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Defining and Making the Case for Flexible Work Arrangements

INTRODUCTION

Susan Miller is the Manager of Health Claims at the head office of a large insurance company. She supervises 75 claim processors, and another 35 telephone clerks who respond to customer inquiries about their claims between the hours of 7:00 and 19:00. All but three of these 110 employees are women, and the vast majority of them are mothers as well. When the telephone service was first introduced, Susan had to determine how to deploy her staff to cover the 12 hour service day. She decided to present the problem to the entire department, and came away from the meeting with a list of people who wanted to work according to a variety of different schedules. Some preferred swing shifts that allowed them to go home for a few hours in the middle of the day to prepare the evening dinner, look in on a frail parent, or simply recover from the morning's telephone inquiries. Others preferred to work three 12-hour shifts, and then have a 4-day break that would give them the large block of time they needed to complete assignments for evening courses in which they had enrolled. Still others decided that this was an opportune time to request a part-time arrangement that would involve sharing a job with a co-worker who also wanted to cut back her hours at work.

The result is that there are now about thirty different *flexitime* arrangements, and sixteen part-time employees, half of whom share jobs. An added bonus is that the *job sharing* arrangement created several new vacancies in the unit, allowing Susan to absorb some employees who had lost their positions elsewhere at head office due to restructuring. Equally important, the results of the last employee morale survey showed dramatic improvements in Susan's performance ratings as well as in employee job satisfaction. There was also an upturn in customer satisfaction ratings, and gains in the unit's speed of processing claims. The popularity of this increased flexibility is reflected in Susan's annual report to her manager: 'If we ever went back to a rigid schedule, it would be a sad day. We have learned that one size doesn't fit all'.

Resilient Tire and Booms Ltd manufactures solid rubber tires for forklift trucks and other heavy equipment, as well as a variety of elevated platforms that are used by utility, construction, and stadium workers. The company has an aggressive marketing team of 38 sales representatives who work out of offices that were built onto the manufacturing plant, and who are deployed throughout North America. In addition, 175 employees work on the plant floor. Orders have been increasing rapidly over the past two years, facing management with the task of determining how to utilize more fully the manufacturing equipment without having to pay high overtime rates to employees or leaving them with less time for their families. At the same time, a small scale expansion of the manufacturing space was required to accommodate the addition of some new equipment.

Management met these challenges in two ways. First, since the sales representatives were on the road so much of the time, management decided to expand the plant by colonizing all but five of the sales force's offices. The remaining offices could be used as temporary quarters when a representative needed to come into head office. Hence, the sales division could primarily work from their homes, with the company providing equipment and furniture that they could use to furbish home offices. Each *telecommuter* received a computer with fax modem, a telephone answering machine, basic office furniture, and a modest home remodelling subsidy. Second, to make optimal use of the shop equipment, the company moved to a 24-hour a day operation, seven days a week by implementing two versions of a *compressed* *work week.* Two platoons of plant employees work four 11-hour shifts from Monday to Thursday, workers switching shifts every two weeks. These workers are rewarded for their intensive labour with a three-day weekend. Employees on the two weekend shifts work three 12-hour shifts, but are paid for 40 hours of work, and then get four days off.

Both of these novel arrangements have yielded benefits for the company and its employees. Since the sales staff were used to operating on a solo basis, and because they often regretted spending so much time away from home, they felt that the telecommuting arrangement gave them greater flexibility to respond to their family's needs when they were not on the road. It also improved their efficiency because they no longer had to shuttle back and forth between office and home. With free access to fax, e-mail, and courier services, they could communicate promptly and succinctly with co-workers and senior management, file their monthly reports, and still have the time to attend an after school conference with their child's teacher. From management's perspective, huge capital cost savings were realized by annexing the sales department's offices, with no adverse effects on the speed or accuracy of communication.

Similarly, the new shiftwork arrangements were greeted very favourably by management and employees alike. Less time was wasted reheating the heavy presses that vulcanize the rubber because there were no longer any shutdowns, and like the sales staff, the majority of the workers cherished the sustained time they had to attend to family responsibilities or to engage in leisure or educational activities. Commenting on the large number of employees who coveted the 36-hour weekend shift, the plant's general manager remarked: '*A lot of our people are dads and the others take up studies or work on projects around their homes or in their communities. Or a guy can really work on his golf game spending that kind of time on the course during the week.*'

AIMS AND BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK

This book is largely addressed to managers, supervisors, and human resources personnel who wish to familiarize themselves with the variety of ways in which flexible work arrangements, such as those identified in the preceding case examples, can be used as strategic tools to address productivity, morale, cost, and employee development issues. The book aims to equip these individuals with the knowledge, insights, and tools required to:

- identify employees who are experiencing stress resulting from episodic or ongoing conflicts between their jobs and their personal lives;
- negotiate and implement flexible work arrangements that optimize benefits for both the employee and the employer;
- monitor and evaluate the personal and organizational impacts of policies and practices related to flexible work arrangements; and
- develop mechanisms to ensure that the process and outcomes of flexible work arrangements are consistent with principles of equity and fairness, and that they are aligned with the organization's guiding credo.

