

## **Workplace Flexibility: Integrating Employer and Employee Perspectives to Close the Research-Practice Implementation Gap**

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Workplace flexibility research has had mixed results, and varied consequences for employees and employers. Workplace flexibility is defined as a formal or informal agreement between an employer and employee to provide individual job control over flexibility in timing, location, amount, or continuity in concert with nonwork needs. Integrating organizational and individual perspectives, this chapter unpacks the mixed consequences of workplace flexibility taking into account that each type can be understood from varying employment relationship vantages, outcomes and implementation challenges. The chapter concludes by examining multiple stakeholder roles to enhance future research and practice linkages.

**Keywords:** Workplace Flexibility, Flexible Work Arrangements, Flextime, Flexible Scheduling, Telework

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## **Introduction**

“I truly appreciate having the ability to work from home and the flexibility to change the days each week in order to meet the demands of work and family life. I am better able to focus on work and be a better employee when my mind is not distracted by competing needs. Through the use of instant messaging, email, and online presentation tools, I am able to interact with both staff and clients alike from virtually anywhere” (Northern Trust Manager quoted in Kossek, Hammer, Thompson & Burke, 2014: 7).

“Yahoo says that killing working from home is turning out perfectly... After receiving tons of heat for taking away workers’ remote privileges Yahoo now says that things are working just as planned: engagement and productivity are up” (Fast Company, 2013: 1).

Workplace flexibility is rising as a formal policy and informal work practice for both work-life and business purposes. The 2014 National Study of Employers found that more than four-fifths (81%) of U.S. employers allowed at least some employees to change the times they start/stop work and 67% allowed at least some employees to occasionally work from home (Matos & Galinsky, 2014). Despite the growing interest in workplace flexibility to give employees more control over where and when they work to help them manage work, family and other nonwork roles, employees and employers often have mixed experiences with these practices. There is a lot of variation across organizations with how workplace flexibility is implemented and viewed. One challenge is that formal policies and practices often exist, which can be good public relations for the company, but are not necessarily spread across the organization. A recent U.S. survey reports that (SHRM Strategic Benefits, 2015) when flexible work arrangements are offered, less than half of employees have access to them. Further, employee and employer perspectives on these policies can vary within and across firms. In some

organizations, as in the opening example, teleworking – a growing form of workplace flexibility is seen as both an employer business tool and an employee work-life support. Yet as the Yahoo example shows, some employers have recently pulled back on their availability of flexibility policies that give employees discretion over where and when they work due to fears that employee-controlled flexibility will get in the way of productivity and teamwork.

Research reviews on flexibility also point to the mixed effects of these initiatives (Kossek & Michel, 2011). Reviews show variable effect sizes depending on many factors: 1) the *type* of flexibility (telework, flextime, part time or leaves), 2) the *source and nature of support* (formal organizational policy (Kossek, 2005), informal supervisor support (Hammer, Kossek, Bodner & Crain, 2013), work design characteristics such as job autonomy (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999; Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006)), 3) the *outcomes* studied (work-family conflict, burnout, intent to turnover) and 4) *for whom* (employee, employer, manager, family) (Byron, 2005; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kelly et al., 2008; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Kossek et al., 2011; Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, Shockley, 2013). The mixed nature and lack of specificity in these findings make it difficult to predict whether a particular type and source of flexibility will affect a specific outcome, the conditions under which it is likely to have an impact, and the mechanisms that explain when and why flexibility matters (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2013).

Given equivocal results and the persistent gap between the positive rhetoric surrounding workplace flexibility compared to the challenges in translating research to practice reported by some employers, this chapter integrates employer and employee views to close the research-practice gap. A main tenet of this chapter is that it is critical to take a more nuanced view of the mixed effects of different types of flexibility, noting different stakeholder and theoretical perspectives, particularly clarifying managerial, employee and organizational roles.

This chapter begins with a discussion of trends making workplace flexibility increasingly important for an effective workplace and society. This is followed by a general definition of workplace flexibility and balanced themes when it is viewed as an employment relations inducement. Next, different types of flexibility and varied consequences across theoretical perspectives and employee and employer views are reviewed. To address the implementation gap, the chapter closes with a discussion of multiple stakeholder roles.

### **Why Workplace Flexibility is Important to Societies**

Trends from around the globe regarding the changing nature of work and the workforce suggest that effective workplace flexibility implementation to support work-life demands is critical for organizational effectiveness. Specifically, effective implementation means employees feel that their work-life needs are supported via employee initiated job flexibility practices and that employers perceive that organizational goals are served via these practices and policies.

National studies (Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2012) show that nearly all employee demographic groups report increasing difficulty managing work and life responsibilities, creating a critical need for organizations to implement workplace flexibility to give employees more control over where, when and how long they work (Kossek, et al., 2014). Scholars argue that increased employer and public policy support of access and use of flexibility policies and workplace practices could lead to greater gender equality, less work-life stress and greater societal well-being (Fuwa, 2004). In response, some organizations have become more flexible in the time, timing, and location of employees' work arrangements to serve a dual agenda - not only focusing on changing temporal conditions of work as a work-life lens targets, but also redesigning work to better match a changing labor force to foster gender equity (Bailyn, 2011). Offered by employers for work-life and performance reasons, flexible arrangements such as

flextime, telework, reduced load, and compressed work weeks, are employer tools to attract, retain, and motivate talent and support employees' management of work-home responsibilities (Kossek et al, 2014). Growing support for work-life flexibility has also been shown by the federal government's recent initiatives in the U.S. to increase government agencies use of telework (Telework Enhancement Act of 2010) and the 2014 White House Summit on Working Families (<http://workingfamiliesummit.org/>)

Workplace flexibility not only helps companies adapt to the changing nature of the workforce, but also update workforce work time expectations and work processes to better align *when* people work with *customers'* growing 24-7 demand for labor. To adapt to the changing marketplace and global integration of work systems jobs require availability during more work hours throughout the day, from early morning to late at night (Kossek, 2015). These business trends make workplace flexibility an economic imperative to support work-life, gender equity and economic growth.

