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Implementing a Reduced-Workload Arrangement to Retain High Talent: A Case Study

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Reduced-load work arrangements involve a reduction in workload or hours with commensurate pay reduction. Employers use these arrangements to retain talent who value dual engagement in career and personal life. We discuss the reasons employers support reduced-load work, and its relevance to the psychologist-manager. We share a case study representing employee and manager views. Successful arrangements include these implementation features: (a) targeted to high-talent individuals with a track record; (b) redesigned, monitored, and fine-tuned over time; and (c) follow principles of the three Cs: communication, coordination, and challenge management. New managerial mind-sets are needed for success: designer at a distance with high standards, creator of pockets of change, big picture thinker on flexibility, and talent manager of “whole people.”

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Professionals face unique challenges in managing work and personal life demands. Many professionals encounter growing organizational pressures to increase workload and work hours (Gerson & Jacobs, 2004). For most professionals, full-time work does not mean 40 hours a week. More typically, a full-time professional is expected to work 50, 60, or even 70 hours per week. For individuals who seek to advance in their careers, the hours they work can be seen as a symbol of career commitment. Some may fear that placing limits on work hours or loads is likely to be negatively construed by customers, bosses,

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or coworkers. Many professionals are also in dual-career households, where it is hard to be a parent, be an elder caregiver, or “have a life” when work involves such long hours.

Flexible work arrangements are potentially one solution to help professionals ameliorate work–life demands. Many professionals do have increased access to a variety of flexibility policies such as flextime, compressed work weeks, or teleworking. They also have some job autonomy built into their job design such as the ability to flex hours or locations. Yet most traditional flexible arrangements are not fully effective in solving professionals’ core work–life challenges: rising workloads and long hours of work being socially equated with career success.

Indeed, the scholarly literature backs up the belief that flextime and flexible hours are not fully effective for reducing professionals’ levels of work–family conflict. As Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, and Neuman (1999) surmised, the positive effects of flexibility for employees reported in the general work–family literature, such as reduced work–family conflict and increased well-being, usually does not carry over to individuals in professional jobs. Many alternative work arrangements such as flextime, telework, and compressed workweeks do not necessarily reduce the hours or amount of work to be done. One explanation for the limited positive results from traditional formal flexible work arrangements is that they just reshuffle the work without reducing work hours or loads. They also do not fully control for the career contexts, norms, and working conditions of employed professionals (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006). Individuals in these positions are embedded in career and job contexts with norms and pressures to place work ahead of family and not reduce hours.

When faced with simply too much work to do in too little time and constant job creep of ever mounting work hours into personal life, reduced-load work arrangements have evolved to enable professionals to integrate their professional and personal lives (Lee, MacDermid & Buck, 2000). Reduced-load work arrangements are increasingly part of employers’ human resource strategies to retain high-talent individuals who value being highly engaged in both work and personal life. It is currently estimated that approximately 10% of all professionals are on a reduced-load schedule (Shulkin & Tilly, 2005).

GOAL OF PAPER: LEARNING VIA CASE STUDY

The main goal of our paper is to introduce readers to the effective implementation of the growing but relatively new work form of professional reduced-load work through the presentation of a case study. Toward this end, our paper is organized as follows. First, we define reduced-load work and how it relates to part-time work. Second, we discuss why employers would support reduced-load work and the relevance of understanding reduced-load work for the psychologist-manager.

Third, we give some background on the study and the company context in which our case study occurs. In the case study, we present the manager and employee perspectives on the reduced-load arrangement and give a flavor of the actual communication that occurred between employee and manager as they fine-tuned the arrangement. We believe that this approach to the case discussion is important for practitioner learning. In our discussion, we share what actually happened in redesigning the job and then identify characteristics of successful arrangements and the mind-sets of managers who manage them. 70

REDUCED-LOAD WORK: A CUSTOMIZED FORM OF PART-TIME WORK 75

Reduced-load work is a new weapon for winning the war for talent and retaining professionals with valuable skills (Barnett & Hall, 2001). Starting in the 1990s after the eventual implementation of the U.S. Civil Rights Act to open up the managerial and professional ranks, a trend began where many skilled professionals (often women) found that trying to be supermom and super-employee on the fast track leads to role overload and burnout. Most of the popular media would have you believe that opting out was the main strategy that high-talent women chose as a response (cf. Hewlett, 2004). However, less publicity was given to the fact that some individuals (both men and women) crafted a different way of working by negotiating reduced-load work arrangements (cf. Lee & Kossek, 2006; Lee et al., 1999). 80 85

