

Finding Flexible Work Solutions

Kerry Fallon Horgan
Flexibility At Work
www.flexibility.com.au

Adapted from "Time On, Time Out! Flexible work solutions
to keep your life in balance" S.Biggs and K. Fallon Horgan
Published by Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Australia

CONTENTS

- 1 The possibilities 3
- 2 Getting a life 30
- 3 The challenges 49

1

The possibilities

‘The organisations now emerging as successful will be, above all, flexible...’

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *The Change Masters*

Achieving flexibility at your workplace means creating the life you want to live instead of simply reacting to everyday stresses as they occur. You know the feeling of just getting everything under control—work and household routines, personal, family and community commitments—when the unexpected occurs, and you drop all the balls you were trying to juggle. In another scenario you actually have control over when, where and how your work gets done. What difference would it make to your life and wellbeing if you had the flexibility to start work a little later or leave earlier, to work part-time, or even work from home? Do you want more balance in your life? What types of flexibility would suit you and your workplace? How do you go about getting flexibility at work? What obstacles must be overcome? And how do you meet these challenges?

First it is helpful to have an understanding of what the options might be. You may not always reach your ultimate goals, but you must have an idea about what you are aiming for to be clear about the steps you need to take along the way.

So try and put aside any pessimism or disbelief and share with me a vision of a successful, flexible workplace.

Imagine that your workplace survived the turmoil of the global financial crisis by adopting a simple but radical approach to its people and the way in which work was done. While other organisations were rationalising, re-engineering, downsizing and retrenching, together you, your colleagues and senior management took a proactive approach. Rather than merely reacting to the economic downturn and circumstances beyond your control you worked together on areas that you could control to find a solution to the problem.

Everyone in the organisation agreed to reduce their working hours for a six-month period. Some people chose to work part-time or to job share, others chose to take unpaid leave, and senior management led the way by taking a 15 per cent pay cut. This meant that everyone could keep their jobs. The business also benefited by saving on payroll costs but most importantly by not losing the skills of its people, its priceless intellectual capital and irreplaceable internal and external customer relationships.

Few other organisations were able to see or act on the trends needed for leading-edge competition in the new century. They continued treating people as economic commodities to be done away with as cost-cutting measures, and focusing lamentably short-term to achieve quick fix bottom line results. This lack of regard for their employees meant many of the best people left even long-term jobs to find organisations like yours. Those who stayed on were numbed and 'shell-shocked'. They felt acutely the sense of loss caused by close work colleagues leaving, and reacted angrily to what they felt was a betrayal of people by their organisation. The result is that commitment and loyalty have dissipated and productivity and effectiveness plummeted in these organisations. Yet workers are expected to do more and more with fewer and fewer resources.

At the same time, as a result of pulling together in a time of crisis, the morale and commitment at your workplace is at an all-time high. You and your co-workers have created an environment where people trust and help each other, where you feel secure in your jobs, and where the work and life balance has become a cornerstone of the organisation's business and strategic planning. Because of its innovative and

people-oriented practices, your organisation is now a globally benchmarked success story, and attracts and keeps the most highly skilled, productive and effective employees.

An unexpected outcome of the six-month reduced work time is that productivity has not been significantly affected. Even more surprising is that, although everyone was offered full-time work when the economic environment recovered, most chose to stay on reduced hours. The people at your workplace have decided that time is their most valued commodity, and they are no longer willing to work ever-longer hours for more money. Their priorities have changed. They are discovering that success for them is not so much about accumulating material possessions but about quality of life. A higher value is now placed on health, family, friends, learning, spirituality and community interests.

Responding to people's desire for better life balance meant creating a flexible workplace. It was soon discovered that such a workplace has important results because it means supporting the flexible, creative thinking and wellbeing needed for peak performance, innovation and organisational survival in the new millennium.

Your organisation's flexible work practices are innovative and far-reaching. They have been brought about by outstanding communication and cooperation between teams, departments and with customers. Reciprocity is at the heart of any decisions made and empowered teams work together to ensure that the needs of both their members and the organisation are met. Many employees work away from the workplace, having being supplied with the necessary support and equipment to work from home. Clear performance measures and objectives are mutually determined by team leaders and team members and it is up to the employee to decide how and when the work is to be accomplished. So if an employee whose role it is to negotiate \$1 million worth of business for the company each year reaches that target in six months, she has completed her work for the year and can attend courses, undertake community work, spend time developing in other ways or continue working for further bonuses.

To ensure the continuing growth of the organisation, the individual and the work group, all team members meet for a full day once a month in specially designed rooms at head

office. There is a teleconference link-up for anyone who under special circumstances is unable to be there in person on the day.

The morning meeting, in the blue room, is designed to discuss business objectives and developments. This meeting is regularly attended by people from various specialties within the organisation to add different dimensions of organisational experiences and to build alliances with your team. This meeting is followed by two hours of socialising over lunch, during which team members have fun together, build on their relationships, and informally sort out any problems they are experiencing.

The afternoon meeting, in the green room, is an in-depth conversation between members of your business unit facilitated by a dialogue expert. In this dialogue hot topics are explored, feelings expressed and assumptions challenged. This brings the team to a deeper understanding of themselves and the variety of ideas, experience and views of team members. The sharing of personal stories also develops the relationships necessary to keep people connected in this fluid work environment.

As a cornerstone of success, some of the flexible work practices people enjoy at your workplace are:

- *Flexible work schedules* are available for employees, with starting and finishing times between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m., any five days of the week including Saturday and Sunday. This helps people balance work and personal lives and allows for personal preferences for morning or afternoon people to work at times when they perform best. Extra time can be worked in busy periods and accrued for leave at a later date.
- *Job sharing* is practised throughout the organisation, including by the joint CEOs. This is seen as an important organisational strategy to multi-skill the workforce and ensure that there is always someone able to do the job if the work 'partner' needs to take time off. The increased diversity also stimulates creativity and innovation.
- *Permanent part-time work* is available to any staff member, and pro-rata annual leave and other entitlements apply. This is very attractive to people who want to pursue a course of study, train for the Olympics, take a role in ongoing community work or contribute in some way to

their children's school. Part-time arrangements are very flexible and allow, even for someone who is studying, to work reduced hours during the term and longer hours during the semester breaks.

- *Extra initiatives* include:
 - assistance for study (such as a book allowance and paid exam leave);
 - a flexi-time that can be accrued and taken when needed;
 - moving leave and relocation support;
 - a career break scheme;
 - less formal arrangements, including taking holiday leave in, say, two-hour lots to attend appointments that can be planned ahead.
- *Keeping in touch* is necessary for staff members on extended leave, through regular telephone calls, staff newsletter, in-house training, and calling in for casual work when similarly skilled employees are unable to work. There is also a pool of ex-employees who have left to pursue other interests but remain available for occasional work.
- *Family-friendly practices* include:
 - paid parental leave;
 - time off during the school holidays by working longer hours during the term;
 - a 48/52 system, where the employee is paid the equivalent of 48 weeks over the year but has eight weeks' holiday;
 - priority given to those with school-aged children for time off during school holiday times;
 - reserving and subsidising child care in centres near the workplace;
 - provision of a child care and elder care information and referral service;
 - parenting, elder care and health care seminars;
 - an after-school care room, where older children can come to the workplace and be supervised up until 6 p.m., with a quiet room for homework and studying and a games room with computers and videos;
 - paid leave to care for sick family members or other family emergencies;
 - a health plan for employees and their families to cover

out-of-pocket health care costs as well as death and disability benefits;

- bereavement leave for the death of a family member;
- free counselling with an external agency for issues such as relationship difficulties, financial problems and substance abuse;
- family members encouraged to attend work functions;
- employee training only in work hours so as not to interfere with family commitments.

All employees from the CEO down take advantage of these flexible practices, which are encouraged as a vital part of a growing and creative organisation. Flexibility is seen as a business imperative for success in the new millennium.

THE REALITY

Many will say ‘Well, all this is great in the ideal world, but is it possible in reality?’

In fact, there are already organisations today that have listened to their employees’ needs for greater balance between work and personal life and have implemented innovative flexible workplace practices. They have introduced these practices not merely as a matter of recognising their responsibility to their employees and the community, but as a matter of ongoing quality improvement with substantial bottom line benefits for the organisation. Quality business outcomes result from the quality of life of employees. Westpac Banking Corporation employs over 30 000 people and is an award-winning organisation in the area of flexible work practices. The CEO said the driving force for the introduction of Westpac’s flexible work initiatives to be simply that it makes ‘good business sense’.

Harry Stout, at the time, ING Australia CEO, said:

As a result of the GFC we have had to find creative ways of best deploying our resources from declining business areas to those that are growing and requiring greater resources needs. INGA has prided itself on retaining employment wherever possible, while our competitors reduced headcount by five to 20 per cent. To achieve this we worked with our employees in finding ways we could reduce our employment costs while maintaining headcount. Through further encouraging flexible work practices, we were able to ride through the markets turbulence and are now positioned to leverage new opportunities.

Flexible working arrangements are open to all employees at INGA. They include access to part-time working arrangements such as a reduced working week, a reduction in hours by 1.5 per day to accommodate school times, as well as the option to work a nine-day fortnight or a 19-day month. These practices were promoted extensively during the GFC and as a result INGA generated a ten per cent take-up rate.

A similar response happened at AMP Ltd. AMP Head of Talent & Diversity explains:

The challenging environment of the financial crisis encouraged us to look at creative ways to retain our employees and increase engagement and productivity in challenging times. Creative workforce planning strategies that continually reinforce flexibility as a work option ensure AMP has the workforce it needs, without compromising our optimistic and positive brand and culture.

Many organizations now realise that achieving flexibility in the workplace is not only possible but necessary—that, in an unpredictably changing environment, flexibility and innovation are critical to the competitive advantage needed for success. They are finding that a vital key to improving business performance is through supporting and enhancing the performance of the individual.

The downsizing tactics of the past decade, aimed at achieving ever-greater profits, have had very detrimental effects on employees' morale and commitment with resultant adverse effects on performance. Organisations are now looking to options such as flexible work practices to help overcome these problems. This means a win/win outcome for both the organisation and their employees.

BENEFITS FOR ORGANISATIONS

The benefits to organisations implementing flexible practices include:

- becoming an employer of choice for job candidates, thus attracting the best employees;
- expanding the pool of potential employees to cater for changing business needs;

- better customer service from a happier, more diverse and flexible workforce;
- higher retention of employees and reduced absenteeism, leading to huge cost savings;
- improved employee commitment and morale, improving effectiveness and performance;
- increased workforce diversity, enhancing creativity and innovation;
- a greater capacity by staff to adapt to change;
- enhanced public relations; and
- observance of legal requirements.

The financial benefits of improved morale, better staff retention, lower rates of absenteeism, stress reduction and competitive recruiting are enormous. The introduction of flexible practices can bring about cost savings in such areas as a reduction in office space and infrastructure costs and maximising the use of expensive machinery. Further benefits are found from having a pool of trained staff, who may be on leave, job sharing or working part-time but who are accessible to cover peak work periods or one-off projects. All this means maintaining optimum productivity, which would not be possible without a flexible workforce.

Added to these incentives is the fact that many flexible practices are inexpensive to introduce and are therefore very cost-effective. In their Report on Reducing Benefits Costs, the US Institute of Management & Administration states that work and family programs ‘can lead to increased productivity and profitability at little or no cost to the employer’. When asked about the cost of implementing flexible practices, best-practice organisations such as the US Longaberger Baskets believe that ‘they can’t afford not to’.

The ability to decrease staff turnover, reduce absenteeism and attract staff through flexible work practices translates to productivity benefits for employers. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, in her book *The Change Masters*, cites research comparing the productivity of similar companies within the same industry. She found that ‘the companies with reputations for progressive human resource practices were significantly higher in long-term profitability and financial growth than their counterparts’

Keeping the best employees

Organisations are finding huge cost savings as a result of adopting flexible work practices. One example is in the costs of losing a key long-term employee. One service organisation with 4500 employees and 2 million members and policy-holders estimated the costs of replacing its staff at \$34 400 for front line staff, \$53 300 for senior specialists such as data processors, and \$53 600 for front line managers. It estimated that its work and family programs cost \$700 000 to establish, operate and evaluate and the benefits accrued in reduced staff turnover for family reasons over a five year period to be \$12 million.

Other organisations are finding similar benefits from their ability to retain staff after introducing flexible arrangements. The US Aetna Life and Casualty estimated a \$1 million reduction in turnover costs per annum due to a higher retention of women after the introduction of work and family initiatives. The Chubb Corporation found that it cost over \$3 million to replace 50 employees who left the company because of the lack of flexible work practices.

Businesses cannot afford to lose their best employees, and the reality is that highly trained and skilled employees are increasingly sought by competitors. AT&T's Global Business Communications Systems found through an analysis of their exit interviews that '28 per cent of management associates left the company because workplace schedules were inflexible and 38 per cent cited an inability to balance work and family'.

