



Rupert & COMPANY

Guides to a changing workplace

FlexBulletin #52: Flex Focus, Flex Retooling

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*[In the last issue of the Bulletin -- **FlexBulletin #51: Flex and Independence Day** – we touched on some points where the soaring aspirations of the **Declaration of Independence** were reflected in the very practical expectations of workplace flexibility. In this issue we take a slightly different approach to “independence.” Building on the notion that less is more, we reexamine our ballooning approach to flexibility promises and explore the idea that focus, prioritization and targeted supports in key areas might yield better outcomes. Think of it as independence from excess.*

*In support of this approach, we are launching several new tools that we hope you find useful. At www.rupertandcompany.com is our totally revamped website that hosts all of our online guidelines and training tools, including the new **Flexwise™ 2.0** suite. We encourage you to browse through the site and see its compelling case studies, robust client feedback and detailed methodology for change. Finally, the website serves as home to the growing **FlexBulletin** archive and the inaugural – and future – issues of the **FlexWise™ Blog**. We hope you enjoy it.]*



CAN THERE BE TOO MANY positive claims for flexibility?

Late night TV advertising is often a cavalcade of back-to-back promos for products with 6, 8 or 10 declared advantages. Of late we have been struck by flexibility claims as numerous as those for denture powder. We understand the theory: a combination of appeals to market segments, a so-called business case that rolls across several PowerPoint slides and the capture of any priority of the day that sweeps or may sweep across the business landscape. The current list includes:

- A positive effect on recruitment
- A proven impact on retention
- An increase in employee engagement
- The retention of older workers
- Savings in reduced office space
- Improved client service and coverage
- A reduced carbon footprint
- A tool for business continuity
- Increased profitability
- A robust sustainability tool
- Promotion of true diversity
- Support of those with disabilities
- A major contributor to wellness

Unlike some denture and exercise tool ads, these flexibility claims are both true and compelling. But they run the risk of any something-for-everyone campaign. An abundance of good things can lead to a diffuse message – and a general level of support with little real focus. Is there an alternative way to proceed?

HOW IMPROVED FOCUS may yield superior results

While internal champions of flexibility have been slowly expanding the benefits list, many companies seem to be moving in a different direction. The most visible targeting of outcomes is occurring in the area of promoting mobility and reducing space costs. Many companies are focusing their efforts, and seem to

be seeking one of three major gains. These gains are substantial, in line with major initiatives and linked to business payoffs.

Talent As the use of flexibility has matured, the diffuse approach to its recruitment, retention and engagement powers has sharpened. The emergence of the Talent Management function or its equivalent has created a more productive focus on flexibility. Talent has come to be seen as an increasingly valuable company asset. As the impact of the recession on talent markets slowly recedes, the potential for rethinking its use as an attraction tool grows. It is far more effective to build the case for talent as a key, distinct goal than to argue for recruitment and retention as 2 of 10 possible flex values.

Mobility No flex-related trend has been more pronounced than the explosion of mobility – telework and the space-saving, traffic reduction and business continuity it enables. The drivers of mobility have often resided outside HR in Facilities and IT. Mobility’s rapid growth has been based on the perceived savings from off-site work coupled with office space reduction. This rapid uptake in use has not always been supported by quality supports in training, coaching and development. But the continuing value of these tools will likely drive increasing focus on interactive skills.

Productivity As companies continue the quest for greater productivity, many are turning to flexibility as a possible source. One focus is on more systematic ways to define, enhance and track individual outcomes. The shift from general claims to reliable measures of productivity is a high priority. And enhanced productivity is a generally shared and easily communicated value in most companies.

FOCUSED INITIATIVES REQUIRE focused support tools

Every company is different. What drives flexibility – the broad agenda or a focus on talent, mobility or productivity – varies among companies. What should not vary is the quality and depth of supports provided managers and employees trying to maximize the value of these distinct ways of working.

As we have observed these trends over the past two years, we have responded by remodeling our proven and well-received flexibility guidelines and trainings. As we reported recently, we have launched a new general platform called ***Flexwise 2.0***. We are now adding three specialized tools which we describe in detail at ***FlexWise 2.0 Suites***. Each of these tools supports a core business goal and incorporates specialized trainings, tools and information designed to strengthen overall implementation.

We welcome your review of and comment on this modified approach.

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Best regards,
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