

# The future of flextime: Transforming a perk into higher profits and productivity

by Craig Dexheimer

As America emerges from the worst recession in modern memory, smart organizations recognize that now is the time to take care of their most valued employees — those who have logged longer hours and taken on a much heavier workload to help their companies weather the turbulent economics of the past 18 months. In fact, a recent study by the Corporate Leadership Council (CLC) found that more than 60 percent of workers rank flexible schedules as the most important work-life benefit a company can provide. If that is the case, then now is the right time to make flextime an integral part of the corporate culture.

This may be easier said than done at organizations where flextime is viewed as a perk that reduces productivity and increases costs. According to the CLC, this notion should immediately be laid to rest. In a recent study measuring

work-life balance, the CLC found that employees who feel they have more control over their time work 21 percent harder than others. The research also showed that companies offering well-defined flextime programs — even if employees do not use them — achieve higher rates of employee loyalty and retention. This view debunks the perception that remote-work options, staggered work hours, reduced schedules and mini-sabbaticals are benefits that should be among the first targets of corporate belt-tightening. In fact, these perks represent hidden currency to the company and should be the last items considered for cutbacks.

## Right time to formalize flextime

It may seem counterintuitive, but tough times are the absolute best time to formalize flexible work schedules. Formalizing flextime has one unsung, but important, consequence: It removes the stigma of asking for time off. Knowing that there is some give in the workplace — not all take — goes a long way in building morale and improving performance.



For starters, smart companies should recognize that flexible work schedules may enable them to reduce operating costs, provide better customer service and manage talent and headcount. Accolades abound about the merits of flextime for both employee and employer:

- Improved job satisfaction, morale and productivity
- Enhanced success in recruiting and retaining A-team employees, especially the sought-after Gen Yers who heavily consider flexibility before accepting a job offer
- Increased employee energy and creativity
- Reduced absenteeism
- Less stress and burnout

In the current business environment, many executives initially say that flexibility is an unaffordable perk. But in a difficult economy, flexible work arrangements are a triple win — possibly allowing organizations to cut payroll costs without large-scale staff reductions, boosting morale and retaining top talent so that these organizations can quickly gear up for new business when the economy rebounds.

## Be flexible about flextime

Flexibility as a core business strategy is not without challenge. Rethinking the way work is done, how life is managed, how employees are evaluated and how corporate culture is maintained requires creative thinking and new approaches.

### These are a few popular flextime practices:

**Job sharing:** In this arrangement, two employees each work half time, constituting one full-time employee. For this to be successful, tasks, roles and responsibilities must be well-defined, closely coordinated and tracked to ensure optimal productivity and accountability.

**Staggered workdays:** This practice allows an employee to work a different schedule than most colleagues – coming in later and leaving later, for instance – but logging the equivalent number of hours.

**Compressed workweeks:** Employees work 40 hours in less than five days. A 10-hour, four-day week is common. Another alternative is to work nine days out of 10 in a two-week schedule. The configurations here are limited only by what works for your business.

**Telecommuting:** This is a popular alternative because it addresses most directly the home-based needs of many workers. In this arrangement, an employee works from home or another remote location on a fixed schedule with clearly defined assignments.

**Peak periods:** In companies or industries with a lot of fluctuation in work flow, such as accounting firms, employees work much longer than the traditional “40-hour week” during the busy season. When business slows, they work less hours.

**Informal flexibility:** Employees can occasionally change their schedules or work locations for personal reasons, including everything from taking the dog to the vet to catching a child’s afternoon soccer game.

**Career flexibility:** This approach allows an employee to shift in and out of roles and job responsibilities, typically as personal developments take on a greater role in the individual’s life. These situations can range from raising children to caring for an aging parent to training for a triathlon. Career flexibility would include a formal leave of absence or a sabbatical as well as time off (without pay) with the ability to return.

## Secrets to success

Instituting a successful flextime program requires a business to consider its own needs first. Once these are defined, each flextime option must be litmus-tested to ensure that the needs of the business are not being compromised. Employees who want flexible work options need to be assessed in terms of their ability to self-start and self-manage. Employees without these characteristics tend to do poorly in flextime situations because their productivity and effectiveness is driven by direct supervision.