The book is based largely on our extensive history of consultation with numerous employers in both the public and private sectors regarding techniques of assessing the need for and implementing flexible work arrangements and related work–family initiatives. Our approach is unique by virtue of its strong empirical grounding. Typically, we begin by conducting a systematic assessment of the work-life pressures that are prevalent among employees, gauging the personal and organizational costs incurred by such stress, and assessing the need for and appeal of existing and potential strategies of alleviating and preventing these pressures. Through the use of interviews and focus groups, we gather qualitative data on these subjects, while also compiling quantitative data through periodic surveys of the workforce. We confer with senior management and human resources personnel about ways of embedding work–life balance (ie, the relation of work to life) within the corporate culture, and about how to promote and reward flexibility on the part of management. Finally, we provide technical assistance for customizing resource materials and evaluative tools which will enable employers to proactively design flexible work arrangements and continuously monitor their effectiveness.

SOCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL TRENDS FAVOURING FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

The preceding two case examples illustrate the many creative ways in which employers are using flexible work arrangements as strategic management tools. Just as organizations devise new products and services to meet the needs of their external environments, so too are they innovating new policies and programmes to meet the shifting needs of their employees and to attract the talent that will give them a competitive edge. According to Hewitt Associates' (1995) survey of 1050 major US employers, 67% of companies offer some type of flexible work arrangement. Flexitime is the most prevalent arrangement, offered by 73% of those employers, followed by job sharing (36%), compressed work weeks (21%), and telecommuting (19%), usually involving work at home arrangements.

Particularly in an era of corporate downsizing and restructuring, job sharing arrangements represent a way of retaining valued personnel on a part-time basis rather than dismissing them, with the attendant threat and demoralization that are aroused among other employees. When companies decide to contract in size, whether on a temporary or permanent basis, the flexibility that is provided by a programme of reduced hours can lower payroll costs while retaining highly skilled employees. Similarly, at a time when companies are extending their hours of customer service, many offering 'round the clock response capability, there is a call for more flexible scheduling, including restructured full-time hours and unconventional part-time hours. For example, financial services are now widely available on a 24-hour-a-day basis, partly because of their globalization and partly because customers expect their needs to be serviced at any time of the day or night. Flexible schedules and innovative part-time arrangements permit managers to achieve broader or more intensive coverage during periods of high demand, as well as to relax their staffing during slower periods.

Flexible work arrangements have also given many employers the competitive edge in recruiting qualified personnel and in retaining employees in whom they have made a significant investment. This is because compensation and benefits are often very similar across employers, making the quality of working life and the balance between work and the rest of life more salient bases for distinguishing among employers. Especially for companies that recruit for jobs requiring the specialized skills of 'bright collar' or information age workers, or employers that draw on a labour pool composed of a high proportion of people with family responsibilities, flexible schedules offer a recruitment advantage. In addition, companies that create more part-time positions by implementing job sharing arrangements thereby establish a mechanism for cross training, since more employees can rotate through these positions. Finally, telecommuting not only offers companies cost savings by virtue of reducing the expense of office space, but also reduces parking costs and automobile pollution. In fact, in ten heavily polluted regions of the United States, the federal Clean Air Act of 1990 requires companies with at least 100 employees to design 'trip reduction programs' in order to reduce solo commuting to work. The State of California has also introduced legislation that limits the number of vehicles that employers are permitted to accommodate at the workplace.

From the employees' perspective, flexible work arrangements can make a profound difference in terms of stress and the quality of life. Witness the following plea for flexitime from a bank employee who must otherwise choose between meeting her family's needs and fulfilling her job responsibilities:

> I think it would be excellent to start work at a later time in the morning. We presently start work at 8:30, which puts a strain on my family life. My family always comes first, no matter what. I give my all at my job, but if my family needs me in any way, they are top priority. We should not be criticized for having a family with needs.

Indeed, some subgroups in the workforce are at much greater risk of serious adverse health and job consequences stemming from clashes between their employment and onerous responsibilities at home and in the community. These employees include parents of young children and adolescents, individuals who provide care to elderly or disabled family members, and employees who hold positions in voluntary organizations or who are involved in continuing educational pursuits or vocational training.

However, broad demographic trends suggest that the workforce of the twenty-first century will be increasingly characterized by an older and more diverse labour pool, composed of people who have substantial family responsibilities and for whom the quality of the work environment is as important as the compensation they receive. Among the latter qualities, flexibility in the place, hours, and scheduling of work is of paramount importance. In fact, recent studies have shown that large proportions of employees are willing to trade money and advancement at work for the increased flexibility to spend time with family members and to engage in other valued activities outside their jobs (Galinsky, Bond & Friedman, 1993). For example, in our own research, we have found that 45% of men and 50% of women would turn down a promotion if the new position would leave them with less time for their personal or family life. Similarly, 32% of men and 44% of women would trade a promotion for a more flexible work schedule. We also found that 36% of men and 27% of women would take a transfer to a new location if it promised to give them more time for themselves or their families (CARNET, 1994).

