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Workplace Flexibility: Integrating Employer and Employee Perspectives to Close the Research–Practice Implementation Gap

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Abstract and Keywords

Workplace flexibility research has had mixed results and varied consequences for employees and employers. Workplace flexibility is defined as a formal or informal agreement between an employer and employee to provide individual job control over flexibility in timing, location, amount, or continuity in concert with nonwork needs. Integrating organizational and individual perspectives, this chapter discusses the mixed consequences of workplace flexibility taking into account that each type can be understood from varying employment relationship vantages, outcomes, and implementation challenges. The chapter concludes by examining multiple stakeholder roles to enhance future research and practice linkages.

Keywords: workplace flexibility, flexible work arrangements, flextime, flexible scheduling, telework

Introduction

“I truly appreciate having the ability to work from home and the flexibility to change the days each week in order to meet the demands of work and family life. I am better able to focus on work and be a better employee when my mind is not distracted by competing needs. Through the use of instant messaging, email, and online presentation tools, I am able to interact with both staff and clients alike from virtually anywhere” (Northern Trust Manager quoted in Kossek, Hammer, Thompson, & Burke, 2014, p. 7).

“Yahoo says that killing working from home is turning out perfectly... After receiving tons of heat for taking away workers’ remote privileges Yahoo now says that things are working just as planned: engagement and productivity are up” (Fast Company, 2015, p. 1).

Workplace flexibility is rising as a formal policy and informal work practice for both work–life and business purposes. The 2014 National Study of Employers found that more than four-fifths (81%) of U.S. employers allowed at least some employees to change the times they start/stop work and 67% allowed at least some employees to occasionally work from home (Matos & Galinsky, 2014). Despite the growing interest in workplace flexibility to give employees more control over where and when they work to help them manage work, family, and other nonwork roles, employees and employers often have mixed experiences with these practices. There is considerable variation across organizations concerning how workplace flexibility is implemented and viewed. One challenge is that formal policies and practices often exist, which can be good public relations for the company, but are not necessarily spread across the organization. A recent U.S. survey (SHRM, 2015) reports that when flexible work arrangements are offered, less than half of all employees have access to them. Furthermore, employee and employer perspectives on these policies can vary within and across firms. In some organizations, as in the opening example, teleworking, a growing form of workplace flexibility, is seen as both an employer business tool and an employee work–life support. Yet as the Yahoo example shows, some employers have recently pulled back on their availability of flexibility policies that give employees discretion over where and when they work due to fears that employee-controlled flexibility will get in the way of productivity and teamwork.

Research reviews on flexibility also point to the mixed effects of these initiatives (Kossek & Michel, 2011). Reviews show variable effect sizes depending on many factors: (1) the *type* of flexibility (telework, flextime, part time, or leaves), (2) the *source and nature of support* [formal organizational policy (Kossek, 2005), informal supervisor support (Hammer, Kossek, Bodner, & Crain, 2013), and work design characteristics such as job autonomy (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006)], (3) the *outcomes* studied (work–family conflict, burnout, intent to turnover), and (4) *for whom* (employee, employer, manager, or family) (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kelly et al., 2008; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Kossek & Michel, 2011). The mixed nature and lack of specificity in these findings make it difficult to predict whether a particular type and source of flexibility will affect a specific outcome, the conditions under which it is likely to have an impact, and the mechanisms that explain when and why flexibility matters (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2013).

Given equivocal results and the persistent gap between the positive rhetoric surrounding workplace flexibility compared to the challenges in translating research to practice reported by some employers, this chapter integrates employer and employee views to close the research–practice gap. A main tenet of this chapter is that it is critical to take a more nuanced view of the mixed effects of different types of flexibility, noting different stakeholder and theoretical perspectives, particularly clarifying managerial, employee, and organizational roles.

This chapter begins with a discussion of trends making workplace flexibility increasingly important for an effective workplace and society. This is followed by a general definition of workplace flexibility and balanced themes when it is viewed as an employment relations inducement. Next, different types of flexibility and varied consequences across theoretical perspectives and employee and employer views are reviewed. To address the implementation gap, the chapter closes with a discussion of multiple stakeholder roles.

Why Workplace Flexibility Is Important to Societies

Trends from around the globe regarding the changing nature of work and the workforce suggest that effective workplace flexibility implementation to support work–life demands is critical for organizational effectiveness. Specifically, effective implementation means employees believe that their work–life needs are supported via employee initiated job flexibility practices and that employers perceive that organizational goals are served via these practices and policies.

National studies (Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2012) show that nearly all employee demographic groups report increasing difficulty managing work and life responsibilities, creating a critical need for organizations to implement workplace flexibility to give employees more control over where, when, and how long they work (Kossek et al., 2014). Scholars argue that increased employer and public policy support of access and use of flexibility policies and workplace practices could lead to greater gender equality, less work–life stress, and greater societal well-being (Fuwa, 2004). In response, some organizations have become more flexible in the time, timing, and location of employees' work arrangements to serve a dual agenda—not only focusing on changing temporal conditions of work as a work–life lens targets, but also redesigning work to better match a changing labor force to foster gender equity (Bailyn, 2011). Offered by employers for work–life and performance reasons, flexible arrangements such as flextime, telework, reduced load, and compressed workweeks are employer tools to attract, retain, and motivate talent and support employees' management of work–home responsibilities (Kossek et al., 2014). Growing support for work–life flexibility has also been shown by the federal government's recent initiatives in the United States to increase government agencies use of telework (Telework Enhancement Act of 2010) and the 2014 White House Summit on Working Families (<http://www.dol.gov/wb/WorkingFamilies/>).

