One of the vehicles to attain balance and fulfill personal satisfaction is flexible-time arrangements. In the next section we concentrate on how this fashionable term has evolved and discuss problems related to the implementation of the program.

Key Concepts

Research on work-life balance started in the mid-1960s (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1965) and developed from the focus on women and work-family conflict, to a more recent focus on all employees. However, the term “ work-life balance” is a misnomer. The phrase indicates that work is separate from life, although work is increasingly dominating people’s lives. Furthermore, the word “ balance” seems to imply that there is a trade-off between work and life, yet they are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Kanter, 1977).

Parasuraman and Greenhaus introduced the term “ work-life integration” to overcome the problem of “ work-life balance” (1997). The idea is to integrate work and personal lives rather than seeing them as two separate domains that rule out one another, thus have to be “ balanced”. However, one misunderstanding of the term “ integration” is that “ it implies work and personal life must be integrated in the sense of merging each other, eliminating the possibility of integrating the two by deliberately keeping these domains separate” (Lewis & Cooper, 1999). As a result, the word “ harmonization” has been introduced to relate work and personal life domains in harmonious ways without ruling out one another or merging these domains together (Gambles, Lewis, & Rapoport, 2003). For simplification purpose, we will not delve into the issue of these terms and use the term “ work-life balance” interchangeably with “ work-life harmonization” or “ work-life integration”.

Ballard and Seibold (2004) stated that “ flexibility pertains to the degree of rigidity in time structuring and task completion plans.” Flexibility is

categorized into flex-time, job sharing/part-time work, and

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telecommuting (Hall & Richter, 1988; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). Flex-time is a simplified term that describes flexibility in work schedules and hours.

Employees can manage their work days within core-hours – the hours which employees must present at work, usually between 10: 00-14: 00- and a bandwidth – the earliest and latest starting and finishing times built around core-hours to which they can choose to adjust (Christensen & Staines, 1990). There is no universal definition of standard work days due to different legislations across countries. however, we assume that it is defined by 40-hour and five-day working week.

The Current Flextime Trend in Canada

Flex-time programs are common in Canada and the trend reflects employers' belief on that flex-time implementation results in better business performances. According to Statistics Canada's 2003 Workplace and Employee Survey (WES), which sampled 20, 834 employees from 6, 565 workplaces, approximately 57% of all working Canadians are already using flex-time programs, including compressed workweek and flexible work schedule. In the study, Flexibility: Whose Choice Is It Anyway? conducted by Cooke and Mann, they analyzed the WES data and discovered that flex time programs are implemented to improve business performances and minimize cost rather than to assist employees with their work-life balance.

The Demographic Change

The sandwich generation and workaholics are the two main groups of employees that are experiencing low satisfaction due to their poor work-life balance. According to Statistic Canada's General Social Survey (GSS), the sandwich generation population has increased from 670, 000 in 2002 to <https://assignbuster.com/flextime-policies-achieve-better-work-life-balance-management-essay/>

about 2.7 million Canadians in 2007 (General Social Survey: Cycle 21, 2007). In 2002, it was estimated that approximately 27% of people age 45 and above are struggling to support both their children under 25 years old and their aging parents while working a full-time job (Williams, 2005). In fact, the latest GSS published in 2008 indicates a steady increase of sandwiched caregivers due to the late marriage trend, currently baby boomer generation are sandwiched in between family and work.

In addition to that, the increasing population of females in the workforce today also constitute to the proportion of the sandwich generation. There is an 11.6% increase of all working women from 1976 to 2006 (Table 1). Increased education, desire for personal fulfillment, increased consumption, the high cost of living, and the high rate of divorce has contributed the growth in women participation in the workforce. In fact, according to the Statistics Canada's data collected in 2006, 73% of all women with children are part of the workforce (Almey, 2006). This indicates that families with children are more likely to have dual income from both the wife and the husband, leaving lesser time for individuals to take care of the family. 2005 GSS also collected data showing that there are 31% working Canadians aging 19 to 64 who think they are workaholics. Comparing to the non-workaholics, the majority of workaholics are unsatisfied with their current work-life balance. The large proportion of working Canadians who are unhappy with their work-life balance indicates the possibility that flextime can be a feasible solution to help with their stress in time management.

Society also witnesses the increasing number of boomerang generation.

Boomerang generation or boomerang kids are young adults age 20 and
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above that have returned from independence to live together with their parents. The growth of the boomerang generation is partly due to the economic condition and also to the multicultural family structure of Canada. According to Statistic Canada, 73% of Asian-Canadian families have adult children living with their parents whereas only 26% of Canadian born parents are allowing their adult children to live with them (Turcotte, 2006). Nevertheless, the boomerang generation relies partially on their parents in order to save the cost of owning and renting a house which helps maintain their desired lifestyle. Due to the emergence of the boomerang generation the burden has doubled for the aging baby boomers who have to continue working in order to take care of their adult children and the elders in the family (Canada Year Book: Society and community, 2008).

