

Why do we hear so much about Flexibility™ in the organization of work and what does it mean? Do you think this is just a convenient post industrial ideology for employers or does it offer much to employees as well? Discuss.

44744144004

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Introduction:

Flexibility is a growing concept and many employers have already adopted flexible working arrangements because they see them as making good business sense. For employees, the opportunity to work flexibly can help them strike a better balance between their paid work and other responsibilities. Flexible working arrangements benefit everyone- employers, employees and their families (Department of Labor).

Flexibility is a way to identify that how the work should be done and when it should be completed and how the careers of employees get organized. It is a vital component to overall workplace efficiency. Companies use it as a tool for improving recruitment and retention, for managing workload, and for responding to employee diversity. Research shows that flexibility can also improve employee engagement and job satisfaction and reduce stress. Flexibility is a management tool that can help get the job done, not an employee perk or accommodation and it works best when the work unit and customers are involved. Research from Families and Work Institute's 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW) demonstrates that a critical element of workplace effectiveness is flexibility (Friedman).

Flexible working arrangements:

Various types of working arrangements are designed to give flexibility to both employees and employers in the number of working hours (Hogarth, Hasluck & Pierre 2000). Some of them are:

Traditional flextime allows employees to select their starting and quitting times within a range of hours surrounding core-operating hours (Friedman). **Daily flextime** allows employees to select their starting and quitting times within a range of hours, typically surrounding core-operating hours, on a daily basis (Friedman). **Part-time work** means working part days, five days per week or working full days, but fewer than five days per week. **Job sharing** is when two employees share one full-time job with its pro-rated salary and benefits are also a form of part-time work (Friedman).

Part-year work means working reduced hours on an annual basis, rather than a daily or weekly basis—for example, working full-time during the school year and then taking a block of time off during the summer (Friedman). **Time off during the workday to address personal and family issues** includes time off for expected issues (a parent-teacher conference) or unexpected issues

(waiting for a plumber to fix a broken pipe) etc (Friedman). **Time off for personal illness** allows employees paid time off when they are ill. **Paid time off to care for children** involves being allowed to take a few days off to care for a sick child without losing pay or without having to make up some other reason for one's absence (Friedman). **Parental Leave** is planned time off for mothers and fathers for the birth, adoption, or care of a foster child (Friedman). **Working from home** happens when people work from their home on a regular or occasional basis when the need for work arises. Due to increased demands of job and to get more work done, most of the companies allow their employees to work from home (Hogarth, Hasluck & Pierre 2000, p.129).

Social sciences:

Social science is the study of human society and of individual relationships that are prevailing in that society. This field includes study of sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, political science, and history. It is a discipline that deals with the socio-cultural aspects of human behavior. Psychology is the branch of social science which involves study of behavior and mental processes. It refers to the application of such knowledge to various spheres of human activity, including problems of individuals' daily lives and the treatment of mental illness. Sociology is also a branch of social sciences which deals with the systematic study of society and human social actions. Issue of flexibility basically comes under sociology as it talks about human problems and actions (Answers.com).

Pre-industrialization:

In the pre-industrial economy, there was more focus on human labor and everyone was assigned with the tasks that they need to complete on time and there was no concept of flexibility given to the employees in working environment (Lascette, M 2010).

Post-industrialism:

A post-industrial economy refers to a period of growth within an industrialized economy in which there is less importance for manufacturing and more for services, information, innovation and research (Wikipedia 2009).

There are few characteristics of post-industrial economy which includes transition from production of goods to the provision of services, knowledge becomes valued form of capital, innovation becomes pre-dominant engine for economic growth and behavioral sciences and technologies are developed. Due to globalization and automation, the value for blue collar, unionized work and manual work declines and the value for professional workers like scientists and IT professionals increases (Bell, D).