In addition, in a survey of 777 Canadian organizations, aimed to document attitudes and practices related to the subject of work and family, approximately a quarter of the responding companies reported that there is a perception that employees must choose between moving up the corporate ladder and devoting time and attention to their family lives (Watson Wyatt Memorandum, 1995). Finally, a survey of the quality of working life among a nationally representative sample of US employees, revealed that 60% of respondents stated that they considered their job's effect on their personal or family life as a 'very important' factor in their decision to accept their current employment. In comparison, only 35% rated the salary or wage they were to be paid as a 'very important' factor in their employment decision (Galinsky, Bond & Friedman, 1993).

Demographic and social trends underscore the need for employers to come to terms with the personal and family challenges faced by their workforce. As elsewhere in the industrial world, Canadian women have substantially increased their participation in the labour force in the past 30 years, rising to 58% by 1991 (Lero & Johnson, 1994). Moreover, the largest increase in the rate of labour force participation has occurred among women with preschool-age children, the rate for women with a youngest child under three years of age nearly doubling, from 32% to 62% over the 15 year period between 1976 and 1991 (Statistics Canada, 1991). Some sense of the pressure on these women is gained from data revealing that more than two-thirds of mothers with a youngest child under the age of six worked at a paid job or business on a full-time basis. The proportion of dual wage earning couples in the Canadian population is equally impressive. More than half of all married women were in the paid labour force in 1986, with almost two thirds of them (63%) being between 45 and 54 years of age. This latter statistic suggests that large numbers of employed women find themselves at a stage in the life course when they have a high probability of assuming some responsibility for the care of elderly parents, with many adding such care to the care of children who are still at home. Hence, as Martin Matthews and Rosenthal (1993) have pointed out, the 'caregiving crunch' experienced by this sandwich generation stems from the reduction of the amount of time that women can devote to assisting family members, not from any increased demands for such care. The multiple pressures that employed women face, and the toll that these pressures take on their psyches are dramatically illustrated in the following remarks of a bank employee:

> The long days I leave for work at 7:30 and return at 6:30—leave little time for young, growing children, time for my husband, and personal time. Added requirements to take the CIM (Canadian Investment Management) course and study outside of work hours are absolutely impossible. My weekends are spent with my children and their activities, and maintaining/running my home. Personal/social time is limited as is. If I don't take the course I will receive a low rating on my annual review; it is part of my team target to complete the course. The bank is requiring that we take this course, therefore they should allow for this time, not expect me to take it out of my family time.

The case for flexibility is given even greater urgency by evidence that there is an insufficient pool of younger, entry-level workers who can replace an aging workforce. Therefore, employers need to take measures to retain their more seasoned workers, giving them the flexibility they desperately need to meet their family responsibilities and other life commitments.

All of this means that in the vast majority of Canadian families with children, no parent stays at home. In companies with large numbers of female workers, this is evidenced by the cascade of phone calls that 'light up the switchboard' every afternoon at the time when latchkey children return home from school. It also suggests that the formerly full-time job of managing a home is now compressed into late afternoon, evening, and weekend hours, leaving less time for recovery and recuperation from job demands, much less for leisure activities with family members.

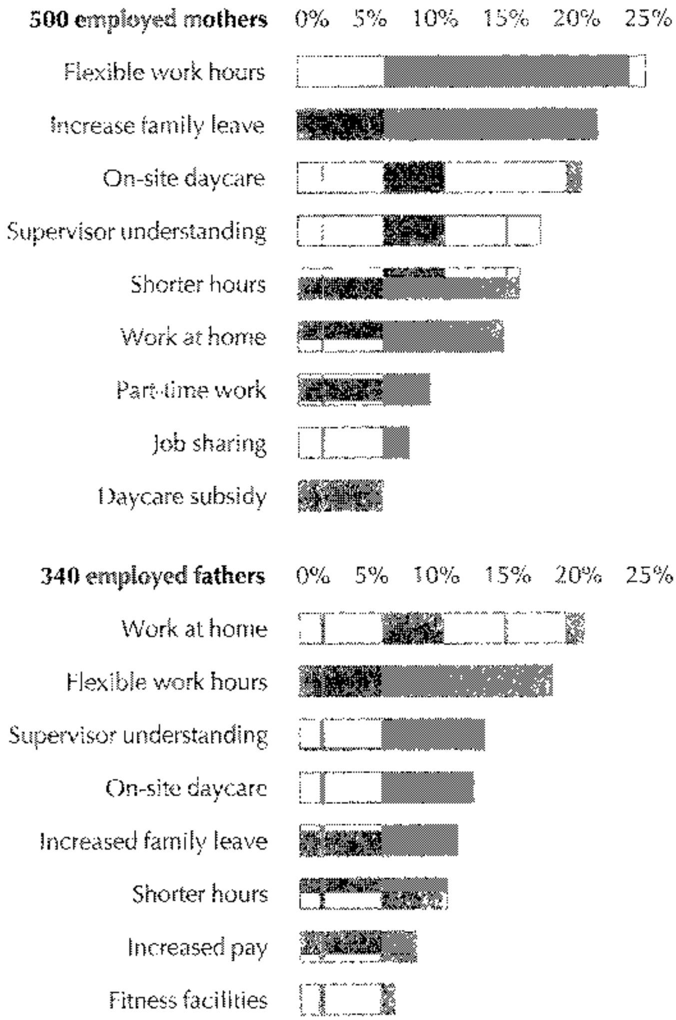
An increasing number of employers are recognizing that all employees experience periods in their life when they must grapple with emotional problems that are brought about by stressful life events and developmental turning points that affect themselves and their loved ones. Their worries about how to manage or resolve these problems cannot be confined to the hours they spend outside the workplace, and therefore they carry their personal concerns with them while at work. For example, in a study of family influences on the workplace, Crouter (1984) quotes a manufacturing plant's supervisor, who was preoccupied by concerns about his teenaged son:

> When there's strife at home, I have to consciously put it in the back of my mind. My son had a serious motorcycle accident last year, and could have died. That took its toll on my abilities to concentrate. Arguments do that, too (Crouter, 1984: 432).

