



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: DON'T BE RIGIDLY FLEXIBLE

The pandemic has taught us a lot, not least of which—from an organizational standpoint—is that a company can continue to conduct business, and thrive and grow, even when all employees are not physically at the workplace at all times, or in some cases, if none of them are.

The demand for flexible work arrangements predates Covid by decades as does the effort to provide them. It has become clearer now more than ever that a company's ability to attract and retain talent could depend directly on its ability to provide truly flexible work arrangements (FWA). Job candidates are saying – if you cannot offer me flexibility, I will find it elsewhere.

Talent management is not the only reason to offer flexible work arrangements. There is ample evidence that productivity and morale also improve. See the Gartner “Flexible Working Hours...” article. (Links to Further Reading below.) Self-determination is a powerful motivator.

Of course, there are good and bad implementations when it comes to building FWA into an organization's culture and mode of operating. An example of what not to do would be to impose the same “flexibility” on all employees. That is not flexible, pretty much by definition. Some companies early on, say 30 or 40 years ago, would offer FWA. “Now you can take every other Friday off, and you will work an extra hour the other 9 days in order to earn it.” Well, suppose that does not help me (or 85% of the workforce)? Suppose that is not what I need for my productivity and my life? Flexibility without autonomy is dictatorial. See the HBR “Forget Flexibility...” article listed below.

Obviously, both the needs of the company/customer and the needs of the employee have to be met. If you were designing a new product, you would ask your end users what they need. You also need to ask the end users (your employees) what flexibility they are seeking – change of hours, work from home or closer to home, adjustment to workload, something else?

Here are seven steps you can take to institute, expand, or rework FWA:

1. Align the needs of the organization and the employee.
2. Determine what types of FWA the employee base is looking for.
3. Think innovatively about what programs/mechanisms/changes will provide the opportunity for flexible work in your industry/business.
4. Write guidelines and parameters, not rules and regulations.
5. Set up clear structures, metrics, and expectations. Make sure they are communicated.
6. Address issues of equity, e.g., pay for work, not location; don't make FWA a privilege of only a few.
7. Test and re-establish. Test the effectiveness and make any mid-course corrections based on employee and customer data and input.

Do you have legacy FWAs that are actually rigid and need to be revamped? How can you reconcile the needs of the organization and of employees seeking FWA?

FURTHER READING

- [The Future of Flexibility at Work \(hbr.org\)](https://hbr.org/2020/07/the-future-of-flexibility-at-work/)
- [Forget Flexibility Your Employees Want Autonomy \(hbr.org\)](https://hbr.org/2020/07/forget-flexibility-your-employees-want-autonomy/)
- [Flexible Working Hours Enable Remote Workers to Increase Productivity \(gartner.com\)](https://gartner.com/en-us/articles/2020/07/flexible-working-hours-enable-remote-workers-to-increase-productivity/)
- [A Guide to Implementing the 4-Day Workweek \(hbr.org\)](https://hbr.org/2020/07/a-guide-to-implementing-the-4-day-workweek/)
- [5 Myths About Flexible Work \(hbr.org\)](https://hbr.org/2020/07/5-myths-about-flexible-work/)
- [We Are In An Exciting New 'Era Of Hyper-Innovation' \(forbes.com\)](https://forbes.com/sites/steveforbes/2020/07/20/we-are-in-an-exciting-new-era-of-hyper-innovation/)