



# Rupert & COMPANY

Guides to a changing workplace

## **FlexBulletin #97: The Other Final Four - Tech 1, Indiana Lost**

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*Ever since Yahoo's Marissa Mayer put her finger on the scale against telecommuting, the **Bulletin** has been paying close attention to the new economy tech giants of the Bay Area. We have pointed out that although most commentators and much of the country took exception to her policy departure, her tech colleagues in Silicon Valley and San Francisco seemed far more accepting.*

*It became clear to us that prominent firms at the leading edge of this emergent industry not only had limited enthusiasm for telecommuting; flexibility of any sort, if offered, was infrequent and informal. When the most visible industry leaders reported on their demographics throughout 2014, Apple, Google and Facebook turned out to be heavily male and predominantly white and Asian. Whether fewer women meant less demand for flexibility, or rigid environments discouraged recruitment and retention of women is a classic angels on the head of a pin argument.*

*What has become absolutely clear as time has gone on is that these powerful new players behave differently than mature companies around the country. While even older tech companies like Cisco, H-P and Intel have policies resembling eastern banks, pharmaceuticals and professional service firms, tech is committed to developing unique policies for what it considers organizations of a new type. And as tech expands rapidly outside the Bay Area - major tech centers now exist in Boston, New York, Austin, etc. -- Its organizational designs typically follow.*

*Indiana offers an intriguing example of such reach. Salesforce, the dominant tech company in San Francisco, led the charge on the "religious freedom" legislation because it has a recently acquired subsidiary of about 2,000 people in Indiana. Many other companies joined. Many pundits who decried Yahoo's telecommuting stance praised its and others' positions here. I am not comparing content. I am just making a few simple points:*

- 1. Companies and industries can coalesce quickly and firmly around policy positions*
- 2. Powerful and committed companies can have national and local reach*
- 3. The line between private and public policy can be a very blurred one*

*Given the ferment in and impact of the Bay Area on issues of diversity, flexibility and innovation, a group of workforce and workplace researchers and advocates has been forming. They decided that the time has come to promote collaborative flexibility in the Bay Area ([www.CollaborationAtWork.org](http://www.CollaborationAtWork.org)).*

*If the home of tech is going to become an active policy exporter, we thought it could benefit from a think tank that could "import" national flexibility experience and blend it with local innovation to meet a range of social needs. Below is a summary of our initiative. We would appreciate your thoughts and comments; please write to [paulrupertdc@cs.com](mailto:paulrupertdc@cs.com).*

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### **Collaboration@Work** *Redesigning the How, When & Where of Work*

**Up Against the Clock.** As the Great Recession recedes, issues of talent and compensation have surged to the forefront. While pay equity, minimum wage, income inequality and affordable housing have become media staples, for most Bay Area workers **time** is the most pressing daily challenge. They face clogged commutes, long work hours and little time for families or leisure. In the Bay Area, epicenter of innovation, rigid employers and deep-seated habits prevail, and flexible ways of working seem to be in short supply.

**Bay Area Seeks a Flex Re-set.** Advocates at SF's New Ways to Work promoted flexibility in the 1980s along with national telecommuting champion Pacific Bell. Their tools helped connect employees with their employers when the 1989 earthquake closed the Bay Bridge. These pioneers of flexible work - Bank of America, Wells Fargo, PG&E and Bechtel among others - launched a national trend. Staying true to these roots of innovation, a new generation of businesses continues to navigate the tension between what employers want and employees need. Their actions have established the Bay Area as both battleground and testing ground for a new approach to workplace flexibility:

- Yahoo's Marissa Mayer suspended "telecommuting", insisting that true collaboration demanded co-location; she generated a national backlash but Silicon Valley support.
- Google, Apple, etc. bus employees to long hour, meet-all-needs "campuses" rather than let them work remotely. A leader defined Google's telework goal: "as little as possible."
- SF's Board of Supervisors enacted a "Right to Request" flexibility law that spells out a process for workers with caregiving needs to request schedule options, and penalties for violators.
- Diverse firms are pursuing different forms of flexible work, such as Gap and Salesforce (results-oriented environment) and Genentech (a menu of flexible arrangements.).
- Uber and many other businesses rely upon a largely independent contractor workforce and cite flexibility as a major draw for workers.

**Time for Collaborative Flexibility.** Blending a history of flexible work and the dramatic growth of innovative tech companies, the Bay Area is positioned to become the nation's Demonstration Region for how to design and implement today's and tomorrow's truly flexible workplaces. This will not happen without a comprehensive and sustained regional effort to design flexibility models that serve both employers and employees. The standard for these next-generation approaches should be *collaborative flexibility* - where highly trained leaders and teams focus on individual and collective goals.

**The mission of Collaboration@Work.** C@W is a nonprofit that brings together a deeply experienced team of local and national flexibility and organizational experts to research and help redesign the How, When and Where of work in the Bay Area. Our mission is to identify, support and promote Collaborative Flexibility as a powerful solution to a variety of individual, enterprise and regional problems:



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

Best regards,  
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