In this, and many other instances of episodic or ongoing tension between work and family, organizational support and managerial flexibility can be of profound importance. This is revealed in Box 1.1, which shows that, for both employed fathers and mothers, their supervisor's understanding is among the most highly requested expression of organizational assistance (Lee, Duxbury, Higgins, & Mills, 1992). Moreover, by assisting a diverse workforce to find creative solutions to tensions between their jobs and their personal lives, employers will find themselves rewarded with a more productive, loyal and healthy pool of employees. This is vividly illustrated in the following observations of two bank employees. Whereas both employees express their appreciation of the flexibility they have been granted by the bank, the second employee also voices her concern about the absence of a career track for individuals who have job-sharing arrangements.

> Because my branch manager has given me the opportunity to work hours that suit me, I strive to do the best job that I possibly can. I would also go out of my way to do something job-related if my manager asked me to, such as extend my hours and visit customers outside the branch. Several of my 'A' clients have my home phone number, and I have no problem dealing in this way.

Box 1.1 *Employees respond: what could your employer do to help you balance work and family?*



The second employee also feels indebted to the bank for her arrangement, but adds a caveat:

> I feel very lucky to be employed on a job-sharing basis. It provides me the flexibility I require to balance my family life and run a smooth household. It also allows me to give 100% to the bank while I'm at work because I can

> prepare so well for the days I do work. I become frustrated sometimes at lost opportunities for advancement, but understand that this is my decision right now and if I stay informed and trained, I would be able to slide in if opportunity arose and I so desired.

Since caregiving continues to be largely gender defined in western cultures, organizations that employ large numbers of women are particularly sensitive to the strains that arise when domestic and paid work collide. These organizations, including banks, insurance companies, educational institutions, retailers, and hospitals have therefore been the pioneers in establishing a range of flexible work arrangements. To the extent that these arrangements succeed in mitigating the stress arising from the cross pressures between the job and demands at home, they may prevent lost productivity due to physical or mental absenteeism, tardiness, or exhaustion, the loss of motivation and interest at work, and ultimately, the loss of jobs and the considerable financial investments entailed in training employees for those jobs.

From a more positive perspective, the introduction of flexible work arrangements, and their customization to the individual's needs and lifestyle, can signal to employees that their company is committed to helping them achieve a more harmonious and healthy balance between their personal and work lives. Moreover, to the extent that considerations of flexibility enter into managers' performance appraisals, appear in annual morale surveys, and are enshrined in human resource policies, employees will view management as more responsive and compassionate, and they will demonstrate more loyalty and commitment. Moreover, according to the National Study of the Changing Workforce, the most attractive employers are those who offer flexible work arrangements. The study's findings revealed that 60% of employees took their present job because they anticipated it would minimize any adverse effects on their personal and family lives (Galinsky, Bond & Friedman, 1993).

In what follows, we define each type of flexible work arrangement (FWA), describing variations in its structure, and briefly considering its benefits for employees and management. Box 1.2 summarizes this information. Chapter Two provides greater detail about the potential costs and benefits of these work arrangements.

Box 1.2 *Definitions of Alternative Work Arrangements*

Flexitime

start and/or end the work day earlier (or later) than usual

Pros: allows employees to co-ordinate work hours with other obligations

Cons: (a) some flexitime policies are not very flexible; the employee must report for work at a fixed time; (b) working time is at the work site

Compressed hours

work fewer (or no) hours some days, and longer hours on other days *(e.g., work 37.5 hrs. in 4 days, with 1 day off)*

Pros: blocks of time off work, at times when services can be accessed

Cons: (a) it is difficult for employees to make caregiving arrangements for the extra portion of their working days; (b) employees are often extremely fatigued at the end of long work days

Telecommuting

work from home for all or part of the work week

Pros: (a) enables employees to assist a dependent for limited periods of time throughout the day; (b) commuters can reduce their travel

Cons: reduces the employee's visibility and social integration at work

Part-time

work less than 30 hours a week

Pros: enables those with time-consuming domestic or community responsibilities to be employed

Cons: in some organizations, part-time positions may have reduced or no fringe benefits, lower pay, and/or lower job security

Job-sharing

share the responsibility and benefits of one full-time position with another employee

Pros: may permit higher-level employees to work part-time hours

Cons: the job performance of each employee may not be distinguished; this is problematic if employees make unequal contributions