Workplace flexibility not only helps companies adapt to the changing nature of the workforce, but also updates workforce work time expectations and work processes to better align *when* people work with *customers'* growing 24/7 demand for labor. To adapt to the changing marketplace and global integration of work systems jobs require availability during more work hours throughout the day, from early morning to late at night (Kossek, 2015). These business trends make workplace flexibility an economic imperative to support work–life, gender equity, and economic growth.

What Is Workplace Flexibility?

Some scholars refer to flexibility as “work options that permit flexibility in terms of ‘where’ work is completed (often referred to as telecommuting or flexplace) and/or ‘when’ work is completed (often referred to as flextime or scheduling flexibility)” (Allen et al., 2013, p. 345). However, other researchers note that flexibility is broader than choice over the time or place of work, extending it to choices of employees in managing breaks in their careers, amount of time off from work, and even an organizational culture of flexibility (Berg, Kossek, Misra, & Belman, 2014). This range of views and concept drift on what workplace flexibility is may be partly because the level of analysis perspective taken on workplace flexibility varies in the literature. As one review (Hill et al., 2008) notes, some researchers take an *organizational perspective*, focusing on how organizations adapt processes and features to align with changes in their external competitive environments, with concerns for workers a tangential focus. A second perspective is at the individual level labeled a “*worker perspective*,” focusing on “individual agency” in the structure and culture of work, namely the degree employees have a “choice over where, when and for how long work is conducted in order to allow employees the ability to control how these aspects of their job design interface with their nonwork lives” (Hill et al., 2008, p. 149).

An Employment Relationship Approach

We argue that workplace flexibility definitions and studies (1) should examine how it is part of the employment relationship between individuals and employers with implications for job control, (2) faces an implementation gap, and (3) can have good and bad consequences for parties.

Flexibility as an employer inducement for employee contributions.

We integrate levels and stakeholder perspectives to incorporate an employment–organizational relationship view (E-O-R) on workplace flexibility. An E-O-R perspective examines the contributions it expects from employees and the specific contributions it offers employees as inducements for these contributions (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997). Drawing on this perspective, we assume that formal workplace flexibility policies and practices are organizational inducements for employee contributions at work

that reflect a social exchange between employer and employee as part of the employment relationship (Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy, & Hannum, 2012).

Workplace flexibility refers to a workplace arrangement, practice, or prevailing job characteristic in which employees have some degree of choice to control job flexibility over when, where, or how they conduct their work for work–life reasons (Kossek & Michel, 2011; Kossek et al., 2014). Employee choice in the use of workplace flexibility is a necessary but insufficient condition for flexibility use to lead to positive outcomes for the employee. We assume that when the timing, scheduling, and/or amount of work are forced on an employee, the individual is unlikely to experience well-being or work–life fit. Effective flexibility policies are more likely to be sustainable in organizations if they are implemented in ways that meet both employees’ work–life needs and employers’ productivity demands (Kossek et al., 2012).

Empowering employees to control their working conditions to support their work–life needs is an example of the growing trend in discretionary human resources practices and policies in which their use is left up to their volition. Our conceptualization of workplace flexibility also draws on the definitions of job flexibility control (Kossek et al., 2006) and work–life voice (Berg et al., 2014) in which flexibility is seen as giving employees some say over how their jobs are carried out. This approach assumes that for workplace flexibility use to lead to positive work–life outcomes, individuals must not only have access or use of formal policies and practices allowed by employers, but they must also experience the workplace flexibility as providing control over job flexibility in terms of the timing, location, amount, or continuity of work. Before elaborating on the different types of workplace flexibility, it is important to first generally discuss a persistent implementation gap and variation in employer and employee perspectives that are related to these issues of control.

The workplace flexibility implementation gap.

Although workplace flexibility is growing in some firms and many scholars tout the benefits of flexibility policies, there is often an implementation gap, in which workers and employers are dissatisfied with workplace flexibility experiences and outcomes (Ryan & Kossek, 2008). We define the implementation gap as a gap between the stated goals and objectives of the workplace flexibility policy stated on paper and/or in work–life theory compared to how flexibility is actually experienced in practice. One reason for the implementation gap is there is often confusion regarding how to successfully implement and maintain workplace flexibility (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010a, 2010b). Managers are often unsure of how to implement flexible policies and practices in their organization, often perceiving that they will have a harder time supervising, communicating, and managing team performance (Van Dyne, Kossek, & Lobel, 2007). They also may make attributions regarding policy use that may have an adverse impact on employees. For example, one study found that managers may attribute work–life policy use as signaling higher work–family conflict for women, but not for men (Leslie, Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012). Correspondingly, career-oriented employees may be afraid of using these policies, fearing a stigma for working flexibly and having less face time. Policy users sometimes fear career backlash or worse yet job loss from a flexibility stigma (Williams, 2013) for not appearing that work is a paramount priority. Equity issues occur between employee groups, as some policies such as telework and flextime may be available for some jobs (e.g., professionals) but not for others (e.g., lower level clerical or hourly workers) (Kossek, 2005). At the end of this chapter we provide diagnostic questions for closing the implementation gap.

Differential flexibility meanings and stakeholder valence: Good and bad flex.