In the post industrial era, to build new and more productive work model it is important to take some points into consideration. Now-a-days, social employees look for mentors and not boss and empowerment is necessary to manage business problems. There is freedom to choose any hardware which suits individual's work style like mobiles and laptops etc and continuous access to social web is becoming crucial. There are clear business objectives which are supported by a flexible strategy therefore; employees strive for more flexibility at work place. Though in post-industrial era, the working style has changed and more flexibility is being offered to employees but it is merely a phenomenon for employers and it solely depends on their wish (Lascette, M 2010).

Why is flexibility important to businesses and organizations?

In post-industrial economy, more focus is being on employees and to give them flexible working conditions. To attract talented people for the organization is very complicated procedure as recruitment is costly therefore; organizations pay more for strategies to retain employees and try to give them flexible working conditions where they could keep balance between their work life and personal commitments (Friedman).

Turnover is expensive especially in this labor market. The Saratoga Institute found that it costs 150 to 200 percent of an exempt person's yearly salary to replace him compared that to a study by Families and Work Institute that found that allowing an employee one-year parental leave

costs 32 percent of a year's salary. In a 1998 Watson Wyatt survey of 614 companies, flexibility was ranked by half of the companies as their most effective retention tool, better than above-market salaries, stock options or training (Friedman).

To raise morale and job satisfaction, there are clear links between job satisfaction and turnover. A Sears study has linked employee satisfaction with customer retention. Their work with the University of Michigan Business School found that if employee satisfaction were to improve by five points, there would be a predictable improvement in customer satisfaction of two points, and revenues would grow by 1.6 percent. In one of the study, it was found that instead of illness and family issues are now the most often cited reason for taking time off. Other non-sickness reasons cited are stress and personal demands. Employees now-a-days give more importance to their personal demands and therefore; gives more significance to it (Friedman).

DuPont study concluded that workers who used their work-life and flexibility programs were more committed and less "burned out" than those who did not use any of the programs. All forms of stress have been found to lead to other problems that affect productivity and are potentially costly to business. Employees who feel burned out tend to have less commitment and focus or may leave the company (Friedman).

Are flexible working arrangements being provided to the employees?

In post industrial economy, there is more focus on employees and to provide them with flexible working environment so that they are able to manage both work and family requirements at the same time. In the real world, it is a mere concept rather than a reality. In the competing world today, more and more emphasis is being put on work and less on employees' flexibility because for the organizations, work places more importance and flexibility of employees is secondary. The flexibility is always initiated by the employees themselves when they need it and is not maintained by employers. When employees need flexible time to meet their family requirements, they need to take permission from their supervisors and it solely depends on their approval to provide it. Hence it is employers' last say whether the employee should be given flexible working hours or not though it is employee's right to demand it (Hirschhom, L 1988).

Less provision of flexibility at work place:

After the industrial revolution, employees at workplace should be given flexibility in every sphere of their personal life and work and when they are not provided with the flexible working environment, they may be exposed to work-life conflict which includes increase in stress level (Exhaustion, depression and anxiety) and increase in absenteeism rate, job and life dissatisfaction, low commitment levels, health problems, recruitment and retention troubles and turnover intentions (Noor & Maad 2008, p. 93).

Kavanagh, Alves, Hsieh, Huang & Su (Noor & Maad 2008, p. 93) stated that stress is defined as a non-specific response of the body to a stimulus or event. In English, stress is defined as the pressure or anguish resulting from difficult situations. It refers to the employees who are unable to adjust to work and hence are engaged in some organic and mental reaction. Thaden (Noor & Maad 2008, p. 93) found that work load increases due to large duties, insufficient staffing, and additional work handed down by management, workers became more stressed and therefore quit, especially during critical incidents. Duke (Durham 2007, p.31) explained found approval and disapproval of challenges, the role offered to the understanding and the issue related to the disappointment with not being able to complete tasks was a reason of exhaustion. Giga & Hoel (2003) & Sheridan & Abelson (1983) have related stress with reduced worker and organizational performance. A survey conducted by Work Life Balance Centre and Coventry University found that the increase in non-attendance matched with the rise in the number of people feeling stressed at work, with 58% of the days lost being recognized to stress-related issues. The survey also found that 62% of employees felt that their load of work has increased in the last year while almost a third felt 'out of control' in their jobs. One of the spokesman said that the survey showed there has been an increase in extra hours being worked, and a greater proportion of people reporting problems with getting a work/life balance (Baker 2009).