In this globalised marketplace, with highly competitive organisations, people are moving regularly from one organisation to another. Alternatively the best people are leaving, starting up their own businesses, and are soon back consulting for the same organisations they left at enormous financial cost. So, if the best people are leaving, who is staying to run these inflexible organisations? Catherine Harris, when Director of the Affirmative Action Agency, said a major concern is that in these organisations people must find it difficult to balance their work and life; she asks: 'What sort of human beings are they? Are they the people you want running your organisation? These are frightening questions. Anybody who doesn't have a life outside the company, do you really want them managing 2000 people? I don't.'

For workplaces to be successful, they need to find ways to keep their best employees. This means responding to diverse and changing needs. A younger employee may want to work reduced hours to further his/her education, a parent may want to take leave to care for a baby, a son may need flexible scheduling to care for an elderly parent, or an older worker may want to phase into retirement.

The organisations adapting to these needs are getting outstanding results. Nations Bank in the USA found a 50 per cent lower turnover rate among employees who use their work and family options. First Tennessee National Corp. found that when employees rated their supervisors as supportive of work–family balance the bank ‘retained employees twice as long as the bank average and kept 7 per cent more retail customers’.

The organisations failing to be flexible are losing highly skilled employees, with a consequent loss of customer–employee relationships, investment in training and knowledge that could be passed on to new employees. An example of this was a manufacturing organisation that insisted that all employees, even executives, commence work at 7.15 a.m. This was an impossible situation for one particular manager, who had to drop her young children at child care before she started work. She told her employer that she found it intolerable having to leave her children at such an hour, but the employer would not change the starting times. This very key manager therefore obtained another excellent job and left the inflexible workplace. The company did subsequently change the work hours as a result of losing this valuable employee, but it was too late to get her back.

The costs to this employer in losing the manager were: (a) the recruitment cost to employ her initially; (b) the administrative costs of her leaving the organisation, such as deletion from the payroll; (c) the cost of the many years of on-the-job and external training she received (ESSO Australia calculated the cost of training an experienced employee to be at least \$100 000); (d) the cost of recruiting and retraining her replacement (the replacement would not be fully functioning at the previous manager’s output for some time and would require the attention of other employees while learning on the job); and (e) the less readily identifiable costs of business knowledge, workplace and customer relationships, strategic alliances with stakeholders and loss of employee morale.

Professor Cascio warns that organisations ignore assets such as intellectual capital at their peril. He cites the director of the Swedish financial services company Skandia AFS, who 'estimates the ratio of the value of intellectual capital to the value of physical and financial capital as between 5:1 and 16:1. Values this large convey an important lesson . . .'.

Hallmark Cards Inc. in the USA is a company that successfully focuses on retaining employees. The organisation provides numerous family-friendly programs, and even in times of business downturn employees are moved to other business units or can undertake community work on full pay, rather than being retrenched. Employees rarely leave the company and nearly one-quarter have been with the company for more than 25 years. This is an organisation that cares about its people—also one with annual sales of nearly \$4 billion.

Organisational ethics expert and author, Attracta Lagan, explains:

research shows that staff turnover goes into rapid decline when you introduce flexibility because people become extremely loyal to the organisation because they are able to enjoy their lives and work. So that would be one indicator of what I would call a healthy organisation.

If you know that your workplace has difficulty retaining staff and would benefit from a higher retention rate, or is losing people due to lack of flexibility, this would be a key factor in supporting your case for flexibility with your employer. The information could be obtained by discussing these issues with your colleagues or your human resources or equal employment opportunity (EEO) people.

Becoming an employer of choice

One of the main reasons for incorporating flexible practices into the work culture is to attract the best employees. Having the brightest and best employees gives an organisation a competitive advantage. AMP, is a Gold Award winning organization in the *Australian Financial Review*/Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) Corporate Work and Family Award. As one AMP Managing Director positioned it 'the most powerful tool at our disposal in achieving

business success is becoming an employer of choice and focusing on people'. He sees flexibility 'as being part and parcel of our objective of attracting and retaining the best people' and as part of their responsiveness to dramatic social changes, such as the growing number of women in the workforce. He believes that without such responsiveness to social changes, the organisation would be 'writing ourselves out of the script—so it's enlightened self interest'.

In a survey of 153 US organisations it was found that the initiatives that most enhanced recruitment were part-time work, flexible or cafeteria benefits, financial assistance for child care and on-site child care. In Australia, Sydney Water has found that 'new recruits continue to cite the Work and Family policy as a major contributing factor to their application for employment'.

The best employees are not necessarily the people who can, or want, to work the normal 9–5, five-day-a-week working schedule. Many people with excellent skills and experience want to pursue extra studies or spend time with family, for example. It is the workplaces that offer flexible working hours that will have a larger pool from which to recruit their employees and therefore the greatest opportunity to recruit the best staff.

A case in point was a major Australian oil company, which positioned itself as a leader in work-life practices. The benefit of this was borne out when they needed to recruit young female engineers. One of the reasons they were successful in their recruitment was that these women felt the company would be supportive of their desire to have both a career and a family life.

Employee effectiveness and commitment

Employee effectiveness is enhanced by flexible practices. In a pilot of home-based work for information technology employees at Westpac Banking, managers estimated a rise in productivity of between 5 and 20 per cent. Similarly, following the introduction of flexible working hours at its Regensburg plant, BMW saw a productivity increase of 24–30 per cent. This success has led to an expansion of such practices to other plants, with more than 2000 employees taking the opportunity to arrange alternative schedules.

Improvements in productivity can be a result of people being able to work at the times of day or evening that best suit them and at times they are at their most effective. Some people work best in the mornings, others at night. Allowing for these individual differences can also improve business performance, through the extended use of office space and equipment as well as extended periods of customer service.

It is just common sense that when people are happy and less stressed about conflicts between work and personal life they are more productive. Interestingly, a survey of people in the Australian workplace showed that, for nearly one-third of employees, satisfaction with the balance between work and family life had declined from the previous year. This decline in satisfaction was less likely for part-time workers and more likely for managers, professionals and para-professionals.

Consider, for example, someone who comes to work worried about a sick child or elderly parent. It is impossible for this person to focus fully on the work at hand. If flexibility is not available to take the time to deal with these important problems many areas of work will suffer, including concentration, morale, teamwork, possibly leading to stress-related health and safety problems. The most effective use of this person's time would be to deal with the issues of family care and then be fully functioning when back at the workplace. Ray Greenshields explained the relationship between personal life problems and work performance in the following way:

I think people who have an unhappy home and are having difficulties in coping with both work and home, don't perform. I have had personal experience when things have been absolutely rotten at home, then it is very distracting. The issue really for me in those circumstances was 'how do I deal with that crisis while still doing my job here?' I needed to have a boss who understood that and would actually say to me 'Ray you've got to down tools and go and deal with that crisis'. That has happened to me and I've actually used that myself.

In a survey of 17 000 employees at BHP Steel by the then Childcare at Work Ltd (now Families At Work), 6 per cent reported difficulties in concentrating at work because of pressures associated with childcare. A study at the US St Paul Companies showed that 'Staff who believed work was causing

problems in their personal lives were much more likely to make mistakes than those who had few job-related personal problems (30 per cent compared with 19 per cent)'. When a Sydney Electricity survey of employees found that 'family responsibilities were having a major impact on the ability of male and female employees to work overtime, concentrate at work and apply for promotion', they introduced flexible initiatives into their enterprise agreement. These initiatives included '40 hours of paid family leave to care for sick dependents or if child care arrangements break down, flexitime and job sharing, and part-time work with access to higher duties and promotion prospects'.

For family-related or personal absences, which can be planned ahead, providing flexibility not only reduces stress in employees but can significantly reduce the costs of absenteeism. If employees can plan ahead to attend the school sports day, arrange household repairs or other personal or family needs, employers can plan ahead to ensure that any loss of productivity is minimised. At Pacific Dunlop Ltd the problem of absenteeism was tackled by a process of training, consultation and building a climate of trust, so that employees were willing to inform their supervisors of their need for such leave. The results were dramatic, with Pacific Dunlop Ltd reducing its absenteeism by 60 per cent which resulted in an annual saving of \$21 million.

A significant reduction in absenteeism was also found at Pella Corporation, a manufacturing company in the USA when it introduced job sharing for production line workers. The company found that job sharing 'eliminated overstaffing because absenteeism dropped 81 per cent'.

In terms of employee commitment, a survey undertaken by a large national bank showed that the people most committed to the workplace, those who cared most about the workplace and took the least leave, were the permanent part-time staff. The bank had assumed that its most committed people would be senior management. Employers often state that part-time workers are very productive because they are focused on their work and concentrate on getting the job done for the shorter time they are at the workplace.

There is a common misconception that if people work fewer hours then they are less committed to the workplace. In

reality, commitment is related to such issues as personal motivation. People who feel supported by their employer and co-workers are much more likely to be committed to organisational objectives. Fel Pro is a US manufacturer of car products and a leader in the introduction of flexible work practices. The company has found that the employees with the highest performance evaluations, openness to organisational change and commitment to staying with the organisation are those who make the most use of work-family programs. The links between commitment, flexible practices and achieving business objectives were described by an AMP HR Executive. She said that flexibility:

certainly increases loyalty and loyalty would make you more support the fairly challenging goals that we've got as a business. The measures that we've got in the climate survey would suggest that our employees are in fact very loyal. But if you talk to the women or the men who've taken paid paternity leave, their loyalty is just unbelievable. They are dramatically grateful that they are able to have a career and a family and do it with less stress. I'm sure it's still stressful trying to cope with it all but you can minimise it.

Most organisations today realise the need to be customer-focused, and want their employees to be flexible in relation to the needs of the customers. It follows that, if you are expected to provide diverse solutions to your customers, your employers need to provide diverse solutions for you. When the First Tennessee Bank in the USA gave control of work scheduling hours to its employees, it got outstanding results: for example, an account-processing group was able to give team members an extra day off each month and provide better customer service. In this case 'customer service turnaround time was cut in half . . . and the team's quality score in customer service jumped by 60 percent'.

It is a well-known customer service maxim that employers must treat their staff the way they want their staff to treat the customers. Happier employees lead to improved customer satisfaction. It works this way: by themselves, flexible workplace practices do not necessarily generate more business; what they do is create an environment where business has a platform to grow and develop its markets. One of the reasons you might

choose a company to do business with is the service its people provide. The employees have been there a long time, know the products and how to match those products to the customer's needs. The staff concerned are also motivated to serve—they want you as a customer and are willing to go that extra mile to get and keep your business. You can bet this is because the employees are happy and genuinely want to stay as part of the organisation. Here flexible workplace practices are at the heart of the employee–employer relationship.

Legal requirements

A further incentive for implementing flexible work practices is to comply with legal requirements under industrial relations, antidiscrimination and equal opportunity laws to ensure that workers are treated fairly when balancing work and family responsibilities. Under the National Employment Standards employees have the right to request flexible working arrangements if they have children under school age or a child under 18 years who has a disability.

Employers can be liable to pay significant compensation for breaking these laws. In a case in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), a female partner in a law firm was awarded \$95,000 against the firm in compensation for indirect sex discrimination, when it was made difficult for her to work part-time on her return from maternity leave. There can be additional financial repercussions for the organisation as a result of poor public relations following such court actions.

Keeping up with the Joneses

A good starting point to back up your case for flexible practices is to find out what other organisations are doing in this area and compare them to your workplace. Organisations are always looking for a competitive advantage, and flexible work practices can be part of gaining this edge. Keeping up

with, or doing better than, the Joneses in this highly competitive marketplace can mean the very survival of an organisation.

Making these comparisons is termed benchmarking, and can be done in a number of ways. You might look at what the opposition is doing in relation to flexible practices in your industry. You could compare your workplace to best-practice organisations that have successfully implemented flexible policies. Other evidence you might look for is bottom line comparisons in annual reports, or good public relations such as prominent awards or publicity for good workplace practices. There is also the cost of poor public relations—for example, when organisations are sued for not meeting legal requirements in relation to work and family responsibilities. It's important to look at benchmarking your work unit with other units within your organisation that are successfully implementing flexible practices.

Some good information on the best and worst performers in the area of human resource practices can be obtained from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency. One of the Agency's roles is to facilitate the establishment of flexible practices in organisations through benchmarking. It does this by highlighting the good organisations in this area and setting up industry discussions. Then Agency Director, Catherine Harris provided a vivid example of the power of benchmarking in creating significant change when describing a meeting with the managing partners of the 'big six' accounting firms plus the head of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, a professor of change management, and two senior women from the finance sector:

The day started off badly when one partner said 'Look, I know we really support EEO. But the trouble is that our clients demand that people be there. At 5 o'clock, 6 o'clock, 10 o'clock at night we are often still working and women with any sort of outside commitment just cannot put in the hours. We have an up and out promotion process, and nine times out of ten they've just got to leave. So that's why we've got no women at the top'.

