



## **FlexBulletin #76: Welcome to Our Blog – Short, Sharp, Social**

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**Every Purpose Has Its Tool** As we know, when you face a nail, you (hopefully) grab a hammer. Searching for the obscure, you Google. We hope that when readers seek thoughtful views and occasional wisdom on workplace flexibility, they turn to the **FlexBulletin**.

But where can you turn for brief, insightful, punchy advocacy of the exciting new approach to flexibility that we call Collaborative or Co Scheduling? **The Co Scheduler** is that tool, a tool with a very clear purpose – a blog that contrasts the pros and cons of a Flexible Work Arrangement approach to one that better leads the evolution to a more inclusive, productive and fluid flexibility that emerges from intensive and capable negotiations.

Just as we continue to develop and refine our online flexibility toolkits, we are committed to developing our distinct and robust Bulletin and blog in the months ahead. We welcome your feedback and hope you enjoy the blog below and the broader problem-solving **FlexBulletin** next week.

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**And Speaking of Tools...** Whether you're surfing the web for innovation or shopping for tools to advance your initiatives, we'd suggest a stop at our 2013 model websites. The home page of [www.rupertandcompany.com](http://www.rupertandcompany.com) links you to the Co Scheduling playbook, the **Bulletin** archive, our blog site, recent R&C research and media features. At [www.flexwisetools.com](http://www.flexwisetools.com) you will find two sets of comprehensive tools: one enables the best possible FWAs, the other supports a vigorous Co Scheduling approach. Off the shelf or customized, these proven tools will energize your New Year's resolutions.

### **"Has the "Mommy Track" Become the Flexibility Track?"**

I went public as a flexibility advocate in 1986. It seemed then that our small band at San Francisco's New Ways to Work was either onto something big - or tilting at windmills. Both things turned out to be true. Our signature tool - Flexible Work Arrangements - was destined to sweep companies large and small in the decades ahead. Our central concern - equity for employees working differently - has had a much harder time.

An early dust-up occurred with the great "Mommy Track" debate ignited in 1989 by an HBR article and memorialized by a New York Times catch phrase. Felice Schwartz, of the advocacy group Catalyst, proposed in "Management Women and the New Facts of Life" that companies create two distinct career paths: one for women choosing to balance career and family and another for those who were more career focused.

With that, the battle was joined. In an eerie anticipation of today's Twitter explosions, charges and counter-charges were hurled across all available media platforms. The concern: caregivers should not pay a long-term career price for a period of dual priorities.

The controversy eventually faded with an uneasy truce. Company-supported Flexible Work Arrangements could be the vehicle to support periods of reduced work without lasting career impact. One long track with inconsequential sidings here and there. Splendid! And two decades later the users of FWAs number in the millions.

Much has been written about the many business values of flexibility. First on the list were retention and recruitment. Today's robust business case includes claims for productivity, real estate savings, business

continuity, employee wellness and more. And the general assumption seems to be that the fears of negative impact on careers are fading along with cubicles and landline phones.

Perhaps - but then all may not be what it seems. Lisa Leslie and Colleen Manchester may have discovered that two new, and perhaps broader tracks, are still running. These business school researchers have just published the results of a clever and arresting study, *Flexible Work Practices: A Source of Career Premiums or Penalties?*

Their conclusion is that managers assess the commitment of flex users based on whether the purpose of their flexibility is productivity or personal life. Career premiums are associated with productivity, while career penalties tend to attach to personal life requests. (I excerpt and summarize their findings in my FlexBulletin #75)

If they are right, and career penalties are an unintended consequence of a very promising solution, how has this happened? And what can be done about it?

I would offer a simple explanation. Those of us who use and support flexible schedules believe that they add value at the company level. More importantly, they can build engagement, productivity, commitment and assorted values at the individual level.

But this case is seldom made by individuals for or with their managers. Decisions about individual performance, rewards, bonuses and promotions are made at the level of the manager and the flex user. Do promotions go to the enablers of real estate savings?

A major challenge is that individuals seeking flexibility rarely make a strong business case for themselves. I have personally read many thousands of employee flexibility proposals from our client firms and other companies. Absent serious training, so-called business-based proposals tend to be 95% focused on personal value and the balance on limited business gains. If I were the manager reviewing these "business proposals", I'd send them back for revision or want to sit down and negotiate a better deal.

But managers almost never do these things. They seem to sign off on any proposal and harbor who knows what opinion of the employee's commitment. As the study suggests, employees are by default setting themselves up for the penalties that tend to attach to personal life requests. And most managers collude. Without strong expectations, rigorous training and measurable processes, that won't change.

Co Scheduling offers a solution to this problem. But how serious is this problem? No one knows better than you how these issues are playing out in your organization.

***We welcome your comments on this Bulletin or Blog.  
When you write, please email me at: [PaulRupertDC@cs.com](mailto:PaulRupertDC@cs.com).***

Best regards,  
Paul Rupert  
Rupert & Company  
Chevy Chase, MD  
301-873-8489  
[PaulRupertDC@CS.com](mailto:PaulRupertDC@CS.com)

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