### **What is Workplace Flexibility?**

Some scholars refer to flexibility as “work options that permit flexibility in terms of ‘where’ work is completed (often referred to as telecommuting or flexplace) and/or ‘when’ work is completed (often referred to as flextime or scheduling flexibility)” (Allen et al., 2013, p 345). However, other researchers note that flexibility is broader than choice over the time or place of work, extending it to employee choices in managing breaks in one's career, amount of time off from work, and even an organizational culture of flexibility (Berg, Kossek, Misra & Belman, 2014). This range of views and concept drift on what workplace flexibility is may be partly because the level of analysis perspective taken on workplace flexibility varies in the literature. As one review (Hill, Grzywacz, Allen, Blanchard, Matz-Costac, Shulkin, & Pitt-Catsoupes,

2008) notes, some researchers take an *organizational perspective*, focusing on how organizations adapt processes and features to align with changes in their external competitive environments, with concerns for workers a tangential focus. A second perspective is at the individual level labeled a “*worker perspective*,” focusing on individual agency” in the structure and culture of work, namely the degree employees have “choice over where, when and for how long work is conducted in order to allow employees the ability to control how these aspects of their job design interface with their nonwork lives” (Hill et al, 2008: 149).

### **An Employment Relationship Approach**

We argue that workplace flexibility definitions and studies 1) should examine how it is part of the employment relationship between individuals and employers with implications for job control, 2) faces an implementation gap, and 3) can have good and bad consequences for parties.

**Flexibility as an employer inducement for employee contributions.** We integrate levels and stakeholder perspectives to incorporate an employment-organizational relationship view (E- O-R) on workplace flexibility. An E-O-R perspective examines the contributions it expects from employees and the specific contributions it offers employees as inducements for these contributions (Tsui, Pearce, Porter & Tripoli, 2008). Drawing on this perspective, we assume that formal workplace flexibility policies and practices are organizational inducements for employee contributions at work that reflect a social exchange between employer and employee as part of the employment relationship (Kossek & Ruderman, 2012).

Workplace flexibility refers to a workplace arrangement, practice or prevailing job characteristic in which employees have some degree of choice to control job flexibility over when, where, or how they conduct their work for work-life reasons (Kossek, et al, 2014; Kossek & Michel, 2011). Employee choice in use of workplace flexibility is a necessary but insufficient

condition for flexibility use to lead to positive outcomes for the employee. We assume that when the timing, scheduling, and/or amount of work are forced on an employee, the individual is unlikely to experience well-being or work-life fit. Effective flexibility policies are more likely to be sustainable in organizations if they are implemented in ways that meet both employees' work-life needs and employers' productivity demands (Kossek & Ruderman, 2012).

Empowering an employee to control their working conditions to support their work-life needs, is an example of the growing trend in discretionary human resources practices and policies in which their use is left up to employee volition. Our conceptualization of workplace flexibility also draws on the definitions of job flexibility control (Kossek et al., 2006) and work life voice (Berg et al, 2014) where flexibility is seen as giving employees some say over how their jobs are carried out. This approach assumes that for workplace flexibility use to lead to positive work-life outcomes, an individual must not only have access or use of formal policies and practices allowed by employers, but they must also experience the workplace flexibility as providing control over job flexibility in terms of the timing, location, amount or continuity of work. Before elaborating on the different types of workplace flexibility, it is important to first generally discuss a persistent implementation gap and variation in employer and employee perspectives that is related to these issues of control.

**The workplace flexibility implementation gap.** Although workplace flexibility is growing in some firms and many scholars tout the benefits of flexibility policies, there is often an implementation gap, where workers and employers are dissatisfied with workplace flexibility experiences and outcomes (Ryan & Kossek, 2008). We define the implementation gap as a gap between the stated goals and objectives of the workplace flexibility policy stated on paper and/or in work-life theory compared to how flexibility is actually experienced in practice. One reason

for the implementation gap is there is often confusion regarding how to successfully implement and maintain workplace flexibility (SHRM, 2010). Managers are often unsure how to implement flexible policies and practices in their organization, often perceiving that they will have a harder time supervising, communicating, and managing team performance (Van Dyne, Kossek & Lobel, 2007). They also may make attributions regarding policy use that may have adverse impact on employees. For example, one study found that managers may attribute work-life policy use as signaling higher work-family conflict for women, but not for men (Leslie. Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012). Correspondingly, career-oriented employees may be afraid of using these policies, fearing a stigma for working flexibly and having less face time. Policy users sometimes fear career backlash or worse yet job loss from a flexibility stigma (Williams, 2013) for not appearing that work is a paramount priority. Equity issues occur between employee groups, as some policies such as telework and flextime may be available for some jobs (e.g., professionals) but not others (e.g., lower level clerical or hourly workers) (Kossek, 2005). At the end of this chapter we provide diagnostic questions for closing the implementation gap.

