

Working Paper

**Managing Flexible Schedules:  
What Successful Organizations Do<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** a set of family friendly policies has emerged as managers in organizations respond to the changing nature of the workforce and the need to integrate work and family. The most successful of these policies have been the ones that allow flexibility of time and place of work. These policies have been shown to improve productivity, reduce work family conflict, and improve commitment to the organization. However, these policies are not widely available. A key limiting factor of the diffusion of flexible practices is line managers, who worry about the consequences that allowing people to flex their schedule will have on their work. This paper shares a series of principles and practices that have helped software development groups to make use of flexible schedules successfully. The objective is to understand the tools managers use in their groups to facilitate the necessary cognitive shift from “line of sight” management to “target based” management in order to reap all the benefits that come from having flexible schedules. The ability to successfully manage flexible schedules is a key managerial skill in the new workplace reality.

## Introduction

A set of organizational family friendly policies has emerged in recent years as a response to the changing nature of the workforce and the realization that the mythical family of one breadwinner/one homemaker is but a small group. Raabe and Gessner { , 1988 #440} classified the different policies into three major categories: policies that provide more time for parenting, policies that facilitate obtaining and using supplemental childcare, and policies that provide educational and counseling services. Expanding these definitions to include elder care provides a useful categorization of policies. Of these, the policies that deal with the time dimension have been the most successful. In particular flexible scheduling has emerged as one of the options preferred by employees (Catalyst inc., 1998; Galinsky, Bond, & Hill, 2004; Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

The benefits of providing flexibility in the workplace have been shown in increases of productivity, reduction of work family conflict, increase in morale, and reduction in turnover rates (Boston College Center for Work and Family, 2000; Healy, 2004; Shepard, Clifto, & Kruse, 1996). But if these policies are so beneficial, why are flexible work arrangements not widely available? And furthermore, how is it that in many organizations where the policy exists it is underutilized?

Research has shown that a key piece in the flexibility puzzle are line managers, most senior managers in companies leave to them the approval of flexible arrangements and they are the ones that can “make or break” the policy (Lewis, 2003; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Managers are hesitant to encourage the use of flexible schedules, they worry about the consequences and implications flexibility would have on their work. Supervising flexible schedules does require a different focus to the day to day business. It requires a cognitive shift, the traditional schemas used by managers that rely on “line of sight” and hours at the office to evaluate and manage employees can no longer be used. A new set of managerial schemas that are “target based” needs to be learned.

Many organizations have been able to successfully implement flexible schedules. Those have acquired a set of practices and principles that allow them to be successful. What are these tricks, practices, and principles? Would using them imply an increased workload for the managers? What can managers do to facilitate the transition to a *target based* organization? These are the issues that will be studied in this paper, using information gathered from in depth interviews with software engineers. Computer professionals report twice as much access to flexibility as the rest of the occupations in the US (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001) presenting an ideal opportunity to investigate

successful adaptations to flexibility. I will look into the factors that are used to assure that work gets done on time and well while allowing employees to make use of flexible schedules. These are the basis for a new style of management where the attention is placed on results and not in the hours worked.

### **The changing nature of the workforce**

The landscape that is the world's workforce has changed dramatically in recent years. With the increased participation of female workers and the rise of dual income families the current workforce is different from the ones that came before. There are more demands on people's time than were assumed before. People feel pressured to not only work hard and long hours but also to make "effective" use of their time outside the office (Hochschild, 1997).

The participation of women in the workforce has reached 56% of the women in the US, and 70% of the women in the EU (percentage per country ranges between 56% in Italy to 86% in Denmark) work (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005; Lehmann & Wirtz, 2004). The rising trend is expected to continue. The US Census Bureau projects the proportion of women working in 2010 at 62%, which will represent 48% of the workforce (U. S. Census Bureau, 2002). In 2002, already 56% of the US college students were women and they outnumbered men in every age bracket (US Census, 2002a).

Dual income families, where both partners are active in the workforce, have become the majority of the households. They amount to 62% of the family households in the European Union (the country percentages range from 75% in the UK to 45% in Spain) (Franco & Winqvist, 2002) and to 56% in the US (U. S. Census Bureau, 2004b). In the US the growth of single parent families has also affected the workforce landscape, single parent families represent 24% of family households (U. S. Census Bureau, 2004a), surprisingly the percentage for the European Union for single parent families is approximately 3% of all households (Lehmann & Wirtz, 2004).

