USING FLEXIBLE SCHEDULES IN THE MANAGERIAL WORLD: THE POWER OF PEERS

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Reports indicate that managers fail to take advantage of flexible work schedules to integrate work and life demands. A survey was conducted of approximately 1,000 managers who had three alternative schedule options: flextime, part-time work, and leave of absence. Managers who were women or who had work group peers who were schedule users were more likely to use each schedule. Managers' productivity concerns were highest for flextime, then leaves, and least for part-time work. Organizational cultural change can occur if managers take the lead in their work groups to use flexible schedules in order to remove social barriers.[1] © 1999 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Introduction

Managing the integration of work and life demands is a critical challenge facing organizations and an issue of growing importance for business. In the United States today, less than 10% of families consist of two parents, one of whom is a stay-at-home spouse. Over half the children under age 18 will live in a single-parent family for part of their childhood. More than one-third of the work force has elder care responsibilities (U.S. Census, 1994), and over half of the managers at *Fortune* 500 companies are in dual-career families (Brett, Stroh, & Reilly, 1992).

The general trend of rising nonwork demands has been accompanied by a proliferation of policies that should facilitate work/life balance. All employers with over 50 employees are legally mandated by the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act to offer unpaid leaves, and virtually all major U.S. firms offer an array of flexible work arrangements to support work/life integration (Towers Perrin, 1994).

The widespread advances in computing technologies allowing employees to increasingly work at home, and the passage of Federal Clean Air Act mandates requiring metropolitan area employers to implement plans to reduce the use of cars during peak commuting periods, also offer rationale for firms to adopt (and employees to use) flexible schedules.

Despite rhetoric and increased availability of policies, however, studies show flexible schedules do not necessarily reduce work-family conflict (Blum, Fields, & Goodman, 1994) nor do they improve productivity (Dunham, Pierce, & Casteneda, 1987). Managerial resistance, fear of negative career impact, and unsupportive cultures are often cited as major barriers against use of flexible work arrangements (Schwartz, 1994). Recent reports in the popular press also raise questions about the usefulness of these policies. In a controversial new book, *The Time Bind*, Hochschild (1997) argued that many professionals consciously or unconsciously fail to take advantage of family-friendly policies and choose

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instead to work longer hours. And a recent *Fortune* cover story entitled "Is Your Family Wrecking Your Career?" contends that despite the political correctness of work/family policies, many firms see family demands as an ugly albatross competing for employees' time (Morris, 1997).

Managerial Use: Critical to Implementing Flexible Working Arrangements

The goal of this article is to increase understanding of managers' use of some common flexible work schedules[2]: flextime, part-time work, and leaves of absence. Managers are critical to the success of flexible schedules because they help communicate and implement them. Also, subordinate use often requires supervisor cooperation (Lee, 1990). In designing the study, we focused on a managerial role that has been neglected in research and practice: managers as role models. Managers' own use of flexible schedules serves as a change agent role. As key conveyers of culture, managers can help alleviate employee fear by providing examples: by using flexible schedules, they make salient to others that it's acceptable to place personal time demands on an equal footing with work time demands. High performance at work and home are equally valued. If managers never intend to use alternative schedules, however, a message is sent to peers and subordinates that using them and being career-oriented are mutually exclusive (Schwartz, 1994). We argue that if more managers "walked the talk" (used flexible schedules), alternative work schedule implementation would be enhanced for *all* employees. Managerial use is also important because of its impact on managers' own quality of life.

We contend that managerial use is explained by three main factors: personal characteristics, the social influence of work group peers, and productivity concerns. Most past studies have overlooked contextual influences on using flexible schedules, often assuming that an employee's personal background and/or need to use the policies are the sole determining influences. Such a perspective ignores the fact that managers operate in *complex social and business contexts* that limit the degree to which they are likely to act only based on self interest and family needs. We will show that even after the effects of managers' individual backgrounds (e.g., gender, number of dependents) are considered, the social influence of their work groups and departmental productivity issues significantly affect use.

We measured use in two ways: (1) managers' reports of whether they had previous experience with flexible schedules (past or current use), and (2) their intended future use. We felt that it was important to measure intended future use as well as previous use, because one's need to use flexible schedules may be episodic (i.e., related to a particular life circumstance such as a newborn child or a sick parent). Nonusers may simply be people who have not (yet) needed to use the policies but may well use them in the future.