### **Differential flexibility meanings and stakeholder valence: Good and bad flex.**

Another key challenge in defining, studying and implementing workplace flexibility is that it can mean different things and have different valence depending on the type of flexibility used. While researchers often assume that work-life flexibility is positive, they have under-discussed the notion that employers may support workplace flexibility, not necessarily for work-life reasons, but as a workforce management tool to align the demand for labor with employer interests. Employers tend to support workplace flexibility when the employer has the power to control workplace flexibility use and access. For example, one study found that whether managers are likely to support workplace flexibility practices to reduce and customize workloads depends on if



the employees are the top performers; willing to be “flexible to change how they use flexibility to meet fluctuations in employer demands—such as working longer hours or on different days of availability—that is to be “flexible on flexibility”; and only if policy use was restricted to certain jobs that were “noncore” (Kossek, Ollier- Malaterre, Lee, Pichler, Hall, in press). Kossek et al. found that what jobs were seen as noncore was fluid in social construction. Employees thought more job tasks could be done using flexibility than did their managers and employers. In contrast, employers were more likely to support work-life flexibility as a contingent reward or as a quid pro quo- inducement offered, if employees were willing to expand work hours to work overtime or at home to meet employer needs. Employers saw “good” workplace flexibility as a way to obtain just in time labor, a contingent workforce or as a means for labor cost reduction. Yet these are all examples of workplace flexibility that workers may see as “Bad flexibility” – in the social exchange of contributions for flexibility inducements.

In sum, the word “flexibility” means different things to different stakeholder groups, an issue rarely systematically captured in the literature. Employees, managers, clients, and coworkers may each have different conceptualizations as well as unique expectations concerning workplace flexibility, which can shift worker-employer power dynamics to transform the workplace as a contested terrain. Flexible work arrangements can either be viewed as bureaucratic structures that enhance employer control over the worker or true sources of empowerment to benefit the workers work-life needs. These meanings shape how workplace flexibility practices are implemented and experienced. Yet the research surrounding workplace flexibility often takes the perspective of one group or another, sometimes overlooking the holistic implications of implementing flexibility initiatives.

### **General Employer and Employee Workplace Flexibility Outcomes**

## **Employee Outcomes**

Some reviews suggest that employees are attracted to and remain with organizations offering workplace flexibility because of the increased control over work tasks and schedules, which allows employees to more easily manage nonwork demands around work tasks (Kossek & Michel, 2011). Correspondingly, many positive employee outcomes have been linked to workplace flexibility, including decreased stress and improvements in health, well-being, and work interference with family, which have corresponding impacts on rates of burnout, turnover intentions, and overall health care costs (Amstad et al., 2011; Kossek & Michel, 2011).

### **General Employer outcomes**

Workplace flexibility can be used to strategically enhance organizational objectives (Kossek & Michel, 2011). Flexible work arrangements can allow employers to offer more accessibility to clients by expanding the hours and/or locations available. One of the most frequently cited benefits of workplace flexibility is the ability to attract and retain a qualified and productive workforce (Thompson, Payne, & Taylor, in press). Because workplace flexibility enables employees to manage work demands around nonwork demands (both short term and ongoing), organizations are able to recruit employees who value these practices as well as retain valuable organizational members who experience life changes.

By offering workplace flexibility, organizations can distinguish themselves in a competitive market as an “employer of choice” (Kossek et al., 2014). Organizations that offer the option to work away from the central work site can attract the most qualified candidates for vacancies, regardless of the location of the employer. Similarly, an organization can retain a talented full-time employee by allowing him/her to reduce the number of hours by working part

time or job-sharing. By utilizing the form of workplace flexibility that works best for the organization, employers are able to attract and retain top talent.

Another important way organizations benefit from offering workplace flexibility programs is in the savings they experience from improved productivity and effort as well as reduced accidents and turnover (Kossek & Michel, 2011). Employees who are less distracted by nonwork demands (e.g., taking a sick child to the doctor) are better able to focus on work tasks while at work, thereby improving productivity and reducing counterproductive outcomes (e.g., safety hazards, faulty work). Finally, employees are less likely to miss work or quit due to an inability to manage nonwork obligations if they have the ability to meet the demands as they occur, rather than use time off (or skip work altogether).

Offering flexible work arrangements can be symbolic of the potential nonwork support organizations may be likely to provide employees. Employees can interpret information about an organization that is conveyed through observable characteristics or signals (Spence, 1973). Researchers have argued that offering workplace flexibility policies indicates to potential employees that organizations value them and are supportive of their nonwork demands (Grover & Crooker, 1995). Applicants identify information and form opinions about an organization through the recruitment process, guiding their expectations of the organization and whether they would be likely to accept an employment offer (Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Thompson et al., in press). In other words, organizations that offer flexibility can make themselves more attractive by signaling their support of employees' nonwork roles through policies that act as symbols of workplace social support (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner & Hammer 2011).

Below we 1) review types of flexibility with examples and mixed consequences from employer

and employee perspectives, and (2) identify relevant theories and how they relate to individual and organizational goals (e.g., reduce work-family conflict, improve productivity).

## **Types of Workplace Flexibility**

### **Overview**

There are four primary types of workplace flexibility: (1) flexibility in scheduling; (2) flexibility in place/location; (3) flexibility in amount of work/workload and hours; and (4) flexibility in leave periods and career continuity (Kossek et al., 2011). For completeness we introduce all four types, but focus discussion on the first three types (See Table 1). Workplace flexibility in continuity is beyond the scope of this chapter. While paid and unpaid leaves are important for well-being, they do not necessarily address work processes that give employees day-to-day control. The first three types offer employees regular or frequent control over their work tasks (i.e., time, space, amount), and can be implemented in conjunction with one another.

