

Flextime

WHAT IS FLEXTIME?

Flextime is a growing business practice that gives employees a choice of work schedule. The flexibility can range from choice of the beginning and ending times of a work day to an unrestricted work week. With any form of flextime, the employee must work a contracted number of hours. Variations of flextime allow adaptation of schedules to the needs of employees as well as to the needs of different organizations, such as customer service, interdependence among workers, and interaction with outside organizations.

With flextime, a "work day span" is set, meaning the hours employees can be on the job (e.g., 7:00 am to 6:00 pm). During a "settlement period" (which may range from the 7 or 8 hour work day to the 35 or 40 hour workweek, a pay period, or longer), the employee must work a required number of hours.

Most workplaces specify a "core time" when an employee must be at work (e.g., between 10:00 am and 3:00 pm). There may be two core times (e.g., 9:00 am to 12:00 and 2:00 to 4:00 pm) allowing for a flexible lunch break. The use of a core time makes it easier to schedule meetings and respond to outside organizations, vendors and clients.

A variant of flextime is called compressed time: shortened workweeks made up of longer workdays. Many government and private sector employees are now on schedules by which they work nine out of ten days, with three days off every second week; or four-day weeks of ten hours each day.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES?

Advantages

Employees, managers and business can benefit from flextime because it:

- Boosts productivity. Flextime reduces time off for medical and dental appointments and other personal business; allows employees to work at their most efficient times; reduces tardiness and absenteeism; and provides for better use of equipment and facilities (e.g., computer use can be spread out more evenly throughout the day).



- Saves time, money and energy. Employees can travel and use equipment during off-peak hours.
- Improves service to clients through extended service hours.
- Enhances recruitment and improves employee retention.
- Creates a cooperative working atmosphere.

A 1982 Federal government experiment with flextime and compressed work week, including more than 1,500 organizations with 325,000 workers, found that 85 percent of supervisors and 90 percent of employees were satisfied and wanted to keep the alternative system. Similarly, a company surveyed in Simcha Ronen's book Flexible Working Hours reported "an improved relationship between individuals and their bosses. Employees are more open minded, attitudes towards changes in the organization and to procedures improve, and there is a marked increase in cooperation" as a result of employee opportunities "to make decisions which affect [their] working life."

Disadvantages

Employees and employers may have difficulty adapting to variable work schedules. Possible problems include:

- Potential for abuse of system.
- Financial costs--implementation, administration and overhead.
- More difficulty in maintaining communication between managers and employees, and among employees with related work.
- Increased demand for supervisors to plan and monitor workloads and schedules.
- Increased need for employees to cooperate and share responsibilities.
- Intense workload and other demands on employees (e.g., staff meeting) during core time periods.
- Unavailability of flextime for some employees.

PIONEERING EMPLOYERS

Below are some examples of companies and the various flextime programs they have implemented.

The U.S. Bureau of Printing and Engraving began compressed work schedules in 1979, with 110 employees taking immediate advantage of the policy, working 10 hours per day, 4 days per week.

The U.S. Geological Survey (Reston, VA) was among the first federal government agencies to implement flextime. Under their program, employees arrive at work between 7 and 9 a.m., work 8 hours, and leave anytime from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.

The program at Pitney Bowes, Inc. (Stamford, CT) includes 800 employees with a work day span from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. The maximum work day is 10 1/2 hours with a required 30 minutes for lunch. Core hours are determined by department and may not be more than 3 1/2 hours.

Industrial Indemnity Company (San Francisco, CA) includes all of its 2,200 employees in the flextime program. Core hours are 9:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m. The work day span is 7 a.m.-6 p.m. Employees must work 35-40 hours each week with a settlement period of 2 weeks.

The Food and Drug Administration (Rockville, MD) has 1,500 of its 7000 employees participating in flextime. They include managers, first line supervisors, clerical, shop level and scientific personnel. Core hours are 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. with a work day span from 7 a.m. to 6 pm.

Occidental Life Insurance Co. (Los Angeles, CA) has 3,660 employees in their flextime program and 5,000 in a compressed workweek program. Employees may arrive between 7-9 a.m. and must work 7 3/4 hours a day, with 30-60 minutes for lunch.

Acacia Mutual Life Insurance Co. (Washington, DC) has all of its employees participating in a compressed work week for the 6 months of daylight savings time. The schedule is 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m.-12:45 p.m. on Friday.

University National Bank (Rockville, MD) has 80 of its clerical, managerial, and first line supervisory employees working core hours of 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m. with a work day spread from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

RESOURCES

More information on flextime and compressed workweeks can be obtained from the organizations and publications listed below.

Work in America Institute, Inc.
700 White Plains Road
Scarsdale, NY 10583
(914) 472-9600

Corporations, foundations, government and labor unions sponsor the Institute's promotion of labor-management cooperation, increased productivity and a quality worklife for employees. Their national policy studies, research reports and other work related publications include: New Work Schedules in Practice; Managing Time in a Changing Society and New Patterns of Work by Stanley D. Nollen; New Work Schedules for a Changing Society, a policy study report by Jerome Rosow and Robert Zager; Meeting Family Needs: The Corporate Response by Sheila B. Kameron.

New Ways To Work
149 Ninth Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 552-1000

New Ways To Work, a national non-profit organization, provides information, resources and training on work-time options and other workplace issues to employers and employees. Their quarterly newsletter, "Work Times," focuses on work time options. Another useful publication is "A Selected Bibliography on Work Time Options," 1985.

American Management Association
135 West 50th St.
New York, NY 10020
(212) 586-8100

AMA was founded in 1923. Its 85,000 membership are managers in industry commerce, government; charitable and non-commercial organizations; university teachers of management; and administrators. It provides educational products and programs for management. Publications include: "Alternative Work Schedules: Flextime," a survey report by Stanley Nollen and Virginia Martin, 1978, and A Flexible Approach to Working Hours by J. Carroll Swart.

Other useful publications are:

Ronen, Simcha. Flexible Working Hours. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1981.

U.S. Civil Service Commission. Bureau of Policies and Standards. Flextime. May, 1974.