The Caregiver's Wish List

In order to assist with the growing number of employees with work-life balance concern, Statistic Canada's 2007 GSS provides further data which include 712, 000 caregiver aged between 45 and 64 and explore their major concerns with their work and personal life. According to the statistics, 70% of sandwiched employees believe if the company provides more support and flex time programs, their work performance will improve (General Social Survey: Cycle 21, 2007).

The following statistic is from Cara Williams's article, The sandwich generation, which shows the significant cost for sandwiched employees when they do not have access to resources that help them balance their work and personal life (2005).

- 15 % reduced their work hours
- 20 % changed their schedules
- 10 % lost income
- 70 % are stressed out

Table 2 (refer to the Appendices), The Caregiver's Wish list, is a comparison of the needs from sandwiched employees to employees with elder care needs. The highlighted percentage of sandwiched employees shows that the top two wishes for both sandwiched employees and employees with elder-care responsibility are some form of workplace support such as flexible schedule and elder care to help accommodate their overwhelming responsibilities (Williams, 2005). Overall, both statistic and employee survey suggest that flexibility is a major attribute that potential employees consider in a company.

Flextime Policies

The adoption of flexible time policies differ widely by the level of public provision and culture of the organization. Some researchers argue that laissez-faire market stimulates employees' concern of work-life programs, whereas others argue that " public provision creates a climate which employers become active in pursuing this entitlement" (Lewis, 1997). Den Dulk (2001) further reinstates that active government provision does not translate into the disappearance of the motivation for employers to implement work-life programs. Poelmans and Sahibzada (2004) summarize all factors that may influence the adoption decision. They argue that the

probability of an organization to address work-life conflict is a function of the macro-level context in which the organization runs the business. The country level context is related to employees' sense of entitlement to receive support from their employers, whereas the labor market context affects employees' choice and negotiation power over organizations' work-life policies, thus increasing the pressure on firms to implement them (Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004). The complete factors that influence organizations' adoption decision is presented in Table 3 (refer to the Appendices).

Organizations need to decide the flexible work arrangements that suit their business model and the needs of the workforce. Business model that requires employees to meet fluctuating demands from clients outside work hours may implement flexible work arrangements. In fact, flextime is ranked more favorably than reduced-time schedules because many (full-time) employees with family responsibilities cannot afford to work less than standard full-time schedule (Rodgers, 1992).

Benefits

Employees that benefit from flex-time include working parents, especially working mothers, who want to be involved in their children's lives while having the balance of having a family and a career at the same time. At Bristol Myers Squibb, 72% of those who worked flexible hours in 2003 were female (Poelmans & Beham, 2005). Flextime options are excellent recruiting and retention tools. An article in the Long Island Business News interviewed many executives and found that they agree that investment in such programs shows that the company cares about their employees' well-being and increases the company's attractiveness to highly skilled people who

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might not be ready to go back into the workplace on a full-time basis or just need flexible schedules (Starzee, 2009). In a survey by Careerbuilding. com in 2008, 54% of 7600 workers felt that companies offer flexible work arrangements to help manage stress levels and work life balance. 90% of American employees also feel that they are more valued by their companies if given the option of flexible schedules (Sweeney, 2003).

Benefits offered depend on the type of job, industry or the employees.. With the right employees and good implementation on the part of management, costs of flex-time policies should be much less than replacement costs, which includes recruitment, hiring, training, and orientation. Even for an entry level position, replacement costs can exceed \$10, 000, not including lost time, energy and effort of management (Bednar, 2010).

Using this strategy, companies can keep their top talent happy and reduce turnover. When the same employees stay with the company for a long time, they can provide better service for clients due to increased experience. Absenteeism is also likely to decrease since employees are more motivated to work when they feel they are valued by the company by giving them options to help them juggle their home and work demands. Table 4 in the Appendices lists the possible advantages of flexible work arrangements.

Costs

There are also costs to implementing flex-time policies. First of all, it is not one size fits all. Most employers identified through years of experience that many employees might not have the same motivation to work hard and get work done by staying late if they were given the option of coming in after the

official start time (Bednar, 2010). Therefore, monitoring is essential to ensure that employees are not taking advantage of the policy. In order to properly and effectively implement a flex-time policy, employers need to introduce a series of new rules and procedures to manage the flexible workers and culture change, such as stricter punctuality and related provisions to ensure the equal, or even higher level of productivity. It is a burden and a risk for management. They are also required to monitor the performance of flexible employees with different measures to reduce scheme risks and achieve work goals.

Secondly, starting such programs requires a great amount of communication to the employees about the availability and details (Bitti, 2008). Regardless of the results, management must spend time and effort in the attempt to make flex-time work. Productivity could decrease, service level might be lowered and lead to customer dissatisfaction, and employee dissatisfaction might also arise if they believe the arrangements were unfair. Flex-time is not always supported by all employees, even though it is mostly considered as a benefit for employees. In 2008, a Deloitte's survey of more than 1600 workers showed that 39% respondents agreed that taking advantage of formal flexible work policies including flex-time would harm their career. Based on the survey, employees are more comfortable with informal policies, such as taking time off for personal activities, if leaders are more open about their own needs and practices (CFO, 2008).