Job commitment and satisfaction decreases with increase in job stress. Research study conducted by Nelson (1999) concluded that though dissatisfaction at job and stress are directly related to each other, it is difficult to find a casual correlation ship among both. Nadeem & Abbas (2009, p.72) further concluded that the load at work place is the major forecaster of disagreement at work and there is a direct correlation existing among work load and dissatisfaction at work.

Managers facing more conflicts and disagreement at work are more likely to be absent for the number of days per year and are found to be less committed to work and organization, and less satisfied and intend to leave their jobs (Todd 2004, p.9).

The result that extensive hours and exhaustion put on the manager's output enhances the risk of accidents. Research proved a multiplying effect of the risk of accidents after the eight hour of job. Moreover, exhaustion-related injury is similar to the impacts of reasonable alcohol intoxication (Dawson et al. 2001). Policies related to the Work-life balance such as flexible working hours and time off allow managers enough time to take rest and minimize their exhaustion levels and lowers the risks of office accidents (Pherson 2007).

The most challenging situation faced by organization is to recruit and retain the quality staff. Due to shortage of skills across sectors, the demand for exceeds supply. Increasing dissatisfaction and stress among work force along with the demographic changes, the current demand for policies related to work life balance and flexibility of employees means that employers need to retain and attract employees they need. Research studies conducted by Pierce and Newstrom's (1982) on an insurance sector and Rothausen's (1994) on retail workers both revealed when the level of flexibility given by the organization decreased, the intentions among the employees for turnover increased (Wise & Bond 2003).

The most significant concern about the companies is that employee turnover is expensive especially in the lower level jobs where it is high in number. There are certain significant factors which play major role in employee turnover like salaries, allowances/benefits by the company, employee attendance and performance at job. Companies will be better able to manage employee turnover rate by offering certain employee benefits like balance between personal and professional life, performance benefits and incentives and other typical benefits like holidays or sick leave etc (Beam 2010). The turnover traditional factors, organizational commitment and work exhaustion were related to turnover intention (Ahuja et al. 2007). "Several behavioral consequences of reduced job involvement, weakened performance, and low job satisfaction would definitely lead to absenteeism and turnover" (Bhagat 1983).

Better performance of an organization:

Satisfied and happy employees who enjoy a flexible working environment are committed to the organization personally and consider the company's goals as his/her own goal. They deliver superior quality service to customers who are satisfied and loyal and hence generate more sales. Hence organization's flexible strategies are more likely to be beneficial in short run plan. (Papaconstantinou, 1993) and those who enjoy flexible policies enjoy higher rate of share holder revenue.

Conclusion:

Post-industrial economy comprises of services, information, research and innovation industry where employees should be given flexibility in every corner of work. Sociology also focus on solving problems that human beings face while maintaining a balance between their work and family commitments. This is basically a chain where all these variables are connected with each other. If organization provides flexibility to their employees, it will lead to more involvement of the employees at workplace and hence positive output. But if the organization is not able to provide flexible environment to the employees, there are chances that they get stressed out and get exhausted which on the other hand may lead to less involvement in work and more absents as many health issues could arise and at last it leads to turnover intentions (Beam 2010). Organizations today are placing more burdens on employees as for as work is concerned and that is the reason, they are not able to get flexible time for their personal commitments which results in low involvement and in the end organization suffers(Duxbury, Higgins & Johnson 1999).In today's challenging environment, organizations are competing with each other on every possible matter hence the work load and pressures is continuously been increased on the employees which on the other hand decrease their flexibility. Organizations are bound to get work done from their employees and due to competing nature of work; employees get suffered and are not provided with flexible working times. It does not only affect their health but they also lose their morale as they are less involved in work which in the end results in the decreased performance of an organization(Noor & Maad 2008, p. 93).

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