The new workforce has a significant potential for conflict and stress as people strive to balance the demands from home and work. Work has been and still is organized around the assumption that families have one breadwinner and one stay at home partner to take care of the house and family, but that assumption is no longer valid. Nowadays the reality is that for dual income families two people have to handle three jobs, two full time or part time jobs outside the home and one taking care of home, and for single parents one person is expected to handle two jobs, and these two groups comprise the majority of the population. The changes in the workforce require changes in the way work is organized and in the relationship family-employee-employer.

Moreover the changes do not stop there, strategies to manage the potential conflict between family and work will become even more relevant in the years to come as the

population ages. The future distribution of the population is expected to change; the percentage of people age 65 and over will increase significantly. The US will see the baby boom generation age and retire. By 2020 20% of the US population will be over 65, there will be as many of them as 20-35 year olds (Judy, D'Amico, & Geipel, 1997). The OECD forecasts an increase in the 65 and over population in all its member countries<sup>2</sup>. In average it expects that the proportion of the population 65 and over will increase from being equal to 20% of the population aged 15 to 64 in 2000, to becoming 47% in 2050 (OECD, 2005). This increase in the older population will also intensify the time demands of the active workforce, needing to care for aging parents will become the norm.

### **Family Friendly Policies**

Family friendly policies have emerged as a solution to reduce the potential for work family conflict that arises from the disparity between the way work was designed and expected to be executed, and the needs of the employee. The conflict created between work and family results in increased strain affecting employees performance, satisfaction, and intention to stay in their present organization (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Many different policies have been implemented: on site day care centers, telecommuting, childcare subsidies, and counseling among others with different degrees of success. These policies will be more or less useful to each different employee, and the policy usefulness will change during the life course of the employee (Kossek, 1990). Hence, it is best when many different options are offered and the employees can choose the ones that better fit their current situation; even though on occasion the availability of myriad choices can produce negative consequences as the effort of making a decision increases (Schwartz, 2004).

Family friendly policies have been shown to reduce the conflict between work and family (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000), which in turn allows people to work more hours before experiencing problems in balancing work and family (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001). Furthermore Thomas and Ganster (1995) showed that family friendly policies significantly improve employee attitude and well-being; but that employee control is the key mechanism through which the policies affect work family conflict. Work family policies have been shown to positively affect other variables; they increase commitment, reduce turnover, increase productivity, etc. for a detailed summary of research results see Glass and Estes (1997).

An important caveat is that it is not enough to have these policies; employees need to feel able to use them. In many situations the culture of the organization and the supervisor and coworkers' attitudes create an environment where no one is able to take advantage of the available policies. If the employees are not able to use these policies then their positive effect on work family conflict does not materialize (Allen, 2001).

## **Flexible Schedules**

Out of the different family friendly policies that have emerged in organizations, the policies dealing with time, policies that allow employees to modify the time spent at work and/or the office, have proved to be the most successful and most desired (Catalyst inc., 1998; Galinsky et al., 2004), in particular highly flexible scheduling practices (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). These policies include: traditional flex time (working a schedule that has employee-chosen start and end times), daily flex time (working a schedule that allows the employee to vary work hours on a daily basis), and telecommuting (working from a different location) (Boston College Center for Work and Family, 2000). The most promising of these is daily flextime as it allows a maximum degree of freedom to the employee.

On top of the benefits shown by family friendly policies, flexible arrangements have shown to strongly improve productivity. In one study 70% of managers and 87% of employees who were part of the Work/Life Measurement Project reported flexible arrangements as having a positive impact on productivity (Boston College Center for Work and Family, 2000). Another study measured a 10% improvement in productivity from flexible work schedules (Shepard et al., 1996).

Flexibility has also been shown to improve recruitment and retention (Healy, 2004). Employers will always face challenges to recruit highly qualified applicants and being able to offer flexible schedule can make them employers of choice. An increased retention rate is a highly desirable outcome also. The increased complexity of jobs in the information economy makes it more difficult and costly for organizations to replace experienced employees.

