Basic Concepts and Definitions

What is Flextime (also called flexitime or flexible working hours)? Flextime is a type of flexible work arrangement that:

- allows employees to vary their work schedules, within certain ranges and dimensions, according to their differing needs (Ronen, 1981).
- focuses exclusively on the work schedule and does not alter the location of work or the total number of hours worked.
- allows employees to break from the standard work schedule by starting the work day early and ending early, starting late and ending late, or taking breaks during the day and making up the time at the beginning or end of the day.
- may permit employees to work extra hours on one day to make up for shortened hours on another day.

Although there is no truly "standard" work schedule, the traditional workday is defined as a forty-hour week, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday (Catalyst, 1997).

Key dimensions of flextime are:

- core hours (the daily hours during which employees must be at work),
- bandwidth (the earliest and latest starting and stopping times to which employees can adjust their schedules) and
- schedule flexibility, which is the ability to change starting and stopping times from day to day and week to week without prior approval from supervisors (Golembiewski & Proehl, 1978; Christensen & Staines, 1990).

Variations in flextime policies are determined by the organization and generally concern the extent of control that employees have over their schedules. Employees or employers may control how often
schedules can be altered, variability in the length of the working day, and core time when all employees are required to be at work.

What is the individual's work situation? The suitability of flextime may vary for individuals depending on factors such as their job or hierarchical level within the organization. Some jobs, for instance those with set customer service hours or those in production may have limited compatibility with flextime. Narayanan and Nath (1982) suggest that such constraints affect lower level employees more than they affect higher level employees. Kossek (1989) found that nonexempt employees had less favorable opinions of flextime than professional employees and surmised that the effect was likely due to the time constraints associated with being a non-exempt employee. However, flextime may be less useful to higher level employees, as they often have inherent flexibility in their jobs. Thus, flextime would be more beneficial to lower level employees with more rigid schedules.

Theories associated with flextime have primarily come from the work-family literature.

- Spillover theory (Staines, 1980; Crouter, 1984) suggests that emotions from work and home spill into the other domain, despite physical and temporal boundaries between the domains.
- Compensation theory proposes that individuals invest more heavily in one domain to make up for what is missing in the other domain (Staines, 1980).

Both of these theories suggest that work and family are interdependent, but they do not adequately explain, predict, and help solve problems that individuals face when balancing work and home responsibilities (Clark, 2000, p. 749).

Two theories that have been proposed more recently, boundary theory (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000) and border theory (Clark, 2000), explain how more flexible boundaries between work and home roles, such as those loosened by flextime, should allow for greater integration of roles than a standard work schedule [see entry, Border/Boundary Theory]. This should occur due to greater flexibility of the temporal boundaries separating roles such as work and home.

EXAMPLE OF BOUNDARY/BORDER THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF FLEXTIME

If an employee would like to be a leader for her daughter's Girl Scout troop which meets weekly at 4:00 p.m., she would be unable to fulfill this family role if the temporal boundary of her work role was rigid and required her to work until 5:00 p.m. Under a flextime policy, the temporal work boundary could be shifted, thus allowing the employee to serve as troop leader at 4:00 p.m. by beginning her work earlier in the morning.
Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies

Flextime has traditionally been thought of as a way to help working parents, with conflicting demands (Christensen & Staines, 1990). It has been the subject of research since the 1970s (e.g., Evans, 1973). Flextime is important for work-family studies in terms of its potential implications for both employers (reduced turnover, improved productivity) and employees (time spent in family roles, conflict between work and family roles, satisfaction with family life). In addition, the relevant issues for the work-family literature extend beyond these employer and employee outcomes in two primary directions. First, is flextime being underutilized?

- Employees may be hesitant to use flextime due to a stigma that using flextime implies a lack of commitment to one's job or due to a lack of others in the organization using flextime (Wiscombe, 2002; Kossek, Barber, & Winters, 1999).
- Research and organizational policy can advocate flextime, but without employee use, the potential benefits for employer and employees will not be reaped.

Second, does flextime appeal solely to those employees with families?

- Recent studies have found that working parents are not the only employees interested in flextime, as professional women without children and members of Generation X are also likely to request it (Stauffer, 1997; Wiscombe, 2002).
- While flextime may have implications as a "family friendly" policy, the effects of flextime for all employees should not be ignored. This is especially important given that work-family programs such as flextime have been associated with family-friendly backlash (Hegtvedt, Clay-Warner, & Ferrigno, 2002; Wiscombe, 2002).
- According to Elinor Burkett, author of The Baby Boon: How Family-Friendly America Cheats the Childless (2000), flextime should only be offered if it is available to all employees, rather than only to those with family responsibilities.