Another goal was to examine how contextual factors varied in predictive power across schedule types, which reflect different forms of flexibility (e.g., flextime offers daily, often ad hoc flexibility with no pay cut, while part-time work tends to have fixed hours with salary reduction). We felt the prevailing literature did not fully consider different drivers and implications of various schedules. Instead, publications are rife with sanguine general calls by scholars and advocates to try to promote "greater workplace flexibility" to support worklife integration, without examining the different reasons behind and consequences of using specific schedules. In summary, our objectives were to (1) make salient the issues of how and why managers' own use is critical to policy effectiveness, thereby adding to theory about what using these schedules represents to the corporate world about the prioritization of work and nonwork roles; and (2) examine the differential role of social and business context across schedules. This research is important if firms are going to be able to implement policies more effectively, educate managers and employees about their use, and develop solutions to real and perceived problems with flexible schedules.

Choosing to Use Flexible Work Arrangements: Signaling Change in the Hegemony of Work/Nonwork Roles

Flexible work schedules are illustrative of a current trend toward greater diversity, individualized orientation, and noncompulsoriness in the design of human resource (HR) policies to

address personal needs. Rather than mandatory policies that are "one-size-fits-all," employees at virtually all levels are increasingly being given choice over whether to invoke *personal needs policies*. A decision to use flexible schedules makes salient one's nonwork life demands to others, which entails some risks. *First, employee initiation of an optional alternative work arrangement sends a message to others that the work role time demands do not always take precedence over personal time demands*. For professionals, this behavior can be perilous in the new corporate context of limited job security, lessened upward mobility, and increasing peer pressure from the rise of team-based work systems. Although many firms offer a plethora of optional flexible schedule programs to meet individual needs, in reality, invoking the policies often *signals nonconformity and creates exceptions to the status quo that can create additional work for managers*. For example, how will supervision, communication, and workload be managed for the employee on the "different schedule"?

Feelings of *inequity among peers* may arise, particularly among those "committed workers" who signal their unfettered dedication by following "regular" established work hours. Since corporate cultures generally support the segmentation of work and family roles, *using flexibility to integrate or restructure the enactment of work/family roles is still uncomfortable* in many settings, even when alternative schedules are permitted. As examples of this uneasiness, it is common practice in some major "family-friendly firms" to not approve a parent's work at home arrangement unless proof is given that the child is in day care during traditional work hours or an employee may only use flextime if prearranged in advance (Kossek, 1989).[3] These practices send a not uncommon corporate message that flexible schedules may be used only if the employee tightly separates work and family roles while doing so (consistent with the way the workplace is traditionally structured); or if s/he warns workers well in advance (preserving the primacy of work by not letting nonwork needs disrupt work). By placing rigid constraints on how one enacts flexibility, the message is clear: Work demands should prevail. Understanding the extent of and rationale behind managerial use of flexible schedules can provide a powerful counterforce to this corporate cultural tradition.

Predictors of Managerial Use: Personal, Peer, and Productivity Considerations

Personal Characteristics Influencing Flexible Schedule Use. Most past research on the use of flexible schedules focuses on identifying personal characteristics (i.e., gender, level) related to use. Young low-level females of child-bearing age are generally most likely to use flexible schedules, particularly, leaves and part-time work (Kossek, 1990). Yet studies consistently show that women of all ranks take primary responsibility for managing all forms of dependent care including not only children, but elders such as parents and in-laws (Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1997; Rothausen, 1994).

Relationships between managers' family responsibilities and values and use of alternative schedules have received limited study. Since flexible schedules have been seen as primarily serving employees who place a higher value on family relative to career (Kofodimos, 1995) and are the most appreciated by employees with extensive family responsibility (Rothausen, 1994), we expected managers who placed a higher value on family than on career or who have substantial dependent care responsibilities to be more likely to use them.

We also expected older managers to have lower use due to different family structures and career socialization than those of younger managers. Older managers are more likely to have grown children and a nonworking spouse to handle elder and personal needs (Zedeck, 1992). Many older employees started working when work/life supports were not provided or expected and were socialized that work needs should take precedence. In summary, after controlling for level (which previous research has found to be negatively correlated with use), managers who were female, younger, with high dependent care responsibilities, or who placed a high value on family, were expected to have greater use due to greater personal need for flexibility.

Social Construction of the Appropriateness of Using Flexibility: Peer and Productivity Influences

Social context. Johns (1993) attributed the general gap between the merit of state-of-the-art HR programs in theory and in practice to

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a lack of attention to social context. This inattention can be seen in the alternative work schedules literature. Many practitioner reports suggest that social and business pressures inhibit use of optional schedules (Kofodimos, 1995; Sheley, 1996), but no substantiating empirical studies were found in a literature review. Kossek (1989) demonstrated that acceptance of innovative HR programs could vary widely across departments even within a single firm. Based on this work and our belief that examining only personal influences provides an incomplete explanation of the factors affecting use, we explored contextual factors: namely, social and productivity considerations.