DEFINITIONS OF FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Flexitime

The most prevalent alternative work arrangement, flexitime or flexible work hours, typically consists of flexible workday start and finish times. Most organizations that offer flexitime require all employees to be on the job during a set of core hours, but allow employees more choice over their work schedules on either side of these core hours. Flexitime does not alter the total number of hours for which the employee was hired, but most flexitime arrangements include schemes for logging surplus and deficit hours they may have incurred. For example, if, during a given week, an employee's family demands require her to arrive at work when core hours begin at 10:00 and to leave when core hours end at 16:00, then over a five-day work week, she will accrue a deficit of 10 hours in her regular 40-hour work week. She can then repay her debt by extending her hours through the two flexitime periods (08:00 to 10:00, and 16:00 to 18:00) during another week, or by working extra hours on certain days in the months ahead. Most flexitime plans give employees the option of accumulating or banking extra hours as credits to be used within a designated time period, and repaying owed hours as deficits. Rarely can employees receive overtime pay for their credited hours. In most flexitime plans, workers and managers agree in advance on a maximum number of carry-over hours from one period to the next, and a minimum notice period for time off when credits can be spent.

Flexible hours can be extended even more by further dividing core hours into two periods, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, with a flexible lunch period in between. This provides a third period of flexible hours, when employees can tend to tasks and domestic chores, look in on elderly relatives, or have lunch with a child.

Like other flexible work arrangements, the degree of variation in employees' hours of work that can be accommodated depends on the number of daily hours the organization operates, the hours each employee is required to be present, the extent to which satisfaction of other workers' and customers' needs depends on interaction with the employee, and the manager's tolerance of work schedule variability. Some managers prefer predictability and therefore ask their employees to commit to a flexitime schedule that is permanent or at least fixed for a period of time. Sometimes referred to as 'staggered hours', this fixed flexitime arrangement does not involve any carry-over of excess hours or shortfalls. Other managers are prepared to approve a truly variable flexitime arrangement whereby employees schedule their work hours on a daily basis, as their needs dictate. However, some positions preclude such variability because employees must be on the job at the same time every day. For example, a school principal is unlikely to approve a variable flexitime arrangement for a normal classroom teacher, but could consider staggered hours which ensure the teacher's presence during specified hours.

Flexitime arrangements are attractive to employers who need to maintain extended hours of operation or respond to fluctuating levels of service or product demand. As one bank manager commented when asked about how an employee was faring in her new flexitime arrangement:

> Our branch and this employee believe that customer service is our number one priority. Therefore, we do our best to accommodate our clients, including working earlier or later to meet with them at their convenience, or occasionally on Saturdays if needed. This employee is single and has somewhat more flexibility than many others, but she still highly values personal time, and we respect her professional and personal commitments (CARNET, 1995).

Flexitime arrangements are also perceived to be a means of reducing tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover, and improving employees' time management skills. Moreover, since some employees' flexitime hours occur when their manager is not present (before the manager's arrival or after the manager's departure), managers must be prepared to either relinquish or delegate supervision of the employee. By the same token, when supervisory time is reduced, it is important for flexitime users to discuss how their managers will evaluate their performance. Ideally, there should be agreement that performance will be assessed in terms of what is accomplished rather than when it is accomplished.

Flexible time arrangements not only give employees a greater sense of control over their hours of work, but also give employees formal recognition and compensation for the extra hours they devote to their jobs. For example, the following bank employee should not have to regularly donate time to her branch in order to achieve superior performance appraisals; in a flexitime arrangement, she would be credited for her extra hours. However, at present, she describes her predicament this way:

> For the last two years I have been rated '4' (high performer) on annual reviews. I am convinced that this would *not* be so if I left each day at 5:00 p.m. No matter how I attempt to manage my time daily, my manager or

other employees demand my time at 4:50 p.m., and I rarely leave before 5:45 p.m. If I were to refuse to stay to assist them or attend a meeting, my performance would be perceived as 'not committed' to the success of the branch or team.

Flexitime also enables employees to meet a variety of responsibilities at home and in the community during the standard 9:00 to 17:00 workday. Instead of having to spend most of the weekend attending to banking, shopping, and domestic chores, much of this work can be accomplished during the non-core hours of the work week. Moreover, in urban areas, flexitime can help employees avoid rush hour traffic, thereby reducing their commuting time. In addition, for a diverse workforce, flexitime offers a means of facilitating participation in religious and cultural practices. For example, Jewish employees who wish to leave work early on Friday afternoons in order to observe the sabbath can be accommodated by drawing on their credited hours. In this way, flexible hours can also help an organization achieve its employment equity goals. Similarly, flexitime can be used for employees who wish to upgrade their skills or continue their education by enrolling in a course scheduled for three hours on a weekday afternoon.

Job Sharing

Job sharing is an arrangement in which two people voluntarily share the responsibilities, salary, and (pro-rated) benefits of one full-time position, each working part-time on a conventional basis. Job sharing creates normal part-time employment opportunities where there is a need for a full-time position. It differs from other part-time work by virtue of the coordinated approach to job responsibilities that it requires.