State of the Body of Knowledge

According to Rau (2003), research on flexible work arrangements has focused on five primary issues.

First, although much anecdotal work suggests that the use of flextime is increasing, limited survey research has attempted to measure the prevalence of flextime and managerial attitudes towards flextime.

- Among employers surveyed by William M. Mercer, Inc. the availability of flextime increased by 21% between 1993 and 1998 (Gold, 1998).
The 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998) found that the ability to choose (within a range) starting and stopping times for work was available to 45% of respondents. Could update with 2002 NSCW

More recently, an annual survey of human resource professionals conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 58% responded that their organizations were now offering flextime (SHRM Foundation, 2001). Could update with 2004 data

According to the results of Hewitt Associates' 2001-2002 Work-Life Benefits Survey, 59% of employers offer flextime, despite the difficulties of the recession during this period (Hewitt Associates, 2002). Also, new data is available

What about the informal flextime arrangements that may be negotiated between an employee and his/her manager in an organization that does not have a formal flextime policy? The actual use of flextime may be higher than the organizational policy statistics suggest.

Analysis of data from the 1997 Current Population Survey (CPS) showed that the percentage of workers with formal or informal flexible schedules had doubled since 1985 (Beers, 2000).

However, another study of the CPS data found that the use of flexible work schedules was related to the number of hours worked each week, with employees working less than 40 hours and employees working more than 40 hours having flexible work schedules more than those individuals working a standards 40 hour work week (Golden, 2001).

How does manager's attitudes affect utilization? Research on managerial attitudes towards flextime is more meager. As mentioned earlier, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is often a backlash against employees using flexible work arrangements. One study about hesitancy towards flexible work arrangements found that managers were more concerned about productivity issues related to flextime than they were with part-time work or leaves of absence (Kossek, Barber, & Winters, 1999).

Second, most of the research has focused on understanding how flextime affects various individual-level outcomes, particularly employer-related and employee-related outcomes.

**Employer-related outcomes.**

A review of the literature by Christensen and Staines (1990) found that employers' concerns about organizational effectiveness, turnover, or job attitudes do not make a convincing case for the effectiveness of flextime.

A well designed study by Dalton and Mesch (1990) examined experimental and control groups over a six year period of time. The authors found that absenteeism decreased in the experimental group, but not the control group, after the implementation of flextime, but turnover was not affected.
A similar study by Dunham, Pierce and Castanda (1987) found that after the introduction of flextime, worker satisfaction with the work schedule and general worker reactions, such as job involvement and stress all improved.

A meta-analysis of flextime studies found that absenteeism decreased and productivity, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with schedule all increased when flextime was used (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999). The only work-related outcome that did not have a significant relationship with flextime was self-rated performance.

Other research has found positive wage differentials associated with using flextime (e.g., Gariety & Shaffer, 2001; Johnson & Provan, 1995).

Labor productivity has been studied as an outcome, but no clear effect emerges from the literature. Although decreases in productivity are not reported, several studies have found no significant effects of flextime on productivity (Hicks & Klimoski, 1981; Kim & Campagna, 1981; Naraynan & Nath, 1982; Ralston, 1989).

Other studies have found improvements in productivity related to flextime, but not for all groups in the study (e.g., Schein, Maurer, & Novak, 1977). Shepard, Clifton, and Kruse (1996) did indeed find improvements in productivity related to flextime in the pharmaceutical industry, yet the effects on productivity have also been found to diminish over time after flextime is introduced (Ralston, Anthony & Gustafason, 1985).

Organizational outcomes

Studies have found that bundles of work-family policies, including flextime, are associated with increased perceived organizational performance (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000) and policy statements on human resource decisions, including flextime, are associated with increased shareholder return (Arthur, in press). As human resource management is increasingly being encouraged to demonstrate the impact of policies on the bottom line, research on the organizational performance implications of flextime could serve to justify the implementation of flextime policies in organizational settings.

Employee-related outcomes: Outcomes that are directly related to employees also have been a focus of research. Although outcomes such as work-family conflict and life satisfaction are more closely related to the home sphere, they also could have an indirect effect on work-related outcomes. For example, if an employee’s work/family conflict is reduced by flextime, the employee may need to be absent less often.