To capture social context, we examined how the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of managers in the same department, who reported to the same supervisor, related to schedule use. Data on use by peer managers were utilized to capture social issues because peer managers' behavior reflects professional norms regarding time presence at work and prevailing views about negative career impact from use. It is well documented that co-workers can be powerful influences on individuals' thoughts and actions by enacting group norms (Hackman, 1992). Such norms are likely to strongly reflect the boss's attitude regarding the acceptability of using flexibility, as department co-workers are competing for rewards, favorable ratings, and promotions from the same supervisor. Managers who report to the same boss are likely to experience a similar social reality concerning their boss's attitudes and beliefs. Further, given the political correctness of supporting work/family policies in theory and not discriminating against women and others with caregiving responsibilities, we felt co-workers' use of schedules might be less tainted by social desirability and be a better reflection of the pressures shaping a particular manager's use, than would peer or supervisor reports of their attitudes toward these programs.

Besides peer use, we also considered how peer group composition related to use, since group demography exerts social pressures on members' thoughts and actions (Lawrence, 1988) and serves as a critical constraint on the exercise of personal preference (Ibarra, 1993). The age and gender demography of

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work groups, for example, have both been found to generate career management norms. Lawrence (1988) argued that within an occupational group, the predominant age group defined socially generated group benchmarks and applied pressures on those who deviated from standards considered normal for that career and family stage. Ely (1994) found that individuals in groups where women were under-represented in management (i.e., tokens) felt increased co-worker competition and pressures to act like role models (i.e., like "men"). These findings could suggest that the more that managers had peer groups composed of individuals with attributes similar to those traditionally targeted by alternative schedules (i.e., women, younger employees, those with heavy family demands), the less likely negative token dynamics would be to arise because the social context would include members likely to be supportive of alternative schedules. The reduction in token dynamics should support less rigid norms for managerial behavior, allowing individuals to perceive they are able to use schedule flexibility if needed.

Business Context Framing. The second group of contextual factors we explored were influences on managers' framing of unit productivity concerns. Managers' use was believed to be negatively related to the degree to which (1) they had concerns about how schedules would affect productivity or (2) had limited experience with subordinate use. One of the main roles of managers is to ensure that their departments are productive. This role may be carried out differently by each manager depending on his or her beliefs about how workers should be managed to achieve unit goals. In particular, managers are likely to vary in the extent to which they harbor productivity concerns about how flexible schedules affect unit operations. Most of the practitioner literature on how alternative schedules affect productivity is unfavorable. Articles often discuss how flexible schedules create productivity problems for managers (e.g., Peak, 1994), increase their involvement in scheduling conflicts, and can hurt customer service (Sheley, 1996). The more that managers have productivity concerns, the less likely they will use flexible schedules. Managers understand the potential ramifications of personally using

flexibility; if they are heavy users, the flood-gates could open for their subordinates.

While the practitioner literature often associates flexible schedules with problems, research generally fails to support this. An extensive scholarly review on business benefits of flexible schedules showed either null or no negative effects on productivity (Dunham, Pierce, & Casteneda, 1987) or mild positive outcomes. These include better job attitudes (e.g., a lower intention to be absent or quit) (Pierce, Newstrom, Dunham, & Barber, 1989, p. 47), and increased organizational commitment (Grover & Crooker, 1995), which could spur workers to engage in extra-role behaviors.

In light of the prevailing managerial lore that using flexible schedules causes managerial difficulties and the lack of empirical evidence that this actually happens, we thought that managers needed to "try flexibility" via subordinates to realize that productivity does not have to suffer. For those that have never worked with employees on flexible schedules, all the negatives are likely to carry heavier emphasis over the positives, since managers are likely to feel uncomfortable taking away flexibility (like many employee benefits) after allowing it, if they are dissatisfied with the arrangement. Until managers try schedule flexibility, even if symbolically through subordinates, they are likely to be biased against use.

Method

Setting, Schedule Descriptions, and Procedure

Survey data (see Table I for measures) were collected from managers at a large midwestern telecommunications company that had adopted flextime, extended leaves of absence, and part-time work. Under *flextime*, employees negotiated with their supervisors to modify their normal five-day schedule such that beginning and ending times might differ, but total daily hours remain the same. Employees selecting *part-time* schedules reduced their hours and salaries by 10 to 30%. *Leaves* of absence allowed employees to take 30 days or more of absence without pay. Leaves were allowed for dependent care, education, antici-

pated disability, care for a newborn/adopted child, and military service.

