



Clearly these are very tough times. We all confront a steady background din of layoffs by the tens of thousands, a gloomy stock market and evidence that consumers are actually saving rather than spending money. Recession seems to extend to the horizon and beyond.

For those who have positioned flexibility as a retention tool above all, an aggressive flexibility initiative now may seem like an oxymoron. But as we are discussing with our current clients and prospects, well-designed and well-managed flexibility delivers on multiple fronts:

- Flex can and should contribute to individual and group productivity
- It enables work process redesign
- It reduces space and travel costs
- It builds engagement in uncertain times
- And it does contribute to the retention of highly valued employees
- And it can - with carefully crafted supports - recruit the very talented

Many companies base their Flexible Work Arrangements program on some of these bulleted items. But it is one thing to hope for these results and quite another to achieve them. It takes informed research and design, a proven flexibility system and flawless execution to build flexibility that delivers what companies need now and for the long term. **Here are four standards:**

**Maximize individual control** The approval system for FWAs needs two strong elements. Individuals need the opportunity and responsibility to propose more constructive ways of working. And managers need the unfettered authority to decide on schedules. This not only produces healthier business outcomes, *but the process and greater flexibility can add to one's sense of control when, as is the case these days, any feeling of control is in very short supply.*

**Make flex a leading element of "total rewards"** When many firms are holding or cutting comp and freezing or reducing benefits, it should be a "no-brainer" to put strengthened, low-cost flex front and center. But this is also the beginning of a long-term opportunity for company leaderships to understand and properly align the reward system to make robust flexibility a more central element. *To do so, leaders need to be fully engaged in a process of redefining flexibility.*

**Collect data for effective redesign** There is no better time than the present to do some of the crucial data collection needed to make sure that your flex approach produces genuine business outcomes. Among the steps to consider are:

- A "FlexAudit" to assess quality of existing process and productivity impact
- Assessments to determine employee preferences and manager satisfaction
- A review of use and suitability of the flex approach for recruiting purposes
- Study of how telecommuting and other schedules can cut costs

**Modernize marginal infrastructure** A business-beneficial revamping of a company's approach needs to be creative and thorough. The steps required to redirect an effort include:

Line-by-line review of guidelines and their conversion to online tools  
The building of a comprehensive live and online training process  
Development of a continuous, multi-audience communication effort  
Creation of a focused business-based assessment process

*We do not know when this recession will end - and when we will suddenly find ourselves back in the talent search, wishing we had a better flexibility offering to make to restless staff and shining recruits. But that day will surely come. Rather than wait until it's too late to do the redesign process that is needed, this is the perfect year to do it right, once and for all. The good news is that the payoffs can be immediate as well as long-term.*

*And we stand ready to provide tools, techniques and perspective that can increase the value of your redesign, reduce project time and expense and avoid missteps that will undermine your effort. We look forward to discussing with you your questions about or interest in this approach.*

Best regards,  
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