A study by Hill, Hawkins, Ferris and Weitzman (2001) found that perceived flexibility in the timing and location of work was positively related to work-family balance, and that the greater the extent of flexibility, the more the employees were able to work a greater number of hours without harming their work-family balance.
• Another study found a direct effect of flextime on work-family conflict (Shinn, Wong, Simko, & Ortiz-Torres, 1989).

1) Several studies have found that flextime is related to outcomes indicative of work-family conflict.

• Ralston (1989) found that employees were better able to juggle work and family demands after flextime was implemented and Bohen & Viveros-Long (1981) found that flextime reduced stress among parents.
• Thomas & Ganster (1995) found that flextime was directly related to perceived control over work and family, and it was indirectly related to work-family conflict.

2) Despite these advantageous outcomes in relation to flextime, other research has not found such beneficial effects.

• Christensen and Staines (1990) found that flextime did not increase employees' satisfaction with their family lives.
• Clark (2002) suggests that flextime may result in borders between work and home that allow work to spill into the home, more than home spills into work, which could explain the lack of improvement in satisfaction.
• There are also other important employee outcomes of flextime that have rarely been studied, such as the distribution of household work and/or care-taking responsibilities within families (Rau, 2003).

3) Research on flextime has also examined the moderating effects of role conflict on the relationship of flextime with organizational and employee outcomes.

• Rau & Hyland (2002) studied the relationship between role conflict and attraction to flextime during recruitment, finding that as level of role conflict increased, attraction to flextime also increased.
• Additional research has studied the effectiveness of flextime in improving organizational and employee outcomes in relation to family responsibilities, finding that those who had family responsibilities had a stronger relationship between flextime and outcomes such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and attendance than those who did not have family responsibilities (e.g., Krausz & Freibach, 1983; Scandura & Lankau, 1997). These results suggest that flextime is especially beneficial for individuals with multiple and conflicting roles.

4) Little research has examined the characteristics of individuals who would be most likely to choose to use flextime.
Billings and Sharpe (1999) found that being married and having a household income of $75,000 or above increased the probability of using flextime, as did working in management, professional, or sales positions. However, they also found that age, race, and having a child between the ages of 6 and 11 or 12 and 17 did not affect the likelihood of using flextime, which contradicted previous research findings (Billings & Sharpe, 1999). With little research upon which to draw, these findings on the characteristics of flextime users should be interpreted cautiously.

5) The implications of flextime for societies and national employment policies could be taken into consideration. There are few if any issues related to national employment policies. Two exceptions are the Great Britain's Employment Act 2002 and Japan's Child Care and Family Leave Law, as amended in 2002.

- Great Britain's legislation introduced a package of "family friendly" employment rights, giving parents with children under six years of age (or disabled children up to the age of 18) the right to request flexible working hours. The legislation requires employers to give proper consideration to such requests.
- Japan's law permits flextime (or reduced working hours) to parents with children under age three who have not taken a childcare leave of absence. Although much of Western Europe has generous work-family policies, there is little focus on flextime.

**Implications for Practice and Research**

Although flextime has been in existence for a number of years, it still is not clearly understood. Studies have found primarily positive effects for flextime on various outcomes, yet there is a substantial amount of research that does not support the use of flextime. Additional research is needed, as is an increased understanding of flextime by practitioners.

**HOW FLEXIBLE IS FLEXIBILITY?**

Although by definition, flextime is a type of flexible work arrangement, the extent to which employees are able to change the parameters of their flextime schedules affects the degree of the arrangement's flexibility. Thus, if an employee normally works 7:30 to 3:30 in order to be home when his children return from school, and inclement weather results in a delayed school opening, the employee's flextime schedule will not meet his family needs. If, however, he is able to adjust his schedule for that day to arrive late and work late (assuming other arrangements can be made for someone to watch the children after school), the flextime schedule will better meet his needs. Practitioners should consider the permissibility of changes in flextime schedules when adopting or revising flextime policies, as increased flexibility may
improve the ability of flextime to meet employee needs, thus reducing conflict and improving other outcomes. Researchers should explore the extent of flexibility to determine which (if any) outcomes are affected by unplanned flexibility as an added dimension of flextime.