Another key challenge in defining, studying, and implementing workplace flexibility is that it can mean different things and have different valence depending on the type of flexibility used. Although researchers often assume that work–life flexibility is positive, they have underdiscussed the notion that employers may support workplace flexibility, not necessarily for work–life reasons, but as a workforce management tool to align the demand for labor with employer interests. Employers tend to support workplace flexibility when the employer has the power to control workplace flexibility use and access. For example, one study found that whether managers are likely to support workplace flexibility practices to reduce and customize workloads depends on whether the employees are the top performers; are willing to be “flexible to change how they use flexibility to meet fluctuations in employer demands”—such as working longer hours or on different days of availability—that is to be “flexible on flexibility”; and only if policy use was restricted to certain jobs that were “noncore” (Kossek, Ollier-Malaterre, Lee, Pichler, & Hall, 2015). Kossek et al. found that what jobs were seen as noncore was fluid in social construction. Employees thought more job tasks could be done using flexibility than did their managers and employers. In contrast, employers were more likely to support work–life flexibility as a contingent reward or as a quid pro quo inducement offered if employees were willing to expand work hours to work overtime or at home to meet employer needs. Employers saw “good” workplace flexibility as a way to obtain just in time labor, a contingent workforce, or as a means for labor cost reduction. Yet these are all examples of workplace flexibility that workers may see as “bad flexibility”—in the social exchange of contributions for flexibility inducements.

In sum, the word “flexibility” means different things to different stakeholder groups, an issue rarely systematically captured in the literature. Employees, managers, clients, and co-workers may each have different conceptualizations as well as unique expectations concerning workplace flexibility, which can shift worker–employer power dynamics to transform the workplace as a contested terrain. Flexible work arrangements can either be viewed as bureaucratic structures that enhance employer control over the worker or as true sources of empowerment to benefit the workers’ work–life needs. These meanings shape how workplace flexibility practices are implemented and experienced. Yet the research surrounding workplace flexibility often takes the perspective of one group or another, sometimes overlooking the holistic implications of implementing flexibility initiatives.

General Employer and Employee Workplace Flexibility Outcomes

Employee Outcomes

Some reviews suggest that employees are attracted to and remain with organizations offering workplace flexibility because of the increased control over work tasks and schedules, which allows employees to more easily manage nonwork demands around work tasks (Kossek & Michel, 2011). Correspondingly, many positive employee outcomes have been linked to workplace flexibility, including decreased stress and improvements in health, well-being, and work interference with family, which have corresponding impacts on rates of burnout, turnover intentions, and overall health care costs (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011; Kossek & Michel, 2011).

General Employer Outcomes

Workplace flexibility can be used to strategically enhance organizational objectives (Kossek & Michel, 2011). Flexible work arrangements can allow employers to offer more accessibility to clients by expanding the hours and/or locations available. One of the most frequently cited benefits of workplace flexibility is the ability to attract and retain a qualified and productive workforce (Thompson, Payne, & Taylor, in press). Because workplace flexibility enables employees to manage work demands around nonwork demands (both short term and ongoing), organizations are able to recruit employees who value these practices as well as retain valuable organizational members who experience life changes.

By offering workplace flexibility, organizations can distinguish themselves in a competitive market as an “employer of choice” (Kossek et al., 2014). Organizations that offer the option to work away from the central work site can attract the most qualified candidates for vacancies, regardless of the location of the employer. Similarly, an organization can retain a talented full-time employee by allowing him or her to reduce the number of hours by working part time or job-sharing. By utilizing the form of workplace flexibility that works best for the organization, employers are able to attract and retain top talent.

Another important way organizations benefit from offering workplace flexibility programs is in the savings they experience from improved productivity and effort as well as reduced accidents and turnover (Kossek & Michel, 2011). Employees who are less distracted by nonwork demands (e.g., taking a sick child to the doctor) are better able to focus on work tasks while at work, thereby improving productivity and reducing counterproductive outcomes (e.g., safety hazards, faulty work). Finally, employees are less likely to miss work or quit due to an inability to manage nonwork obligations if they have the ability to meet the demands as they occur, rather than use time off (or skip work altogether).

Offering flexible work arrangements can be symbolic of the potential nonwork support organizations may be likely to provide employees. Employees can interpret information about an organization that is conveyed through observable characteristics or signals (Spence, 1973). Researchers have argued that offering workplace flexibility policies indicates to potential employees that organizations value them and are supportive of their nonwork demands (Grover & Crooker, 1995). Applicants identify information and form opinions about an organization through the recruitment process, guiding their expectations of the organization and whether they would be likely to accept an employment offer (Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Thompson et al., in press). In other words, organizations that offer flexibility can make themselves more attractive by signaling their support of employees’ nonwork roles through policies that act as symbols of workplace social support (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). Below we (1) review types of flexibility with examples and mixed consequences from employer and employee perspectives, and (2) identify relevant theories and how they relate to individual and organizational goals (e.g., reduce work-family conflict, improve productivity).

Types of Workplace Flexibility

Overview

There are four primary types of workplace flexibility: (1) flexibility in scheduling; (2) flexibility in place/location; (3) flexibility in amount of work/workload and hours; and (4) flexibility in leave periods and career continuity (Kossek et al., 2011). For completeness we introduce all four types, but focus discussion on the first three types (see Table 1). Workplace flexibility in continuity is beyond the scope of this chapter. Although paid and unpaid leaves are important for well-being, they do not necessarily address work processes that give employees day-to-day control. The first three types offer employees regular or frequent control over their work tasks (i.e., time, space, amount), and can be implemented in conjunction with one another.

Flexibility in time allows full-time employees to choose to some extent how their total weekly work hours are allocated relative to a traditional work schedule. Examples include flextime (with a core band of time around which employees are expected to work an expected number of hours), compressed workweeks (e.g., 9/80 schedule in which 80 hours are worked over 9 days, rather than 10), flexible shifts, and part-year/seasonal work (Baltes et al., 1999; Kossek & Michel, 2011).