And I thought 'Oh God, this is going to be a tough day'. Then it was just like magic. One of the other Managing Partners turned around and said 'Well, you know we've done a lot of research in our organisation and in fact the research showed that our customers don't care whether they're in the office or not,

because they're always on a mobile or there's a fax machine or we can ring them at home. But what they do care about is that they have the same person looking after them this year and next year and the year after'. So the tone suddenly shifted . . . it was fabulous and out of that meeting there were some huge changes. Since then some of these firms, such as Ernst & Young and Coopers & Lybrand, have introduced some good family-friendly policies.

Throughout this book there are many success stories that you can read about and compare with the practices at your own workplace. There are articles, audios and a video providing excellent tips and examples of success with flexible work practices at www.flexibility.com.au and www.WomensHealingOrg.com

You will usually find that the human resources or EEO employee in best-practice organisations will be approachable if you have further questions about their policies. You may even discover the possibility of a strategic alliance with another organisation that can assist you with your flexibility needs: for example, if you need child care there may be an organisation in your locality that could make child care places available to employees at your workplace.

SUCCESS STORIES

Each organisation is a unique community made up of people with individual needs. In our knowledge-based organisations, without the people there is simply no organisation. Many employers, realising that people are their most important asset, are providing individual solutions to ensure that both employees' and business needs are being met.

Organisations tend to be at different stages in relation to developing flexible work practices, ranging from those organisations that allow no flexibility to those that see it as necessary to business effectiveness and have flexible practices wholly integrated in their organisational culture. Most organisations are moving through transitional stages, from the introduction of a particular practice to overcome a specific need to the development of more integrated policies and practices, and ultimately to these issues being integral to the success of mainstream organisational objectives.

The following cases studies provide examples of how two best-practice organisations, AMP Financial Services and The

Body Shop, implemented their flexible practices. This will give you various options you could try at your workplace.

AMP Limited

AMP has been recognised for its leadership in the field of flexible work practices as an Australian Financial Review/ACCI Corporate Work and Family Gold Award winner. An AMP CEO said that ‘part of the AMP’s vision is to be an employer of choice—the place to work and the people to work with’. To achieve this, flexible work practices have become an integral part of AMP’s business strategy.

AMP encourages all of their employees to make the most of their flexible work options. They understand the fundamental benefits associated with offering flexibility to employees, including greater retention of skilled employees, reduced training costs, increased ability to attract candidates, and a more engaged and productive workforce. AMP believes flexible work options benefit both their employees and their business. They see flexibility as an employee benefit and a competitive business advantage, and talk about it this way. While their employee policies directly support flexibility, their Diversity Manager says that it’s really just part of the way they work at AMP – each business area owns and champions flexibility.

An AMP HR Executive sees further advantages for AMP in the future competitive edge flexibility will give the business. In particular its ability to adapt readily to market changes, such as having a flexible workforce to be available to customers for longer periods of time. She said that having flexible practices in place now

is going to make it easier for us to manage the transition of business change into the future . . . rather than saying it all happens between 8 am and 6 pm, you can actually staff according to the workflow. You could have people on contracts to work 10 hours a week, from say 12 till 2, and it’s that sort of flexibility that gives you great dollar incentives. You can find many people who want to work 10 hours a week—students, mums, retired people—you just have to be flexible and creative in the way you find them.

AMP Diversity Manager said that the challenging environment of the financial crisis encouraged AMP to look at creative ways to retain employees and increase engagement and productivity in challenging times. She considers that “creative workforce planning strategies that continually reinforce flexibility as a work option ensure AMP has the workforce it needs, without compromising our optimistic and positive brand and culture.”

AMP actively promotes a variety of flexible work practices:

- Purchase additional annual leave
- Carers leave
- Flexible start and finish times
- Credit/debit time
- Career breaks
- Job-share arrangements
- Part-time work
- Telecommuting
- Work from home
- Compressed work hours
- Emergency family leave

This flexibility is accessible to all employees, a recent employee survey showed that around 50% of employees had worked flexibly in some way in the last six months. Many access this flexibility for family reasons but it is also used for people wanting to pursue community, academic and sporting interests or for reasons of health. AMP found that having the flexibility to work from home when the need arises is the practice that most enhanced their executive recruitment. Women employees find the ability to be able to work part-time and in a flexible way particularly appealing. An example of this practice was two lawyers on maternity leave, who arranged that when they are able they will work one day a week from home and gradually phase back into the workplace.

AMP employee surveys have found that the benefits expressed by home-based workers included a reduction in stress, more sleep, more time with their children and for non-work activities, and enhanced effectiveness and productivity due to fewer distractions. Some managers also said that their communication and team management skills have improved as a result of home-based work, because it has forced them to focus on the issues of managing performance and communication in a new way. The AMP Diversity Manager said:

It is easy to establish the business case for flexible practices, for example, it costs us on average about \$1500 to set someone up at home and if we double the tenure in the job then we know we've got value for money, let alone the 20 per cent increase in productivity. The single-tracked workaholic is probably not your best model for a creative, flexible thinker who really brings the innovation that we need to be successful.

She also sees the benefit of people developing new skills, interests and capabilities that can then be applied in the workplace, for example by those employees who are using flexible practices to do community work.

She describes the success of the Advisor Technology Helpdesk team, who have been working effectively from home for the past four years:

half of the team are at home one week and the other half of the team are at home the second week. So each person works a week at home then a week in the office. That team has reported a 20 per cent increase in productivity. No one has resigned from that team since they started this practice, and that is quite unusual, this kind of work tends to have about an 18 month turn around. I have actually surveyed most of the people working in that team and they all say that they find it extremely valuable, they wouldn't give it up for anything. They've got a very good team spirit and it's working very well both for them personally, for the advisers and for the company.

The team manager explained how their work- from-home team operates:

We have organised ourselves into two groups. While group one works from home, group two works in the office. On alternate weeks they swap. On Fridays everyone comes in to the office for a team meeting and training.

We provide a service to our customers until 8 p.m. every day. The people working from home cover the phones until then. This initiative has also helped us save money in taxi fares home for those working late.

Each person at home has a 'buddy' in the office who does anything for the work-from-home person that can only be done in the office. A direct, priority telephone line into the office gives work-from-home people immediate access to assistance. When someone calls in to the help desk they can't tell whether they're talking to someone in the office or home.

Some people feel isolated with long periods at home, so occasionally they will come into the office on a home day. It's also important to make everyone feel a part of the team, and that's something we constantly work at. We are very conscious of maintaining the team's morale and dynamics. We use a call logging system with a broadcast facility. When someone types in a message it pops up on everyone's screen. It is used for passing around work information as well as keeping in touch with one another.

In my opinion it is the single best thing we have ever done in our team that has benefited AMP and the staff. They see working from home as a real benefit of working at AMP. I know a number of key staff would have moved on without it.

AMP also provides employees with a range of flexible leave arrangements. These include five days of personal emergency leave per year and the use of sick leave to care for sick dependents. Annual leave can be taken in short blocks, such as one day or a few hours for up to five days a year, and unpaid leave can be taken for family purposes.

AMP was the first private sector company to introduce six weeks' paid parental leave for men. The average time taken is five weeks but some take more than six weeks, topping it up with unpaid parental leave, which is available for up to 52 weeks for the primary carer. Many of these men prefer to take the leave when their partner re-enters the workforce.

THE POSSIBILITIES

The men are saying that they really get a lot out of it. One of our senior managers has taken 6 weeks' paid parental leave twice. He found the experience fantastic and has strongly encouraged the men reporting to him to take the paid parental leave because it's just so good for the relationship with the family . . . they're also finding out that it's not impacting negatively on their careers. Our CEO has expressed the view that people need to have balanced lives and that your workaholic, 70 hour a week manager is not the ideal manager, and it's not to him an indication of someone who's ready for the next promotion.

AMP has a keep-in-touch philosophy, encouraging managers or someone from within their team to keep those on parental leave up to date with the business. To bridge the gap between home and work life AMP hosts family picnic days and a 'Kids to Work' day. Periodically, parents and children are invited in for lunch and a business update from senior managers. A private room has been equipped and made available at the main office for women who want to return to work while they are breast-feeding. Similar facilities are being considered at other AMP offices. Another initiative is a national Dependent Care Information and Referral Service, to assist employees caring for children, the elderly or disabled dependents.

AMP continually evaluates the effectiveness of its programs, and their Climate Survey revealed that 75 per cent of employees believe that managers consider their work and personal life balance. They are actively pursuing cultural change that focuses on results rather than time spent in the office, on collaboration and shared responsibility, and on supporting the implementation and maintenance of flexible practices. The benefits to the business of offering flexible work options are extremely positive. Their return to work rate remains high at over 71%, and those who return tend to stay. They expect these statistics to further improve over time. One in five employees have been with AMP 10 years or more.

The Body Shop

The Body Shop is a global retail and manufacturing operation, with franchisees running their own businesses in over 1650 shops around the world. The very profitable business endeavours to pursue social and environmental change and to balance the financial and human needs of employees and other stakeholders.

This involves acting on its values by, for example, independently auditing its social and environmental performance, supporting shop staff to become involved in their local community, creating happy and healthy work environments, and empowering employees to be responsible for creating the organisation's culture. As founder Anita Roddick said, in the workplace 'the parent has to be served, child development needs to be supported, families welcomed and values explored and protected'.

The Body Shop endeavours to integrate work and personal life in response to the needs expressed by its employees. Roddick described to me the way in which flexible work practices have evolved in her organisation:

Our staff said six years ago 'We want a child development centre' and we did it. We want to continue our personal education, so every member of our staff can spend a hundred pounds a year learning anything they want. Paternity leave is really strong. In America we do something quite radical—we give same sex partners medical insurance. For staff who don't have access to our office daycare facilities, their childcare is subsidised.

Roddick said that the reciprocity expected for such investment in terms of support, education and training as that she wants staff to share their ideas and relationships; she says also:

'We want them to stay, we value them'.

In Australia The Body Shop has won awards for its commitment to assisting its employees balance their work and family lives. Its philosophy is highlighted in a work-life statement, which

recognises there is no division made between an employee's life at or away from The Body Shop; these two areas are a

part of an employee's whole life. Recognising this we are eager to provide assistance for employees to maintain a healthy balance between these two parts of their lives.

The organisation endeavours to respond to the needs expressed by its employees for a flexible work environment. These issues have been placed on the agenda through a 'balancing work and family survey', through monthly meetings of representatives from all areas of the organisation, and by giving staff permission to ask. An example of this permission is found in the 'elder care kit', which states, 'as new needs arise we will consider ways in which the company can assist an employee. This might be through the provision of leave, services advice or information to assist the employee with their particular need—anything can be discussed'.

The Body Shop's flexible workplace initiatives, which support employees' ability to integrate work and personal lives, include the following.

Family supportive practices

- Visits from the Parent Support Service are provided for Melbourne metropolitan staff.
- There is a 54-place children's centre, also available to the local community.
- Staff can use their own sick leave to care for dependents.
- Head office staff can use a day-room equipped with a workstation, bed, kitchenette and children's facilities to enable staff to attend work with a sick dependent.
- Counselling is provided on family support issues such as drug and gambling addiction.
- There is a six-week nappy-wash service after the birth of a baby.
- A national child care referral service is available.
- There is a 'keep-in-touch' policy for staff on parental leave.

- A lunchtime parents' group fosters discussion of a range of parenting topics.
- There is an elder care kit.
- Part-time work is available during or on return from parental leave.
- A family Christmas party is provided and invitations to social events are extended to staff on leave.

The benefits of introducing these family-oriented practices have included a decline in staff turnover and a growing rate of return from parental leave. A Site Manager describes his experience of working for The Body Shop for a 10 year period:

The Body Shop has offered me a secure job, development of my skills, training in new skills, contact with the community around me, and an environment that has become like a second home. As a sole parent for all of the ten years I have had peace of mind, knowing that where the family is concerned, whether it be children or aged parents, their support and understanding has been there.

Personal development and wellbeing

Ongoing training is encouraged for all staff. This includes internal training in courses such as customer care, management, sales and technical skills; external training in courses such as computer skills, 'train the trainer' and self-defence for women; a video and book library; a subsidy towards the cost of non-vocational education and reimbursement of training expenses for retail support staff undertaking tertiary courses relevant to their positions. Staff on parental leave can also access appropriate training sessions.

Employee wellbeing is supported in numerous ways. Their 'health awareness plan' is aimed to raise awareness and gain involvement in health issues affecting employees' lives. Seminars on celebrating health and managing alcohol and drugs as well as a course on enhancing energy levels continue to be held for employees. Staff members have initiated aerobics sessions, a walking group and a running

group. There are good facilities at head office, such as a swimming pool, restaurant and weekly massage service.

Community involvement

Each staff member is supported in contributing to the community by being involved in community projects during work time. Projects have included the development of a playground at Perth Zoo for children with disabilities; massages for people with HIV; child care staff working with families in crisis; and the recording of two weekly newspapers for print-handicapped readers.

Through its approach to its employees' lives, The Body Shop promotes the development of the whole person, who in return can contribute the richness of such a life to the workplace.

GETTING BACK TO BASICS

We now have to ask the question: 'If people really want balance in their lives and there are so many advantages to organisations implementing flexible practices, why is this not occurring in all organisations right now?'