Reduced-load work is defined as working less than full-time, such as 4 days a week instead of 5, and being paid less accordingly. These work arrangements have been referred to as “new-concept part-time work” (cf. Hill, Martinson, Ferris, & Baker, 2004) and customized work (Meiksins & Whalley, 2002). This is because most part-time workers have historically been individuals working in lower-level jobs reduced from a standard 40-hour work schedule and who are not necessarily career-oriented. 90

Yet most reduced-load work involves talented individuals who want to continue in their careers. Because many professional jobs have a full-time norm of over 40 hours a week, reduced-load work can vary greatly in the actual hours worked depending on what the typical load is for that job. For example, if a sales manager typically supervises six sales personnel and works 60 hours over 5 days a week, a reduced load of 80% might include job redesign to supervise five salespersons and work in the office an average of 50 hours over 4 days a week. Or a research scientist who normally works on four research projects 48 hours per week might at 75% load work on three research projects 40 hours a week. In sum, although these arrangements are often customized to specific job 95 100

and personal needs, what is common across arrangements is that these positions involve a pay cut and a commensurate reduction in work hours and/or load. 105

Why Employers Should Support Reduced-Load Work

Managers may ask, “Why in the world would it make sense to allow our go-to talent to cut back when there is heightened global competition and constant pressures for financial performance?” Well, for one, it is part of an updated total rewards strategy for managing and retaining talent. The best and brightest are either burning out or jumping corporate ships. Recent reports indicate that most employed executives are dissatisfied with their jobs and are ready to leave and companies are beginning to be aware of the downsides of overwork and increased job stress (“Dispatches on the War on Stress,” 2007). More rewarding careers, flexibility, and more supportive work cultures—not necessarily more money—are what is key to job hoppers (Metlife, 2006). A recent survey showed that nearly three fourths of U.S. companies predict competition for talent to heighten in the next 5 years. Work–life balance has emerged as one of the highest recruitment and retention criterion—second only to the quality of coworker and customer relationships (“Work-Life Balance Becoming Critical to Recruitment and Retention,” 2006). 110 115 120

Second, reduced-load work helps organizations adapt to the realities of a changing workforce and helps foster increased diversity in the management and professional ranks. It shows responsiveness to a labor market pull strategy. Workforce demographics have shifted to where 83% of women with children under 18 are in the workforce and 40% of managers and professionals are women (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Prottas, 2002). 125

Today it is becoming increasingly clear that many talented professionals (including managers) are seeking jobs that are very different from those traditionally being offered. A different way of working is desired by skilled professionals, many of whom now want a job that enables them to allocate their time and energy to foster high dual involvement in both caregiving and careers. This approach to professional work enables good performers to zero in on what matters most in their jobs and at the same time get breathing space to “have a life” and also take care of their families. 130 135

Granted, historically, most professional company men and women in their gray flannel suits were married to their employers and put in long hours at work to climb the corporate ladder, always putting work first over their personal lives. This social culture has begun to dramatically change in many Western countries such as the United States, where new generations of talented professionals now seek to live a more balanced life and as many are demanding and getting access to new ways of working. Many employees not only in the United States but also abroad want to craft their jobs in order to gain greater control over their work 140

and family relationships. Employers who do not offer customized work options or who implement them poorly when available will not be employers of choice. 145

Third, reduced-load work can actually help productivity contrary to conventional wisdom. The current strategy of just adding more and more work to existing workloads and organizational systems may be at its breaking point. We need to redesign current works systems. This runs counter to prevailing wisdom for higher white-collar productivity—lean staffing, hefty workloads, and long hours. Yet when we let talent cut back, there are many benefits. There are cost savings in pay. Individuals are able to have increased focus on crucial projects and tasks when on the job. The ability to attract and retain top performers is enhanced. Coworker relationships and communication are improved, because reducing workloads requires managers and employees to talk about priorities at work and home authentically (Kossek, Lee, & Hall, 2007). Backup training systems and subordinate development are also enhanced. 150 155