Table 1. Employee and Employer Advantages and Challenges of Three Types of Workplace

| Types of Flexibility | Examples of Policies | Advantages | Challenges |
|----------------------|----------------------|------------|------------|
|----------------------|----------------------|------------|------------|

| | | Employee | Business | Employee | Business |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Scheduling | Flextime | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be available to attend to demands during traditional work hours • Increased perceptions of control | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less overtime • Reduced absenteeism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May find it difficult to meet nonwork demands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating multiple or overlapping employee schedules • Supporting clients' needs around employee schedules • Costs of implementing new arrangements |
| | Compressed workweeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be available to attend to demands during traditional work hours/days • Additional days "off" per work week/period | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced overhead costs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not perceive as "flexible" –lack of choice in days off • Potential increase in burnout with longer work days | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating multiple or overlapping employee schedules • Supporting clients' needs around employee schedules • Costs of implementing new arrangements costs |
| | Flex shiftwork/ workday schedules | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be available to attend to demands during traditional work hours | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded availability for client needs • Increased hours of productivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Metabolic and cardiovascular disorders • Work–family conflict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for accidents and injuries • Can be difficult to coordinate shifts |
| | Self-scheduled breaks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased schedule control | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in productivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to schedule breaks during peak times/demands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overlapping scheduling demands |
| | Part year/seasonal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can work less during slower times of the year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased pool of candidates for selection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than a full year of work can reduce compensation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased paperwork due to increases in hiring |
| | Weekend/ evening/night work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better management of nonwork responsibilities, or the ability to work a second | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better ability to cover 24/7 demands; increased pool of applicants for selection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have difficulty finding dependent care during nontraditional | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers who work during the days may not be available to supervise |

Workplace Flexibility

| | | job | | hours | evening or night employees |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| Place/Location | Telework; home based | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitates living farther from central work site Reduced commute to/from work Comfortable clothing & atmosphere | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced overhead costs of maintaining central work site Improved attraction/retention of employees who live away from central work site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication and maintaining goals may be difficult for some May not have flexibility in time Pressure to be available during standard work hours (visibility/face time) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisors may find maintaining communication difficult Not all work can be taken off site Employers usually must facilitate work by providing technology & equipment |
| | Remote work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can live great distance from main work location | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased pool for selection Greater accessibility for client demands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication can be challenging for some | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisors may find communication and setting long-term goals difficult Employers usually must facilitate work by providing technology & equipment |
| | Hoteling (partial teleworkers share desks instead of using a reserved desk space) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Real-estate cost savings can benefit all employees indirectly (e.g., pay, resources) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced costs from shared office space | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees may feel isolated from coworkers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be challenging to align team goals and foster commitment among distributed coworker |
| Amount of Work/workload and Hours | Job sharing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced role overload Reduced conflict between work and nonwork demands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher retention of employees who would otherwise be forced to quit due to outside demands Turnover costs reduced | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roles within organization may be unclear Employees are dependent on one another | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased expenses resulting from increased employees (e.g., benefits) |
| | Reduced load or customized work/part-time work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced conflict between work and nonwork demands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher retention of employees who would otherwise be forced to quit due to outside demands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced compensation May feel pressure to perform full-time workload | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More employees to manage Potentially increased expenses |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| | | | • Turnover costs reduced | time workload in reduced load arrangement | expenses (e.g., benefits) |
|--|--|--|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|

Note. This table has new content that is updates and adapts from Kossek et al., 2014. For parsimony, we focus on three forms of flexibility, scheduling, location, and amount, as managers are most involved in their implementation. Continuity of flexibility is often a policy implemented at the corporate level and has some linkage to FMLA which is often administered by the HR department. For more information on continuity of flexibility, see Kossek et al., 2014.

Flexibility in location, or “flexplace,” permits employees to choose where they conduct their work relative to the main work site. This allows employees to work away from the main work site, supported by electronic resources, for some or all of their work schedule (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Examples include telework, remote work, and hoteling (employers assigning office space on an as-needed basis to employees working offsite).

Flexibility in the amount of work offers employees the ability to alter the amount of work they conduct, which includes policies such as part-time work, reduced-load work, and job-sharing (Kossek & Michel, 2011). These forms of workplace flexibility allow employees to modify their workload or hours in order to meet nonwork obligations. This lets employees retain their employment (and prorated benefits) so that they can still participate in and manage nonwork responsibilities. Examples of situations that might require flexibility in an employee’s amount of work include the employee’s role as parent, student, caregiver, military personnel, and volunteer.

Workplace Flexibility across Types

An underexamined issue in the literature is that workplace flexibility outcomes vary across types and these consequences, as shown in Table 1, may vary for different types of jobs and from employer and employee views. Below we briefly give examples of subforms under each type of flexibility that was defined at the beginning of this section, and provide an illustrative benefit or drawback from employer or employee perspectives. We hope this format will spur future research to take a more nuanced approach of mixed perspectives and outcomes.

Examples of Flexibility in Time

Policies and practices offering workplace flexibility in time typically keep weekly or biweekly or even daily hours the same but allow employees to have some control over work schedule. For example, under flextime, the weekly number of hours remain the same but employees have daily flexibility. Under other types such as compressed workweeks, employees might expand hours on some days and have several days a week off. Flexibility in time allows employees to shift work hours to carry out both work and nonwork tasks. Employers also frequently benefit from these policies with increased availability for clients.