The reasons range from the personal to the organisational. The first is the difficulty we all have in changing ourselves, and that is where the change has to begin. The second is the organisational culture that resists such changes. To start with the personal, read chapter 2 and consider what you want to achieve in your life, and whether balance in your work and personal life is really your aim.

2

Getting a life

This is a time of profound change in all our lives. The changes are greater in their impact and are happening faster than at any other time in human history. This effect is compounded by the fact that the changes are taking place on so many levels—global, personal, economic, technological, environmental, organisational and social.

The relevance of such changes to work and personal life balance is that they provide a catalyst to personal change and an opportunity to redefine how we want our lives to be in the 21st century. Many of the old assumptions and behaviours are no longer working for people in this changed and changing world. It is important for us to decide what constitutes a successful life in the new millennium and to find ways to achieve it.

DEFINING SUCCESS

The very meaning of success in our society is going through a radical change. This process of redefinition is providing people with a new lens through which to view their lives.

Many people's view of success seems to be measured on external factors, including power, money, seniority in employment, the type of car you drive, the schools the children attend,

the suburb in which you live, and physical beauty (which often means being undernourished to achieve what some in our society find beautiful). The socialisation process has led many to a very narrow definition of what constitutes a successful life. People see themselves and judge others through these external factors, rather than by whom they really are as people.

In achieving this traditional type of success, people have suffered and continue to do so. It seems that, although the developed countries have become richer in economic terms, ever-growing suicide and mental illness rates suggest strongly that this wealth has not had a positive effect on all the individuals in those societies.

In many organisations today the constant changes, restructuring and downsizing have left people feeling a great deal of pain, stress and conflict. At the same time, to reach the heights of seniority, or even just to retain employment, many have (willingly or otherwise) become addicted to their work. The gruelling hours at the office have resulted in loss of health, reduced effectiveness, family breakdown and a destructive lack of balance. This way of being becomes entrenched in the organisation's accepted culture. It then negatively affects employees who emulate this behaviour to 'succeed'.

But there is a movement away from these ways of viewing success. People are 'downshifting', changing jobs, or demanding that the workplace provide initiatives that enable them to live more balanced lives. This new definition of success is based on internalised factors, such as an individual's values and quality of life. English management expert Charles Handy calls the new way of viewing success the 'doctrine of enough': once people have satisfied their hunger for the things in life, they need to satisfy their hunger for the point of life. Handy says that the lower people set their goals for the things in life the freer they are; they can then move on to fulfilling their point in life.

Career and lifestyle designer Elaine Burston considers that the old way of viewing success needs to be replaced by 'achieving'—by meeting our own inner criteria and not someone else's. She describes it this way:

Success is the outer trimmings and achieving is an inner experience.

Success can be quite busy and heady. Can we have success and achievement? Yes! Can we have success without achievement? Yes. It's when we are left feeling empty.

What people usually want in their lives is balance, and this includes people of all ages. In an international survey of more than 1200 business students from 30 universities in 10 countries, what the students overwhelmingly wanted was a balanced lifestyle and a rewarding life outside work. In fact, when asked about their future career goals, 45 per cent stated that achieving this balance was one of their top three priorities. Further, the number one criterion they would look for in a potential first employer was the 'ability to achieve a balanced lifestyle'. The students' most important priorities for their future lives were personal development and growth, a career, spending time with close friends and relatives, and building a family.

These priorities for young graduates are now regularly heard by recruitment firms and personnel departments of organisations, who report that the availability of flexible workplace practices is a high priority for these job-seekers. Jackie O'Brien, part-time partner in a legal firm, said that the issue of how a firm 'accommodates family responsibilities is at the top of the list of many of the young women candidates we see for recruitment'.

A growing trend in employees towards seeking work and personal life balance has also been found in organisational surveys. Research in the United States by Work/Family Directions found that over three-quarters of employees would choose increased flexibility even at the cost of career advancement. Over 50 per cent would turn down a promotion if it meant spending less time with their families. Further, a survey of a large high-tech US company found that work and life balance was the second most critical factor in keeping the top 10 per cent of performers at that particular place of work, and an employee survey at Du Pont revealed that over half of the men and three-quarters of the women considered that the most important thing the company could do for them was to give them greater flexibility in their schedules.

Research by Dr Graeme Russell in Australian organisations found that almost three-quarters of people with dependent children would refuse a job or promotion if it meant spending less time with their family. He also found that almost two-

thirds of men under 35, with young children and with partners in the paid workforce, would refuse a transfer or promotion if it interfered with family life. A study of the US workforce 'found that 35 per cent of employees with children under 13 years would be willing to switch jobs if flexitime were to be offered by another company'. Similarly, a survey of 5000 employees by the American Management Association 'found that the number-one issue for 87 per cent of respondents was more flexibility in the workplace'.

Organisation Development Manager for Orica Australia Pty Ltd Bob D'Arcy was quoted in the *Financial Review Magazine* as saying:

Now, where a promotion is being considered, men are saying things like 'I don't want to be a stranger to my family', or 'I'm getting a good salary, I don't want more money, I don't want more stress, I don't want that next step up the ladder'.

WHAT DOES WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE BALANCE MEAN FOR PEOPLE?

Descriptive of the changing view of success is the story told by a middle-aged man on a talkback radio program. He worked very long hours over many, many years, and is now considered a 'guru' in his field of business. Those who know him think of him as a success. But he sees it differently. He now looks back over those years and feels he wasted his life, realising all too late that for him a truly successful life is about achieving a balance.

Many people in our society are questioning the current definition of success—people who no longer see getting to the top of the organisation as worth the all-consuming energy it requires in most workplaces. In fact, many people in senior management positions are opting out because their work does not give them the satisfaction or lifestyle that they want. Others are staying in these organisations but are doing the hard work necessary to change themselves and their organisational culture. Either way, these people are choosing a life as well as a career, and are no longer willing to make work their sole or even their main priority.

Margot Cairnes is a leadership strategist, who works inter-

nationally with managing directors and boards of large multinationals. She regularly witnesses the devastation suffered by individual leaders and the people in their organisations from following the traditional path to 'success' in highly competitive, aggressive, egocentric organisations. She observes that, for many of these leaders:

Their marriages are often rocky, their kids are often suffering, and very often (particularly if they travel a lot) they have very few friends because they don't have time for friends. This is a fairly unhealthy human being and it's not that people go into those jobs unhealthy, the jobs the way they operate, make you unhealthy.

Cairnes says that, for her, balancing work and personal life is 'just about everything'. She brings this approach to her work with organisational leaders, where she spends time talking about all areas of their lives—their relationships, spirituality, health—looking at them as whole people, and dealing with the kind of issues that people in those complex jobs have to face.

People from all occupations and walks of life are now redefining success in their own terms. In their search for greater balance they are finding that flexible workplace practices are assisting them in achieving this goal, as the following examples illustrate.

Margaret and Liam

Margaret and Liam O'Neill have chosen to work part-time so that they both enjoy the benefits of work and career satisfaction and what they term 'quantity time' with each other and their two children aged 3 and 2 months. Margaret works three days a week as a scientific editor with her freelance business operating from the home office, and Liam works for an international software development company on an 80 per cent employment package four days a week. Getting to this point took some negotiating and decision making, and there were certainly some barriers along the way.

Before the birth of her first child, Margaret approached the directors of the international publishing company she was then working full time for, to support her by sponsoring a child care place at a centre close to her workplace. This involved the employer agreeing to guarantee the fees for the

centre, although they would be paid by Margaret, or any employee using the placement for their child. However, the discussion didn't even get this far: Margaret was literally laughed out of the boardroom. She took the three months' paid and nine months' unpaid maternity leave, and her ability to return to work would then have to depend on the child care options she was able to find without the assistance of her employer. Interestingly, the company was sold during her maternity leave and she continued with the new employer in a freelance capacity, which developed into her own business and enabled her to work the flexible hours that suited her.

Margaret's ability to grow a new small business was helped by Liam taking on a greater parenting role. This support was both in terms of time, which freed her to work; and peace of mind, knowing that her child's father was taking care of the baby and having only to rely on part-time care outside the home which both parents felt comfortable with.

Liam wanted to spend more time with his child as well as to enable Margaret to continue working, which gave her career satisfaction. He approached his manager with the proposal that he work four days a week for a period of six months, with a corresponding drop in his salary to 80 per cent. The manager supported him and acted for Liam in arranging this with the human resource department. Because this was a relatively short-term agreement, no adjustment was made to his super-annuation or other benefits, but if he wanted to continue with this after six months it was agreed that the arrangement should be reviewed. Liam decided to return to work full-time at the end of the period, as Margaret had settled into a stable work load and their daughter was able happily to increase her child care from two to three days a week.

After the birth of their second child, Liam approached his new manager with the same proposal for a six-month period of 80 per cent work load. Because the precedent had been set, the manager was in conditional agreement as long as Liam's colleagues (who might have to take on some of Liam's consulting work) were in agreement. This group was very positive towards Liam in his undertaking, expressing playful jealousy that he would have every Monday off (but not actually wanting to pursue the idea for themselves). Liam's company employs around 230 staff in his office.

Liam is able to pursue a part-time work arrangement for a number of reasons. His target of three to four billable work days a week can still be achieved in the days available to him. He has to fit his personal administration into less time and has less time to consult with colleagues or provide his expertise to them. However, the company's bottom line is not suffering and may even be benefiting, as he is still servicing the same client base yet is being paid for four days' work. His performance is gauged by client satisfaction, as well as annual billable days achieved.

The reduction in Liam's income means that the family is able to meet its needs and pay the bills, but with less left over for savings or bigger purchases. This is a sacrifice they consider 'worth the extra time we have together as a family, and to make our life a little less hectic. We believe that quantity time is important for our children and for us'.

Fiona

Fiona, a Workforce Diversity Manager, sees that success for her is about achieving her goals to make a difference in her workplace as well as having time with her children and an effective family life. Flexible workplace practices enable her to deliver her work and home objectives.

The types of flexibility people want differ, but basically they want control over working times, where they work and how the work gets done. For some people it may be starting work early and leaving early; for others, like Fiona, it's being able to go to the school concert, to parent interviews, to meet all the goals that are important to her, and having some flexibility around work. She acknowledges that having this flexibility requires reciprocity on her part, by working outside normal business hours when necessary.

On the birth of her first child, Fiona negotiated flexibility around working at home so that she could care for her baby. Initially she worked part-time and gradually brought the hours back up to full-time work. Her husband stayed home for three months with both of their children, taking long-service leave. She believes this has been valuable because their 'children have always been very shared as a result of that. There's never been the discomfort that you see with some men that "Oh, I can't

carry the baby” or “The baby’s sick, this is your problem, it’s not my problem”’. Flexible work practices have helped to facilitate the equal sharing of responsibilities in Fiona’s family.

Wendy

The search for personal and work life balance is not a new concept, and some people have been actively pursuing this goal in their lives for many years. Wendy is an experienced businesswoman and has assumed many major leadership roles in the public and private sector. She says that balancing work and personal life has always been profoundly important to her: ‘The balance between professional and personal life has been one of the driving forces in my professional career’.

Wendy describes how she achieved this balance in her life by taking a very proactive stand:

I forced my husband out of some of his corporate existence in order to achieve that balance in our family when we were young parents, and I’ve done it brutally. I’ve given up things that I loved in order to do that, both for raising my children and also for my own sanity.

Wendy recalls that her husband was ‘in serious danger of being long term corporately addicted’, and she was not prepared to accept that situation. There can be a price to pay for making such lifestyle choices. Wendy sees that their choice not to let work erode their lives meant her husband did not go to the top of the corporate ladder at his workplace. Nevertheless, explains Wendy:¹⁴

He does not regret it in any way. He looks around at many of his peer group and says ‘I don’t envy them’. I think he would see the value and rewards of a marriage that’s survived thirty three years, and of children who like their father and their mother.

Patricia

Patricia is a Principal Consultant with a Chartered Accountanting Firm. Work and personal life balance is important to her and she tries to achieve it ‘through constantly reviewing where I am at. In fact I think I’ve

probably made the first move towards that by achieving a six-week sabbatical which starts tomorrow’.

In an interview for this book, Patricia explained that research at her workplace has shown that life balance and workplace flexibility is a priority for people in the organisation. She says: ‘We have put out our policies and we are moving very strongly towards this flexible workplace.’

Robert

Robert is the CEO of a major bank. He believes that a successful life means having ‘a balanced life, making a contribution, and making a difference in the things that are important to you’. He pursues this balance through having ‘a healthy business or professional life and personal life and emotional life, spiritual and physical life. I think you’ve got to keep those things in balance’.

Robert considers that to achieve this balance requires time and energy as well as a certain amount of personal discipline, of goal-setting, of reminding yourself what’s important to you, and periodically revisiting that:

It’s not something that you can do alone but you have to do with the other people who are important in your life and share that. But I think you do have to concentrate on that, have some openness and discipline about it. It won’t just happen without your consciously discussing it with other people.