Sample and Analyses

Out of a random sample of 2,000, our overall response rate was 67%. Three-fourths of the sample had been with the firm at least 15 years. Over half (56%) were middle aged (between 36 and 45 years) or men (54%). About three-fourths (73%) were first level supervisors. Over half (56%) had dependent care responsibilities. Of the three-fourths who were married, 78% had working spouses. Logistic regression predicted past or current use, a dichotomous variable assessing whether managers had ever used the three flexible schedule types. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was used to assess intended future use. Hierarchical regression analyses assessed the block effects of personal, social, and productivity factors.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among all variables in the regression models are presented in Table II. About two-fifths (38%) of the sample had ever used flextime, one-fifth (19%) leaves, and 4% leaves of absence. Based on a five-point scale, where five is strongly agree and one is strongly disagree, managers generally intended to use flextime (3.75) and did not intend to use part-time work (1.95) or leaves (1.75) in the future.

Table III presents results for the models assessing whether managers had ever used schedules and Table IV, those for intended future use. For *flextime*, all three sets of variables (personal, social, and productivity) influenced past or current use and future intended use. Gender and age (personal factors), peer use (social), and perceptions of the business impact (productivity) were significant predictors of both previous and future use. Specifically, both previous and future use were higher among women, younger managers, managers whose peers had used flextime, and individuals with lower productivity concerns. In addition, previous use was related to the age demography of one's work group (social), with users generally belonging to younger peer

TABLE I   **Measures Used in the Study. (alphas for scales using Likert scales in diagonal of Table II)**

Dependent Variables

Future intended use was assessed via a 2-item ad hoc scale for each schedule. Using a 5-point Likert scale anchored by Not interested (1), to Moderately interested (3), to Very interested (5), respondents indicated: "To what extent would you be personally interested in using . . . Part-time work? Flextime? Leaves of absence?" The second item was "Realistically, indicate how likely it is that you will use these programs if they were available (Flextime? Leaves of absence? Part-time work?)." The scale ranged from very unlikely to very likely.

Previous Use. Single-item measures assessed whether respondents had ever used alternative schedule options. Those who had used an option were coded as "users" (1); all others were coded as "nonusers" (0).

Measures of Individual Manager's Characteristics

Hierarchical level was controlled for by a variable differentiating first-level supervisors (coded 0) from higher level managers (coded l).

Gender was coded: female = 1, male = 0.

Age was coded: 25 or younger (l), 26–35 (2), 36–45 (3), and 46 or older (4).

Level of Dependent Care Responsibility was an index measuring the level and complexity of caregiving demands (i.e., number of dependents, arrangements juggled) as well as one's access to household caregiving supplies or resources (e.g., likely availability of spouse to help with family care). First, an individual's total number of child and elderly dependents were summed. In order to account for care complexity, individuals received 0 additional points if they were managing a single arrangement, l point for two arrangements (e.g., child and elder), 2 points for three arrangements (e.g., child, elder, infant), and 3 points for four arrangements (infant, toddler, school, elder). Employees married to nonworking spouses received 0 additional points; those with a spouse working part-time got l additional point, 2 points for a spouse working full time, and 3 points if they were a single parent/guardian. Higher index scores indicate higher levels of dependent responsibility.

Importance of family relative to career (family values) was assessed via an ad-hoc, 2-item scale: "It is important to place a greater priority on my family than on my career," and "I place a higher value on spending time with my family than spending time on my job".

Social Context (work group) Variables

Overview: Using archival records, we relied on the firm's 5-digit code (called a responsibility code) to identify respondents' work groups: All individuals with the same responsibility code reported to the same manager. Average respondent group size was 10. These work groups were meaningful as the firm we studied had a culture (that it was trying to change) that was very hierarchical. Given this culture, one's supervisor is a critical determinant of one's work environment.

Co-worker gender demography was calculated by determining the percentage of women in the work group; *co-worker age demography* by averaging group member age categories; and *co-worker dependent care responsibility* by averaging group member scores on the index described above.

Peer use was measured via respondent's reporting of peer use of each option.

Productivity Concerns (business context) Variables

Department Business Consequences from Flexible Schedules: Focus groups conducted prior to the survey were used to develop a 6-item scale assessing negative effects on productivity from alternative schedules. These included: "If I allow my subordinates to use flexible work schedules, I would be under-staffed" and "If flexible work schedules could be adopted in my department they would" . . . 'increase my workload," "create problems among my subordinates," "cause staffing headaches," "increase my costs," and "make it more difficult for my department to meet its objectives."