Flextime.

Flextime schedules allow employees to alter the start and end times to traditional schedules typically around a core time, thereby working the same weekly or daily hours as those of other regular full-time employees (Baltes et al., 1999). Flextime schedules can be formally implemented for whole workgroups or informally at the discretion of the supervisor. These types of arrangements allow employees more daily discretion over when they perform their work tasks relative to nonwork demands, allowing them to better accommodate both.

Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.

An employee benefit of flextime is that workers are able to better juggle personal demands with job demands while still receiving full-time pay. A drawback is that employers may design flextime policies that are not very flexible. For example, some policies might be “stingy” and allow limited employee discretion over starting and stopping times, such as being able to shift these times only a half hour or so at the beginning or end of the day. Or employees may only flex if they find back up. This constrained approach may not be very helpful for someone who has a long commute or needs time off to go to a major doctors’ appointment or school appointment, for example. Other flextime policies may be more generous, such as allowing employees to start or stop any time and work any 8 or 9 hour band or even take a break and resume work in a split shift. One challenge of flextime for employers is ensuring coordination of coverage so that not everyone is gone at the same time. A benefit for employers is that the research consistently shows that workers with flextime have higher job satisfaction, which leads to lower turnover from a workplace flexibility policy.

Compressed workweeks.

Compressed workweeks condense a full-time work schedule and responsibilities into fewer than 5 days per week or fewer than 10 days in 2 weeks (Baltes et al., 1999). This is often described as a 9/80 schedule. These types of arrangements offer employees more availability for nonwork demands during what is traditionally work time (i.e., they have more nonwork days than a traditional schedule). This can allow employees to take care of nonwork demands that they may not be able to attend to on weekends (e.g., doctor appointments, home repair work). Organizations may find it cost effective to utilize compressed workweeks as they can save

on electricity and other operating costs if employees are not at the main work site an additional day each week (but still maintain productivity).

As an example, law enforcement officers typically work a traditional 40-hour work week of 5 days of 8-hour shifts, followed by 2 days off. An increasing number of agencies have begun using compressed workweek schedules to improve effectiveness in which officers work four 10-hour shifts per week or three 12-hour shifts. In a recent randomized experiment of compressed work week schedules in law enforcement, the Police Foundation (2014) found advantages of 10-hour shifts such as less overtime work and increased sleep per night for officers, compared to the traditional 8-hour shifts.

Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.

Compressed workweeks can have drawbacks for employees and employers. One study found disadvantages related to the 12-hour shifts, such as reduced alertness on the job compared to the traditional schedule (Police Foundation, 2014). This could increase accidents, or errors at work. Compressed work weeks do allow employees to have time to participate in nonwork roles on their days off, such as attend school, volunteer at a child's school, and/or have days off to focus on home or personal life.

Yet another shortcoming of compressed workweeks is that they might not offer employees a great deal of control over their nonwork tasks (Golden, 2010). In other words, if employees do not have a choice over when they have increased availability to meet nonwork demands, improvements in health and work-life fit are less likely. Specifically, when unexpected nonwork demands arise, employees working compressed work schedules may be less likely to be able to meet these demands than those working a traditional schedule (compared to a flextime schedule that allows some daily choice in when employees conduct their work tasks). Therefore, some employees may be less likely to perceive compressed workweeks as truly flexible or offering the ability to control their nonwork demands.

Flexible shiftwork.

Flexible shiftwork allows employees to work outside traditional work hours, often at night. Flexible shifts, when implemented effectively, can enable organizations to become more 24/7, expanding worker availability for client demands and thereby potentially increasing productivity (e.g., Smith, Folkard, Tucker, & Evans, 2010). Similarly, offering flexible shifts can allow organizations to conduct operations during nontraditional hours or motivate employees to work during peak demands. For example, Macy's offers employees a system called "My Schedule Plus" in which workers can bid on hours and get more hours if they work schedules during peak customer seasons such as the Christmas holidays.

Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.

One benefit of flexible shifts is that they offer flexibility to hourly workers who sometimes do not have a lot of autonomy in scheduling built into their jobs. They also can support workers working in 24/7 systems such as nursing homes or a factory without changing work processes that are continuous. Here the work systems remain the same, but the workers swap shifts fitting into existing work processes. Another benefit is that the total pay could be the same or a worker could ramp up or ramp down and trade hours without being penalized. A drawback for employers is that teams may have lower productivity if a worker on a new shift is unfamiliar with how the team works together. Cross-training and staffing buffers of an extra employee might be useful to enable flexible shifts to move a worker across different functions to fill gaps. From a worker perspective, flexible shifts could hurt sleep patterns if a worker switches from days to nights.

Flexibility in Location

One of the primary reasons employees seek flexibility in location is because it allows employees to work and/or live away from the central work site. This offers employees the ability to integrate their work and nonwork domains, and therefore more quickly and easily transition between roles (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kossek et al., 2006). Having employees who are geographically distant from the main work site may be advantageous for clients' needs; in addition, organizations may benefit from having customer service available for remote clients.

Dell uses virtual call centers to allow full-time employees to work from home. After conducting benchmark assessments, Dell executed a 6-month pilot program, launching additional call centers at home sites across North America. By expanding slowly, the company was able to capitalize on the program, taking advantage of pockets of labor sources and retaining quality employees whose life changes would have otherwise forced them to leave. Benefits from this program include enhanced productivity and reduced facility and real estate costs (Boston College Center for Work & Family, 2007).