Finding balance in our lives means giving ourselves the opportunity to reach our potential as human beings. Not being in balance is like being shut off from oneself. It is living the life of a one-dimensional being, which on the outside can appear to be successful, but on the inside looks different. Once the busy-ness stops, only a hollow sadness of lost opportunity pervades.

Most of us are fortunate enough to have the potential for a healthy vital body—a growing, intelligent mind, spiritual fulfilment, career and financial success, caring, loving relationships, making a contribution to our communities and so on. Yet many fail to take advantage of that potential. Achieving balance in our lives is hard work, it takes constant effort, and there may be a price to pay. The rewards are immeasurable.

DECIDING WHAT YOU WANT

What *do* you want? What *do you* truly value? How *can* you bring about changes in your life and at your workplace if you are not clear about what you want yourself?

To decide which types of flexible workplace practices you need to help you achieve a successful, balanced life, you must clarify what it is you want to achieve and make a plan to attain this. Such a plan will be unique to you and will depend on your circumstances and stage of life.

First, allow yourself the time and solitude needed to make a plan. We tend to spend more time planning a holiday than we do planning our lives. It is important to get our priorities right!

In his lectures on the 'Future of Work', futurist Robert Theobald recommended that we set aside time for renewal at work. He said that we are so overloaded we never finish what we ought to do anyway. He suggests that if we set aside one half day a week to think about what we ought to be doing and how to do it more effectively, we may actually get a greater amount of our really important work done. We would then be increasingly aware of what mattered and what did not.¹⁷

Interestingly, in our society, if you are sitting at your desk reflecting, that's the time someone will interrupt you because they think you aren't doing anything! In other cultures this time sitting and reflecting is respected, and is a signal not to interrupt someone. We really do need a change in mindset to allow ourselves the time for this crucial reflection.

In our personal lives the purpose of this reflection is to better understand what motivates us to act in the ways we do and the impact our actions have on others around us—time out for self-discovery and for listening to ourselves. The author Franz Kafka wrote: 'You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at your table and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait. Do not even wait, be quiet, still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked; it has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet'. This is such a powerful description of the possibilities available to us when we access our inner selves through reflection and meditation.

Once we have made our plan it will be of no use to us

unless we put it into action. This will require a daily focusing on what really matters to us and acting in ways that will enable us to achieve what we want in life. We can then find tremendous satisfaction from voluntarily establishing our goals and meeting them.

If flexible workplace practices are going to work for you, the issue needs to be more than just 'I want the time'. You need to decide what you want to do with the time once you achieve flexibility. As Patricia says:

You need to be very clear about what you want to achieve as an individual. Not simply saying 'Now I have achieved flexibility I don't have to go into the City', but 'I'm doing this for reasons of sanity, I love to be here in the country, I can think, I can be creative, I can achieve so much more, I can write that book', whatever. But you need to have a plan.

Some best-practice organisations, such as BP Australia Limited, are requiring employees to develop a personal plan to consider how they can achieve their work and personal goals.¹⁸ Such organisations realise that the attainment of organisational objectives is a function of people achieving their personal objectives.

According to Patricia, there is a level of maturity and self-development required for flexible practices to really work:¹⁹

I believe it's come from the premise that people just need time in order to meet the commitments they have which are family commitments and so on . . . it's much broader than that if we want to take it into the professional environment. To be able to give your best you need to be able to achieve something for self; which is not selfish, it allows you to give a lot more.

An effective way to begin the process of deciding what you want in life is to go somewhere quiet, where you will not be interrupted, and reflect on reaching a milestone in your life, such as your 75th birthday. Take some time to imagine that all the significant people in your life have gathered to celebrate this milestone with you. A friend, a close family member and a work colleague have been asked to speak about you and your life. What would you like each of them to say about you?

Write down some of the words that they might say that evoke the essence of who you want to be in your life.

Now consider, based on your life to date, what the actual speeches would be like if you continued along the same path. Imagine the celebration is taking place and you are a man who has trodden the traditional path to success. You worked excessively long hours to get to the top of the ladder to the exclusion of much else in your life. Your son may say: ‘Dad worked really long hours and very hard all his life. We didn’t see that much of him but he became the CEO of the company and bought me a great car for my 21st birthday for which I’m truly thankful’.

Alternatively, you might be a man who has taken the time to be with his family and develop his relationships. Your son’s speech might be very different: ‘Dad has always been a supportive, loving, inspirational father, who taught us his values by being true to them. Family and fun have always been priorities for him. He took time out from work to come to my sports carnivals and school plays. He listened to me playing in my band and came to my football games, he went jogging with me, he was there when I needed him. I could talk to him because he spent the time to get to know me. I love him very much’.

The type of speech we receive will depend on the ways we act in our day-to-day lives. We need to be aware and mindful of the present to make the most of each day, because it is our daily actions that enable us to achieve our future goals. Certainly there are circumstances beyond our control, but it is up to us to determine how we act regardless of those circumstances. This individual choice to act in a particular way cannot be taken from us.

The choices we make may not be easy, but we can largely determine our own destiny by acting on our values. Each of us will have a unique set of values and we will order them differently. Our values can include family, friendship, health, learning, spirituality, work, community, relaxation, respect, caring, honesty, empathy, joy, justice, equity, self-worth, intimacy, success, security.

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, father of nine children Steven Covey calls this visualisation process ‘To begin with the end in mind’. Covey says that:

to begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you're going so that you better understand where you are now and so that the steps you take are always in the right direction. It's incredibly easy to get caught up in the activity trap, in the busy-ness of life, to work harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success only to discover it's leaning against the wrong wall.

Many people today are redefining what they consider to be successful lives and are seeking greater balance. This balance means different things to different people and will depend on their stage of life, circumstances, individual values, what they want to achieve from work and for themselves. Many say that their main priorities are to have fulfilling relationships, to experience personal wellbeing and to achieve their goals at work and in the community. The question is: 'If these are truly our goals, are we acting in ways that will give us what we say we want?'

If we want personal wellbeing we need to care for and focus on our physical, emotional, spiritual and mental growth to reach our true potential as human beings. We also need to find a balance between our long-term and short-term goals. Say you are looking for a promotion to senior management in the long term and you are working excessive hours to achieve this goal. In the meantime your health and relationships suffer every day. Not only are your short-term goals for personal wellbeing not being realised, but you are also jeopardising your long-term career goals, which cannot be attained if you are burnt out.

A starting point for finding your balance is to understand what you really do want and to make a plan for how to achieve it. Take some time out, take out a pen and paper, and begin creating the life you want.

YOUR LIFE PLAN

1. Spend some time thinking. Fantasise about what you would like your life to be like. Then write down all the things that you want to do in your life. Let this be an intuitive process. Don't analyse what you have written at this stage. When you

have finished, write six more things you would like to achieve. Now consider everything that you have achieved in your adult life to date. Say you are forty and have achieved this much in twenty years, could you achieve everything that you have written down over the next twenty to thirty years? We don't have to achieve all of our goals all at once but we can make a plan to achieve them in the long term.

2. Write down what is most important to you. Your list may include health, relationships, work, community, leisure.

3. Decide what you want to achieve in each of these areas. Consider, for example, health and relationships. Unless you have your health in balance, anything else in your life will be more difficult to achieve. Having your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health in balance gives you the energy, joy and aliveness you need to achieve your goals in other areas of your life. This will require a daily focusing on your inner self and your physical self.

Your health could look at physical, mental, emotional and spiritual goals:

- physical—to improve fitness and lose 5 kg;
- mental—to undertake a course in communication skills;
- spiritual—to focus on inner growth;
- emotional—to reconcile with Jane.

Your relationships could include:

- partner—to have a fun, loving and intimate relationship;
- son—to have a caring, communicative, close relationship;
- friends—to have supportive, enjoyable and trusting relationships.

4. Decide how and when you will achieve these goals. It is best to start with small, readily achievable steps. If it becomes overwhelming the tendency will be to give up. You can concentrate on achieving one goal at a time, and begin by focusing on what is most important to you. But at this stage at least consider what each goal will take to achieve.

Your health goals could be:

- *Physical.* Walk for 20 minutes on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

- Replace fast food at lunchtime with a salad roll and fruit.
- Drink alcohol only on weekends.
- Lose 1 kg a month starting today.
- *Mental.* Find out about communication courses, maybe at work or the local college.
Ask for time off work to attend a course.
Begin the course next semester.
- *Spiritual.* Spend 5 minutes a day meditating.
Attend church once a week.
Find a spiritual guide.
- *Emotional.* Listen to an audiotape on conflict resolution skills.
Read a book on forgiveness.
Reconcile with Jane within two months.

Your relationship goals could be:

- *Partner.* Be attentive, laugh together, really listen to them and find out their goals.
Discover ways to help each other achieve your goals.
Spend uninterrupted time together once a week starting this Saturday.
- *Son.* Diarise and get to important school activities.
Arrange ahead for leave from work.
Spend 15 minutes a day together doing something the child wants to do.
- *Friends.* Make one phone call to a friend or extended family member once a day. Spend time with a friend once a week.

5. Consider what it will take to maintain your plan. Improving family relationships may mean setting yourself goals for times you get home at night or how you spend your weekends. It can also mean looking at, say, interpersonal communication. If there is a lot of negative criticism eroding the relationship this can be a sign of low self-esteem, and the person may need some positive reinforcement. Look for ways to be grateful for what your partner does for you and the family. Also consider whether there is accuracy in any criticism. A common difficulty among partners is the division of household chores: make sure it is equitable. If you want to open up lines of communication,

start by simply listening to the other person, fully exploring their needs and what they think and feel about a particular issue, before you give your views. Deeply listening to your partner is vital to an intimate relationship. In the book *Working Fathers*, the authors suggest that the best thing you can do for your children is to have a good relationship with your partner.²¹

If you decide to reduce the hours you work, you may need to consider what impact this will have on your finances. One group of solicitors in San Francisco decided to break away from a large firm to start a practice that better enabled them to balance their lives. One of the partners, a father of two young children who reduced his hours to 80 per cent, described the financial issue:

It's not just me that has to deal with a pay cut, the firm's billing hours are cut as well. There has to be a mutual recognition among the partners to sacrifice income. Basically, the commitment here to families is strong enough that people will sacrifice money for it.

Completing the 'Your Life- Your Money E-Program' will enable you to achieve both your life and financial goals. This program is available at <http://yourlifeyourmoney.com.au>

To keep to your plan will require a real commitment to your goals. You have to believe that what you want is worthwhile.

6. Consider also the people your plan may affect and how you will communicate this to them. For example, if you want the workplace flexibility in order to get to school activities, with whom do you need to discuss this and how will you go about it? Consider all the stake-holders, your partner, your boss, team members and so on.

7. Celebrate your achievements. Living your life in this proactive way is not always easy, and it is important to celebrate the achievements along the way. Even if it is only a matter of stopping long enough to congratulate yourself on achieving the smallest step, this will give you incentive to keep going. Remember, success breeds success, and you can continue building on your plan as you achieve each objective.

8. Regularly focus on your goals. Write down positive affirmations about your goals and repeat these as often as possible. It is amazing how much our own negative self-talk can get in the way of achieving our goals. Listen to yourself, and if you find yourself saying something negative, like ‘I can never overcome the problem with Jane’, change it to ‘I can now communicate with Jane’, and imagine that you and Jane now have a good relationship.

Such a process is used by great athletes in achieving their goals. For example, runners will see themselves winning the race and receiving the medal prior to the event. In a study of basketballers in the USA three groups were tested for improvement over a certain period. The group that did no training or visualising did not improve. The second group that spent time each day visualising themselves playing extremely well actually improved their game to the same extent as the third group, which practised daily. Our thought processes are a source of energy that few people actually use effectively.

9. Review your plan. This will be necessary if your circumstances change or if your goals no longer serve you in attaining your life purpose.

FINDING TIME

You may be asking at this stage ‘How on earth can I find the time for all of this?’ If so, then there are a couple of other questions to consider: first, ‘How important is it to you to create the life you want?; second, ‘Is this avoidance a defence against looking inwards?’ Some people may find it difficult—even painful—to do the type of reflection needed for this process. It can bring to the surface thoughts and feelings that they unconsciously bury in the busy-ness of life to protect them from feeling the pain of the negative aspects of their socialisation process. We all need emotional healing to some extent and to move forward in our emotional and spiritual growth we may need the guidance of an expert in this area.

You can use your time creatively and simultaneously achieve your goals. For example, you can focus on your goals while taking your walk. Alternatively, like a couple I know,

you can take a walk together in the morning and in this way get fit and spend time on your relationship. In the 16th century, Teresa of Ávila said: ‘God can be found among the pots and the pans’. It is not essential to go to a particular place to find your spirituality.

Maintaining good personal and family relationships also assists in achieving work and health goals. People are able to perform better at work when they do not have to cope with stress at home, but there are even more significant outcomes—as two recent studies of fathers involved with their children show. In a 40-year study of 240 fathers, psychologist John Snarey found that ‘involved fathers are more likely to have career success—as well as happy marriages—by midlife’. And in a study of dual-earner couples for the US National Institute of Mental Health it was found that:

Being a father who is deeply involved with his children is good for a man’s health. The men in our study who had the fewest worries about their relationships with their children also had the fewest health problems.

