

**FlexBulletin #67 – Isn't ROBUST Flexibility the Best?**

May 1, 2012

*In the last few weeks we have had a number of conversations with **Bulletin** readers and companies interested in flexibility initiatives. We appreciate the time our subscribers have taken to talk with us and look forward to many chats with the rest of you in the weeks ahead.*

*An interesting theme emerged from these two sets of conversations. The flexibility “menus” being discussed in each case were almost identical. One might expect those new to the field to be interested in addressing emerging trends. Or perhaps those firms with greater maturity would be branching out to new populations with more adventuresome options.*

*The facts suggest otherwise. The longstanding, plain vanilla offerings – flextime, part-time, job sharing, telecommuting and remote work – seem to remain the options of choice. Perhaps now is the time to rethink what should constitute the “new normal.” Shall we?*



*As we mentioned in the last **Bulletin**, many of you have told us you would appreciate some shorter, more graphical pieces that highlight some of our tools related to the **Bulletin** topics. We did such a mailing on training tools last week. Later this week or early next, we will send a brief demo of our new “Collaborative Scheduling Guidelines.” The subject line will include Co Scheduling, and the return address will be “rupertandcoDemo” rather than “rupertandcoFlexBulletin.” If you aren't interested in seeing these, please delete. (If you unsubscribe, you will be removing yourself from the **Bulletin** list.)*

**Demographics + demand + devices drive the flexibility menu.** In 1972 Hewlett-Packard employees sought relief from heavy commutes, and corporate Flextime was born. In the 1980s a growing number of women entering the workforce struggled to mainstream part-time work and job sharing as a way of balancing work and family life. The 1990s marked the beginning of mass work-at-home, with a tech savvy workforce riding a wave of mobile devices that allowed work from anywhere. Demographics + Demand + Devices gave us today's common menu.

**Is something missing?** Admirable though it may be, this basic menu seems a tad stale – and at least a little confining. Some demographics appear to be under-represented and their levels of demand are not strongly reflected in most menus. But then mobile devices are everywhere and offsite work is exploding. Today's more complete list of options growing from Demographics + Demand + Devices might include:

**PHASED RETIREMENT** – *Ideal for older worker demand, nearly nonexistent supply*  
**TEAM SELF-SCHEDULING** – *A boon for hourly workers, but far too rare an offering*  
**COMPRESSED FOR EXEMPTS** – *A favorite of time-starved staff, but oh so controversial*  
**ASSERTIVE HYBRIDS** – *“True flex” for millennials +, sitting mostly on the drawing boards*  
**WORK SHARING** – *A tool for the un- and under-employed, more menu-buster than booster*  
**VIRTUAL COACH** – *Aimed at flex novices, this toolkit “has only just begun”*

The good news is that none of these options is untested.. Each serves at least one specific, large segment of the workforce. And In fact, they rarely fail. So why do these choices not appear on the main menu? The story on each is different, but all share one common trait: the mechanics seem a bit more challenging. Overcoming that perception, sometimes assisted by technology, is essential to mainstreaming each of these options.

### ***PHASED RETIREMENT – Ideal for older worker demand, nearly nonexistent supply***

**Demographics:** Older workforce is growing, and needs to keep working longer than planned

**Demand:** Phased retirement allows planned annual reduction, e.g. (90%, 80%, etc.) that fits personal preferences; this flexible option is rarely offered, considered too complex

**Devices:** Calculations are demanding and redesign is needed; computerized systems allow benefits management, knowledge transfer and work redesign that enable broader offerings

If older workers are a large constituency that seeks greater flexibility, hourly workers represent a far larger group that may be even more insistent. Many options can meet the needs of this group: shift swapping, compressed work weeks, forms of flextime, even offsite work. We focus on one option which can meet the needs of diverse teams.