Flexibility in time allows full-time employees to choose to some extent how their total weekly work hours are allocated relative to a traditional work schedule. Examples include flextime (with a core band of time around which employees are expected to work an expected number of hours), compressed workweeks (e.g., 9/80 schedule in which 80 hours are worked over 9 days, rather than 10), flexible shifts, and part-year/seasonal work (Baltes et al., 1999; Kossek & Michel, 2011).

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Insert Table 1 about here.

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Flexibility in location, or “flexplace,” permits employees to choose where they conduct their work relative to the main work site. This allows employees to work away from the main work site, supported by electronic resources, for some or all of their work-schedule (Gajendran

& Harrison, 2007). Examples include telework, remote work, and hoteling (employers assigning office space on an as-needed basis to employees working offsite).

Flexibility in amount of work offers employees the ability to alter the amount of work they conduct, which includes policies such as part-time work, reduced-load, and job-sharing (Kossek & Michel, 2011). These forms of workplace flexibility allow employees to modify their workload or hours in order to meet nonwork obligations. This lets employees retain their employment (and prorated benefits) so that they can still participate in and manage nonwork responsibilities. Examples of situations that might require flexibility in an employee's amount of work include the employee's role as parent, student, caregiver, military personnel, and volunteer.

### **Workplace Flexibility across Types**

An under-examined issue in the literature is that workplace flexibility outcomes vary across types and these consequences, as shown in Table 1 may vary for different types of jobs and from employer and employee views. Below we briefly give examples of subforms under each type of flexibility that was defined at the beginning of this section, and provide an illustrative benefit or drawback from employer or employee perspectives. We hope this format will spur future research to take a more nuanced approach of mixed perspectives and outcomes.

### **Examples of Flexibility in Time**

Policies and practices offering workplace flexibility in time typically keep weekly or biweekly or even daily hours the same but allow employees to have some control over work schedule. For example, under flextime, the weekly number of hours remain the same but employees have daily flexibility. Under other types such as compressed workweeks, employees might expand hours on some days and have several days a week off. Flexibility in time allows

employees to shift work hours to carry out both work and nonwork tasks. Employers also frequently benefit from these policies with increased availability for clients.

**Flextime.** Flextime schedules allow employees to alter the start and end times to traditional schedules typically around a core time, thereby working the same weekly or daily hours as those of other regular full-time employees (Baltes et al., 1999). Flextime schedules can be formally implemented for whole workgroups or informally at the discretion of the supervisor. These types of arrangements allow employees more daily discretion over when they perform their work tasks relative to nonwork demands, allowing them to better accommodate both.

*Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.* An employee benefit of flextime is that workers are able to better juggle personal demands with job demands while still receiving full time pay. A drawback is that employers may design flextime policies that are not very flexible. For example, some policies might be “stingy” and allow limited employee discretion over starting and stopping times, such as being able to shift these times only a half hour or so at the beginning or end of the day. Or an employee may only flex if they find back up. This constrained approach may not be very helpful for someone who has a long commute or needs time off to go to a major doctors’ or school appointment for example. Other flextime policies may be more generous, such as allowing employees to start or stop any time and work any 8 or 9 hour band or even take a break and resume work in a split shift. One challenge of flextime for employers is ensuring coordination of coverage so that not everyone is gone at the same time. A benefit for employers is that the research consistently shows that workers with flextime have higher job satisfaction, which leads to lower turnover from a workplace flexibility policy.

**Compressed workweeks.** Compressed workweeks condense a full-time work schedule and responsibilities into fewer than five days per week or fewer than 10 days in two weeks

(Baltes et al., 1999). This is often described as a 9/80 schedule. These types of arrangements offer employees more availability for nonwork demands during what is traditionally work time (i.e., they have more nonwork days than a traditional schedule). This can allow employees to take care of nonwork demands that they may not be able to attend to on weekends (e.g., doctor appointments, home repair work). Organizations may find it cost effective to utilize compressed workweeks as they can save on electricity and other operating costs if employees are not at the main work site an additional day each week (but still maintain productivity).

As an example, law enforcement officers typically work a traditional 40-hour work week of five days of 8-hour shifts, followed by two days off. An increasing number of agencies have begun using compressed workweek schedules to improve effectiveness where officers work four 10-hour shifts per week or three 12-hour shifts. In a recent randomized experiment of compressed work week schedules in law enforcement, the Police Foundation (2014) found advantages of 10-hour shifts such as less overtime work and increased sleep per night for officers, compared to the traditional 8-hour shifts.

*Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.* Compressed work weeks can have drawbacks for employees and employers. One study found disadvantages related to the 12-hour shifts, such as reduced alertness on the job compared to the traditional schedule (Police Foundation, 2014). This could increase accidents, or errors at work. Compressed work weeks do allow employees to have time to participate in nonwork roles on their days off, such as attend school, volunteer at a child's school, and/or have days off to focus on home or personal life.

Yet another shortcoming of compressed workweeks is that they might not offer employees a great deal of control over their nonwork tasks (Golden, 2010). In other words, if employees do not have choice over when they have increased availability to meet nonwork

demands, improvements in health and work-life fit are less likely. Specifically, when unexpected nonwork demands arise, employees working compressed work schedules may be less likely to be able to meet these demands than those working a traditional schedule (compared to a flextime schedule that allows some daily choice in when employees conduct their work tasks). Therefore, some employees may be less likely to perceive compressed workweeks as truly flexible or offering the ability to control their nonwork demands.