Nevertheless, if it is all so good for us and really possible given our hectic schedules, we have to ask ‘Why don’t more people get more flexibility and balance in their lives?’ This is a complex question; and the reasons can be personal, organisational and social. These issues are the barriers to success, and we explore some of them with you in chapter 3.

3

The challenges

You have decided what you want to achieve. It is now time to consider the challenges you may need to face to reach your goals. We also want to look at some of the strategies you can develop to meet these challenges. You must be ready because these challenges, or barriers, can undermine your resolve and prevent you from achieving the flexible work practices you need.

Challenges range from the personal to the organisational. They are complex and multifaceted and are unique to each individual and each organisation and can limit people's potential both to achieve greater life balance and to contribute effectively in their workplace.

The barriers that may appear in your way include:

- lack of time;
- fear of change;
- assumptions and perceptions;
- unclear expectations;
- lack of role models;
- need for self-responsibility; and
- organisational culture.

LACK OF TIME

An excuse often proffered for not taking the steps necessary to make important changes in people's lives and in their organisations is lack of time. The issue of time is one of great complexity. It requires personal, social and organisational responses to enable appropriate change to occur.

This lack of time is understandable in our modern hectic lives. Trying to fit everything we need to do into our days—caring for our health, relationships, households, and communities; continuing to learn, grow and work. It is a difficult request.

Time is a finite resource and has become one of our most precious commodities. Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop, said that a key motivating factor for her is lack of time. She describes it in this way:

At my age it's really important that I look back, reflect and say 'what have I done, how have I shaped anything, and what more do I have to do?' because time is everything. I think that, for me, has been one of the most important aspects of understanding what motivates me.

So how do you find the time you need to achieve a balanced life? I have been trying to attain this for many years and still have a fair way to go. What motivates me to keep on is the ever-greater sense of fulfilment that gaining this balance can bring. You have already started on the path to finding balance if you have developed a life plan and considered how you need to act on a day-to-day basis to achieve it.

The next step is to reflect on how you are *actually* acting and thinking. For example, are you valuing money more than your time, working more and more hours to buy more of the things that you will have less and less time to enjoy at a greater and greater cost to your health and relationships? Or are you proactively seeking more balance in your life by obtaining more flexibility at work and ensuring that you have the supports you need to reach your goals? An example of such support would be the equitable sharing of family and household responsibilities, so that both partners have a greater opportunity to gain balance in their lives and experience the joys of family life.

It is also difficult to find the balance between your long-term and short-term goals. A long-term goal may be to become the leader of your organisation. You believe that to get there you have to work gruelling hours to prove your commitment. This means less time for achieving your short-term goals of improving your health and relationships. The more time you put into work, the more your health and relationships suffer. Similarly, if you concentrate on the personal issues and fail to perform at work, your long-term goal will not be reached. The key is to find a balance between the two by taking the action necessary to make it happen. In this case a starting point would be to clarify what is required of you to get the next promotion. There are growing reports of leaders looking for people with a more balanced life to promote above the corporate-addicted, and by gaining greater balance now, your long-term goal may be realised.

Achieving work and personal life balance through flexible workplace practices also helps us to gain the control we need in our lives to use our time more effectively. So, like anything that is important in life, this process needs an investment. By investing some of your precious time deciding what you want your life to be and making the personal or workplace changes necessary, the pay-off is that you'll find you have more time to actually live the life you want.

Organisations are increasingly turning to flexible work practices because of the concern about time expressed by employees. At Nabisco Inc. in New Jersey, a survey of employees found that control over their time was their number one concern; in response, flexible work schedules were offered by the company. Flexible practices also mean that employees are more likely to remain with the organisation, leading to huge time savings by these organisations not needing to recruit and train new employees. Further time is saved by people's willingness to adapt to change, lessening the transition time required.

But what about the organisation's responsibility not to waste employees' time? Time-wasting is endemic in organisations. I have seen this in:

- ineffective, unplanned and unnecessary meetings, followed by hours spent around the coffee machine complaining about these time-wasting meetings;

- lack of communication skills, leading to time lost in completing the wrong task and subsequent time lost with conflict about differing expectations;
- senior managers taking workers off the production line to complete a task for them, with no thought of the impact of such demands on productivity and the wasting of the workers' precious time;
- managers asking more and more of employees without any real thought of priorities; and
- time-wasting rules, regulations and paperwork unnecessarily insisted on.

If these problems were tackled in organisations people would be able to perform their jobs in less time. This would then free employees to better balance their work and personal lives. Such a situation was handled by Merck's Canadian subsidiary. HR Director Perry Christensen explains:

We identified that the salespeople had received computers and were being asked to do all sorts of reports. Since they didn't want to cut into their sales time, they ended up doing the reports on evenings or weekends, which cut into their family time. We cut the reports from twenty-seven to twelve on a quarterly basis. As a result the sales force had an increase of time selling to doctors and time with their families.

FEAR OF CHANGE

The pressures on us to maintain the status quo and not to change are enormous, whether it be in our personal lives or in organisations. (Have you ever tried to change a particular way of behaving in your personal life and, no matter how positive the change, the pressures from family and friends to go back to your 'old self' made you feel the effort was just not worth it?)

Changes we make to our lives also bring with them a certain amount of fear, including fear of the unknown and fear of how people who are important to us may react. Say you would like to spend more time with your family, so you decide to go in to work later or leave earlier two days a week. But the fear of not putting in the long work hours and belief that

this will result in the loss of a raise or promotion takes you straight back to your old hours. The greater the level of fear, the higher the resistance to change.

Concern about the effect of flexible practices on career advancement is certainly an issue for some employees. A study conducted by Sydney Water, a leader in the area of flexible work practices, found that 'while employees perceived as important the flexible work practices available in Sydney Water, there was still some concern that employees who access these flexible work practices may be disadvantaged with respect to career advancement'. To overcome these negative perceptions, the study concluded, 'efforts will need to be directed to ensuring employees believe that senior management is committed to flexible work practices—and that such practices are perceived to be legitimate'.

Staff surveys conducted by NRMA Ltd indicated that there was not a perception among employees that the use of flexible options would have a negative impact on careers. In the USA a study by the organisation Catalyst found that '53 per cent of the participants had received promotions while working on a reduced schedule'. Catalyst concludes that where supervisors and managers have negative perceptions of flexible arrangements this can negatively affect career prospects, but 'part-time employees are often eligible for and given promotions'.

At AMP Ltd a group of senior part-time employees are looking specifically at effects on careers for people working part-time, and are developing recommendations for improving career opportunities for employees accessing these options. An AMP HR Executive said that she intends to focus on the issue of career paths of people using flexible practices to ensure that there is equal access to job opportunities.

In considering the impact of leave options on career paths in the USA Levine and Pittinsky found that 'so far the best research suggests not that paternity leave harms a father's career, but that fear of career harm prevents fathers from taking leave'.

In this era of continual company downsizing, you may even fear losing your job if you decide to challenge the system. Many of these fears are based on false assumptions and

perceptions, and need to be tested for people to be able to move forward; others, however, are very real indeed.

Start by acknowledging your fears. Write them down! Then take the fears one by one and develop strategies to deal with each one. Decide on the worst that could happen if the fear was realised and what you would do in that case. Then make a reality check. Find someone at work you can trust, and who may have been down this or a similar road before. Talk about these fears and your strategies and see what your colleague has to say. Your sounding board ideally will give you objective feedback and have a good understanding of the workplace culture. Part of the reality check is also the realisation that with globalisation and outsourcing on the increase, there is no guarantee of a secure job, regardless of the time spent at work.

If your workplace has little flexibility and a high resistance to change, there is something else to consider. Your strategies will need to include how to manage the political dynamics in the organisation. This is not so much knowing the hierarchy as how decisions are made and who can actually influence change.

It is also important to get some balance into the equation. You may be fearful of the changes you want to make and acknowledging these is part of the process of change, but what about the benefits and opportunities these changes will bring? Write down your list of fears and, in a column next to these, list the benefits of a more flexible way of working. These may include less stress, improved wellbeing, better physical and emotional health, improved relationships, enhanced work satisfaction, greater creativity and innovation, personal development and so on.

Once you can get the fears into perspective and start believing in the benefits, you can then move on to making the change a reality.

ASSUMPTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

Assumptions about flexible work practices remain a major barrier to success. This is largely because they are rarely discussed or are at such an unconscious level that people do not realise these untested perceptions are holding them back.

Some of the key assumptions people hold about flexible practices are that:

- they are solely about employees and their children;
- it is a female issue;
- other people at work will be resentful if you use these practices;
- there should be a clear boundary between work and personal life; or
- customer service organisations cannot provide these practices.

Considering these assumptions will help in testing their accuracy. Are they based on fact or on past beliefs that no longer stand up to scrutiny? Looking at the belief that flexible practices are solely a female or family issue, the reality is that everyone at some time in their lives will need to use flexible practices—be it to study, to travel, to contribute to the community, to pursue an interest, to care for an elderly parent or a sick partner, to spend time with the children. Work and life balance is not an issue for a small part of the work population but for everyone. In fact, organisations that successfully implement flexible workplace policies are seeing them as being non-gender-specific, and both men and women are increasingly taking up these policies.

Corporate and Family Care Australia ran a series of lunch-time parenting workshops for several companies. Over a three-year period they found that the number of fathers participating in these workshops rose from 10 to 47 per cent. A survey of 2642 employees by the Australian Institute of Family Studies found that men and women took the same average number of days off work because of their family responsibilities.

It is often assumed that it is mostly, if not exclusively, mothers who work full-time in the paid workforce who experience significant conflict between work and personal life. But more and more men are starting to express this conflict. A study by the US Families and Work Institute of a representative sample of the population found that '58 per cent of all working parents experience significant conflict balancing their work and family/personal lives', with no significant difference between mothers and fathers.

The real gender problem is not that flexible practices are needed only by women, but that many organisations tend to reinforce gender roles. So men are encouraged to put work first and women to give family priority. One supervisor succinctly describes the issue for many male employees: ‘Men here are seen as wimps by senior management if they talk about their desire to spend time with their families’. For women: ‘The expectations that they are or should be “family-primary” tend to taint them as unfit for organisational life’. Fortunately, many employees are now questioning such attitudes, with resultant benefits to both men and women.

What about the question of co-workers being resentful if these practices are available and used by some in the workplace? If your workplace has a culture of favouritism—where privileges or opportunities in many areas of work are or appear to be given to the chosen few—resentment can be a real problem for employees, which can often be put down to poor management practice. To manage these initiatives well, it is important to ensure that:

- flexible practices are available to everyone and all employees understand what they are, what they mean and what effect it will have on them; good communication is the key;
- employees know that fewer hours worked means a reduction in income and usually also in benefits received by the person using these flexible arrangements;
- there is an equitable redistribution of the work: if a team member cuts working hours and this overloads co-workers or leaves the team short-staffed in busy periods, the employment of more part-time staff or rescheduling needs to be considered;
- co-workers are asked about their concerns and any problems that result from flexible practices need to be resolved.

Evidence from staff surveys and anecdotal evidence do not bear out the belief that employees are resentful of co-workers who use the flexible practices available *when these practices are managed well*. For example, when one large Australian company set up its child care centre, organisational surveys showed that even people who did not have children believed it to be a valuable initiative.

The CEO of a large banking corporation stated that his company’s

flexible practices are viewed as beneficial throughout the organisation.

I think even those who don't need it as much, view it as beneficial because they feel good about their fellow staff members having opportunities to work out their schedules in a way that is mutually compatible for both the company and the staff . . . they want to work for a company like that.

The belief that work and personal life need to be separated and 'never the twain shall meet' is an outmoded, though prevalent, view. In fact, research has been shown that people who integrated the skills from the two spheres of their lives into their ways of working significantly added value to their workplace. The research stated that 'assumptions about work and the "ideal" worker—one who can maintain a strict boundary between work and private life—have little connection to reality, and undermine innovation and creativity in the workplace'.

Further, it is only common sense to realise that if people are experiencing significant stress in their personal life this is going to affect their ability to function fully at work. Personal problems can have detrimental financial effects on the business through absenteeism, staff turnover and loss of productivity. An Australian Institute of Family Studies survey found that 71 per cent of mothers and 64 per cent of fathers took time off work for dependent children over the course of a year. If flexible practices, such as leave to attend school activities, are available, this can be planned for with much less disruption to work schedules. Also, employees feel less stress if they can be truthful about the leave they are taking. As Levine and Pittinsky state in their book about working fathers:

. . . work and family are interdependent spheres for fathers, just as they are for mothers. Men don't shelve their father-part at work, or their worker-part at home. Each aspect of their life deeply affects the other. Until we get beyond the fragmentation of work and family as separate spheres for both men and women, our society will never be able to adequately address one of the biggest challenges of contemporary life: how to balance the continuing need for workplace productivity with the continuing need to care for our families.