There is great variability in the ways the time and the demands of a job are shared. Time need not be shared on a 50:50 basis, but can vary in proportions usually depending on the needs of the job sharers. For example, two employees, each of whom has a preschool child, may wish to spend more time with their children, but neither wishes to quit work or take a leave of absence. Together, they submit a proposal to their manager which specifies how they will share the time and responsibilities of a single position. Whereas some proposals may involve workers sharing the same responsibilities, others may call for them to assume complementary job functions. Partners who have the same skills and experience may fully share all activities, divide them according to each party's interests and aptitudes, or accept equal assignments of projects, with each of the sharers taking responsibility for his or her own projects and sharing responsibility for the general duties of their common position. Partners with different skills and experience can engage in complementary activities that reflect each partner's strengths, or they can fully share all activities, with each learning from the other's area of special competence, or divide the work on a senior–junior basis. It follows that job sharers may be jointly accountable for some aspects of the job and individually accountable for others.

The job sharing schedule can also be highly variable because it is usually carefully tailored to the two parties' personal circumstances and lifestyles. Those employees who opt for a weekly 50:50 time split may each work for two and a half days or divide the schedule into mornings and afternoons. However, they may also choose to work alternate weeks, or three days on and two days off followed by two days on and three off.

The quality of the working relationship between the job sharers is a critical determinant of its success. Experience reveals that the optimal process for the development of a job sharing arrangement is when the two parties jointly apply to share a job after they have confirmed their compatibility and decided how to divide their work, and coordinate with one another and with their manager and co-workers. When this is not possible, such as when an agreement to share a job has been reached between one employee and the employer before identifying a partner, or when a new partner has to be found to replace one who has left, it is best to involve the job sharers in the selection of their partners. No manager wants to assume the extra work of resolving differences between job sharers, and therefore employees who have not 'done their homework' with one another before approaching their manager are unlikely to receive a positive response.

For employers, job sharing arrangements hold the potential advantages of greater productivity due to the increased energy that part-time employees can bring to their work, greater job commitment because the sharers have a stake in making the arrangement succeed, better coverage of the job because the sharers can step in for one another when need be rather than turning to less qualified relief personnel, and improved problem-solving and innovation, because these assets are required to make the job sharing arrangement work. As one bank manager commented:

> In my opinion, the success of job sharing is through having very compatible employees who maintain open communication with each other, as well as a manager who adjusts to setting expectations for one position and coaches two people for the results (CARNET, 1995).

In addition, it is noteworthy that many managers claim that the combined hours and contributions of job sharers far exceed those resulting from one individual occupying a full-time job. In short, because job sharers tend to devote more time to the job than they are paid for, it is usually a value-added arrangement.

For employees, job sharing is a creative way of achieving a healthier balance between paid employment and the demands issuing from family and community life. It can offer considerable flexibility in scheduling time at work, and combined with the reduced hours of paid employment, it usually results in more productivity on the job, greater job satisfaction, and less stress and burnout. Job sharers also benefit from the opportunity to learn from the complementary skills and experiences of their partners, and have the advantage of exchanging mutual support and encouragement. Job sharing is a viable option for individuals who are unable to work full-time due to a disability or during a period of convalescence following hospitalization.

The problems that can arise in job sharing arrangements include difficulties in communication and collaboration between the partners, which can not only make them less productive, but also create problems for managers and co-workers. It has also been suggested that, because they are on a reduced hours schedule, job sharers are perceived to have less commitment to the job and may not be taken as seriously as full-time employees. For these reasons, job sharers sometimes find it difficult to get promoted or to advance as a team, and therefore they need to discuss with their managers how this arrangement might affect their career path. Finally, although in principle unions and other employee associations support the idea of job sharing as a way of harmonizing employment and family responsibilities, they are apprehensive about the possibility that employers will use this arrangement to convert full-time positions into part-time jobs. In addition, they want assurances that job sharing will not circumvent the terms of a collective agreement that govern hiring, seniority, promotion, and benefit levels and continuity (Labour Canada, 1990).

Telecommuting

Sometimes referred to as telework, sometimes as flexiplace, and sometimes simply as work-at-home, telecommuting is an arrangement in which an employee works at home, in a satellite office, or at a customer's location for part or all of the work week. When they are not in the central office, telecommuters communicate with their co-workers and managers by means of phone, computer modem, and fax.

Telecommuting schedules can vary widely, from every other week, to every other day, to full-time. Some employers allow employees to use telecommuting arrangements whenever they want or need to work at home, whereas others stipulate that a telecommuter must attend the workplace for a minimum number of consecutive hours each week. Full-time telecommuters and their managers usually set up a roster of face-to-face meetings at the central office in order to preserve the necessary personal dimension of office communication.

Telecommuting helps commuters to reduce their commuting time and travel costs, and it is said to relieve traffic congestion in densely populated areas, and even diminish suburban crime by keeping more people in their home neighbourhoods during the day. It also offers increased flexibility for many types of sales and service activities, such as insurance, financial, and real estate sales. In addition, it affords opportunities for better coordination of employees' work schedules with their personal and family needs. For example, the case for telecommuting on a part-time or as-needed basis is poignantly expressed in the following quotation of a female bank employee:

> I want to be able to work more hours, but because my children are so young, and young only once, I also want to be home with them on a part-time basis. If I had a computer to work on at home, there is plenty of

work I could do in the evening or on weekends (with compensation of course). As well, if one of my children were too sick to go to the caregiver or school, and I was unable to go into work, I could at least get some work done at home with a computer instead of none and be stressed out the next day because of work load.