Subordinate use was provided by the respondents as an indicator of the unit's experience with letting lower-level workers use these programs.

TABLE II Descriptive Statistics.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
1. Hierarchical Level	.25	.43																									
2. Gender	1.45	.50	-.15*																								
3. Age	3.19	.66	.09	-.13*																							
4. Dependent Care Responsibility	2.42	2.39	-.01	-.14*	-.10*																						
5. Family Values	3.58	.83	-.07	-.13*	-.10*	.18*	[.80]																				
6. Group Gender Demography	1.45	.22	-.09	.45*	-.08	-.02	-.08																				
7. Group Age Demography	3.19	.23	.13*	-.10	.35*	-.02	-.05	-.23*																			
8. Group Dependent Care Demography	2.42	.74	-.10*	-.04	-.03	.31*	.02	-.06	-.10																		
9. Group Family Values	3.58	.83	-.14*	-.12*	-.06	.01	.31*	-.26*	-.18*	.04																	
10. Peer Use: Flextime	2.47	1.59	-.02	.14*	-.12*	-.04	.03	.14*	-.23*	-.12*	.09																
11. Peer Use: Leaves	1.88	1.04	.03	.11*	-.13*	-.06	.05	.08	-.08	-.02	.04	.33*															
12. Peer Use: Part-time	1.55	.94	-.03	-.08*	-.11*	.00	.02	.05	-.17*	-.05	.04	.39*	.40*														
13. Dept. Customer Contact	.51	.50	-.06	-.01	.06	-.04	.02	.14*	.10	-.07	-.27*	.10	-.18														
14. Dept. Service Perceptions	3.12	.64	.05	.04	.05	-.10	.00	.08	.04	.01	.05	.07	-.03	.07	-.31*	[.75]											
15. Beliefs about Business Consequences of Flex Schedules	2.84	.79	.00	-.16*	.11*	.02	.00	-.10*	.19*	.03	-.03	-.03	-.30	-.11	-.13	.23*	[.71]										
16. Dept. Subordinate Use: Flextime	2.74	1.52	.14*	.19*	-.02	-.03	.06	.19*	-.08	-.06	-.09	.56*	.19*	.18*	-.14	.18	-.25*										
17. Dept. Subordinate Use: Leaves	2.07	1.01	.08*	.18*	.05	.02	-.03	.13*	.04	.05	-.07	.07	.32*	.05	.08	.04	.00	.26*									
18. Dept. Subordinate Use: Part-time	2.19	1.17	.06	.19*	-.02	.01	-.07	.14*	-.04	.00	-.17*	.10*	.09	.13*	.02	.09	-.05	.37*	.19*								
19. Intention to Use: Flextime	3.57	1.53	.10*	.17*	-.18*	.00	.08	.16*	-.20*	-.05	.10*	.53*	.17*	.17*	-.16*	-.07	-.38*	.03	.04	.04	[.91]						
20. Intention to Use: Leaves	1.75	1.05	.02	.18*	-.22*	.00	.05	.08	-.12*	.01	.03	.18*	.19*	.19*	-.07	-.09	.13*	.11	.04	.04	.25*	[.81]					
21. Intention to Use: Part-time	1.95	1.26	-.08	.33*	-.15*	.00	.05	.18*	-.08	.01	.00	.18*	.05	.18*	-.06	.06	-.19*	.09	.12	.12*	.31*	.49*	[.87]				
22. Actual Use: Flextime	.38	.48	-.09*	.17*	-.16*	-.02	.04	.17*	-.26*	-.06	.11*	.67*	.18*	.25*	-.22*	.08	-.31*	.02	.10	.10	.53*	.17*	.21*				
23. Actual Use: Leaves	.19	.39	-.06	.35*	-.08	.17*	.07	.16*	-.04	.03	.03	.13*	.20	.03	-.01	.04	-.09	.17*	.07	.07	.14*	.23*	.23*	.20			
24. Actual Use: Part-time	.04	.21	-.03	.13*	-.05	.06	.04	.08	-.04	.01	.00	.07	.04	.15*	-.15	.09	-.06	.04	-.02	.09	.07	.12	.30*	.18	.29*		