The availability of traditional flex time has increased for US employees from 29% in 1992 to 43% in 2002, as well as the availability of daily flex time that has increased from 18% in 1992 to 23% in 2002 (Bond, Galinsky, & Hill, 2004). The availability of flexibility is not uniform across occupations, in 2001 the BLS reported overall flexibility at 30.9%, while occupations ranged from 59.3% for mathematic and computer scientists to 10% for teachers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001). In the European Union 20% of employees have flex time (countries range from 2% in Greece to over 55% in the UK) (Van Bastelaer & Vaguer, 2004).

The availability of flexible schedules has steadily risen over the last years, but flexible schedule policies are still not widely spread, there are still over two out of five US employees and 4 out of every 5 in the EU working without flexible schedules. Furthermore, in many organizations in which flexible schedules exist they are only part of formal policies but are not used by the workforce. It is in the use of the policies where the benefits are derived (Eaton, 2003).

## **The role of managers in flexible work schedules and the necessary cognitive shift**

A key element in the successful use of flexible schedules is the line manager. Many organizations leave the implementation of the flexible schedules policies to the managers. They are the gatekeepers – it is in their hands to encourage or discourage, to approve or reject requests for flexible schedules. Support from the organization can be undermined by line managers (Lewis, 2003) or vice versa. But their support may be the most critical variable in the employees decision to use organizational policies (Thompson et al., 1999).

Managers are hesitant to promote flexible policies because they worry that everyone will want to use them and that their work will be negatively impacted (Eaton, 2003). They fear work will not get done and they will be unable to control it. They imagine people coming and going at completely different hours. Managers fear that it will add hours to their own work schedule (Silverstein & Srb, 1979). Many assume that having employees using flexible schedules would mean that they would have to increase their hours to be able to cover all the different schedules, or that performance evaluations will become increasingly complex.

However when we look at managers of employees actively using flexible schedules they noted only improvements, 75% of them reported no change in their workload, and almost all reported positive impact on their group productivity (Boston College Center for Work and Family, 2000). Managers also report that managing flexible schedules has sharpened their overall work management skills (Catalyst inc., 2000).

Managing people in flexible work schedules does seem to require a different mindset; it requires a cognitive shift. Managers have to realize that flexibility needs to be carefully managed (Baines, 1995). Managers have to take into account different work patterns and/or locations, performance assessment will be harder, and if there are not clear rules, flexibility can add a great deal of complexity (Reilly, 2001). Also, the manager's own approach to work life balance affects how extensively flexibility will be used (Lewis, 2003).

The necessary cognitive shift has to start with the current reliance on “*line of sight*” as a basis for managing people; the schemas managers use to evaluate people and to deal with everyday activities need to be modified. The managers' dependence on *line of sight* management, on watching people work as a requirement to get work done, and on relating hours at the office with performance, places unnecessary hurdles to the successfully implementation of flexible schedules. The detrimental consequences of this management style that equates time at the office, “face time”, with commitment and performance have been documented by Bailyn (1993), Fried (1998) and Perlow (1997), among others. This style of management creates noxious practices where people put in



longer hours in the office to show their commitment potentially creating increased levels of conflict between work and family and its detrimental consequences.

The *line of sight* schemas need to be replaced with more *target based* schemas. These two styles differ across many dimensions; Table 1 compares some of them. The *line of sight* management is characterized by a reliance on presence. The manager relies on being able to see people work to assess performance, and furthermore the manager believes he needs to see people for them to work. This style of management relies on presence also for communication, there are usually no planned activities that ensure that the whole team and the manager are informed of progress. Project planning is done at a minimum, relying on being able to coordinate work in the hallways and being able to call meetings in the spur of the moment. This management style does not allow room for flexibility, not only because the employee's performance is evaluated on the number of hours spent at the office, but also because the work is organized around relying on people being around the office ready for a meeting, change of plans, etc.

The *target based* management is on the other hand, characterized by a reliance and focus on results. The manager evaluates people on whether they met their milestones, on whether they got the work done. The projects when people use *target based* schemas are planned in detail, meetings are set in advance. This management style makes room for flexibility, people's performance is dependent on the work they have accomplished not when and where it was done. Careful planning allows for people's needs to be taken into account and to incorporate the needs for co-location, if any, in the different stages of the project. There are mechanisms and checkpoints in place to inform everyone of progress, alert of any potential complications, and bring together separate pieces of information on the project. This style shifts the responsibility for getting the work done, that *line of sight* managers believe rests on them towards the employees. While *line of sight* managers believe they need to be there to make work happen, and that employees will not work without the manager's presence, in the *target based* style this responsibility rests on the employee. It is the employees' responsibility to work, to figure out their schedule, and to progress in line with the project plan. This schema frees from the need to be there to make work happen and allows for better ways to balance their own work and family. The schema frees the employees to choose when and where to work eliminating the need of *face time*.