Flexplace policies differ as to how frequently and intensely employees use telework and work away from the central worksite, and the degree of contact and space they have at the central worksite/other employees. Employees may be able to work offsite frequently or on an as-needed basis or for only a day or two. Some of the most common forms of flexibility in location include home-based telework, in which employees work from home some or most of their work week, and neighborhood work centers, satellite offices, or telecenters, in which multiple employees utilize a single location to perform the majority of their work but do not have space at the main worksite, offering a traditional office environment at a location away from the main site. Whereas telecenters or neighborhood centers allow employees to go to a corporate office nearest them and telework, one hundred percent remote work includes employees who might work out of their home all of the time. This allows these kind of remote workers to conduct work full-

time from great distances away from the central worksite, or typically at the client's location such as a tax auditor reviewing a company's books or a consultant. Hoteling refers to the idea that employees give up their formal work desk but share a desk with workers when they come in.

Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.

One benefit of flexplace for employees is that it reduces commute time and workers can save on costs of work clothes, transportation, and sometimes meals. A drawback is that employees are often responsible for maintaining their home office equipment and boundary control. Overwork can be a problem as workers often work long hours substituting commute time for work time. A benefit for employers is that most teleworkers do work longer hours than nonteleworkers in the same jobs and are less likely to turn over. One presentation made at Purdue University by a VP at Northern Trust bank estimated that companies save \$7,000 in office costs by having employees give up a formal office for their employees in Chicago. A drawback for organizations is learning how to change cultures to measure productivity by output and not face time and creating a team culture.

Flexibility in Amount of Work

Policies offering flexibility in amount of work allow employees to modify their workload relative to full-time demands and expectations of the job. Employees may choose to work fewer hours or a reduced load in order to accommodate nonwork demands (e.g., family, school) while maintaining employment. This form of flexibility is unique in that it does not inherently specify employees' requirements in time or location. Instead, it affords employees greater periods of nonwork time relative to work. Although organizations may expect employees to specify the time/place they will work under these arrangements (i.e., Monday through Wednesday at the central work site), employees may have some degree of choice over their schedule, with the ability to choose when they perform their work tasks each week/month. This allows employees to attend to both planned and sometimes relatively unexpected nonwork tasks or events (e.g., attend an evening class, take a child to a doctor appointment) on a regular basis. Organizations benefit from offering these types of policies because they may be able to attract or retain talented employees who otherwise would not be able to meet the demands of the position. Similarly, organizations can allow the employees to focus on special or high profile projects in order to ensure quality for important clients. Researchers have found that reduced workload employees may be able to pursue creative ways of customizing their work tasks, and therefore frequently receive pay increases, promotions, and formal recognition for their work (Kossek, Thompson, & Lautsch, in press).

Policies offering flexibility in the amount of work present unique legal considerations. Because of the varying requirements across the United States and other countries, organizations must be cognizant of what is considered "full time" under employment laws and corresponding legal requirements before establishing policies that are flexible in the amount of work. For example, some jobs require a continuous work day and splitting shifts or shortening shifts may not be allowed. Or employees working less than full time in states that require payment for daily overtime for certain jobs may be entitled to overtime pay when working more than 8 hours in a single day, even if other days were much shorter.

Professional part-time and reduced-load work.

Part-time work involves the ability to alter your schedule relative to a full-time schedule (e.g., 3-day workweeks, 24-hour workweeks). One concern for these types of jobs is that employees who do not qualify for certain benefits because they work too few hours may be forced to work two or more jobs, which can lead to negative health and economic well-being outcomes. In addition, organizations may experience turnover for part-time positions if employees are not able to receive the amount of hours they need or expect routinely. Reduced-load work refers to situations in which employees have decreased work tasks or responsibilities, which corresponds to a reduction in pay, relative to full-time employees (Lee, MacDermid, & Buck, 2000).

Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.

One employer benefit of reduced load or part-time work is that it prevents turnover for high talent employees who are becoming overloaded by working a 50-hour or 60-hour work week. Many professional jobs today do not specify the number of hours that constitutes full time—expecting exempt workers to work anywhere from 40 to 50 to 60 or more hours a week without overtime pay. These ambiguous hours can burn out workers and companies have seen women and men chose to quit jobs that have long hours in ways that are seen to be incompatible with raising a family. A drawback for employers is that they must specify what a full-time load is, something many companies with rising workloads find difficult to do. A drawback for employees is sometimes companies "forget" someone has opted to take a pay cut and reduce hours and yet they are still contacted during days off. Employees on these "mommy or daddy" tracks may be seen as less committed and have their career stall.

Job-Sharing.

Job-sharing is an arrangement that allows multiple employees to share the responsibilities or demands of a single full-time job on a part-time basis. Similar to reduced-load work, this type of flexibility offers employees the ability to maintain employment while also accommodating nonwork demands or events. This type of arrangement can also be beneficial for organizations in that the entirety of the responsibilities for a full-time position may be kept intact while retaining experienced employees. One of the primary challenges of job-sharing is the need for employees who share responsibilities to carefully coordinate their tasks.

Examples of mixed employee and employer outcomes.

Job-sharing is one form of reduced load work and as such it shares many of the same drawbacks and benefits. There are some additional challenges and benefits. One shared benefit for employers and employees is that it allows for long-term specialization to tailor a big job to strengths. For example, for a manager with a dozen direct reports, one job sharer could focus on the financial tasks and the other could focus on the marketing tasks. The span of control is decreased as say a manager supervising 12 employees in a full-time job now each has 6 employees in a job-share increasing the ability to focus on and develop individual subordinates. A drawback for employees is that if one partner is seen as promotable and the other is not or if one partner turns over they must find a new partner to fit in the position. In addition, benefit costs must be prorated for employees.