Another myth is that customer service organisations cannot implement flexible practices and still keep up high service standards. But customer service organisations that have asked their customers about what is important to them have found that customers want a continuing relationship with a person who understands their needs.

If providing flexible work practices keeps key people, who because of the availability of, say, part-time work can stay with the organisation and maintain important customer relations, this has to be an organisational priority. There are numerous examples of creative ways in which organisations have successfully integrated flexible practices into their customer service-oriented cultures. One small customer-focused organisation found a creative way to make the flexible workplace work. They found that during peak periods of the year the filing piles up, and yet during Christmas and New Year there are very few calls from their customers. So in the busy periods staff come to the office on a Saturday to do filing and in return take two days in lieu at Christmas. Eventually they build up enough days to close the office between Christmas and New Year. The added advantage is higher staff morale, with everyone helping out on the Saturday, having a pizza together and making a usually boring, time-consuming task a fun, effective activity.

UNCLEAR EXPECTATIONS

A major barrier to the success of any relationship, particularly the type of partnerships required to make flexible workplaces work for everyone, is the failure of each party to clarify their expectations. This is complicated by the fact that there are no pat formulae that cover all flexible practices and organisations; also that we are dealing with human nature, and not everyone is willing to cooperate to make these relationships work.

When you are attempting to clarify expectations it is helpful to think in terms of a contract between yourself and your employer. The terms of the contract would include your rights and obligations and the rights and obligations of your employer. Then you would include the consequences of either party not adhering to the terms of the contract. This clarifi-

cation creates a level of certainty needed to enable people to do their jobs.

For example, if your employer provides flexibility around the times you take holidays, you would probably not be expected to seek this leave at the busiest time of the year. Similarly, if you are on a reduced schedule you will need to clarify expectations about your availability for urgent work on your days off. Both your individual needs and the employer's needs have to be taken into account when negotiating flexibility. (For details of the elements that need to be considered in such an agreement see the Flexible Work Practices Toolkit at <http://www.flexibility.com.au>)

Leadership Strategist Margot Cairnes believes that people need to earn the right to work in enlightened organisations. She says that people need to work on themselves and their relationships with colleagues and clients—to learn and grow, to constantly think creatively and to contribute to the wellbeing of the organisation so that it survives: 'If you just hand people out all these rights like lollies, they begin to expect their lolly bag on Monday'. She believes that the key elements to functioning in these innovative, flexible organisations are character and judgement. People who are not honest, open, supportive, putting their ideas forward and their egos on hold, are not appropriate to comprise part of that kind of a system.

Therefore the expectations of the employer and employee in the flexible workplace need to be understood; if 'people are not willing to operate effectively in this type of system the system will fall down. We are going to see a lot of failures just as we're going to see a lot of successes', warns Margot Cairnes.

LACK OF ROLE MODELS

Another significant barrier to the achievement of flexible work practices is the fact that work and personal life balance is not often modelled by senior management. Though there are exceptions, Australian executive culture is characterised by a tough, elitist, aggressive, white Anglo-Saxon maleness, where diversity is all but excluded. More often than not, senior people are men in a traditional family arrangement, with wives at home taking care of the family and other

personal life matters. Their children are mostly grown up and the conflicts between work and family commitments long forgotten, if they were ever a major consideration in the first place.

Such lifestyles make it difficult for them to understand the needs of people requiring flexibility, or the changing attitudes and different living arrangements of the majority of people in their organisations. There are many organisations with good flexibility policies, but it is difficult to find those whose leaders actually use flexible practices themselves. This sends a double message to their staff, 'Do as I say, not as I do'.

If management is not putting policy into practice, people receive the message that if they want to get ahead they have to do what management does—put in the same hours and make the same sacrifices. This is compounded when their leaders, who are successfully balancing work and personal lives, are not willing or able to talk about it.

As one banking corporation CEO said "it's important that the leaders in the organisation set the right example, both in their behaviour and in the way they treat their staff:

As senior managers, we talk about balance and about the example we set, the times of day we call meetings and when we expect people to be somewhere. We question whether we are flexible in our attitudes in terms of recognising that people do have to have a balance between work and family.

The importance of appropriate role modelling can be seen in the following description of a diversity workshop that took place in a major Australian oil company:

We were trying to get first line supervisors to be willing to manage flexibility as part of their role. What we found was they themselves didn't believe they had any flexibility. We had been in there for a day and a half with HR, getting nowhere. Because you can say these are all the policies, these are all the practices, but in fact they didn't believe they themselves had flexibility, so how on earth were they going to manage other people's flexibility.

The deadlock was broken when the production manager came into the workshop and talked about how he managed his work and personal life. He explained that he had teenage children who had activities after school and usually did not get home until 7 p.m., so when he is in Australia he is always home by

7.30 p.m. to have dinner with the children. He told the men that if they had young children he expected them to be at home with their children. The reaction of the supervisors was one of astonishment: 'You could see their jaws dropping because they just aren't the natural conversations that those men were used to having, I don't know why they weren't questioning it'.

Another false assumption that surfaced in the conversation with the production manager was that the back-to-back meetings in his calendar were all work-related. The manager explained: 'In the last week I've been to a school concert, I'm building a house and three of these meetings are with my architect. Although you don't realise it I am managing my work-life balance, and I believe very well'.

When challenged about sending electronic mail messages from home at 11 p.m., the manager described the reality of the situation:

The reason I sent electronic mail messages out last night was yesterday afternoon I was with my architect. I got home from school speech night and I had an hour to kill while my wife was making chocolates, I thought I'll catch up with my email, and I sent out notices. I had no expectation that you guys would be out there answering them.

This is a vivid example of organisational culture change in action through dialogue. The catalyst for change works like this: assumptions behind strongly held views surface and, by talking them through, the reality of the situation becomes clear. It has been found that the process of:

challenging old assumptions and cultural beliefs that underlie work and work-family integration frees employees to think more creatively about work in general and provides companies with a strategic opportunity to achieve a more equitable, productive, and innovative workplace.

Such dialogues are possible in any organisation, though often a facilitator who understands what dialogue is and how it works is needed to enable the process to occur successfully.

The power of success stories can also be seen, in the case of the production manager, as a catalyst to organisational culture change. To facilitate the implementation of flexible practices, organisational leaders need to be willing to share

their own work and personal life priorities; to model successful behaviours; to take these issues seriously; and to support and give permission for these practices to occur. Many organisational leaders will require significant personal reflection to bring about the change in mindset needed for this.

The catalysts for change at the top of organisations have come from a number of spheres, including the growing numbers of women in the workforce, the growing numbers of younger men in senior management who want more balanced lives, and (importantly) the difficulties being experienced in the workplace by the daughters of older executives. These changes are making the previously undiscussable topics of family and personal lives meaningful and necessary for organisational leaders. There is also the growing understanding of the business imperative for the introduction of flexible practices—though this seems to be a lesser incentive for change than the important emotional catalysts.

An AMP Managing Director described his role in facilitating a flexible workplace as supportive:

As a leader you are very powerful in the sense that people look to you for direction. If they try something out on you and it says 'How about some flexibility in the workplace?' and you frown and grumble and say 'Don't know about that', then you give leadership that says 'DON'T'. So my approach to it has been receptive and open, supportive but not directional. Secondly, practising. I've used it for my own purposes on the receiving end and on the giving end. In my mind the work that we've been doing here is not about winning gold awards, it's about achieving the objectives of attracting, retaining, motivating, developing the best people, and about being relevant to our customer base.

An AMP HR Executive described the role of the organisational leaders in the culture change that had taken place:

The CEO would say 'I don't want you to have meetings any other time than between 9 and 5, it's unreasonable' and 'I collected my children from school when they were young and I valued that time and I expect you to do the same'. He speaks a lot about his own family, I think it's the way he talks about the way he deals with his family that has a very positive influence throughout the organisation . . . I think it would be a very

brave person who didn't support this philosophy within AMP now. With the senior management public support, public recognition, clear visibility that senior executives are taking advantage of flexible arrangements as well. So the few remaining diehards who think that hours at work count are very much in the background now.

Similarly, at Lend Lease Corporation permission to act in a balanced way was given by their CEO, in statements to the staff such as: 'I've had a busy week, it's time to catch up with the kids and the family, and I'm going to go home early today', or 'If you're at your workplace, at your desk, or on site every other day beyond six o'clock, why are you doing that? Are you incompetent or do you have too much work on?'

The EEO Manager for Lend Lease at the time of my interview with her, had worked there for 12 years and had taken maternity leave during that time with two of her children. The company's child care facilities and flexible practices helped her maintain balance in her work and personal roles. She believes that taking maternity leave of six months with each child has actually strengthened her career prospects in the organisation 'because you have taken time out; you have organised the balance in your life; time management-wise you know how to organise yourself'.

Lend Lease initiatives, which support work and personal life balance, include:

- job sharing, part-time work, telecommuting;
- hours of work standardised to 150 hours over a four-week period, which can be worked between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m.;
- family and personal emergency leave;
- parental leave information pack;
- keep-in-touch program for people on extended leave;
- four work-based child care centres;
- contract child care referral scheme;
- school holiday programs;
- sports and family days;
- six-day conference for long-term employees and their partners to take time out together at a resort location;

- family visits to the workplace;
- elder care information booklet;
- parent information sessions;
- subsidised emergency child care and care for sick children; and
- a health plan.

Proven benefits for employees and employer alike has meant that flexible practices are now a vital part of the business strategy of Lend Lease.

It is important too to realise that the organisational leaders are not necessarily the people at the top of the organisation. They are the people that others follow. There are times when all of us take leadership and followership roles. Patricia Sneddon, CEO of an HR Consultancy, said that in the change process, 'change is managed and pushed through by a few, the crusaders, and then everyone enjoys the benefits at the end of the day'. Change does not have to come from the top down, it can come from anywhere within the organisation and can be a combination of action from the top down, bottom up or sideways out to the rest of the organisation.

NEED FOR SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

I often find lack of self-responsibility to be a major block to achieving both individual and organisational change. The chairman of the board will say that the CEO needs to change, the CEO says that the chairman and the senior management team need to change, the senior managers say the CEO and the middle managers need to change, the middle managers say the senior managers and staff need to change, and staff say that management needs to change. No-one is looking at the responsibility they need to take in changing both themselves and the organisation in which they work.

An important aspect of facilitating change in organisations is to look at how successfully people at all levels of the organisation are taking responsibility for their own lives. How balanced are they? What do they truly value? Is there a gap between their rhetoric and actions? How can they personally take responsibility in closing that gap or being more honest

with themselves and those around them? How are personal issues affecting organisational objectives and vice versa?

When I take people through this process of guided self-discovery, it leads to the understanding of any conflict between work and personal life and brings to the surface the relationships between these two spheres. When the chairman of a manufacturing company asked me to facilitate an organisational change process, he advised that the organisation could not reach its potential due to the problems within the ranks of senior management.

After many hours of in-depth interviews I found that down the line everyone was pointing the finger at someone else. No-one was seeing the part they were playing in hampering their own and each other's success. For some the relationship problems being experienced at home were having detrimental effects on their work relationships. For others personal relationships had broken down or were under enormous stress because of the excessive work hours demanded by senior management. Conflicts were continually erupting at work and communication throughout the organisation was blocked by ever-growing negativity.

For a successful organisational change to take place the individuals in this organisation, particularly the leaders, needed to look at their own lives, their values, and the part they were playing in blocking their own and other's success. The next step was to take responsibility for making the changes necessary. The lines of communication within the organisation were opened up, the personal needs of employees could be looked at, and flexible work arrangements could be implemented.

Effective change strategies require the individual to understand his/her role in bringing about change and to be committed to taking responsibility for this change occurring.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Every organisation has a unique culture made up of the values, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes of the people working there. For example, a bureaucratic culture tends to be conservative and authoritarian, behaviour is defined by rules and procedures, and values include conformity and seniority. Flexible

workplace cultures are characterised by individuals taking responsibility for their personal growth and the growth of the organisation, where people feel supported in their need to balance work and personal lives and are not penalised for putting their families first. Organisational values include trust, interdependence and the wellbeing of individuals and their families. These organisations value their people and understand the benefits that flexible practices can bring to both individual and business performance. Aspects of your particular organisational culture can either help or hinder the introduction and maintenance of flexible work practices.

Even in progressive, best-practice organisations, the organisational culture can foster conflict between work goals and the individual's personal and family goals. For example, a major barrier to the introduction of flexible practices and to employees achieving work and personal life balance is an overt encouragement of 'workaholism' and other forms of 'addictive' behaviour found in many organisations today. Anita Roddick said this is a problem they identified in The Body Shop organisation and one which they are endeavouring to overcome. She says: 'First you've got to know the malaise is there, you've got to verbalise it, and you've got to be able to speak openly about it'.