What is it that the successful managers do that allows them to reap the many benefits from having flexible work arrangements? How do they manage all the fears and worries that other managers have (and that they probably had at the beginning) and make these arrangements work? Are they special cases or can everyone, everywhere, gain? The focus of the present study is to identify practices that result in a successful adoption of flexible schedules and that can facilitate the cognitive shift towards more *target based* managerial schemas.

## **The research**

I conducted a study of US software engineers that worked either as programmers or line managers. The study consisted of 22 interviews, 20 were done in person and the other 2 over the phone. Most of the participants were located in the greater Boston area, others in locations in the Midwest and the West Coast. The interviews lasted between one and one a half hours; for the people located in Boston the interviews were conducted outside their workplaces. Programmers were the largest group with 17, the other five held management positions.

The reason behind selecting software engineers was because traditionally the profession in the US has enjoyed a significant amount of flexibility. In 2001 the Bureau of Labor Statistics measured the percentage of employees with flexible schedules at 30.9%, the occupational group with the highest percentage was the Mathematical and Computer Professionals at 59.3% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001). Although the flexibility that software engineers experience might not find its origins in family friendliness, the group was ideal to study successfully established practices for managing flexible schedules. Software programming is a complex field that requires people to keep constantly updated on the latest technology and to solve different and difficult problems everyday. Despite or maybe because of all their flexibility software engineers create very complex products that depend on many interdependent parts. Moreover, the profession is also reaching a certain degree of maturity and with it I expected to find certain established practices that help coordinate and make the most of flexible schedule practices.

The participants were selected from the MIT alumni network, and contacted through email inviting them to participate in a study about the nature of software engineering work. 130 emails were sent out, 26 people replied and 19 interviews were set up. Schedule conflicts did not permit the other 7 people to be interviewed. The other 3 participants resulted from meetings with participants in software engineering discussion groups.

The participants' experience with flexibility varied, one person described her workplace as having no flexibility, two others perceived having limited flexibility, and the rest said their workplaces were "very flexible". I analyzed the interviews to identify practices that were used to coordinate and manage the different levels of flexibilities and what from the participants' perspective it was that made flexibility succeed or not in their workplaces.

## **How to make flexible arrangements work.**

The interviews revealed that in the successfully flexible organizations managers used a different set of principles when they evaluated, tracked, and related to their employees.

They have successfully changed their managerial schemas to a ‘results centered’ set or are in the process of doing so. They trusted their employees to do their work, and focused on results. Over and over the interviewees mentioned these two principles as the foundations for the success of flexible schedules.

These two principles signal the cognitive shift that takes place in managers who learn to successfully manage flexible schedules. Successful managers seemed to have changed some of their assumptions of who is a good employee and how to know whether the employees are working or not; they had shifted from the traditional schemas of *line of sight* management. Relying on *line of sight* management is an impediment for flexible scheduling.

Managers and employees recognized that allowing for flexibility was necessary, that they could not rush creativity and that assuming that it will happen from 9 to 5 was naïve. Hence, flexible schedules not only allowed them to improve their life balance but also to work when it was best for them and the project.

The principles are the foundation for decision making, and for managing and evaluating employees. They are key for successful flexibility.

**Trust.** The first principle is trust, and, with the risk of sounding like a cliché, it is a two-way avenue. Managers need to trust their employees, and employees need to trust their managers. The issue of trust manifested itself over and over in the interviews, at times explicit at others implicitly in the way people would talk about what is important in their organizations. The traditional *line of sight* management operates on the principle that people will not work unless they are been checked upon, managers do not trust employees to work without them looking over the shoulder. For the employees it has translated into worrying that if they are not in the office, if they are not ‘seen’ working, they might be considered as not being committed to the organization and their jobs, they don’t trust that their managers will recognize their efforts.