“The future of flextime” continued on page 14.

### The future of flextime

Research conducted recently by the Corporate Leadership Council, involving more than 160,000 employees across industries and geographies, found the following:

- More than 60 percent of workers ranked flexible schedules as the most important work-life practice employers provide.
- Employees who feel they have a better work-life balance work 21 percent harder than others.
- There is a “perception disconnect” between employee and organization: 60 percent of HR executives are satisfied with their work-life practices, but only 16 percent of employees feel the same.
- Employees satisfied with their work-life balance options are 33 percent less likely to leave their organizations.
- Less than 25 percent of employees said their organizations offered work-life practices that align with their preferences.

### Get the most out of your workday

**Learn practical skills to maximize your time and productivity with these seminars, led by Jonathan Robinson, MA, MFCC.**

Talk Your Way to the Top – Managing and Maximizing Relationships (TYTT) • June 28 • 8 CPE hours

Triple Your Memory and Confidence, and Halve Your Stress (TYMC) • June 29 • 8 CPE hours

Getting On Top of it All – The New Science for Increasing Productivity in Yourself and Others (GOT) • June 30 • 8 CPE hours

Each of these courses is held at the MNCPA in Bloomington. For information and registration, visit [www.MNCPA.org/cpe](http://www.MNCPA.org/cpe).



“The future of flextime” continued from page 13.

**Here are some specific guidelines adopted in successful flexible work initiatives, particularly those involving work from home or another remote location:**

**Set clear goals:** The goals for an employee must be specific and action-oriented so he or she can be measured. Scope of work must be defined. Also, a manager must delineate how results will be transmitted. Do you want work details or just the end product? For the best results, the manager must clearly establish what is expected of the employee and determine metrics that will be used to ensure that flextime is benefiting the company.

**Define roles:** Role definition and responsibilities often become an issue for telecommuters. Who does what and where responsibilities lie within a company are critical to a smooth work style for off-site employees. When role clarity is not ensured, confusion, blame, dissension and a lack of productivity often result.

**Decide how to communicate:** Think about what works best for the manager and how well the employee can function without direct and frequent supervision, input and redirection. This will determine whether reporting practices can be loose, such as copying a manager selectively on important e-mails, or whether structured in-person or telephone status meetings will better ensure a successful outcome.

**Establish regular work hours:** Essentially, an employee needs to be available to others. Where that employee is physically located should not affect his or her availability for virtual meetings or phone calls. The best way to achieve this is to set regular workday hours. Many employers have discussed the concept of “core hours” with off-site employees. These are the hours that an employee is expected to be physically present and available to others — just as if he or she were in the office.

For flexible work arrangements to succeed, there are two core imperatives: trust and commitment. Employers must trust that the employee will meet expectations despite reduced visibility and increased flexibility. And the employee must commit to deliver the same level of work and results. These arrangements may not work for all employees, especially those who require close supervision and hands-on management. But for self-directed workers who are motivated for personal reasons to make flextime a win for all, the working world is a very different and much more rewarding environment for them and their employers.

*Craig Dexheimer is Director of Operations and Administration for SALO, LLC, and its related legal entities: Oberon, NumberWorks, and LawgicSearch. Dexheimer’s key responsibilities include SALO’s operations, human resources, marketing and communications.*

FINANCIAL **CONFIDENCE** SHOWS



**“I put a lot of time in. M&I helps me get some of it back.”**

With **M&I Preferred Services**, you can spend more time enjoying your success and less time managing the financial responsibilities that come with it. We’ll provide you with one contact for all your financial needs — a dedicated Preferred Banker who’ll connect you to more than 160 years of financial insights. It’s time to put M&I Preferred Services to work for you.

29 convenient Twin Cities locations.

**Now open in Highland Park!**  
522 Snelling Ave S

[mibank.com](http://mibank.com)



Personal | Business & Commercial | Wealth Management

Member FDIC. Products and services subject to bank/credit approval. ©2010 Marshall & Ilsley Corporation 10-600-047