The Body Shop has brought in academics to study the culture, which they describe as one of 'heroes and villains'. The villains are the abusers of human rights, the heroes the employees, for example, that spend three days camped on the office floors when championing human rights causes. Roddick explains: 'It's that type of behaviour that's constantly condoned in our company. So how do you break it down? First of all you have to understand it, you've got to deconstruct it, then the leaders have got to change the culture.' The unique openness of Anita's approach to overcoming cultural barriers to flexible workplace practices provides us with an outstanding example of the proactive role an organisational leader can take in changing the culture to benefit the wellbeing of employees.

The type of organisational culture will determine the ways in which people are treated and the ways in which they behave. For example, Nixon Uniform Service Inc. in the USA is a \$30 million-a-year business. The culture is built on respect for the individual: as one worker says, 'It's an atmosphere that's totally

different from other jobs'. Flexible practices to be found there include help with emergency child care, and courses in literacy skills, which are provided during working hours. 'Their success, everyone agrees, stems from the way they treat their employees'.

The description of the organisational culture at Childress Buick/Kia in Phoenix as one where 'workers communicate, like each other, have fun, tell the truth, and hold on to customers' is not one that can readily be applied to most organisations today. Nor could it previously have been applied to this organisation, which before the cultural changes that took place was in difficulty. Similarly for most of our large, old-fashioned hierarchical organisations today, flexible workplace practices work best when they are integrated into broader cultural change.

The organisational culture change that has taken place at AMP Ltd to make it a leader in the area of flexible work practices has been inspiring. Their HR Executive said that it has been driven by a business strategy of becoming an employer of choice. Over the past four years the culture has moved from one that:

was very much into power, avoidance behaviour, very obedient sort of culture, very much competing with each other as opposed to competing with the market place to a much more achievement oriented culture, so that we can achieve the business results but also a much more humanistic and affiliative culture.

This culture change has been brought about through a lot of personal coaching, particularly of the top teams, and rewarding the right behaviours such as caring about people and delivering on diversity goals. This process has been reinforced through an extensive performance management system that measures people in terms of climate, culture, values, diversity, succession planning and recruitment supporting 'employer of choice' achievement. Because they reward the right behaviours, not just rewarding financial results the culture is so entrenched that it would be very difficult to turn it back. People are so used to working this way that they would not want to work any other way.

Although culture change can be a difficult process, the rewards in terms of employee morale and satisfaction as well

as financial benefits are readily identifiable in the many organisations that have successfully undergone this transition. Organisational ethics expert, Attracta Lagan, explains that it is this ‘soft’ side, the organisational culture side, of business that actually determines the bottom line.

Significant research has found that dramatic relationships exist between organisational culture and financial performance. The driving force for the introduction of flexible practices in many organisations is the realisation that it makes good business sense. A Banking Corporation CEO sees that this process of cultural change requires the opening up of opportunities and the clearing out of as many obstacles as possible. He says:

I think the main theme is to stay focused on outcomes and performance, and not worry about all the inputs (whether people put in so many hours). What we care about is getting the job done. So we try to have a culture that’s very performance oriented.

Some of the organisations that are successfully incorporating flexible workplace practices into their culture have a particular view about these practices. They see flexibility as part of ‘the way we do business’, rather than as a benefit that can be taken away when cost-cutting occurs. When asked how they can afford to provide flexible practices, their response is, ‘we can’t afford not to’.

A Manager of Workforce Diversity in the finance sector, believes that:

Our goal with flexible work practice is to make them the way we do things around here, and integrate them into the culture. If you see them as a benefit, I don’t believe that gets you to where you want to be . . . Even with child care, I don’t see this as a benefit, I see it as a way we do business to enable parents to come back to work.

Westpac Banking employs over 32 000 people and is recognised as a leader in the area of flexible work practices, winning a Silver Award in the Australian Financial Review/ACCI Corporate Work and Family Awards. A

survey of Westpac front line staff showed that 80 per cent of staff feel they can balance their work and family commitments. Their HR Manager attributes this survey result 'to the fact that there is a range of flexible options that employees and managers are choosing from to make their teams work effectively'.

An example of how this works can be seen at their large Chatswood Branch, where there is a manager 'that just sees flexibility as part of the way to do business . . . He gets benefits from that in terms of the quality of his staff.' She explained that he is also a person that puts policy into practice, ensuring that he leaves the workplace by 5.30 p.m. three nights a week to visit an elderly parent.

More than 5000 of its 32 000 workforce work part-time. The CEO said that permanent part-time work has been outstandingly beneficial in enabling the bank to hire some of its top employees, who are mothers of young children and students and need this flexibility.

As a result of a project involving surveys and focus groups with 1200 part-time employees and 400 supervisors and managers, a process for the implementation of mutually agreed hours of work was developed by Westpac in conjunction with the Financial Sector Union (FSU). Here supervisors and employees must both agree to any proposed changes in hours worked, so that part-time employees are no longer subject to unilateral changes. Further, a minimum of 64 hours' work a month for part-time employees was introduced. This allows part-time employees greater access to training programs and a great sense of security, knowing their financial position is stable and that unexpected roster changes will not clash with other commitments.

The organisation provides a number of family-supportive programs, which include the provision of a child care information and referral service to employees across Australia, three on-site child care centres, assistance with vacation care by reserving places in established vacation care programs, and employer-sponsored family day care.

Westpac was also the first private bank to introduce paid maternity leave. The result has been a significant growth in women returning to work after maternity leave.

Other flexible initiatives include allowing employees to use their accrued sick leave for the care and support of a family member, and the provision of access to legal advice, financial assistance and counselling services for a range of personal problems such as relationship difficulties.

Communicating these policies and practices to all employees is integral to the culture change needed for their success. This is being achieved through the distribution of brochures, an employee handbook given to all staff, stories in their newsletter and bulletins and a freecall number. Job-related information is mailed out to people on maternity and other extended leave. And extensive training is provided on various initiatives such as their workshop, entitled 'Managing Flexibility', which focuses on providing a flexible workplace environment.

An important aspect of changing organisational culture anywhere is the need to examine and test existing beliefs in the workplace. This was vividly illustrated to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency when various accounting firms reported that they assumed women left the firms in order to have babies. When they tested this assumption, they found that only 7 per cent of the women left to have a family. The rest left these firms to go and work for smaller, more flexible organisations. The EOWA Director said that the organisations taking the cultural changes seriously are those that realise:

that the survival of their organisation will not take place unless they do it. They see that one of their key goals is to be an employer of choice, to be able to attract the brightest and the best to their organisation—and I don't just mean at management level, I mean at every level of the organisation. Once they do that and they have this acceptance, then they make the change.

A consulting principal of Ernst & Young advised that the greatest barrier to translating flexible workplace policies into practice to be organisational culture. She says that, at Ernst & Young:

We're like many organisations, we need to go through a huge cultural change, and it takes time, first of all for people to understand that it's OK, they can do it, and then for the management to accept that people want this.

She believes that the cultural changes occur when the people at the top embrace the changes and when others in the organisations use the practices available. At Ernst & Young there is a group dedicated to what they term 'the people process', part of which is to look at the flexible environment they can create for their people. Future plans include making available to employees a database from the US firm offering 450 profiles of flexible work arrangements.

The main type of flexibility their employees want is the ability to structure their work day. 'They want to be able to make the decision whether to come in as an early start and finish early, or come in as a late start and finish late. That is the main request,' she explains.

A major factor in bringing about flexible work initiatives at Ernst & Young is to do with lifestyle issues, with people no longer wanting 'to be workaholics'. She says the choice is:

Do you let the good people go, do you lose them, or do you try and reorganise yourself . . . As a mature organisation surely we should be able to provide that without detriment to the organisation. So it's really to retain the good people.

Ernst & Young in the USA estimates that the cost of acquiring and retraining professionals who leave the firm is \$US150 000 per person. Making the workplace more family-friendly has been identified as a strategy in retaining staff. Steps taken in their Californian offices include advising 755 staff not to check their e-mail or voicemail on the weekends, and acceptable entertaining expenses now include picnics and taking a client's family to the baseball. Further, to hel

deal with the problem of excessive work hours, partners now clarify expectations with clients about acceptable demands on staff, and a staff committee ‘meets regularly to reconcile client demands with staff member’s personal needs’.

Back in Australia, the other benefits of flexible practices that she sees are happier, less stressed, more content people in the workplace, ‘so if you have a more content workforce you have higher productivity’. She said that trust as a key element in maintaining the flexible workplace, and this trust is developed at Ernst & Young by asking ‘How can we help you?’ Consultants are provided with remote access, and if they want to work from home they notify the office and ‘We trust them to get the job done’. She sees many organisations struggling with putting flexible workplace policy into practice, describing one which planned

to have their people work remotely, but they were using technology to actually assess their key-strokes per hour in order to be satisfied that their individuals were working. I found that horrific and in fact I refused to work with that client because I felt if that’s the trust they have of their people, I don’t want to be part of that. If they had no trust in their employees then they weren’t ready for this big move to remote.

To facilitate this culture change the managers at Ernst & Young are participating in a leadership program. She explains:

The purpose of that program is to actually help partners to realise there is another life . . . and they begin to tap in to that inner-self, and it’s very daunting for some of the partners because they’ve never actually stopped to think about themselves or their families in that way. So we’ve certainly started the move to help people to understand their need to get that life balance.

A key indicator of an organisation in transition is the willingness and encouragement of executives to be reflective about their values, behaviour and mindsets.

Another aspect of the organisational culture that is changing at Ernst & Young is the perception that people need to be at the office until late at night to be seen to be doing their job:

In fact you can walk through here in the middle of the day and sometimes this floor is empty, and it doesn't mean that people are out at lunch and it doesn't mean that people are on the beach, it means people are probably on a client site working or they're working from home, or they may be in some sort of learning environment. However when the accounting component of our practice come down onto our floor and see it half empty they say 'Where is everybody?' But here we certainly understand where people are.

Another shift in culture is the perception that using flexible workplace practices will adversely affect promotion or employment opportunity. She said that three years ago this would not only have been a perception but a reality. Now there is a difference. This can be seen in her personal example:

I put my leave form in two weeks ago for six weeks leave. It came back within 24 hours with a 'yes OUCH!' rather than 'please explain why you need this?' Three years ago I couldn't get two weeks leave . . . now it's really saying 'we realise people need to have time out' and that is what it is for me, it's simply time out to think and to refresh.

New senior partners in the practice who come from a background where flexibility within the workplace is very much the norm have aided the shift in culture. She explains:

Even our managing partner put a voicemail on yesterday saying 'Won't be here Thursday because of cross-cultural commitments—it's Thanksgiving and I'm going to be with my family'. That was a great message to give to the people. So we are changing.

Otherwise, people are like 'boiled frogs'. She explains it this way:

If you put a frog into a pan of water and you apply the water heat very slowly, the frog will allow itself to be boiled to death, it won't try and jump out of the pan. People know things are changing around them but they allow it to keep on boiling around them and they think if they keep their head down that they won't be noticed, and they'll just slide through it and things won't ever affect them. And they do of course and they end up being the casualties in the organisation. So people need to begin to see 'yes the temperature is getting hot, I need to do something about it'.

INDIVIDUAL CHOICES

So what can you as an individual do about it? You can make some difficult personal decisions. Do you accept the current system, or do you redefine your personal success and seek ways to achieve it? This means taking responsibility for yourself and your life, being willing to act on your beliefs, being aware of any risks involved and finding ways to minimise them.

Start small, with the areas you feel you have the power to influence, and build on your successes. Initial steps you can take to bring about change might include finding out about the flexible practices available to you at your work and seeking a trial period to establish the effectiveness for everyone concerned. Alternatively you could discuss the possibilities of flexible practices with colleagues, your boss, EEO staff, the HR manager or your union.

You are the person who best knows your job and sees how the job can be done differently to achieve both your needs and those of the organisation. Collaborate with your employer and colleagues to create the optimum work environment. Remember this is a win/win situation for both you and your employer. It takes courage and integrity for an individual to initiate organisational culture change, but it is possible. In fact, culture change can only occur if individuals are willing to change, and that change can start with you. Attracta Lagan believes that these changes do not have to come from the top of the organisation:

THE CHALLENGES

Leadership is throughout an organisation. Leadership is where someone will champion a cause because it is the right thing to do, because it has a collective good, because they have a passion about it.

Be realistic about what is achievable in your organisation and reduce any risks by making a plan for overcoming the hurdles you might encounter. First decide the type of flexibility you need, when you need it and who it will affect. Then write down all the reasons for and against your achieving this work arrangement, remembering to include both personal and organisational barriers. The next step is to develop your strategies to address the challenges and then take action to achieve the life that you want to live.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Need help with implementing flexible work practices? It's a waste of time and money to reinvent the wheel when there are lots of resources to assist you to create a flexible workplace.

Flexibility At Work is a consultancy that has been partnering with organisations for 20 years to provide the resources, guidelines, policies and training needed for success with flexible work practices. These include:

- Best Practice Guidelines on Home Based Work, Job Sharing and Part-time work
- Face-to-face training programs
- E-learning on Creating and Managing Flexible Work Practices
- A Work/life audit to assess the challenges, what is and isn't working and the flexible practices needed
- Articles, audio and video on flexible work practices.

Details at www.flexibility.com.au