Relevance of Understanding Reduced-Load Work to the Psychologist-Manager

Building on the reasons employers should support reduced-load work noted above, there are many reasons the psychologist-manager also could benefit from increased understanding of these arrangements. Psychologist-managers historically play a key role in the design and implementation of alternative work arrangements, which generally could be improved in effectiveness of implementation. Many companies are beginning to ascertain that it is sometimes easier to adopt flexibility and work–life policies on paper at the organizational level than to actually make them work effectively at the manager and subordinate level of the work unit. Employers may formally or informally adopt flexible policies and practices, and they often get good publicity initially. However, over time it is counter to their corporate cultures to publicize these arrangements to clients or group peers or adapt managerial supervisory practices that are based on assumptions of full-time professional and managerial work. Reduced-load arrangements are a newer work form that challenges the design of existing human resource systems and professional cultural norms of career success being equated with long hours and productivity. 160 165 170 175

For all of these reasons, the psychologist-manager needs greater understanding regarding how to successfully change organizational cultures and climates and socialize and train managers on how to motivate professionals who wish to work in different ways. Further, traditional psychological models of careers and motivation do not generally include recognition that talented individuals may want to work less even if it means a pay cut. Understanding reduced-load work also will help the psychologist-manager update career models and compensation and talent management systems to meet the demands of the new workforce. 180

Growing numbers of workers such as NEXTERS, Gen X & Yers, retirees and individuals with health demands, and men and women who want to be involved in caregiving while pursuing an intensive career may not be motivated fully under assumptions of traditional career models (Kossek & Misra, in press). The psychologist-manager who understands new ways of working will also be able to have insights into new survey items to include on organizational assessments of climate surveys on workloads and stress and work hours. They will also be able to better partner with line managers in implementing flexible work arrangement and redesign individual jobs and group work to fit with new ways of working. As internal consultants, they also may be better able to take a multiple stakeholder approach from the employee and manager perspective. This approach will enable them to act as organizational development leaders to help managers and individuals come to a meeting of the minds on how to make the arrangements successful and sustain them over time.

EMPLOYER CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

We identified a number of psychological impediments to open managerial discussion of issues around reduced-load work arrangements. The first involved concerns over equity. For example, if the employer lets one employee work a reduced load, will the floodgates open? A second impediment is the possible problem of facing backlash if not all employees are able to work on a reduced-load basis. A third fear involved client posturing—that is, whether clients will feel that managers value them less if they are served by a reduced-load professional. The last concern involved managerial reputation risks. This is the worry of a manager that “If I don’t make my corporate numbers, will I be scapegoated as a softy because I let my subordinates work in ways that don’t always put the company as the only priority?” All of these possible perceptual barriers hinder getting good information out to managers and the field on how to implement reduced-load work arrangements effectively. By highlighting a successful case in this paper, we hope to enhance managerial learning and effective implementation of policies that are in many companies still just largely formally “on the books.”

Nearly all firms we studied faced some organizational cultural or climate barriers that impeded implementation of policies that allowed talented individuals to reduce workloads. However, these issues are particularly salient in firms experiencing the extremes of growth. Fast-growing firms face particular challenges associated with staffing levels as workloads are escalating and talent cannot be hired and integrated quickly enough. Downsizing firms face different but surprisingly similar challenges. Here companies are also asking nearly all

workers to work more, not less, with fewer labor dollars to allocate as the firm is trying desperately to maintain or increase market share. In both extremes, letting high talent work less—namely reducing hours and workloads—seems contrary to the popular managerial wisdom. Yet we found managers explaining to us a different kind of wisdom in accommodating valued employees. 225

To understand how managers and employees might discuss how to implement these arrangements, let’s turn to our case study.