Whereas some employees have regular weekly telecommuting schedules, others have been granted permission to work at home whenever family demands intensify, such as when a child or other family member becomes ill, as long as they alert their co-workers and managers regarding their whereabouts. Employees whose jobs involve a great deal of 'head down' work, such as planning, budgeting, computer programming, and writing, claim that they are more productive when they can work alone at home. More generally, because telework is performed independently, telecommuters must be engaged in work that involves at least some autonomous tasks.

Employees who work at home need a proper work setting for their comfort, safety, and productivity, including sufficient lighting, office furnishings and equipment. In terms of their personal qualities, telecommuters need to have strong work habits on the one hand, and the ability to discern when to stop work and turn their attention to home and family. Since there is the risk that telework will spill over and encroach on more family time than would a conventional work arrangement, the teleworker must know how to set appropriate limits on the workday. Telework is particularly well suited to employees who are self-disciplined and self-directed. Clearly, they must also be employees who have earned their manager's trust through good performance.

Some organizations have established eligibility criteria for employees applying for telework. For example, in the United States, Steelcase Inc., a designer and manufacturer of office furniture, has set the following five requirements: employees must perform an independent task as part of their larger job specifications; they must have completed a six-month probationary period with the company; they must gain the approval of their immediate supervisor; they must have a good performance record; and they must have a suitable work area at home or in another location. Based on the company's extensive experience with telecommuting, Steelcase has also generated a set of guidelines to promote the success of this arrangement (see Box 1.3).

Box 1.3 Guidelines for Telecommuters

- Adopt a 'contract mentality', in which both the telecommuter and the manager look at the work agenda as though it were a consultant's proposal.
- Establish 'checkpoints' to ensure that work progress continues to meet the needs of the company and the telecommuter.
- Communicate, in writing, each Monday morning, to outline expected results of work in the week ahead.
- Plan on regularly scheduled, face-to-face meetings with one's supervisor/manager. Support of managers and co-workers is essential, as they often act as representatives for the telecommuter in the workplace and can reflect acceptance of the work arrangement.
- Plan to attend regular team or group meetings at the company office.
- Set aside a separate room, or a part of a room, specifically for work, taking into consideration privacy, permanence, professionalism, and productivity.
- Use technology, such as electronic mail, to update managers on daily work activities that are performed.
- Invite co-workers and managers to the home office for periodic meetings.
- Share work experiences with other telecommuters and staff.
- Manage yourself by being proactive, anticipating developments, and communicating effectively and consistently with all others involved.

In a two year study of telework conducted by the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the union representing the largest number of federal employees, the following were the most frequently cited reasons for telework's appeal (Johnson, 1994):

- it eliminates long distance commuting to work;
- it prevents people from having to keep their children in day care centres for up to 10 or 11 hours a day;
- it allows parents to be home for their children after school;
- it gives employees the flexibility they want to schedule their daily work;
- it allows employees to respond more quickly to family emergencies because they are closer to their homes and communities;
- it lets people who regularly work overtime put in the extra hours at home.

At the same time, many of the preceding factors were cited as sources of difficulty with telework. For example, this arrangement does not eliminate the need for or cost of childcare services since it is rarely possible to combine paid labour and the care of young children at home. In addition, the vast majority of teleworkers in this study reported that this arrangement had been established in order to meet increased productivity expectations on the part of their employer. Many respondents stated that, in order to meet deadlines and complete tasks that they had not been able to finish during the regular workday, they regularly worked unpaid overtime hours in the evening at home. In fact, many admitted that they would work less overtime if the work were not so portable. Our own study of almost 2000 employees revealed that those who had worked at home for any period of time during the prior six months averaged a 41.3 hour work week, as compared to an average work week of 35.8 hours for those who had not (CARNET, 1993). In short, telecommuters put in almost another full day of work each week.

From a union standpoint, the risk is that telework may be a stepping stone to increased contracting out of services that are performed by non-unionized workers who are lower paid and who receive few if any benefits. Unions fear the possibility that employers will cut loose unionized workers and transform them into contractors. Therefore, through the collective bargaining process, union members want specific wage, benefit, and job protections. They also want to ensure that telework does not undermine union solidarity by isolating workers from one another. In fact, isolation from colleagues and office politics is often cited as a significant cost of telework. When employees are 'out of the loop', they miss opportunities for taking on new assignments, competing for vacant positions, networking, and following new developments. This is why companies like Steelcase advise teleworkers to spend a certain number of consecutive hours at the central office each week.

As further elaborated in Chapter Two, the telecommuting option also challenges managers to determine who is capable of working at home, how these employees' work will be monitored and evaluated, and how to develop mechanisms to facilitate regular and smooth communications with telecommuters, and between them and both internal and external customers. Clearly, telework is poorly suited to jobs that regularly call for certain kinds of teamwork activities, or that require frequent access to confidential files, documents, or data that cannot be accessed at home even by means of computer modem. In situations where telecommuters can access confidential information, they must understand and comply with information privacy and security operating procedures.