When trust is present an important change takes place, it takes away the suspicion. Managers will assume that if an employee says she is working she is. Employees will believe their manager when she says their evaluation will not be affected because of use of flexible schedules. This message came clear through the interviews, for example in the case of the engineer who described her workplace as inflexible she related it to trust.

“In [company name] people wanted to see you... people did not trust you to work if they don’t see you work” –Programmer

“You want to hire people who are the best so you can get it, and in a start up you usually have a lot of trust in the others” – Manager

This is a fundamental difference that the successful flexible workplaces showed in the interviews.

**What matters is getting the work done.** This principle directly relates to breaking from the assumption that time equals commitment and performance. Successful managers of flexible work arrangements focus on the work, not on the hours worked. This is a very different assumption to work under, and one that dramatically makes it easier to have flexible schedules. This principle shifts the focus of the manager towards the tangible results of work as a measure of performance.

“Flexibility is very important for engineers. Here what is important is getting the job done.” --Programmer

Working in an organization where this principle is present results in increased responsibility over the employees using the flexible schedules. Employees must realize that what they do impacts other members of the team and that they need to get their work done as expected, and when that is not possible they need to communicate with the team.

“[My company] is productivity oriented so you don’t need to be there but you have to not be the one holding off the team.” --Programmer

“The tradeoff that I have found is that flexibility comes with greater responsibility.” --Programmer.

A focus on results gives freedom to employees and managers from the bane of face time that plagues many organizations.

These two principles seem to be the foundation that makes the flexible work arrangements work. Without them the road to flexibility would be riddled with suspicious, negative consequences, and lack of respect. Notice that these are not principles that should only be present when flexible schedules are being implemented. These principles would be beneficial to any operation, but are sadly missing from many. Using these principles as the basis for making decisions, and for managing and evaluating employees greatly facilitates the successful use of flexible schedules.

Incorporating these two principles, ‘trust’ and ‘what matters is getting the work done’, is not easy, it requires a process Schein (1999) has termed transformative change that results in cognitive redefinition in the learner. Managers and employees must change the way they think by first unlearning the old ways and then learning new ones. This learning is uncomfortable and produces anxiety that can battle against the internalization of the new schemas. Schein proposes that in order to promote change the learning anxiety needs to be lowered and with that people will feel more comfortable changing. One way to do this is by providing tools that can help in adopting the desired change. I will use this

strategy and will present a series of practices that can facilitate, by providing a starting point for the change, the cognitive shift, and incorporation of the new principles.

## **Practices**

For someone facing the need to incorporate and successfully manage flexible work arrangements, learning of the two principles discussed before might seem ‘exactly what they were looking for’ but also somewhat daunting, they are great goals in themselves but how to achieve them is not clear, there are not concrete actions to take. For each organization the road to these principles will be different as each group will be starting from a different point, but some common practices might prove useful. This section will provide a set of practices that were used by the different organizations where the interviewees worked that helped them in the process of managing flexible schedules. These are practices that bridge some of the fears and concerns that managers experience when approving or rejecting flexible work schedules; and through their successful use will help to incorporate the principles into ‘the way things are done’ in the organization.

The interviewees identified these practices as what allowed them to work with flexibility. They recognized the flexible schedules could be messy and could slow response time but that when a process was in place drawbacks could be eliminated or at least mitigated.

The practices can be grouped into two major groups. The first covers the practices that deal with planning work. The second covers the practices that deal with executing the work.

### **Planning practices**

These practices attempt to affect the way managers and employees plan their work. These are aimed at helping the manager plan for the flexibility needs of the employees, assess whether work is getting done, and to identify potential problems. They help the employee to show that work is being done and to plan for the future needs of the project.

**Carefully planned projects.** Planning the execution of the project can help facilitate flexibility; it allows the managers to establish a plan to measure against, and the employees to know their responsibilities and dependencies. It is important that the manager include the employees in the planning process, this will help both parts understand the flexibility needs and how they relate to the project planning. Joint planning will also provide an opportunity for the employees to understand the higher level of responsibility they assume when working with flexible schedules.

If the work is divided smartly, deliverables are clearly defined, individual needs taken into account, and clear rules established, then the project is likely to succeed.