*p≤ .01

TABLE III **Previous Use Regression Results.**

	Flextime	Part time	Leaves
Step One (Control)			
Hierarchical Level	-.53**	-.34	-.30
Block Significance	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**
Step Two (Manager Personal Background)			
Dependent Care	-.01	.08	.25**
Age	-.42**	-.18	.02
Gender	.64**	1.34**	2.37**
Family Value	.12	.34	.28*
Block Significance	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**
Step Three (Social Work Group Attributes)			
Group Dependent Care	.09	-.13	-.11
Group Family Values	.55	-.35	.64
Group Age	-1.11**	.39	.47
Group Gender	.88	.15	.05
Peer Use	1.20**	.56**	.41**
Block Significance	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**
Step Four (Productivity Concerns)			
Beliefs about Business Consequences	-.54**	-.13	-.11
Customer Contact	-.26	-.29	.00
Service Perceptions	-.11	.19	.05
Experience with Subordinate Use of Flex Schedules	.33**	.20	.20*
Block Significance	**.000**	**n.s.**	**n.s.**
N	1000	997	1001
-2 log likelihood	695.98**	320.91**	738.76**

*p≤ .05   **p≤ .01

groups. Future use was also positively related to having personal values emphasizing family relative to work (personal).

For *part-time schedules*, personal and social variables predicted previous use and intended future use. Gender (personal) and peer use (social) were consistently related to use, with women and managers whose peers had used part-time schedules more likely either to have used part-time schedules themselves or to anticipate doing so in the future. Employees who were younger and had personal values emphasizing family over work (personal) or who did not have a lot of productivity concerns were more likely to intend to work part time in the future.

With respect to *leaves*, personal, social, and productivity factors predicted previous use and intended future use. Specifically, women (personal) and managers whose peers had taken leaves (social) were more likely to have

already taken leaves and to plan to take future leaves. When taken as a set, productivity factors had a slight but significant association with previous and future use of leaves. In addition, younger managers were more likely to plan to take leaves in the future, and those with significant dependent care responsibilities were more likely to have taken leaves in the past. These results may simply reflect the episodic nature of the need for leaves over the family life cycle.

In summary, these findings demonstrate that gender (a personal characteristic) and peer use (a social factor) are strong and consistent predictors of previous or intended future use across many alternative schedules. The results also indicate that productivity concerns are most strongly associated with use of flextime; slightly, but significantly related to use of leaves; and not related to use of part time work.

TABLE IV **Future Intended Use Regression Results.**

	Flextime	*Part-time*	*Leaves*
Step One (Control)			
Hierarchical Level	-.09**	-.09**	.02
Step Two (Manager Personal Background)			
Dependent Care Responsibility	-.02	.02	-.01
Age	-.14**	-.11**	-.21**
Gender	.17**	.34**	.17**
Family Values	.08	.06*	.07**
Change in R^2	.06**	.13**	.09**
Step Three (Social Work Group Attributes)			
Group Dependent Care Responsibility	-.01	.03	.03
Group Family Values	.05	.00	.01
Group Age	-.02	.02	-.05
Group Gender	.04	.03	-.03
Peer Use	.50**	.13**	.15**
Change in R^2	.25**	.02**	.03**
Step Four (Productivity Concerns)			
Beliefs about Business Consequences	-.24**	-.11**	-.07*
Customer Contact	-.02	-.02	-.02
Service Perceptions	.11	.05	-.02
Experience with Subordinate Use of Flex Schedules	.04	.05	.06
Change in R^2	.06**	.02**	.01
Total R^2	.38**	.15**	.12**
Adjusted R^2	.37	.14	.11
N	1013	1005	1008

*$p \leq .05$ **$p \leq .01$

Discussion

Social Influences on Use: Peer Use Matters

This study shows that use of flexible schedules by one's peers are a favorable social influence supporting use by individual managers in the same unit. Across all schedule types and for both indicators of use (past or current use, and future intended use), peer use was statistically significant *even after* the effects of well researched personal factors such as gender, age, family concerns, and level, were considered. *Previous use by peers* was a much more important social influence than having co-workers with demographics that are typically associated with a *propensity* to use schedule flexibility.

The results imply that traditional organizations could foster cultural change by encouraging more managers to take the lead in their work groups to use flexible schedules in order to remove social barriers hindering their implementation. Using flexible schedules makes it visible to others in the workplace that employees' nonwork needs matter in a corporate world where work demands have historically dominated time management behaviors (Regan, 1994). It is a relatively recent phenomenon that many workers at all levels, genders, ages, and family configurations are openly seeking organizational accommodation of nonwork pursuits. Adopting work-life policies will not guarantee a family-friendly workplace (Solomon,1994) unless attention is given to barriers against using schedule flexibility. Although the *Fortune* cover story mentioned at the beginning of this article holds that companies really don't want to encourage use of family-friendly policies, we will assume that firms genuinely intend flexible schedules to be used as opposed to mere window-dressing.

This study shows that use of flexible schedules by one's peers are a favorable social influence supporting use by individual managers in the same unit.