### ***TEAM SELF-SCHEDULING – A boon for hourly workers, but far too rare an offering***

**Demographics:** Millions of nonexempts face the same time and family pressures as exempts

**Demand:** The view that these “regimented” folks can’t flex is fast giving away to unique options – one of which is the delegation of group scheduling from the manager to the team

**Devices:** This can be done with training and spreadsheets, but automated calendars help

Compressed schedules straddle the common and uncommon menus. Many companies offer group-wide compressed schedules (summer hours, 4/10s, 9/80s, etc.) to nonexempt or hourly employees. As one manager put it, “We’ll stack our nonexempts’ 40 hours any way that works.” Regarding exempts and compressed, a senior manager offered a familiar summary: “Why would we pay someone for 4/10 hour days when we’re getting 5-10s now?”

### ***COMPRESSED FOR EXEMPTS – A favorite of time-starved staff, but oh so controversial***

**Demographics:** The time-starved (parents, students) seek blocs of time off plus full pay

**Demand:** The supply of this schedule for exempts remains stuck despite growing demand. As long as these options seem “unmanageable” and “foes of productivity”, growth will be rare

**Devices:** The confusion of presence, productivity and hours in invites automated time surveys

If the other demographic groups are highly visible in our midst, an even larger cohort is taking shape every day – and it seems to be defining flexibility quite differently. Millennials or Generation Y is less focused on programs and options and more on collaboration and control. As this major group is indeed the workforce of tomorrow, identifying what inspires and engages it matters.

### ***ASSERTIVE HYBRIDS – “True flex” for millennials +, sitting mostly on the drawing boards***

**Demographics:** Research shows that Millennials enter the workforce expecting flex – period

**Demand:** This group expects flex now and even more predictably when they have families. They see flex built on clear expectations, ongoing feedback and the elimination of face time – more hybrid than static arrangements.

This is a long, but reachable climb for most companies.

**Devices:** Calendaring and automated coaching and monitoring could support these hybrids

For decades we have been conditioned to think of flexible schedules as individual options, occasionally offered to some work groups. When we look at company practices, especially during this slow recovery from recession, we would be remiss to omit a form of “social flexibility” that can apply to whole organizations: work sharing, the maintenance of full employment with a reduction in %-age of time worked.

### ***WORK SHARING – A tool for the un- and under-employed, more menu-buster than booster***

**Demographics:** The at-risk portions of the workforce can welcome this job-saving practice

**Demand:** Work Sharing is often seen as a way to avoid or lessen the impact of layoffs. But it can also be a means of expanding employment during recovery.

**Devices:** Companies that embark on this effort find it easier to manage with online calendaring

The final tool is not a form of scheduling; it is a super-enabler of any innovative way of working. Most new users of flexible schedules embark on them with limited orientation, training, feedback and support. The more common options benefit from their application, as do the implementation stages of the more challenging options we have raised.

***VIRTUAL COACH – Aimed at flex novices, this toolkit “has only just begun”***

**Demographics:** The Virtual Coach (<http://www.rupertandcompany.com/toolkit6.htm>) provides highly targeted, interactive training & guidance toward success in any option.

**Demand:** Once the Virtual Coach is made available, it is likely to see heavy use by the challenging options such as Phased Retirement, Compressed Work Week and the Hybrids.

**Devices:** The Virtual Coach is a transforming device that can sort the successful from the endangered and improve the odds of getting new schedules on track.

*Collaborative or Co Scheduling is a comprehensive, innovative approach to flexibility that offers “new model” features for organizations seeking a broader and more robust form of flexibility. As with any new model, it comes with core features and optional elements. Co Scheduling is a customizable approach. If all or part of this system could meet your needs, we would enjoy discussing the possibilities with you.*

**[Approach Summary: Bulletin #61 – NEW Co Scheduling Tools](#)**

**[Co Scheduling Site: http://www.rupertandcompany.com/toolkit.htm](http://www.rupertandcompany.com/toolkit.htm)**

**[Our Website: www.rupertandcompany.com](http://www.rupertandcompany.com)**

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