“The smart division of work is what makes [flexibility] possible.” - Programmer

“We manage flexibility by fixing meetings way in advance it is all well planned.”  
- Programmer

“Needs are different depending on where you are in a project. Now we are at the beginning so there is lots of time spent in meetings checking and revising specifications.” --Programmer

A key learning for the participants was that different phases of the project have different needs, and that people have different flexibility needs. For example, in software projects they recognize that the design phase needed a lot more face to face interaction than the debugging phase. In a well planned project where phases and dates are set, the team can rely on these and plan accordingly, and the managers can also to divide work in ways that the people who need more flexibility are able to work more independently.

**Clear and Frequent Deliverables.** Clear deliverables allow the managers to have checkpoints on a project or activity to assess progress. For the employees the deliverables allow them to plan their work and show their progress. People working with flexible schedules found it useful to have clear milestones. They knew what was expected of them and of the rest of the team. Also these milestones and deliverables were frequent enough to help identify if some part of the project was behind early enough that remedial actions could be taken and the interdependencies could be managed. The frequency would depend on the nature of the project, some of the participants had them weekly, others bi-weekly or monthly. The manager must identify what is the ‘appropriate frequency’ for the particular project; this will probably require some fine tuning and might change depending on the team, the project, etc. This is a key management tool, this way the manager has concrete evidence of the progress of the project and is able to forecast potential problems and handle them in advance.

“I have a pretty detailed list of milestones. Now we have deliverables every two weeks and I try to get them to have something tangible to deliver every time. I make people have to show something, this avoids slacking off until the end without being able to foresee it.” – Manager

This quote illustrates some of the distrust that might exist. The use of the term ‘slacking off’ implies that he was not sure people would actually work. Having clear deliverables, and having the employees fulfill them will help in building the manager’s trust.

In the case of software projects deliverables are easily identified, they can be defined by having specific functions ready, by testing certain code, etc, other activities would have to identify what are appropriate deliverables for them.

### **Execution practices**

These practices aim at creating and facilitating the interactions between the different members of the team and the manager. If people have differing schedules being able to coordinate activities so dependencies and interactions do not suffer becomes important. These practices will help assuage managers' worries on how the interdependencies will be handled, and co-workers' worries about the availability of other team members.

**Core hours.** The establishment of core hours started with the traditional flex time, where people chose different start and end times, always the different alternatives provided a set of core hours where everyone was expected to be present. Core hours are useful as they provide time when one could contact other members of the team or easily set meetings, but core hours can be limiting for flexibility forcing everyone to be present at specific times, especially when the core hours cover a significant portion of the day. Some of the interviewees had found more flexible incarnations of the typical core hours. They were not required to be at the office during them only to assure availability. Some groups used cell phones, email, and/or instant messaging to "be available" but the rule was whatever method you chose you had to be reachable during core hours.

"You have your task list to work on, you need to be accessible on the core hours 10 to 2 with a cell phone no matter where you are" --Programmer

The use of core hours helps ensure that all the members of the team can handle their interdependencies with others regardless of where they are or when they are coming to the office. And when they cover a reasonable amount of hours (the number will depend on the team, activities, etc. and could be revised and changed throughout the project) then core hours do not limit flexibility significantly. In the case of the interviewees most of their core hours were between 10 am and 2 pm, or 10 am and 3 pm, to accommodate early risers and night owls.

**Recurrent status meetings.** Many organizations use status meetings as a way to keep track of projects even when there are no flexible schedules involved. These meetings have similar benefits as the deliverables, they help keep track of progress and identify some potential problems. These meetings have the added benefit of keeping the team informed of the progress of the different parts of the project. While deliverables are oriented more to an employee manager interaction, the meetings allow the whole team to keep track of progress. Some organizations have weekly meetings, others more frequently.

“We just ask for a trail of breadcrumbs so we can pick it up if necessary.” -  
Manager

Of course having people working with different schedules and locations can make meetings difficult; some teams solved this by having the meetings during core hours. One of the interviewee’s group had come up with an innovative approach. More than half of the team members were telecommuters who almost never make it to the office, meetings were not practical for them, they have implemented a shared status report where everyone at the beginning of the week reports what was accomplished the previous week and what they expect to work on the current week. This report is circulated among the group and helps everyone be aware of the project progress.

“To coordinate people we publish a weekly report of what we have done this week, this report used to be for the manager only but since 2 years ago we started sharing it with everyone so we know what is going on.” - Programmer

Status meetings might be more or less frequent in different stages of the project or depending on the team members’ needs.