To further complicate the matter, flex-time was seen as both alleviating and generating stress and was generally seen to have a negative impact on opportunities for learning and advancement (Kelliher & Anderson, 2008).
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Some businesses cannot adjust their employees' work schedules, because such a change would not fit their business (Wensley, 2008). A client may call in looking for something immediately, and the person with the flexible schedule is absent (Starzee, 2009). These potential negative effects may lead managers to be more conservative about implementing flex-time options.

Despite all costs associated with the implementation of flex-time policies, employers that provide greater flexibility have been found to be related with higher perceived organizational performance (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000); resulted in increased shareholder return (Arthur, 2003). In addition, flextime policies create a favorable view of the organization, thereby suggesting that the organization is more attractive to job seekers (Casper & Buffardi, 2004). In fact, many of the industry leaders listed in the “ Best 100 Companies to Work For” in Fortune Magazine provide excellent flextime policies that better integrate work-family life of their employees.

Case Study: Kraft Foods, Inc.

Kraft began to support work-life balance programs after a national employee survey in 2000 showed that the major challenge for most Kraft employees was finding balance between home and work-life. The survey also indicated that Kraft hourly workers that account for 59% of Kraft employees were the least satisfied with their work-life balance among all the employee groups. To overcome the problem, Kraft introduced the Fast Adapts program. Initiated in December 2002, Fast Adapts allows workers to swap shifts, take single day vacations, and request job sharing arrangement from their

supervisor. Fast Adapts program was published in the company newsletters <https://assignbuster.com/flextime-policies-achieve-better-work-life-balance-management-essay/>

and broadcasted on the video monitors. The program was also communicated in the regular plant-wide meetings.

The flexible arrangement enables employees who are out on leave because of extended illness, family issues, or taking vacations to switch shifts with other employees. All hourly workers are eligible to use Fast Adapts program, given that the arrangements are aligned with work process, plant policy, or union contract. If not, employees are encouraged to discuss their situation with Human Resource managers to find alternative work solutions. To evaluate the effectiveness of this program, information about employee satisfaction was collected in the first quarter of 2003. The biannual survey showed improvement in hourly employees' satisfaction with work-life balance.

Conclusion

The repetitive nature and inflexible schedule of the job in Kraft's working site contributed to the decreased level of work-life balance satisfaction among hourly employees. Kraft's Fast Adapts program has been successful for some reasons. Employees receive more autonomy over their work schedule, thus they are able to better integrate work-life demands. Plant managers also need to be more accountable, as they have to develop flexible work arrangements that work best for each individual plant. Fast Adapts program also encourages employees to communicate their needs to employers. The other key issue is to understand that flexibility should be an ongoing and mutual commitment between Kraft and its employees, win-win situation can only be achieved if both sides work toward Kraft's vision of a supportive culture.

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Appendices

Table 1: Employed Women by age group & in percentage

1976

1986

1996

All women

41. 9

50. 2

52. 1

15 to 24

51. 4

58. 1

52. 0

25 to 44

50. 0

66. 4

70. 9

45 to 54

45. 6

55. 9

66. 3

55 to 64

30. 3

30. 3

33. 5

Source: Statistics Canada. (2006). Women in Canada: Work Chapter Updates.

(Catalogue no. 89F0133XWE). Retrieved April 2, 2010 from Statistics

Canada:

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89f0133x/89f0133x2006000-eng.htm>

Table 2: The Caregiver's Wishlist**Employed (%)****Sandwiched****Respite Care****52****Flexible work or study arrangements****46****Information on long-term disabilities****43****Information on care giving****42****Financial compensation / tax breaks****36****Counselling****28****Other****12**

Source:

Williams, C. (2005). The sandwich generation. Perspectives on Labour and Income.(Catalogue number 75-001-XIE). Retrieved March 27, 2010, from Statistics Canada:

www.statcan.ca:8096/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=75-001-X20041097033.

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Table 3: Macro-context factors that influence adoption decision

Country Level

Extensive government-supported policies, as in social democratic countries

Egalitarian gender-role ideology

Low in masculinity

Low in power distance

Countries high in individualism

Labor Market

Scarcity of talent or skills

High diffusion of work-family benefits

High percentage of women in the active population

High reliance on knowledge work

High reliance on quality of customer service

Source : Poelmans, S. & Sahibzada, K. (2004). A multi-level model for studying the context and impact of work-family policies and culture in organizations. Human Resource Management Review, 14. 409-431.

Table 4: Advantages of flextime policies

Benefits for employers

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Cost savings because of increased retention of valuable employees

Improved morale, employee satisfaction, productivity and employee commitment because of better integration of work and family lives.

Better scheduling for the department

A public relation tool to attract new employees

Savings in office space and equipment

Less time lost in traffic jam can be invested at work, also improved parking options

Government incentives to encourage flexible employment fuelled by concerns about traffic, air quality, etc

Source : Poelmans, S. & Sahibzada, K. (2004). A multi-level model for studying the context and impact of work-family policies and culture in organizations. Human Resource Management Review, 14. 409-431 & various.