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When Work Works: A Project on Workplace Effectiveness and Workplace Flexibility

Research Highlights and Project Overview

The American public is intrigued by the way we work. This is especially evident based on the number of television programs that are set in the workplace these days, from popular reality shows to situation comedies. But does the workplace that is depicted in the media reflect reality? New research from Families and Work Institute reveals that the American workplace has been shifting dramatically, away from a command-and-control brand of authority to one based on a partnership between bosses and employees. More and more, businesses are using flexibility and job autonomy as strategic tools for creating workplaces where employees are engaged in, committed to, and satisfied with their jobs.

While much has been written about the learning organization, teams, and quality assurance programs, flexibility has not been featured as a part of these changes. Yet data from the *When Work Works* initiative, drawn from Families and Work Institute's National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW), show that *working flexibly is becoming as commonplace as working with technology*, and is a critical component of creating an effective workplace. Although many companies are moving toward this model, flexibility has long been the missing ingredient in creating partnerships that address both employees' needs as "whole people" and business' needs for maximizing productivity.

In response to these findings, Families and Work Institute, with partner organizations the Center for Workforce Preparation (an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce) and the Center for Emerging Futures, project sponsor the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and research sponsor IBM, is conducting a major research and outreach initiative around workplace effectiveness and flexibility.

Highlights of *When Work Works* Research

The overall impact of being in an effective, flexible workplace is dramatic. For example, 3% of people in effective workplaces are not fully engaged in and committed to their work, vs. 82% who are highly engaged and committed.

When employees have access to flexibility, they use it.

- The majority of men (68%) and the majority of non-parents (70%) use flextime when they have it, and fully 73% of the wage and salaried workforce use the flextime they are allowed to manage work, personal, and family demands.
- Among dual-earner couples with children under 6 years old, 41% rely entirely or mostly on parental care for their children while they are working, and 64% of these parents have specifically arranged their schedules to make this possible.

Many employees need or would prefer more flexibility.

- 24% of women and 13% of men who are full-timers would prefer to be working part-time.

When Work Works is a project of Families and Work Institute sponsored by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation in partnership with The Center for Workforce Preparation an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and The Center for Emerging Futures. For more information, go to www.whenworkworks.org.

- 57% of older workers would also like to remain in the workforce, working part-time. This preference for reduced work hours is expected to become increasingly important as the workforce ages.
- Flexibility is also important to younger workers. Only 13% of women under 45 years old who don't have children but plan to have them someday think they will return to work as soon as possible (i.e., immediately following the period of postpartum disability), while 59% think they will take a few more weeks or months and 28% think they will stop working for a longer period of time (more than a period of months).
- These findings indicate that the trend toward longer leaves for parenting will continue. Although often described as "opting" or dropping out, data from the NSCW and from the Current Population Survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveal that many women are leaving work for a year or two following the birth of a child—but then returning. Our data indicate that men want longer leaves too. However, flex careers are not just for childbirth or adoption. Career entry and exit points, without jeopardy, are necessary to fulfill a variety of personal and family responsibilities throughout the life cycle.
- Flex-place—or working at home—has become important to many employees following 9/11. Among employees who do not work any regularly scheduled hours at home (89% of wage and salaried workers), 43% would like to be able to do so.

There are problems with flexibility as it currently exists.

- When asked how hard it is to take time off during the workday to address personal or family issues, 37% of wage and salaried employees say "somewhat hard" or "very hard."
- Overall, 39% of respondents report that employees who use flexible work options are less likely to get ahead in their jobs or careers.
- 61% of employees working in organizations that have part-time employees say that part-timers receive less compensation on a pro rata basis than full-timers doing the same jobs—*just because they work part-time*.
- Only 28% of low-wage employees are allowed to take a few days off to care for a sick child without losing pay, without using vacation days, and without having to make up some other reason for one's absence, compared with 58% of high-wage employees.
- 19% of part-time employees versus only 9% of full-time employees do not have health insurance coverage from any source.

About the *When Work Works* Initiative

When Work Works is a nationwide initiative to highlight the importance of workforce effectiveness and flexibility in the workplace and in business competitiveness. In addition to publishing the results of research around workplace effectiveness and flexibility, the project will:

- **Host eight community forums** where research results and business case studies are shared with the media, business and policy leaders. These communities are: Brooklyn, NY; Chicago, IL; Dallas, TX; Detroit, MI; Durham, NC; Long Beach, CA; Providence, RI; and Salt Lake City, UT.
- **Develop and launch the Sloan Awards for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility** in collaboration with the Alliance for Work-Life Progress, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Boston College Center for Work & Family, and The Conference Board's Work-Life Leadership Council to honor companies in the eight communities that have successfully used flexibility to meet both business and employee goals.

***When Work Works: A Project on Workplace Effectiveness and Workplace Flexibility* is part of a larger collaboration with Workplace Flexibility 2010 at Georgetown University Law Center and with funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.**