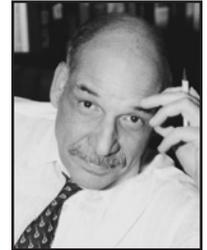


President's Message

Time for Another Look at Flexible Working Hours

A good option for today's workforce



Brian W. Pascal
President

DA few years ago, Marrison Mayer, President and CEO of Yahoo, was pilloried for cancelling working at home agreements with thousands of Yahoo employees and ordering them to show up in person for active duty. The Yahoo management team could not determine how much people were actually doing and in Mayer's view, they were simply not getting value for money. This may have been a case where managers weren't properly supervising staff or maybe there were a few or many employees who were actually abusing the system. We don't really know for sure.

What we do know is that there was an outcry of condemnation from an array of experts who claimed that flexible working arrangements were the only way forward. I may be the only one, but I am starting to doubt this widely held opinion, at least when it comes to benefits for the employer. That is not to say that all workplace flexibility programs are bad, but let's not be afraid to challenge conventionally thinking on this issue.

To begin, let's talk about what does work. I think it's generally agreed that there have to be some accommodations made for people who want to work part-time or share jobs with someone else. That does have some increased costs for the employer who must absorb salary and benefit expenses for more than one employee. But it works for both sides in keeping an older and experienced worker on the payroll longer or allowing a good employee to take time off to care for young children or to provide critical care for a parent or relative.

I am also not opposed to employee working from home as long as there are clear rules and guidelines and a concrete way to evaluate performance. I would actually prefer some combination of time at the office with some off-site days so that there is a regular check-in, partly for supervision but also to ensure connection with other staff in the organization. Is working at home effective? It seems to depend on the organization of course, but more on the individual. The Harvard Business Review studied the issue and found that high performers liked working from home and thrived while many other employees described it as lonely and when given the chance would come back to the office.

There is one form of flexible hours that I simply can't stand. This system, highly popular in government offices, involves working an extra 45 minutes a day to get a day off every two weeks. That means that every Monday or Friday the office is short staffed and I am not really sure how much work gets done in those 45 minute intervals.

As usual, those are my opinions only. Feel free to agree or disagree. We always welcome your comments, eight hours a day, five days a week.

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