Hotelling

Hotelling is a recently coined term that refers to an arrangement that designates temporary office space for employees who normally work at home or elsewhere. Also called 'alternative officing', hotelling allows employees to call ahead to reserve a work station or office for a few hours, days or even weeks, when they need to be on site. The hotelling administrator assigns the space, puts the employee's name on the door, programs the telephone for the employee's usual (home) office number, and sees that any special equipment such as a computer is installed. Some organizations provide lockers for regular 'hotellers', where these employees store any documents they may need.

Hotelling is gaining popularity among companies with large numbers of employees whose work requires portability. For example, it has been estimated that the offices of people involved in field sales, consulting, project management, and customer service are not utilized as much as 70% of the day. As the case example of Resilient Tires and Booms illustrates, cost savings result from using space more efficiently, including a reduction in the number of permanent offices.

Compressed Work Week

This is an arrangement whereby a standard work week is compacted into fewer than five days by extending the length of the work days. The most common patterns are four ten-hour days, three twelve-hour days, and the increasingly popular 9/80 formula, which involves a week of four nine-hour days plus a fifth eight-hour day, followed by a week of four 9-hour days (with a free day in the second week). Although the four-day work week usually includes a predetermined day off, flexibility can be increased by enabling employees to choose their day off. Some employers have implemented compressed work weeks in the summer months in order to provide employees with longer weekends and to save on labour costs during slack times of the year.

From the employers' perspective, compressed work weeks allow manufacturing operations to be used for longer periods, with fewer startups and shutdowns. However, a 1989 national survey showed that the manufacturing sector was only slightly more likely to use compressed work weeks than firms in the service, financial, or insurance industries. Hewitt Associates' 1995 survey documented that 21% of the responding organizations used this work arrangement. The business case for compressed work weeks is principally based on employers' efforts to decrease the costs of overtime and to allocate labour more efficiently. For example, it can be used to optimize staffing levels during periods of peak activity. This is illustrated by an insurance company which placed its group health claims department on a compressed work week because of the large number of claims that flowed into the unit on Mondays and the small number that arrived on Fridays. Since the unit had set a goal of processing claims and issuing payment within 48 hours of receipt, the majority of the staff worked ten hour days from Monday to Thursday, leaving only a skeleton staff to process Friday's claims.

From the employee's perspective, compressed work weeks are a mixed blessing. On the one hand, they offer additional and longer periods of time away from work, with no reduction of pay. On the other hand, many employees, particularly older workers, complain about the fatigue that sets in toward the end of the longer work day, with a concomittant decline in productivity. Unions have registered their concern about the stress, fatigue, and long-term adverse health effects of compressed work weeks, as well as their encroachment on overtime. However, when compressed work schedules do not conflict with existing labour agreements, union attitudes are shaped by the perceived benefits to employees, including more family time and less commuting stress.

OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

Chapter Two is devoted to a more detailed discussion of the ways in which flexible work arrangements can meet personal and organizational needs, and help employees achieve a healthier balance between their jobs and their family and community responsibilities. We discuss the numerous factors that give rise to clashes between work and family life, and we discuss differences in the sources and in the organizational and personal consequences of these clashes. The chapter also spotlights the extra tensions that women experience as a function of the onerous caregiving responsibilities they tend to assume at home. It distinguishes between the demands of caring for children and the demands of 'eldercare', and calls for different organizational responses to these two caregiving contexts. We conclude with a systematic overview of the ways in which flexible work arrangements can prevent and mitigate the adverse effects of job–family conflicts while meeting the competitive needs of industry.

Chapter Three presents a step-by-step, comprehensive approach to the process of planning, negotiating, implementing, and evaluating flexible work arrangements. It is organized into two sections, the first describing a policy planning phase that includes a critical pilot test of the new policy. The second, implementation phase draws managers and employees into a collaborative and mutually responsive process that begins with a consideration of the business case for greater flexibility and ends with a contract that sets out the terms and conditions of the new work arrangement.

In the fourth chapter, we review the present state of knowledge about the effects of flexible work arrangements, and present the findings of two major surveys investigating the characteristics of employees who use different types of arrangements. Equally important, we draw on the results of a pioneering study in which we examined the impact of flexible work arrangements on such personal outcomes as stress and work–family balance, and on such organizational outcomes as absenteeism and productivity. We show that the benefits of workplace flexibility depend on the degree of choice and control that is given to employees in selecting arrangements that fit their needs and lifestyles.

Chapter Five provides a set of guidelines for management training on the subject of workplace flexibility and job-family balance. We highlight the kinds of information managers need and the types of training experiences that are most useful to them. Equally important, we discuss the need for a sea change in managers' attitudes toward unconventional patterns and schedules of work, as well as ways of overcoming their resistance to new ways of working. The chapter also includes a section containing sage advice from the users of flexible arrangements, their managers and co-workers, drawn from the many focus groups and private interviews we have held.

The sixth and final chapter offers a compendium of the measurement tools we have developed for clients who wished to plan and implement flexible work arrangements. It presents many of the questions and scales we have designed and refined to measure employees' need for such flexibility, as well as to assess the impact of new and more flexible initiatives. We are persuaded that the rigour and precision with which these tools gauge the phenomena of interest give our work its unique scholarly character and give our clients a reliable and scientific basis for formulating policy and effecting planned change.