STUDY BACKGROUND AND COMPANY CONTEXT 230

Understanding employee and manager perspectives on how to implement a new work form, when it is early in the institutionalization of the human resource innovation, can be obscured practical knowledge. Though the company, employee, and manager identities have been altered to provide confidentiality, the case study we discuss is based on a real-life example reflective of many successful cases we encountered during our study (Kossek & Lee, 2005). We share views on what managers face in implementing reduced-load work arrangements and issues that career-oriented employees face in asking to work in a different way than the norm. 235 Q2

The case study is typical of those successful cases examined between 2002 and 2005, during the time we were funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to study “Managing Professionals in New Work Forms.” Our work took place at 17 major employers in the United States and Canada representing 6 business sectors (high-technology manufacturing, professional and management services, financial services, pharmaceutical, consumer goods, and hospitality). In each firm we interviewed at least one manager who had been nominated as having significant experience supervising reduced-load professionals and at least one professional who was currently or had recently worked on a reduced-load basis by choice. In the particular case in this paper, the manager interviewed actually supervised the professional on reduced load and the subordinate whom we both interviewed. 240 245 250

The case described below can be used as a teaching tool to open up conversations in your company about how to implement reduced-load work (either for yourself, for your subordinates, or for clients you serve). It can also be valuable as a teaching tool or a role-playing exercise for business and social science undergraduate and graduate students interested in understanding some of the challenges in implementing new ways of working to support engagement of professionals in both work and family and personal life. 255

We found in our study that the human resource department often was not really aware of the details of how reduced-load work arrangements were being 260

implemented. In part, this is because each arrangement is often unique and customized at the department level between employee and manager.

Organizational Profile: Jared's, Inc

Jared's, Inc., is a well-known East Coast eatery known for offering fresh, quality food at affordable prices. Founded in Philadelphia in 1975 as an alternative to fast-food eateries such as McDonald's and Burger King, Jared's entered the marketplace with the intent of giving customers an option for freshly made quality foods at reasonable prices in a reasonable amount of time. The Jared's brand is known for convenience, quality, and the freshness of its products as illustrated by its slogan "Good Gourmet Food Fast!"

The company has experienced an explosion of growth in recent years as both the domestic and international marketplaces have supported the entry of Jared's restaurants at an increasing rate. In addition to growing within the U.S. market, the company is expanding into Canada, Europe, Latin America, and Asia at over 10% a year. Although growth is a positive challenge for any company, it also creates an increasing volume of work and the need to increase staffing levels and hours.

Manager's View

Background

T.C. is a senior accounting executive with Jared's. She had worked her way up through many positions of increasing responsibility in various organizations before signing on with Jared's 13 years ago. She manages eight direct reports and is responsible for strategy surrounding accounting issues that may arise as a result of the international expansion.

T.C.'s Perspective

"One of my direct reports, J.G., has been working a reduced-load schedule for about 4 years now. She's been with the company for several years and has proven herself to be an outstanding performer. She'd been identified as someone who has the skills necessary to fill my role once I move on. Four years ago she began working a reduced load at 80% (4 days a week) in order to allow her to balance work and family responsibilities. There is no company policy around an arrangement such as this; however, she proposed the arrangement and I was supportive. J.G. is an excellent performer and I would hate to lose her talent, although as a manager I am increasingly realizing how it's somewhat difficult to manage an employee working reduced-load who has no interest in

ever coming back to work full-time—at least in the foreseeable future. It’s easy to lose productivity time because although she is scheduled to work less, the work still has to get done. With the growth Jared’s is experiencing, there is more work to do than ever. In some cases, I am picking up her slack. I feel I have been more than generous with her. At the time we agreed on her current work arrangement, Jared’s hadn’t yet begun to face the growth challenges it does today. With the increasing demands of work on the team, now it seems that I am forced to be accessible on days when J.G. is out of the office to answer the many rising questions that she’d normally respond to. In addition, many new cross-functional team meetings have been scheduled, which is beginning to present a problem because J.G. is out of the office the equivalent of 1 day a week. As projects move along, it is also sometimes difficult to get hold of her for progress reports. 300

“In the past J.G has done a good job of managing her workload on a reduced schedule. However this is becoming more difficult as the demands of the business have become increasingly more pressing. I empathize with J.G.’s situation, but I am beginning to worry that her reduced-load schedule won’t work in the new environment at Jared’s. I want to support her, but how do we get all this work done? I’m not sure that this arrangement is going to be successful going forward. The deal we negotiated needs to be revisited.” 310 315