Since use by peers had a strong influence, the following are some suggestions for ways that firms can create environments where it is acceptable to use such policies:

- Treat requests to use flexible schedules seriously and expeditiously and take care to ensure that users who have good output when they are working are not stigmatized. One productive single-parent manager we know at a *Fortune* 500 firm fretted for years over asking for part-time schedules. Once she got up the courage to ask, her boss gave her a positive response and had determined how to restructure her job within four hours of her request. Responsiveness such as this will create vivid examples and will support "first movers."

- Feature managers using flexible schedules as success stories in company communications (i.e., someone heading up the Boy Scout Council, training for a triathlon, rehabilitating a historic home. volunteering at the animal Humane Society, or who just gave birth to twins).

- At performance reviews, have managers bring up the possibility of using programs and present them in a positive light as something of which to be taken advantage. For example, "Bob, I know you sail competitively in the summer months, do you want to change your hours to 7:00–4:00 so you can make it on the water before dark?"

- When approaching a heavy deadline, managers should talk with co-workers about the nonwork time commitments that they have during the period that are nonnegotiable. Do not place value judgments on someone's priorities over another. Let policies be used for multiple reasons, not only to take care of children.

- Challenge management to self-assess the degree to which there is a bravado mentality (e.g., "I worked an 80-hour week or pulled an all nighter when I was a junior associate") and whether this culture is helping them meet their overall corporate goals.

- Include presentations on work/life balance during new employee orientation sessions and career development counseling for all employees.

Gender Effects: Women's Resignation to Mommy-Track Status

The personal characteristic of gender was the other main consistent predictor of past, current, and future use across all schedules. Women managers were slightly more likely than men to use flextime and considerably more likely to use part-time work and leaves. One interpretation of these results is that being female may be a better proxy for work/family conflict and the nuances of how home roles are shared than our dependent care index, which did not give extra points for being female and was not a major predictor of use.[4] Studies continue to consistently show that even when women work full time, they are still the primary providers for all forms of dependent care. Further, work-family conflict is not merely determined by one's extent of dependent care responsibility. For example, reports consistently show that work-family conflict is only weakly correlated with number and age of children (Kossek, 1990), and also by psychological identification with role and job design (Kossek & et al., 1997). Women may have higher role identification with the family and other roles involving caring for others (which may co-exist with high identification in the work role) than do male managers. Until the workplace is redesigned or managers are resocialized to give greater value to caregiving roles, it is likely that women managers will still be marginalized in the corporate world. Organizational perpetuation of the fast track and the slow or stalled career track will continue.

In fact, our data show that women were much more likely to use part-time and leave schedules than were men. Flextime realistically may not offer enough hours for a female manager to easily fulfill family and managerial role demands. Part-time and extended leaves enable lower work role involvement. These schedules allow employees (typically women) to devote fewer hours to work than do traditional schedules or flextime. By using them, individuals are publicly restructuring to symbolically (and often practically) support

lower work role involvement and increase family role involvement (and take a partial or total income reduction). Perhaps most managers culturally or practically feel stigmatized to do this, but some women managers opt to drop off the fast track rather than try to change the culture singlehandedly. How can organizations promote greater gender equity in usage? We suggest the following:

- Promote use of programs for multiple purposes, not only child-rearing.
- If the programs have mommy-track stigma, rename them.
- Run focus groups to find out why men are reluctant to use the programs.
- Present family-friendly policies as meeting business needs, not as interrupting them. Collect hard data to show how the policies help the company save and make money. For example, studies might compare stress-related health care costs, turnover, domestic violence, substance abuse, and absenteeism among workers in units where flexible work schedules have high levels of managerial support with those in other units. Additional comparisons could be made using measures of customer satisfaction, hours of coverage, number of customers served per hour, and the degree to which employees engage in extra-role behaviors.
- Most importantly, work to change the culture to view the need to use flextime (which was not significantly related to level of dependent care responsibilities and only slightly related to gender) as not merely a mommy-track issue, but reflective of the fact that *all employees regardless of gender and care giving demands increasingly need flexibility* to integrate work and personal roles.