Theories Underlying Workplace Flexibility: Linking Employment Perspectives and Types

The most common prevailing theories underlying workplace flexibility included job control, work–family role conflict, and boundary and border theories. They generally focus on the individual level of analysis and do not often differentiate the type of workplace flexibility studied. Below we briefly review each theory and suggest how future studies might integrate employee and organizational perspectives across types.

Control Theory

The ability to control your environment is recognized as an important mechanism in determining your well-being (e.g., Ganster & Rosen, 2013). In particular, employee control over the work environment is critical in overcoming the negative outcomes associated with work–nonwork conflict. The job demands–job control model identifies job decision latitude as “the working individual’s potential control over his tasks and his conduct during the working day” (Karasek, 1979, pp. 289–290). The model posits that the more control an individual has over his or her job demands, the better his or her well-being. Researchers have acknowledged the critical role that perceptions of control play in the effectiveness of workplace flexibility policies (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kossek et al., 2006). Workplace flexibility can offer employees control over aspects of their job design (e.g., timing of work, location of work, amount of work; Fonner & Roloff, 2010; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kossek et al., in press).

Integrating individual and organizational perspectives and control theory.

From an individual perspective, flexibility studies grounded in control theory would assess the degree employees perceive that using workplace flexibility increases perceptions of employee control over distinct aspects of his or her work (scheduling, time, location), and how these perceptions positively relate to favorable employee outcomes on and off the job. From an organizational perspective, studies would address the degree that workplace flexibility is viewed by an employer as an effective inducement to control the workforce and to increase employee contributions on the job. Such studies might also assess the effectiveness of different types of flexibility as a motivational tool to induce desired employer behaviors such as reduced absenteeism and increased efforts in formal job tasks and discretionary roles such as organizational citizenship behaviors.

Role Conflict Theory

Roles refer to subjective expectations about the amount and type of behaviors expected of an individual within a particular domain (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991). Role conflict occurs when the demands from multiple roles are perceived to be incompatible with one another (Cook, Hepworth, Wall, & Warr, 1981). Most individuals occupy multiple roles (e.g., work, family, community), and therefore experience conflict when demands from one role are incompatible with another role.

Providing workplace flexibility to employees can expand the ranges of time and the number of places employees can address work and nonwork demands, thus reducing the conflicts that may arise from competing role demands. Applying Greenhaus and Beutell’s (1985) classic article, workplace flexibility in theory enables workers to reduce several sources of work–family conflict. Time-based conflict should be reduced through use of workplace flexibility as workers can restructure the timing, location, or amount of work tasks to facilitate home tasks. Strain-based conflict can theoretically be reduced because users of workplace flexibility could feel less stress by using this resource.

Integrating individual and organizational perspectives and conflict theory.

From an individual perspective, work–family conflict studies would assess the degree employees believe workplace flexibility is effective in reducing work–life conflicts. An organizational perspective would assess which workplace flexibility policies or practices employers see as most effective in reducing work–life conflicts for the workforce as a whole as well as across different employee subgroups. Studies could also assess which types of workplace flexibility initiatives (workload, scheduling, location) are most effective in reducing work–life conflicts in the structure and organization of work for different types of workers. For example, although companies might offer telework, if workload is not reduced or if employees have little schedule control while at home to manage work–life conflicts, then the initiatives would not be very effective.

Boundary and border theories.

Individuals create and maintain boundaries in order to organize and contextualize their environment. The extent that role transitions

occur depends upon a role's flexibility (malleability of temporal and spatial boundaries) and permeability (ability to be physically but not psychologically or behaviorally located in a role's domain) (Ashforth et al., 2000). Historically, employees agree to work a predetermined number of hours/days at a specified location. These agreements create perceived boundaries (in time and place) around work, distinct from nonwork (Ashforth et al., 2000). Workplace flexibility policies and practices are frequently offered as boundary-spanning resources to facilitate an employee's ability to meet demands in the work domain in conjunction with those in the nonwork domain (Voyandoff, 2005). Workplace flexibility enables employees to perform work demands in synergy with the nonwork domain as well as transition between domains more quickly.

Similar to boundary theory, border theory argues that the contrasting purposes and cultures of the work and family domains can be described as two different countries, with different languages, behaviors, and customs (Clark, 2000). Borders have been used to describe the lines of demarcation between the work and family domains. Individuals cross these borders on a routine (typically daily) basis. The transition between the two domains can be relatively simple for some, whereas for others it can be a complicated process. Individuals who make daily crossings between the two domains are characterized as "border-crossers," transitioning quickly from one domain to another (Clark, 2000).

Workplace flexibility can allow individuals to more smoothly transition between domains, facilitating the ability of employees to cross borders; or it could increase task switching or switching costs from moving back and forth and process losses leading to job and family creep or negative spillover (Kossek & Lautsch, 2007). Workplace flexibility policies and practices enable more permeability between domains, allowing individuals to have the option to address demands within a specific domain as they arise in concert with values (Kossek & Lautsch, 2007).

Integrating employee and organizational perspectives and boundary theories.

From an individual perspective, studies drawing on boundary theory would assess the degree to which employees believe workplace flexibility is effective in facilitating their ability to manage work-life boundaries to fit preferences for work and nonwork role integration or segmentation. An organizational perspective would assess which workplace flexibility policies employers see as facilitating work-life boundaries that serve the organizational interests, such as encouraging employees to expand work hours to meet employer and customer needs, while avoiding burnout.