Reduced-Load Employee View

Background

J.G is a director of tax with Jared’s. She has been with the company for 9 years and has become a model employee. She has a strong work ethic and is very good at what she does, possessing both outstanding technical skills and managerial skills. Of her 9 years with Jared’s, she has worked a reduced load for the last 4 years. 320

J.G.’s Perspective

“When I had my first child 4 years ago, the demands in my family life became greater than I could handle given my job commitments. I had been working for T.C. for some time and proposed a reduced-load work schedule that would allow me to better balance my home and work life. I began working an 80% reduced load in order to spend more time with my family and have the flexibility to pick my kids up from school. This arrangement seems to be working. I work 80% of the time and receive 80% of my pay. My only concern is that even though I work 80% of the time on the record, in reality I work until the job is done. This usually balances out to about 90% of the time. This is fine, except that as it stands I am not being compensated for the time that I’m actually working. 325 330

“Yet despite working a reduced load successfully the past 4 years, the demands on me are still enormous. Jared’s is currently undergoing a number of dramatic changes including double-digit growth that have increased my work at the director level significantly. I’ve been pulled in to work on a number of cross-functional teams that require increased attention and meeting time even though working at 80% is supposed to allow me to be out of the office a full day each week. 335

“Being out of the office is especially important to me right now, because I recently adopted a child from overseas, and I really need the time to help her get adjusted to the new environment. Lately, I just don’t feel like I’m doing a good job at work or at home. I enjoy my job, but my family has to come first. The truth of the matter is that in order for this to work, I need more support from Jared’s. I appreciate that T.C. has always been supportive of me in managing work and family, but the reality is that I’d rather do a good job managing my family responsibilities than do a mediocre job trying to stay afloat managing both work and family. I’ve scheduled a meeting next week with T.C. to let her know that unless we can work out a new arrangement, I’m planning to resign my position.” 340 345 350

The Meeting

J.G. scheduled a meeting with her manager T.C. to express her concerns and inform her of her intent to resign. During the meeting J.G. expressed her need for more flexibility. T.C. was extremely surprised by her request. At the beginning of the conversation, T.C. (manager) felt flabbergasted. She felt she had gone more than halfway in trying to make things work for J.G. and was not sure what more she could do. But then she realized how much courage it took for J.G. to bring up that the arrangement was still not working and that J.G. was at the end of her rope. T.C. woke up to the fact that she stood to lose one of her most talented managers. It would clearly be very difficult to replace her. 355 360

After the initial shock, the discussion turned toward problem solving on developing an arrangement that would create more flexibility for J.G. while addressing both their concerns regarding the current arrangement. Both colleagues were anxious to come to an amicable agreement, and T.C. proposed the following:

- Reduce J.G.’s work commitment to half-time (working 50%) 365
- With the extra cash from the salary reduction, hire a mid-level manager to report to J.G. and take on some of the responsibility
- Set compensation at 60% to address the fact that working half-time will likely require more than 50% effort
- Increase the frequency of one-on-one meetings in order to communicate progress on projects, challenges, and concerns, as well as to consider career development needs 370

- Monitor the arrangement more frequently to assess its feasibility so that major redesign work would not have to be done in the future but fine-tuning could be ongoing 375

Both parties walked away from the meeting believing this proposed solution was feasible. It would save the company money, retain a top employee, and bring in extra backup support to make sure all of the work got done. The tips that made this case a success involved two main themes. The first theme related to what the manager actually did involving the actual management of the case, the three Cs of communication, coordination, and challenge management. The second theme related to the manager’s mind-set or how she conceptualized her role. These themes of the three Cs and a favorable managerial mind-set to flexibility will make managers like T.C. better managers not only of reduced-load workers but also of all employees in general. 380 385

SUSTAINING REDUCED WORKLOAD OVER TIME:
THE THREE CS AND REQUISITE MIND-SET

The Three Cs: Communication, Coordination, and Challenge Management

We found that ongoing frequent communication and forward planning were key. Managers first need to communicate that these arrangements are really part of a total reward package for high or above-average performers. The reduced-load arrangement is not an entitlement but something that is a motivational tool for talent who seek this type of arrangement. 390