What is the business case for flextime? This is not only an issue for academic researchers, but also for practitioners. In the popular press, lists of distinguished organizations, such as Fortune Magazine's "Best Companies to Work For" acknowledge flexible working initiatives as one of the characteristics that makes a company great (Levering & Moskowitz, 2003). This type of positive recognition can be beneficial in attracting and retaining employees. As human resource management is being increasingly encouraged to demonstrate the impact of policies on the bottom line, studies of the organizational performance implications of flextime (e.g., Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000) and the impact of flextime on human resources outcomes, such as attraction to the organization (e.g. Rau & Hyland, 2002), serve to justify the implementation of flextime policies in organizational settings.

Finally, the impact of flextime use on career progression is an area that warrants further investigation. Practitioners and academics may be able to work together to examine the extent to which flextime users are sometimes stigmatized as employees who are not truly committed to the organization, and why this is so. Kossek, Barber, and Winters (1999) found that managers were hesitant to use flextime because of the implications on productivity. Whether or not such concerns are justified would shed additional light on the topic of flextime.

References


Wiscombe, J. (2002). Flex appeal - not just for moms. *Workforce, 81*(3), 1
Locations in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Studies

The Editorial Board of the Teaching Resources section of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared a Matrix as a way to locate important work-family topics in the broad area of work-family studies. (More about the Matrix ...).

Concepts related to adult development are relevant to all of the "Individual" domains in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Study. In addition, theories of adult development are relevant to Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings.

Note: The domain areas most closely related to the entry's topic are presented in full color. Other domains, represented in gray, are provided for context.
About the Matrix

Sloan Work and Family Research Network
Resources for Teaching: Mapping the Work-Family Area of Studies

Introduction

It was appropriate that the members of the Founding Editorial Board of the Resources for Teaching began their work in 2000, for their project represented one of the turning points in the area of work and family studies. This group accepted the challenge of developing resources that could support the efforts of teaching faculty from different disciplines and professional schools to better integrate the work-family body of knowledge into their curricula. The Virtual Think Tank began its work with a vision, a spirit of determination, and sense of civic responsibility to the community of work-family scholars.

A fundamental challenge emerged early in the process. It became clear that before we could design resources that would support the teaching of those topics, we would first need to inventory topics and issues relevant to the work-family area of studies (and begin to distinguish the work-family aspect of these topics from "non work-family" aspects).

The members of the Virtual Think Tank were well aware that surveying the area of work and family studies would be a daunting undertaking. However, we really had no other choice. And so, we began to grapple with the mapping process.

Purpose

1. To develop a preliminary map of the body of knowledge relevant to the work-family area of study that reflects current, "across-the-disciplines" understanding of work-family phenomena.

2. To create a flexible framework (or map) that clarifies the conceptual relationships among the different information domains that comprise the work-family knowledge base.

It is important to understand that this mapping exercise was undertaken as a way to identify and organize the wide range of work-family topics. This project was not intended as a meta-analysis for determining the empirical relationships between specific variables. Therefore, our map of the workfamily area of study does not include any symbols that might suggest the relationships between specific factors or clusters of factors.
Process

The Virtual Think Tank used a 3-step process to create the map of the work-family area of studies.

1. **Key Informants:** The members of the Virtual Think Tank included academics from several different disciplines and professions who have taught and written about work-family studies for years. During the first stage of the mapping process, the Virtual Think Tank functioned as a panel of key informants.

Initially, the Panel engaged in a few brainstorming sessions to identify work-family topics that could be addressed in academic courses. The inductive brainstorming sessions initially resulted in the identification of nearly 50 topics.

Once the preliminary list of topics had been generated, members of the Virtual Think Tank pursued a deductive approach to the identification of work-family issues. Over the course of several conversations, the Virtual Think Tank created a conceptual map that focused on information domains (see Table 1 below).

The last stage of the mapping process undertaken by the Virtual Think Tank consisted of comparing and adjusting the results of the inductive and deductive processes. The preliminary, reconciled list was used as the first index for the Online Work and Family Encyclopedia.

2. **Literature review:** Members of the project team conducted literature searches to identify writings in which authors attempted to map the work-family area of study or specific domains of this area. The highlights of the literature review will be posted on February 1, 2002 when the First Edition of the Work-Family Encyclopedia will be published.