**Flexible shiftwork.** Flexible shiftwork allows employees to work outside traditional work hours, often at night. Flexible shifts, when implemented effectively, can enable organizations to become more 24/7, expanding worker availability for client demands and thereby potentially increasing productivity (e.g., Smith, Folkard, Tucker, & Evans, 2010). Similarly, offering flexible shifts can allow organizations to conduct operations during nontraditional hours or motivate employees to work during peak demands. For example, Macys' offers employees a system called "My Schedule Plus" where workers can bid on hours and get more hours if they work schedules during peak customer seasons like the Christmas holidays.

*Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.* One benefit of flexible shifts is they offer flexibility to hourly workers who sometimes don't have a lot of autonomy in scheduling built into their jobs. They also can support workers working in 24-7 systems such as nursing homes or a factory without changing work processes that are continuous. Here the work systems remain the same, but the workers swap shifts fitting into existing work processes. Another benefit is that the total pay could be the same or a worker could ramp up or ramp down and trade hours without being penalized. A drawback for employers is that teams may have lower productivity if a worker on a new shift is unfamiliar with how the team works together. Cross-training and staffing buffers of an extra employee might be useful to enable flexible shifts



to move a worker across different functions to fill gaps. From a worker perspective, flexible shifts could hurt sleep patterns if one switches from days to nights.

### **Flexibility in Location**

One of the primary reasons employees seek flexibility in location is because it allows employees to work and/or live away from the central work site. This offers employees the ability to integrate their work and nonwork domains, and therefore more quickly and easily transition between roles (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kossek et al., 2006). Having employees who are geographically distant from the main work site may be advantageous for clients' needs as well as organizations may benefit from having customer service available for remote clients.

Dell uses virtual call centers to allow full-time employees to work from home. After conducting benchmark assessments, Dell executed a 6-month pilot program, launching additional call centers at home sites across North America. By expanding slowly, the company was able to capitalize on the program, taking advantage of pockets of labor sources and retaining quality employees whose life changes would have otherwise forced them to leave. Benefits from this program include enhanced productivity and reduced facility and real estate costs (Boston College Center for Work & Family, 2007).

Flexplace policies differ as to how frequently and intensely employees use telework and work away from the central worksite, and the degree of contact and space they have at the central worksite/other employees. Employees may be able to work offsite frequently or on an as-needed basis or for only a day or two. Some of the most common forms of flexibility in location include: home-based telework, where employees work from home some or most of their work-week; neighborhood work centers, satellite offices, or telecenters, whereby multiple employees utilize a single location to perform the majority of their work but do not have space at the main worksite,

offering a traditional office environment at a location away from the main site. While telecenters or neighborhood centers allow someone to go to a corporate office nearest them and telework, one hundred percent remote work includes an employee who might work out of their home all of the time. This allows these kind of remote workers to conduct work full-time from great distances away from the central worksite, or typically at the client's location such as a tax auditor reviewing a company's books or a consultant. Hoteling refers to the idea that an employee gives up their formal work desk but shares a desk with workers when they come in.

*Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.* One benefit of flexplace for employees is that it reduces commute time and workers can save on costs of work clothes, transportation, and sometimes meals. A drawback is that employees are often responsible for maintaining their home office equipment and boundary control. Overwork can be a problem as workers often work long hours substituting commute time for work time. A benefit for employers is that most teleworkers do work longer hours than non-telworkers in the same jobs and are less likely to turnover. One presentation made at Purdue University by a VP at Northern Trust bank estimated that companies save \$7,000 in office costs by having employees give up a formal office for their employees in Chicago. A drawback for organizations is learning how to change cultures to measure productivity by output and not face time and creating a team culture.

### **Flexibility in Amount of Work**

Policies offering flexibility in amount of work allow employees to modify their workload relative to full-time demands and expectations of the job. Employees may choose to work fewer hours or a reduced load in order to accommodate nonwork demands (e.g., family, school) while maintaining employment. This form of flexibility is unique in that it does not inherently specify employees' requirements in time or location. Instead, it affords employees' greater periods of

nonwork time relative to work. While organizations may expect employees to specify the time/place they will work under these arrangements (i.e., Monday through Wednesday at the central work site), employees may have some degree of choice over their schedule, with the ability to choose when they perform their work tasks each week/month. This allows employees to attend to both planned and sometimes relatively unexpected nonwork tasks or events (e.g., attend an evening class, take a child to a doctor appointment) on a regular basis. Organizations benefit from offering these types of policies because they may be able to attract or retain talented employees who otherwise would not be able to meet the demands of the position. Similarly, organizations can allow the employees to focus on special or high profile projects in order to assure quality for important clients. Researchers have found that reduced workload employees may be able to pursue creative ways of customizing their work tasks, and therefore frequently receive pay increases, promotions, and formal recognition for their work (Kossek et al., in press).

Policies offering flexibility in amount of work present unique legal considerations. Because of the varying requirements across the United States and other countries, organizations must be cognizant of what is considered “full time” under employment laws and corresponding legal requirements before establishing policies that are flexible in the amount of work. For example, some jobs require a continuous work day and splitting shifts or shortening shifts may not be allowed. Or employees working less than full time in states that require payment for daily overtime for certain jobs, may be entitled to overtime pay when working more than eight hours in a single day, even if other days were much shorter.

**Professional part-time and reduced-load work.** Part-time work involves the ability to alter one’s schedule relative to a full-time schedule (e.g., three-day workweeks, 24 hour workweeks). One concern for these types of jobs is that employees who do not qualify for certain

benefits because they work too few hours may be forced to work two or more jobs which can lead to negative health and economic well-being outcomes. In addition, organizations may experience turnover for part-time positions if employees are not able to receive the amount of hours they need or expect routinely. Reduced-load work refers to when employees have decreased work tasks or responsibilities, which corresponds to a reduction in pay, relative to full-time employees (Lee, MacDermid, & Buck, 2000).

*Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.* One employer benefit of reduced load or part time work is that it prevents turnover for high talent who are becoming overloaded by working a 50 or 60 hour work week. Many professional jobs today do not specify the number of hours that is full time – expecting exempt workers to work anywhere from 40 to 50 to 60 or more hours a week without overtime pay. These ambiguous hours can burn out workers and companies have seen women and men chose to quit jobs that have long hours in ways that are seen incompatible with raising a family. A drawback for employers is that they must specify what a full time load is, something many companies with rising workloads find difficult to do. A drawback for employees is sometimes companies “forget” someone has opted to take a pay cut and reduce hours and yet they are still contacted during days off. Employees on these “mommy or daddy” tracks may be seen as less committed and have their career stall.

**Job-Sharing.** Job-sharing is an arrangement that allows multiple employees to share the responsibilities or demands of a single full-time job on a part-time basis. Similar to reduced-load work, this type of flexibility offers employees the ability to maintain employment while also accommodating nonwork demands or events. This type of arrangement can also be beneficial for organizations in that the entirety of the responsibilities for a full-time position may be kept intact

while retaining experienced employees. One of the primary challenges of job-sharing is the need for employees who share responsibilities to carefully coordinate their tasks.

*Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.* Job sharing is one form of reduced load work and as such it shares many of the same drawbacks and benefits. There are some additional challenges and benefits. One shared benefit for employers and employees is that it allows for long-term specialization to tailor a big job to strengths. For example, for a manager with a dozen direct reports, one job sharer could focus on the financial tasks and the other could focus on the marketing tasks. The span of control is decreased as say a manager supervising 12 employees in a full time job now each have 6 in a job share increasing the ability to focus on and develop individual subordinates. A drawback for employees is if one partner is seen as promotable and the other is not or if one partner turns over they must find a new partner to fit in the position. In addition, benefits costs must be prorated for employees.

### **Theories Underlying Workplace Flexibility: Linking Employment Perspectives & Types**

The most common prevailing theories underlying workplace flexibility included job control, work-family role conflict and boundary and border theories. They generally focus on the individual level of analysis and do not often differentiate the type of workplace flexibility studied. Below we briefly review each theory and suggest how future studies might integrate employee and organizational perspectives across types.

#### **Control theory**

The ability to control one's environment is recognized as an important mechanism in determining one's well-being (e.g., Ganster & Rosen, 2013). In particular, employee control over the work environment is critical in overcoming the negative outcomes associated with work-nonwork conflict. The job demands-job control model identifies job decision latitude as "the

working individual's potential control over his tasks and his conduct during the working day" (Karasek, 1979, p. 289-290). The model posits that the more control one has over his/her job demands, the better his/her well-being. Researchers have acknowledged the critical role that perceptions of control play in effectiveness of workplace flexibility policies (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kossek et al., 2006). Workplace flexibility can offer employees control over aspects of their job design (e.g., timing of work, location of work, amount of work); Fonner & Roloff, 2010; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kossek et al., in press).

**Integrating individual and organizational perspectives and control theory.** From an individual perspective, flexibility studies grounded in control theory would assess the degree employees perceive using workplace flexibility increases perceptions of employee control over distinct aspects of their work (scheduling, time, location), and how these perceptions positively relate to favorable employee outcomes on and off the job. From an organizational perspective, studies would address the degree workplace flexibility is viewed by an employer as an effective inducement to control the workforce and to increase employee contributions on the job. Such studies might also assess the effectiveness of different types of flexibility as a motivational tool to induce desired employer behaviors such as reduced absenteeism, and increased effort in formal job tasks and discretionary roles such as organizational citizenship behaviors.

### **Role conflict theory**

Roles refer to subjective expectations about the amount and type of behaviors expected of an individual within a particular domain (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991). Role conflict occurs when the demands from multiple roles are perceived as incompatible with one another (Cook et al., 1981). Most individuals occupy multiple roles (e.g., work, family, community), and therefore experience conflict when demands from one role are incompatible with another.

Providing workplace flexibility to employees can expand the ranges of time and the number of places employees can address work and nonwork demands, thus reducing the conflicts that may arise from competing role demands. Applying Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) classic article, workplace flexibility in theory enables workers to reduce several sources of work-family conflict. Time based conflict should be reduced through use of workplace flexibility as workers can restructure the timing, location or amount of work tasks to facilitate home tasks. Strain-based conflict can theoretically be reduced because users of workplace flexibility could feel less stress by using the resource of workplace flexibility.

**Integrating individual and organizational perspectives and conflict theory.** From an individual perspective, work-family conflict studies would assess the degree employees believe workplace flexibility is effective in reducing work-life conflicts. An organizational perspective would assess which workplace flexibility policies or practices employers see as most effective in reducing work life conflicts for the workforce as whole as well as across different employee subgroups. Studies could also assess which types of workplace flexibility initiatives (workload, scheduling, location) are most effective in reducing work-life conflicts in the structure and organization of work for different types of workers. For example, while companies might offer telework, if workload is not reduced or if employees have little schedule control while at home to manage work-life conflicts, then the initiatives would not be very effective.