The manager and employee then touched base every few weeks. Ongoing communication was critical particularly at the beginning of a new agreement for the reduced-load arrangement. This involved frequent updates on projects and completion of work and whether the job was scoped properly. Both parties could easily discuss if the job responsibilities and schedules were working well and then fine-tune, adjust, and improvise. 395 400

The issue of regularly communicating on job scope is particularly important because one key issue for many high-talent employees is that they have a tendency to work too much, not too little. This can result in a big problem of reduced-load employees overworking, where they have taken a pay cut but are still getting about the same workload. Over time, if this issue is not addressed, the inequity creates new problems for the employee and manager and can ultimately lead to turnover. 405

Increased *coordination and mutual flexibility* is also critical to the success of the arrangement. Managers need to develop regular mechanisms for coordination

of work and communication. Core hours are needed so that peers and clients and the reduced-load worker can easily schedule meetings. Alternatively, parties can agree to vary when department meetings are scheduled to accommodate different work schedules. Employees also need to be flexible to come in for special meetings when needed (e.g., a top client that the employee serves is in town and can meet only on the day the reduced-load worker typically has off). Agreements on how to use e-mail to communicate on off days need to be negotiated, and issues such as whether it is OK to call an employee on his or her day off for coordination need to be put on the table and openly discussed.

Contextual challenges also need to be addressed. One of the biggest relates to prevailing headcount constraints and modes of benefits costing. Here managers like T.C. worked with human resource and finance departments to cost work via full-time equivalent (FTE) and not bodies. This costing approach actually fits better with the nature of professional and managerial work today, but most companies have difficulty in letting go of historical ways of costing labor. Similarly, some firms treated employees working at 80% as if they were full-time in terms of benefits, thus kicking in the last 20% of benefits coverage fees gratis. But there are other arrangements as well, especially when the percentage of full-time goes below 75%.

T.C. also helped her worker set boundaries to avoid overwork as noted above and remembered to pay attention to the developmental needs of J.G. The managers we interviewed made it clear that simply because someone is working reduced hours does not mean they should be excluded from off-site training and development experiences, from business travel opportunities, or from new assignments and meetings with new clients. Reduced-load individuals must be included and not marginalized. They must be given the opportunity to decide whether they want to shift their hours for these special learning opportunities that allow them to maintain and enhance skills.

An example of this relates to nomination for company awards. Several years after we first met T.C. and J.G., we went back and found out that J.G. had won the employee of the year award, which honored the top employee in the entire company for making the best contribution to the bottom line that year. T.C.'s willingness to take the risk to manage J.G. differently than the norm paid off in the long run. T.C. did not try to hide the reduced-load arrangement but visibly celebrated the effectiveness of this employee by nominating her for a company award.

Besides the three Cs, perhaps the most critical step to implementing reduced-load work is to overcome outdated managerial belief systems and ways of managing. Managers like T.C. reshaped their mind-sets about management roles and their beliefs about what is possible for managing flexible new work forms. Then they were able to start experimenting in their work unit and begin to spread

the word that there are alternative ways of organizing work and jobs and of managing. Here are some of the beliefs we saw with T.C.

New Conceptions of Manager's Role

We noticed that T.C. had a subtle new conception of how she framed and understood her job as a manager. These included being a designer at a distance but with high standards, pocket of change creator, proactive big picture thinker, and talent manager of whole people. 455

Job Designer at a Distance with High Standards

T.C. saw her leadership or management style as having a hands-off approach that trusted her direct reports such as J.G. to deliver results. T.C. saw herself as people oriented and as supporting positive work relationships with her employees. Yet at the same time, managers like T.C. also stated that they set high standards and clear expectations. 460

T.C. also did not see the reduced-load work arrangement as an add-on. She understood that jobs and work systems needed to be adapted and restructured to effectively implement flexibility across different people and work situations. New ways of working must be implemented in the context of job demands and recalibrated to mesh with coworkers and clients. T.C. saw it as part of her role to take responsibility for the structure and allocation of work to help employees find or create more balance. 465 470