Productivity Concerns: Greatest for Flextime

Many companies today are offering alternative work schedules at the same time that they are striving to retain a competitive position and offering limited job security. Consequently, employers (such as the one in this study) are increasingly likely to experience conflicting pressures in balancing attempts to move toward greater efficiency with efforts to accommodate work/life needs. As several respondents commented:

> *As I see these schedules, they are a waste because the . . . workforces have been cut below the limit where a good job can be performed. What we need now is more people . . . .*

> *Managers are worried about budget and headcount . . . . If they offer (a program) to one—(realistically) they can't offer to others: the precedent thing.*

Indeed, a *Wall Street Journal* survey of large leading edge employers showed that the use of flexible schedules is declining largely due to worker fear to ask to use them (Shellenbarger, 1995). *This study provides a more fine-grained analysis of managers' differential views of flexible schedules: They are not seen as identical in productivity impact by managers.* Productivity concerns were greatest for flextime, slightly an issue for leaves, and not significantly related to part-time work.

Productivity concerns regarding part-time work (and to a lesser extent leaves) may be counterbalanced by reduced income and payroll expenses. From the managerial view of assessing employee inputs relative to business outputs, productivity may not be a major issue for part-time schedules because the employees receive reduced pay (and often benefits). Further, studies show that the work done by two part-time workers is often greater than that of one full-time worker doing the same job. Regarding leaves, while productivity concerns are lower than those for flextime, since most workers are not paid during their absence, leaves for a long period may be seen as a productivity problem. Temporary replacement of employees on leave can be difficult due to headcount controls typically in place to limit overhead expenses, as well as the considerable lead time often needed to find a suitable replacement. Also, uncertainty may exist over when (and if) the employee will return.

Managers may react most strongly to productivity problems with flextime, due to a view that employees have tipped the employer-

Indeed, a **Wall Street Journal** *survey of large leading edge employers showed that the use of flexible schedules is declining largely due to worker fear to ask to use them* (**Shellenbarger, 1995**).

employee psychological contract in the employees' favor. Under flextime, employees are allowed to place personal needs ahead of work needs and still get paid in full. Managers may not truly believe that they are getting an equal ratio of employee and company contributions in the bargain. Further, flextime may simply cause managers more psychological administrative headaches. Flextime is a schedule that is blatantly and visibly in the "manager's face" everyday. Part-time work and leaves require a single schedule adjustment, after which schedules are once again fixed and regular. Under flextime, work schedules often vary daily, which can be seen in theory as hindering availability to others, increasing the need to manage co-worker conflicts, and making it more difficult to maintain service levels. Yet in practice, our results showed that the more that managers had experience with subordinate use, the greater the personal use of flextime. Encouraging greater piloting and experimentation with schedules on a trial basis in departments is a key implication of this study. Managers need to *try* flextime, even vicariously through subordinates, in order to fully support it.

Managers are key to changing culture and increasing the corporate world's comfort in allowing for schedule flexibility and a more rewarding life outside of work.

Employer of Choice: All Employees Need Schedule Flexibility

Why should employers care if managers aren't fully using schedule flexibility? In the current environment where firms cannot offer regular pay increases, job security, or upward mobility, offering flexibility to accommodate individual needs may be the one sure way to get the competitive edge in recruitment and retention and in developing a customer-oriented culture. This benefit may not be obtained if flexibility exists on paper but not in practice. It is inconsistent to ask employees to constantly exceed external customers' expectations if the employer gives the message that it does not value its internal customers' (employees) needs.

The need to offer schedule flexibility to accommodate work/life needs is becoming increasingly important not just to those with families, but to all employees. Many individuals desire schedule flexibility—especially flextime—whether it is to attend plays, volunteer in the community or at church, or simply to take one's car to be serviced. For all schedules, more personal factors correlated with future intention to use alternative schedules than with previous use, suggesting that many managers anticipate using flexible schedules. If companies do not improve current environments to become more supportive of using flexible long-term schedule options, they may pay the long-term costs of lower morale and job satisfaction, noncollegial environments, and higher stress. Managers are key to changing culture and increasing the corporate world's comfort in allowing for schedule flexibility and a more rewarding life outside of work.

This article is one of the first to provide empirical support for what has been widely argued in the popular business literature: Alternative schedules are likely to have limited use unless greater attention is given to managerial resistance and constraining business and social pressures. If the gap between well intentioned policies and employees' rising work/life demands is ever to be bridged, managers must have the courage to manage by example. If they do not, the growing disconnect between organizational posturing and employees' experiences in striving to flexibly integrate work/life demands will continue to occur.

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ENDNOTES

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2. Personal communication. Annual client meeting, The Partnership Group. Philadelphia, PA, 1994.
3. Personal communication. Annual client meeting, The Partnership Group. Philadelphia, PA, 1994.
4. Separate analyses of the individual components of our dependent care index (e.g., marital status, number of dependents) had virtually the same results as the index. Consequently, we combined single measures to create the index for parsimony and also because conceptually we were trying to capture extent of caregiving responsibility.