**Boundary and border theories.** Individuals create and maintain boundaries in order to organize and contextualize their environment. The extent role transitions occur depends upon a role's flexibility (malleability of temporal and spatial boundaries) and permeability (ability to be physically but not psychologically or behaviorally located in a role's domain) (Ashforth et al., 2000). Historically, employees agree to work a predetermined number of hours/days at a

specified location. These agreements create perceived boundaries (in time and place) around work, distinct from nonwork (Ashforth et al., 2000). Workplace flexibility policies and practices are frequently offered as boundary-spanning resources to facilitate an employee's ability to meet demands in the work domain in conjunction with those in the nonwork domain (Voyandoff, 2005). Workplace flexibility enables employees to perform work demands in synergy with the nonwork domain as well as transition between domains more quickly.

Similar to boundary theory, border theory argues that the contrasting purposes and cultures of the work and family domains can be described as two different countries, with different languages, behaviors, and customs (Clark, 2000). Borders have been used to describe the lines of demarcation between the work and family domains. Individuals cross these borders on a routine (typically daily) basis. The transition between the two domains can be relatively simple for some, whereas for others it can be a complicated process. Individuals who make daily crossings between the two domains are characterized as "border-crossers," transitioning quickly from one domain to another (Clark, 2000).

Workplace flexibility can allow individuals to more smoothly transition between domains, facilitating employees' ability to cross borders; or it could increase task switching or switching costs from moving back and forth and processes losses leading to job and family creep or negative spillover (Kossek & Lautsch, 2007). Workplace flexibility policies and practices enable more permeability between domains, allowing individuals to have the option to address demands within a specific domain as they arise in concert with values (Kossek & Lautsch, 2007).

**Integrating employee and organizational perspectives and boundary theories.** From an individual perspective, studies drawing on boundary theory would assess the degree employees believe workplace flexibility is effective in facilitating their ability to manage work



life boundaries to fit preferences for work and nonwork role integration or segmentation. An organizational perspective would assess which workplace flexibility policies employers see as facilitating work-life boundaries that serve the organizational interests, such as encouraging employees to expand work hours to meet employer and customer needs, while avoiding burnout.

**Summary.** While control, conflict and border/boundary theories are valuable, and they are not in conflict with an employment organizational perspective, organizational perspectives have been underutilized in workplace flexibility research. Future research and practice should build on the employment relationship perspective. Such an approach enables a discussion of the mixed consequences of workplace flexibility for multiple stakeholders, fostering a multi-level perspective to integrate the individual and organizational perspectives.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Overall this chapter contends that by unpacking workplace flexibility--taking into account that it can mean different things to individuals, managers, and organizations with varying antecedents, implementation levels, valence, and mixed outcomes across types-- the research to practice gap can be better bridged. Given that workplace flexibility can mean different things to employees and managers, and is not always associated with work-life issues, it is important for future studies to begin understand how organizational stakeholder groups systematically define workplace flexibility, its assumed meanings, goals, valences and desired outcomes. Studies need to measure the degree flexibility use is seen as positive by employees, and to what extent flexibility use is seen as positive by employers as way to capture the shared alignment in the climate for workplace flexibility implementation at the firm. Most current research only takes one perspective (e.g., employee outcomes, employer gains or challenges)

without considering the impact for and unintended effects for each stakeholder group and shift over the life course and employment relationship-issues for future research.

### **Multi-Theoretical Approaches**

Future research should assess the mixed consequences of different forms of workplace flexibility from employee and employer views and compare the different theoretical perspectives we examine in this chapter to identify a rich array of antecedents, outcomes and processes. For example, a control perspective would assess the way employment relations and power dynamics are shifted by workplace flexibility. These practices would be viewed as an empowerment tool from the employee view, and a workforce inducement from employer view to balance interests and needs of each party. Low power employees groups such as minimum wage workers may differentially view and benefit from workplace flexibility compared to higher powered professionals. A work-family role conflict perspective might examine how these policies buffer and protect employees from life stresses, and the organizational benefits of doing so for health care and safety outcomes, and productivity measures. The effectiveness of workplace flexibility from this perspective may be moderated by employees' level of dependent care demands and perceived levels of work-life stress. A boundary/border theory view would assess how workplace flexibility enables employees and employers to define the limits and puncturing of work and nonwork domains and negotiate norms to navigate the growing overlap between personal and professional life via workplace flexibility practices. Cross-cultural norms may come into play as societies vary in the degree to which being and doing are valued and the values placed on the allocation of energy to personal and professional achievement. Currently, most studies take one dominant perspective and employer or employee view.

### **Work-Life Bundles and Flexibility Combinations**

Future research should examine the isolated and cumulative effects of different flexibility forms. Organizations may offer multiple flexibility policies (flextime and job sharing) from which employees may choose as well as policies that include multiple types of flexibility (telework). For example, while telework policies are typically discussed as allowing choice over *where* employees work, teleworkers may also have some degree of discretion over *when* they conduct their work. A teleworker can quickly transition between roles, from a phone call with a client to supervising repair work at home within minutes, allowing greater amount of time devoted to both roles by facilitating role transitions. Organizations may not consider the full impact of offering a policy with multiple forms of discretion. Recognizing the distinction between types of flexibility is critical to implementing successful policies. Studies should examine the synergistic impact of offering/ using different forms together.

By considering how the combination of work-life policies and practices can lead to increases in organizational gains, researchers can begin to identify a more comprehensive framework of the work-life interface (Kossek & Friede, 2006). Such research might build on work life bundling research. Perry-Smith and Blum (2000) examined how work-family bundles promote value in firms through multifaceted policy adoption. The focus of work-life bundles is to assess the bottom-line gains from grouping HR policies that complement one another in a systematic approach to workplace flexibility (Kossek & Friede, 2006). Studies could compare the synergistic effects of bundling work-life policies to implementing policies individually.