Pocket of Change Creator

T.C. also was not afraid of creating change pockets in her work unit—even if all of her peers were not yet on board. She tried to innovate and create supportive subcultures within the organization. T.C. explained, “I think that there are pockets of management that haven’t really seen the benefit of doing this yet and are mired in the mind-set of, ‘Well, that won’t work in our area.’ And I think part of the challenge for a company like ours is, how do you change those attitudes? How do [you] go and help people to see that there are different possibilities? A lot of this has to do, in my opinion, with the culture of the various components of the company. Because as you know, when you’ve got a large company, you’ve got subcultures all over the place. And so there are some subcultures that are very open to this. There are others that are not. And what you find is people wanting to leave the areas where the subculture is not receptive to that kind of balance.” This willingness to manage differently enabled T.C. to attract and keep the best talent internally. She knew that the war for talent is not always external but can be internal as well. 475 480 485

Proactive Big Picture Thinker

T.C. also was able to think about talent development and utilization in the overall work unit instead of just the one person who wants to work less. She was able to focus on her people and anticipate needs from both a personal and a career development perspective in terms of how to manage the work in the context of the work unit. In order to implement reduced-load work well, there was a specific focus on how to actually reduce the load to make less work more in the department. This is especially challenging as there are no clear limits to what is considered full-time today for professional and managerial jobs, which are infamous for not being fixed or finite. More responsibilities and initiatives are typically taken on over time to respond to new demands, especially by top performers. So to be able to enable her direct report to work reduced-load, T.C. had to be very creative and resourceful, constantly rethinking and reanalyzing workloads and responsibilities of individuals in the context of her entire work unit.

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This naturally resulted in managers like T.C. paying more attention to prioritizing the most essential tasks to be done. It enabled her to think of new ways to be more efficient and create backup systems. It forced her to think about new ways to manage more effectively and to avoid “last-minute fire drills.” The challenge of reducing workloads for one or two in the work unit helped T.C. think about implementing flexibility in the context of clients, coworkers, and their own management styles.

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Talent Manager of Whole People

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Although virtually every manager in our study viewed employee retention as a primary reason for supporting reduced-load work, highly successful managers of reduced-load work like T.C. were most likely to view the retention issue as being focused on the most talented employees. Rather than seeing this work form as mainly a work–life benefit to help solve work–family conflicts, T.C. believed that it had to at its core be focused on making less work more to enable her firm to retain high-level, high-performing people. Although all employees should have a right to have flexibility requests considered, managers like T.C. understood that it is in her best interest to give free rein to creative, entrepreneurial types who want to work and lead in different ways. Prevailing flexibility rhetoric was reframed to acknowledge the importance of creating cultures where valued performers feel free to ask managers to help them create or find more balance, and managers like T.C. saw this as part of their core managerial roles.

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T.C. not only identified with and was sensitive to her employee’s personal needs but also saw a payoff or benefit to the company. She supported the viability of new ways of working under certain conditions and for certain people—not as

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a blanket “anything goes” arrangement. She defined her role as talent manager as including not only support for on-the-job development but also support for off-the-job development. 530

CONCLUSION

In this article, we shared a case study to promote greater understanding of how managers might successfully support talent working on a reduced-load basis. Our case provides insights into how a new work form, reduced-load work, enables reconceptualization of the possibilities for professional work and how managers manage those reduced-load professionals reporting to them. For additional information, research reports can be downloaded from the study website: <http://flex-work.lir.msu.edu/>. 535

Many top performers are defining work–life balance in a way that most companies have not fully comprehended—as a balance between personal ideals and corporate mission (“Work-Life Balance Becoming Critical to Recruitment and Retention,” 2006). Talented people want to work on what matters most to their firms but in a way that still enables them to live their total life dreams or simply be dually engaged in career and family or personal interests. This opportunity to do meaningful and developmental work means even more than employment security. Many women managers and executives seeking to balance work and family have had this desire for years. Now this issue has finally wound up on the front burner for employees of all career and life stages. Research shows that men who rate their workplaces as not conducive to family life are more likely to change employers (Moen et al., 2004). 540 Q5 545 550

In sum, the “wiring” of many corporations is not working well enough to support the cultural values of either men or women today. Companies had better wake up to this transformed employee zeitgeist. Burgeoning baby boomer retirements, new millennials who value life paths as much as career paths, and working moms and dads are colliding with scientific, managerial, and engineering shortfalls in the pipeline. 555 Q6

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