

**Flexibility and control** We have commented over the past several years on an evolving definition of flexibility – on a noticeable shift in the way a range of managers and employees thinks about, and requests flexibility. Yesterday's clear programs are becoming less defined. The distinctions among options, the invention of new choices and the significant rise of so-called informal flexibility are eroding inflexible flexibility; and building engagement for employees.

At the same time, the managers who are considering and approving or disapproving proposals for flexible schedules are thinking about them from a longstanding, equally powerful perspective: their control of the work process. They are concerned that any new schedule preserves the optimal functioning of flexible staff.

While champions, policy, and peers talk "flex", "flex", "flex," to build support for greater flexibility, it's equally important to be paying attention to "control", "control", "control" in trying to make it succeed. When managers are thinking about introducing, expanding or decreasing flexibility, they are often considering whether they have enough **control** of peoples' time to get the job done?



**Discount Coupons** We know from recent conversations with many of you that this summer may be a time to retool your flexibility approach. Recognizing that times are demanding all over, we will be emailing you four generous coupons over the next two weeks. Don't hesitate to call us about these great opportunities. You won't get the hard sell – just the firm facts.

It's hard for managers or employees to effectively address questions of control without understanding the forms it takes. Overtly or covertly, managers consider at least these 5 factors when contemplating more workplace flexibility. And employees who are collaborating on new schedules will focus on these same areas of concern.

1. Talking control with flex leads to a true conversation re: **guaranteed access**
2. Talking control with flex leads to a true conversation re: **guaranteed cooperation**
3. Talking control with flex leads to a true conversation re: **guaranteed communication**
4. Talking control with flex leads to a true conversation re: **guaranteed visibility**
5. Talking control with flex leads to a true conversation re: **guaranteed ease of overtime**

Each of these areas carries a significant operational impact that may or may not get addressed in developing new flexible schedules. They will surely be addressed in building **healthy new** schedules.

#### 1. Talking control with flex leads to a true conversation re: **guaranteed access**

All forms of flexibility pose a threat to traditional 9-to-5 access. Trusting that adequate access will occur in all flexible schedules is rarely satisfactory to those with a strong desire for control. Some of the ways in which access can be guaranteed follow:

- Limiting the amount of time away from the work group
  - Telecommuting is allowed only one day a week
  - Enable part-time as an 80% option only
  - Avoid all forms of compressed schedule
  - There is no remote work

- Creating conditions that resemble all hands on deck
  - Telecommuters maintain standards hours, respond immediately to calls, email

## **2. Talking control with flex leads to a true conversation re: guaranteed cooperation**

One of a manager's greatest concerns about widespread flexibility is that it will interfere with effective teamwork or leave a work group vulnerable to sudden needs or emergencies. Some of the ways in which greater control can serve flexibility are:

- Assuring that all members of the group have signed up for a "rapid response" plan
- Building a comprehensive cross-training system that facilitates greater cooperation
- Avoid creating holes in schedules (aka Fridays) and evening out coverages

## **3. Talking control with flex leads to a true conversation re: guaranteed communication**

Reliable communication is at the heart of organizational success. Controlling its quality and conditions is usually the highest requirement of managers. Among the means of doing so are:

- Insisting on absolute participation in all regular meetings and group sessions
- Create a standard requiring near-immediate responses to all incoming communications
- Developing a "buddy system" that assures the circulation of vital and emergency messages

## **4. Talking control with flex leads to a true conversation re: guaranteed visibility**

All forms of flexibility create some degree of absence – and thus anxiety about how visible staff on flexible schedules will be. It is also important to distinguish between the functional forms of being connected (such as access and communication) and the traditional value of "being seen." Very traditional managers show a strong desire for the latter. What is often sought is:

- Limitations on the volume and duration of offsite work
- Insistence on live attendance at all staff meetings
- The rotation of visibility-robbing options among staff to reduce their impact

## **5. Talking control with flex leads to a true conversation re: guaranteed ease of overtime**

For the last decade the real or perceived hours of exempt staff have varied greatly within, between and among roles and organizations. And so have the assumptions about how much so-called overtime is available and how easily it should be:

- To many managers, unexpected work is best covered by having all hands on deck
- Absent that, clearing offsite days in advance can preserve in-office overtime
- Asking that any users of flexible schedules maintain a potential overtime zone

**Negotiating the blend of flex and control** Every manager and employee ideally collaborate to develop a flexible schedule on the basis of the real interests of each. Ignoring the control needs of a traditional manager or unduly acquiescing in them would be a serious error. Surfacing and resolving these issues can best serve the users and the company.

*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.*

**[Bulletin #68 – Unveiling Co Scheduling – New Flex in Pictures](#)**

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