



Matching Employee and Employer Needs for Flexibility

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Can Flexible Working practices meet the needs of employers and employees?

- Long tradition of academic research into flexibility **of** the employee or employer driven flexibility, designed to manage labour more efficiently
- More recent research into flexibility **for** employees or employee driven flexibility designed to help employees achieve a better work life balance
- Although some of these practices look similar, few extant attempts to draw these literatures together and explore whether they can meet the needs for flexibility for both parties



Benefit from Employer Driven Flexibility

- Flexible work practices which are employer driven generally seen as inferior to 'standard' employment
- But some evidence of employee benefit
 - Temporary contracts and careers
 - Zero hours irregular and 'voluntary' nature of work



Benefit from Employee Driven Flexibility matched?

Evidence of employer benefit from flexible working

- Flexible work practices which are employee driven also found to yield benefit to employers
- Employee commitment, reduced labour turnover, absence, enhanced performance
- Flexitime allowing extended operating hours
- Remote working saving on accommodation costs etc.

But can the needs for flexibility be matched?

More recently a number of calls in the literature to explore whether organizational and employee needs for flexibility can be reconciled



Agile Future Forum set up by UK Government

- Historically UK Government Policy has supported both labour market flexibility (employer driven practices) and helping employees achieve a better work-life balance
- In 2013 the then UK Deputy Prime Minister established the Agile Future Forum, a group of business leaders (CEOs and Chairman) of large employers to examine the agility of the UK workforce

- Research in 4 AFF organisations to examine ‘Agile Work Practices’
- Interviews with HR practitioners, line managers and employees
- Interviews designed to explore:
 - intention behind implementing agile practices
 - experiences of working on the AAC
 - tensions
 - unanticipated consequences



Annual hours contracts in a professional services firm

- Significant fluctuations in demand for services provided by professional staff
- Annual hours contracts allows employer to schedule staff in line with demand patterns



Annual hours contract

- 50 hours per week for 36 weeks
- 12 non-working weeks (in addition to annual leave)
- Voluntary scheme



Why do staff opt for annual hours?

Work-life Balance

- Childcare
- Quality time with children
- Travelling/holidays
- Moving house
- Study leave
- “I was doing long hours anyway”



Outcomes for employers

- Reduced overall staffing levels since fewer staff needed to cover peak periods
- No longer relied just on goodwill
- No need to 'keep staff busy' in quiet periods
- No noticeable effect on sickness levels during intense periods
- Engagement levels remained high



Tensions between individual and organizational needs

- Point where long hours may have detrimental effects/duty of care
- Lack of flexibility in how annual hours worked
- Managing holidays with non-working time and peak periods
- Getting the right level of uptake
- Staff on/not on annual hours contracts



Observations and conclusions

- Change essentially employer driven
- Some work-life benefits for employees
- Annual view of work-life balance rather than daily or weekly