Summary.

Although control, conflict, and border/boundary theories are valuable, and they are not in conflict with an employment relationship and organizational perspective, organizational perspectives have been underutilized in workplace flexibility research. Future research and practice should build on the employment relationship perspective. Such an approach enables a discussion of the mixed consequences of workplace flexibility for multiple stakeholders, fostering a multilevel perspective to integrate the individual and organizational perspectives.

Implications for Future Research

Overall this chapter contends that by unpacking workplace flexibility—taking into account that it can mean different things to individuals, managers, and organizations with varying antecedents, implementation levels, valence, and mixed outcomes across types—the research to practice gap can be better bridged. Given that workplace flexibility can mean different things to employees and managers, and is not always associated with work-life issues, it is important for future studies to begin to understand how organizational stakeholder groups systematically define workplace flexibility and its assumed meanings, goals, valences, and desired outcomes. Studies need to measure the degree that flexibility use is seen as positive by employees, and to what extent flexibility use is seen as positive by employers as a way to capture the shared alignment in the climate for the implementation of workplace flexibility at the firm. Most current research takes only one perspective (e.g., employee outcomes, employer gains or challenges) without considering the impact for and unintended effects for each stakeholder group and shift over the life course and employment relationship issues for future research.

Multitheoretical Approaches

Future research should assess the mixed consequences of different forms of workplace flexibility from employee and employer views and compare the different theoretical perspectives we examine in this chapter to identify a rich array of antecedents, outcomes, and processes. For example, a control perspective would assess the way employment relations and power dynamics are shifted by workplace flexibility. These practices would be viewed as an empowerment tool from the employee view and a workforce inducement tool from the employer view to balance the interests and needs of each party. Low power employee groups such as minimum wage workers may differentially view and benefit from workplace flexibility compared to higher powered professionals. A work-family role conflict perspective might examine how these policies buffer and protect employees from life stresses, and the organizational benefits of doing so for health care and safety outcomes and for productivity measures. The effectiveness of workplace flexibility from this perspective may be moderated by employees' level of dependent care demands and perceived levels of work-life stress. A boundary/border theory view would assess how workplace flexibility enables employees and employers to define the limits and puncturing of work and nonwork domains and negotiate norms to navigate the growing overlap between personal and professional life via workplace flexibility practices. Cross-cultural norms may come into play as societies vary in the

degree to which being and doing are valued and the values placed on the allocation of energy to personal and professional achievement. Currently, most studies take one dominant perspective and one employer or employee view.

Work–Life Bundles and Flexibility Combinations

Future research should examine the isolated and cumulative effects of different flexibility forms. Organizations may offer multiple flexibility policies (flextime and job sharing) from which employees may choose as well as policies that include multiple types of flexibility (telework). For example, although telework policies are typically discussed as allowing choice over *where* employees work, teleworkers may also have some degree of discretion over *when* they conduct their work. A teleworker can quickly transition between roles, from a phone call with a client to supervising repair work at home within minutes, allowing greater amount of time devoted to both roles by facilitating role transitions. Organizations may not consider the full impact of offering a policy with multiple forms of discretion. Recognizing the distinction between types of flexibility is critical to implementing successful policies. Studies should examine the synergistic impact of offering/using different forms together.

By considering how the combination of work–life policies and practices can lead to increases in organizational gains, researchers can begin to identify a more comprehensive framework of the work–life interface (Kossek & Friede, 2006). Such research might build on work–life bundling research. Perry-Smith and Blum (2000) examined how work–family bundles promote value in firms through multifaceted policy adoption. The focus of work–life bundles is to assess the bottom-line gains from grouping HR policies that complement one another in a systematic approach to workplace flexibility (Kossek & Friede, 2006). Studies could compare the synergistic effects of bundling work–life policies to implementing policies individually.

Closing.

Implementing flexibility requires an understanding of its mixed consequences for employer and employees. Table 2 specifies joint manager and employee roles to close the implementation gap. An employee–employer partnership and balanced approach is needed to make flexibility a positive experience for all parties.

Table 2. Strategies and Roles for Implementing Whole-Systems Workplace Flexibility

| Managers |
|--|
| Managers should implement flexible policies based on neutral or value-free reasons; all employees should have access to workplace flexibility. |
| Managers should establish communication expectations as well as identify clear performance goals. |
| Managers can demonstrate successful use of workplace flexibility for employees by taking part in flexibility policies/practices. |
| Employees |
| Employees should clearly establish how they will benefit from and use workplace flexibility, identifying how they will work with co-workers and their supervisor to maintain productivity. |
| Employees should communicate frequently with their manager in order to facilitate progress on performance goals. |
| Employees should strategically outline tasks and objectives to ensure they maintain progress while using workplace flexibility. |
| Employees should clearly establish how they will benefit from and use workplace flexibility, identifying how they will work with co-workers and their supervisor to maintain productivity. |
| Organization |
| Organizations should formalize and clarify flexibility policies/guidelines for all job types/employees. Identify how policies might differentially apply to different departments/jobs and modify accordingly. |
| Organizations should identify what tools and resources are necessary to facilitate successful flexible policies (e.g., computers for teleworkers, programs for scheduling). |
| Organizations should provide training for all parties involved, explaining each party's role and how they should coordinate with others (managers, employees, HR representatives). |

Note: This table offers concrete solutions to help the multiple stakeholders overcome barriers and successfully implement workplace flexibility. Solutions are identified for managers, employees, and organizations. Each group should work together within its unique role to coordinate effective implementation of workplace flexibility.

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