**Leverage the technology.** When Working Mother evaluates companies to include in its list of “Best Companies”, they assess whether the organization helps employees set up equipment so they can be truly productive when working at home (Working Mother, 2003). The appropriate use of technology can make a significant difference in managing people in flexible schedules. Tools like instant messaging and email are useful when people telecommute as you are able to contact people in other locations easily, instant messaging provides a more interactive interface and it feels like you can carry out a conversation. The widespread availability of high speed connections has also broadened the horizon of activities that can be performed from locations different from the office. Additionally, in the case of software programming, increasing computer power has allowed people to take more and more work home since they are able to run more powerful applications on their home computers.

“The technology helps me keep control of the flex time and place, with instant messaging and email.” - Manager

All the interviewees used email and cell phones, and most instant messaging, and although these tools help they still don’t supplant being able to walk over to the other person’s cube. The tools create opportunities for dodging and stalling that could not exist in face to face interaction, this can be lessened by establishing rules and expectations. There are also concerns around the cost of the technology and the safety of exchanging proprietary information through these channels, but new and safer ways to exchange



information become available all the time; they just need to be incorporated into the process.

These practices can be useful for many kinds of activities and projects, they are not limited to software projects. The nature of a software project might make it easier to divide work and set deliverables, and to have periods where little interaction is necessary. But careful planning can compensate for the difference and anticipate potential problems. If the project or activity does not lend itself to frequent deliverables then the manager would need to make the most of the status meetings. If people need to interact frequently, promoting the use of instant messaging, cell phones, blackberries, etc. so that physical presence is not necessary will allow for more flexibility. These interactive tools run the risk of becoming constraining forcing people to be available at all times. The key is to be creative and establish rules, to try different alternatives and combinations until the most appropriate one is found. With time these practices will infuse the principles of trust and focus on results into the managers, employees, and the organization at large.

### **Flexibility in the long term**

The need for flexibility is here to stay and will only increase in subsequent years. Managers need to learn to handle flexible schedules, I believe this is a key management skill in the modern office. The strong reliance on *line of sight* management needs to be broken and a cognitive shift towards a new reliance on results needs to replace it.

The goal is to create a cognitive shift towards *target based* management. The practices discussed in this paper can be useful in most projects and activities, with higher or lower degrees of flexibility, and will provide a starting point for the development of new managerial schemas. There will always be jobs that will not be able to allow daily flexibility or telecommuting. For these jobs different approaches to handling employee's needs for work family integration will be necessary. But for most, these principles and practices will prove appropriate. What is necessary is to break through the fear and concern managers experience so that they can achieve the benefits that flexibility can bring. Managers need to be aware of their importance as gatekeepers of the flexibility policies and use the practices to manage the new challenges that will emerge.

The flexible workplace can create more satisfied employees with less conflict between family and work, employees whose commitment to the organization would be stronger. These benefits can extend to the managers also. Managers realize that they don't need to work extra hours to manage their flexible workforce reducing their own strain and work family conflict.

Hence, managers need to make the leap and try out flexibility. The practices described here will serve as a starting point on the road towards absorbing the principles. In time

managers and employees will work out their own version of them. They might add some and eliminate others that serve better their own style and needs. In time the need for some of the practices might not exist as the principles take root and dissipate doubts and concerns from managers and employees.

**Table 1** Differing dimensions between “line of sight” and “target based” managerial schemas.

Dimension	Line of Sight Style	Target Based Style
Performance	Is equated with number of hours in the office.	Is equated with results and meeting milestones.
Responsibility for making the work happen	Rests on the manager who needs to keep an eye on the employees.	Rests on the employees, they know what they need to do and they find ways to achieve it.
Planning	Not detailed, relies on spur of moment meetings.	Detailed, takes into account people’s need for flexibility and the project’s needs.
Supervising	Is equated with keeping an eye on employees.	Is equated with tracking the project’s progress.
Information Sharing	There is not a concerted effort to share information, relies on being present.	There are activities aimed at sharing information not only with the supervisor but also with other members of the team.
Flexible work schedules	Mean more work for the manager.	Are built into the project and allow people to focus on work by reducing the potential strain of work family conflicts.

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**Footnotes:**

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<sup>2</sup> The OECD member countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States

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