3. **Peer review:** On October 1, 2001, the Preliminary Mapping of the work-family area of study was posted on the website of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network. The members of the Virtual Think Tank invite work-family leaders to submit suggestions and comments about the Mapping and the List of Work-Family Topics. The Virtual Think Tank will consider the suggestions and, as indicated, will make adjustments in both of these products. Please send your comments to Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes at pittcats@bc.edu

Assumptions

Prior to identifying the different information domains relevant to the work-family area of study, members of the Virtual Think Tank adopted two premises:
1. Our use of the word “family” refers to both traditional and nontraditional families. Therefore, we consider the term “work-family” to be relevant to individuals who might reside by themselves. Many work-family leaders have noted the problematic dimensions of the term “work-family” (see Barnett, 1999). In particular, concern has been expressed that the word “family” continues to connote the married couple family with dependent children, despite the widespread recognition that family structures and relationships continue to be very diverse and often change over time. As a group, we understand the word “family” to refer to relationships characterized by deep caring and commitment that exist over time. We do not limit family relationships to those established by marriage, birth, blood, or shared residency.

2. It is important to examine and measure work-family issues and experiences at many different levels, including: individual, dyadic (e.g., couple relationships, parent-child relationships, caregiver/caretaker relationships), family and other small groups, organizational, community, and societal. Much of the work-family discourse glosses over the fact that the work-family experiences of one person or stakeholder group may, in fact, be different from (and potentially in conflict with) those of another.

Outcomes

We will publish a Working Paper, “Mapping the Work-Family Area of Study,” on the Sloan Work and Family Research Network in 2002. In this publication, we will acknowledge the comments and suggestions for improvement sent to us.

Limitations

It is important to understand that the members of the Virtual Think Tank viewed their efforts to map the work-family area of study as a “work in progress.” We anticipate that we will periodically review and revise the map as this area of study evolves.

The members of the panel are also cognizant that other scholars may have different conceptualizations of the work-family area of study. We welcome your comments and look forward to public dialogue about this important topic.

Listing of the Information Domains Included in the Map

The members of the Virtual Think Tank wanted to focus their map of work-family issues around the experiences of five principal stakeholder groups:
1. individuals,
2. families,
3. workplaces,
4. communities, and
5. society-at-large.

Each of these stakeholder groups is represented by a row in the Table 1, Information Domain Matrix (below).

Work-Family Experiences: The discussions of the members of the Virtual Think Tank began with an identification of some of the salient needs & priorities/problems & concerns of the five principal stakeholder groups. These domains are represented by the cells in Column B of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individuals' work-family needs & priorities
- Individuals' work-family problems & concerns
- Families' work-family need & priorities
- Families' work-family problems & concerns
- Needs & priorities of workplaces related to work-family issues
- Workplace problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs & priorities of communities related to work-family issues
- Communities' problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs and priorities of society related to work-family issues
- Societal problems & concerns related to work-family issues

Antecedents: Next, the Virtual Think Tank identified the primary roots causes and factors that might have either precipitated or affected the work-family experiences of the principal stakeholder groups. These domains are highlighted in Column A of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individual Antecedents
- Family Antecedents
- Workplace Antecedents
- Community Antecedents
- Societal Antecedents

Covariates: The third set of information domains include factors that moderate the relationships between the antecedents and the work-family experiences of different stakeholder groups (see
Column C in Table 1).

- Individual Covariates
- Family Covariates
- Workplace Covariates
- Community Covariates
- Societal Covariates

**Decisions and Responses:** The responses of the stakeholder groups to different work-family experiences are highlighted in Column D.

- Individual Decision and Responses
- Family Decisions and Responses
- Workplace Decisions and Responses
- Community Decisions and Responses
- Public Sector Decisions and Responses

**Outcomes & Impacts:** The fifth set of information domains refer to the outcomes and impacts of different work-family issues and experiences on the principal stakeholder groups (see Column E).

- Outcomes & Impacts on Individuals
- Outcomes & Impacts on Families
- Outcomes & Impacts on Workplaces
- Outcomes & Impacts on Communities
- Outcomes & Impacts on Society

**Theoretical Foundations:** The Virtual Think Tank established a sixth information domain to designate the multi-disciplinary theoretical underpinnings to the work-family area of study (noted as Information Domain F).
Table 1: Matrix of Information Domains (9/30/01)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain A: Antecedent Descriptives</th>
<th>Domain B: Work-Family Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain C: Covariates</th>
<th>Domain D: Responses to W-F Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain E: Outcomes and Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Antecedents</td>
<td>Individual Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Individual Covariates</td>
<td>Individual Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Individual Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Antecedents</td>
<td>Family Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Family Covariates</td>
<td>Family Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Family Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Workplace Covariates</td>
<td>Workplace Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Workplace Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Antecedents</td>
<td>Community Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Community Covariates</td>
<td>Community Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Community Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Antecedents</td>
<td>Societal Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Societal Covariates</td>
<td>Societal Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Societal Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>