**Closing.** Implementing flexibility requires an understanding of its mixed consequences for employer and employees. Table 2 specifies joint manager and employee roles to close the implementation gap. An employee- employer partnership and balanced approach is needed to make flexibility a positive experience for all parties.

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**Table 1: Benefits and Challenges of Various Types of Workplace**

<b>Types of Flexibility</b>	<b>Types of Policies/ Practices</b>	<b>Benefits</b>		<b>Challenges</b>	
		<b>Employee</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Employee</b>	<b>Organization</b>
<i>Time Schedules</i>	Flextime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased availability for demands during regular work hours</li> <li>Greater perceptions of control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced overtime</li> <li>Less absenteeism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May not be able to meet all nonwork responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Synchronizing employee schedules</li> <li>Aligning schedules with clients' needs</li> <li>Implementation costs</li> </ul>
	Compressed Workweeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased availability for demands during regular work hours as many employees schedule appointments scheduled during personal weekdays off</li> <li>More days "off" per period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less overhead costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not always "flexible" (degree of choice in day off)</li> <li>Longer work days can lead to burnout</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinating employee schedules</li> <li>Clients' needs</li> <li>Implementation costs</li> </ul>
	Flex Shiftwork/ workday schedules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be available during "traditional" work hours for other demands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can expand availability to clients</li> <li>Can increase hours of productivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fatigue</li> <li>Metabolic &amp; Cardiovascular Disorders</li> <li>Work-family Conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accidents &amp; Injuries</li> <li>Difficult to assign all shifts</li> </ul>
	Self-scheduled breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater control over schedule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees may be more productive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coworkers may want the same breaks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coverage needs still must be met</li> </ul>
	Part year/Seasonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees are able to work less during slower times of the year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizations are able to hire from a larger pool of candidates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working less than a full year may result in lower compensation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More paperwork because of hiring people every year or season</li> </ul>
	Weekend/ evening/ night work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees can better manage their non-work responsibilities, or work a second job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizations needing 24/7 coverage have a greater pool of candidates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dependent care may be more difficult to find in the evenings or nights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers who work during the days may not be available to supervise evening or night employees</li> </ul>

Types of Flexibility	Types of Policies/ Practices	Benefits		Challenges	
		Employee	Organization	Employee	Organization
<i>Place</i>	Telework; home based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can live farther from central work site</li> <li>• Reduces commute to/from work</li> <li>• Comfort/clothing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less overhead costs at central work site</li> <li>• Can attract/retain employees who live away from main work site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating with colleagues/supervisor</li> <li>• May not have flexibility in time</li> <li>• Pressure to be available during standard work hours (visibility/face time)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating communication</li> <li>• Not all work can be taken off site</li> <li>• Typically requires providing employee with technology</li> </ul>
	Remote work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can live great distance from central work site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enlarges pool of workers</li> <li>• Employees can be located closer to customers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating with colleagues/supervisor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating communication &amp; long-term goals</li> <li>• Typically requires providing employee with technology</li> </ul>
	Hoteling (when employees who partially telework share desks rather than have a reserved desk.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indirectly, the real estate cost savings benefits all employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduces office costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of isolation when removed from team members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be difficult to coordinate teams/foster commitment</li> </ul>
<i>Amount of Work</i>	Job sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower role overload</li> <li>• Less work-family conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can retain trained/quality employees who otherwise could not maintain workload</li> <li>• Reduced turnover costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role identification may be unclear</li> <li>• Each employee is dependent on the other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased expenses resulting from number of employees (e.g., benefits)</li> </ul>
	Reduced load or customized work/part time work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less work-family conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can retain trained/quality employees who otherwise could not maintain workload</li> <li>• Reduced turnover costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease in compensation</li> <li>• Need to be careful not to try to do full time work load in fewer hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More employees to manage and possibly higher overall benefits expenses</li> </ul>

Table 2  
Strategies and Roles for Implementing Whole-Systems Workplace Flexibility

<b>Managers</b>
Managers should implement flexible policies based on neutral or value-free reasons; all employees should have access to workplace flexibility.
Managers should establish communication expectations as well as identify clear performance goals.
Managers can demonstrate successful use of workplace flexibility for employees by taking part in flexibility policies/practices.
<b>Employees</b>
Employees should clearly establish how they will benefit from and use workplace flexibility, identifying how they will work with coworkers and their supervisor to maintain productivity.
Employees should communicate frequently with their manager in order to facilitate progress on performance goals.
Employees should strategically outline tasks and objectives to ensure they maintain progress while using workplace flexibility.
Employees should clearly establish how they will benefit from and use workplace flexibility, identifying how they will work with coworkers and their supervisor to maintain productivity.
<b>Organization</b>
Organizations should formalize and clarify flexibility policies/guidelines for all job types/employees. Identify how policies might differentially apply to different departments/jobs and modify accordingly.
Organizations should identify what tools and resources are necessary to facilitate successful flexible policies (e.g., computers for teleworkers, programs for scheduling, etc.).
Organizations should provide training for all parties involved, explaining each party's role and how they should coordinate with others (managers, employees, HR representatives).

Note. This table offers concrete solutions to help the multiple stakeholders overcome barriers and successfully implement workplace flexibility. Solutions are identified for managers, employees, and organizations. Each group should work together within their unique role to coordinate effective implementation of workplace flexibility.