Big Ideas in the Classroom:

Cali Williams Yost – Why We Need to Reimagine How, When and Where Work is Done Together

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About Big Ideas Videos and The Big Ideas in the Classroom Series

The Big Ideas video series was developed by Ellen Galinsky in her work as the 2023-2024 President of the Work and Family Researchers Network.

The initial videos were filmed at the 2024 WFRN Conference in Montreal Canada where President Galinsky organized 20 leading scholars to present the most compelling new ideas in the work-family field. These films, all approximately 15 minutes in length, highlight promising strategies for work and life effectiveness, organizational functioning and social policy advancement. They bring some of the best research to life because it is presented by the researchers themselves and were designed to use in the classroom as well as to orient stakeholders to the most pressing concerns in the work-family areas of scholarship and practice. The entire library of Big Ideas videos can be found at this link: https://wfrn.org/big-ideas-videos/.

To increase the reach and impact of these engaging presentations, the Big Ideas in the Classroom series presents ideas for classroom applications. The videos themselves are targeted to engage thought leaders, workplace practitioners, policy advocates, as well as undergraduate and graduate students at all levels. They are well suited for presentation in courses in the social sciences and in business programs.

Video Content

Big Idea Video Link

https://youtu.be/kGXYyGBqCHQ

Big Idea Speaker Biography

For more than two decades, Cali Williams Yost has been a leading authority on high performance work flexibility. A visionary workplace futurist, strategist, and author, Yost is the Founder and CEO of the Flex+Strategy Group, a solutions company helping organizations unlock performance and engagement by reimagining how, when, and where work is done. Called “one of the most sophisticated thinkers” on the transformation of work by The New York Times, her commentary is frequently featured in The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Harvard Business Review, USA TODAY, Marketplace, NBC Nightly News and CNN. Yost approaches flexible work transformation as a strategic business imperative. She codified her concepts in her books, Tweak It: Make What Matters to You Happen Every Day, (Hachette), and Work+Life: Finding the Fit That’s Right for You (Penguin Group). Yost graduated with honors from Columbia Business School where she’s noted as an alumnus “Changing the World.” In 2018, she was named one of the global management thinkers “On the Radar” by Thinkers50.

Key Concepts

- Work life flexibility
- Flexible work arrangements
- Leader context
- Employee context
- Workplace culture

PowerPoint Slides

Slides

Classroom Discussion Ideas

Free Writing Prompts

Free writing prompts are open-ended statements or questions designed to inspire spontaneous, unstructured writing. They are commonly used in classrooms to encourage creativity, self-expression, and fluency in writing without the pressure of strict rules or evaluation. Students are given a set amount of time (5-10 minutes) to write continuously, focusing on a flow of ideas without worry for spelling or grammar. Here are some prompts related to the video that might help generate discussion and insight.

- What was the most compelling part of the video for you? Why do you feel it's important for people to know this?
- How does the video relate to your everyday life or experiences?
- What are some other real-world examples of what you saw in the video?
- What questions or concerns did you have after watching the video? How might you go about answering them?

Pair and Share and Class Discussion Topics

Pairing and sharing is a collaborative learning strategy used in classrooms to promote student engagement, communication, and deeper understanding of content. It involves students working in pairs to discuss ideas, answer questions, or reflect on a topic before sharing their thoughts with a larger group or the whole class. Here are some topics related to the video that might help generate discussion and insight.

- Why do some employers and employees believe that "real work" can only be done in an office? What social or cultural values reinforce this perception?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped ideas about where and how work gets done? Are these changes permanent or temporary?
- How might a physical office function not just as a place of productivity, but also as a site of surveillance, culture-building, and identity formation?
- What do people gain by working together in an office (like teamwork or friendships)? What might they lose if more jobs were online?
- How might one's access to flexible work change based on their gender, race, age, class status, or chosen career?
- If most jobs became flexible, how might that change everyday life for families, communities, or society as a whole?

- If you had the choice between working fully in person, fully remote, or a mix of both, which would you prefer, and why?
- How might negotiating for flexibility look different at your first job versus later in your career?
- What do you think an employer might gain if they let workers choose where they work? What concerns might they have?
- If a job you really wanted required you to be in the office every day, would that be a dealbreaker for you? Why or why not?

Assignment Ideas

Flexible Work Case Study

Overview

You and your classmates are employees at a mid-sized company. Since the pandemic, many workers have been able to complete some or all their work remotely. Now, your company would like to have employees return to the office, as they are concerned about workplace culture, quality of work, and employee commitment. Instead of imposing a top-down policy, they've decided to take a "forward-thinking" approach when it comes to the future of work at your company. As such, they have asked your team to design their own schedule and plan for how your work will be completed.

Your team must come up with a flexible work plan that balances the needs of employees with the needs of the company. At the end, you'll present your plan to the "employer" (the class or instructor).

Background About Your Company

You are part of a care coordination organization that helps connect clients and community members to essential services like healthcare, housing, food assistance, and transportation. Your work focuses on supporting people who may face barriers in accessing these services, and you often collaborate with doctors, social workers, housing providers, and community organizations. Your team specifically works with clients to identify their physical, emotional, and social needs, and help connect them to services that can help address said needs.

Before the pandemic, almost all employees worked in the office full-time. During the pandemic, most staff were able to complete their work remotely—through phone calls, video meetings, online databases, and digital records. This shift worked surprisingly

well, but some employees and managers believe face-to-face collaboration (with coworkers, clients, or partners) is still very important.

Your task is to design the parameters of your team's flexible work model that helps your team meet the needs of clients, supports the wellbeing of employees, and ensures the company continues to run smoothly.

Part I: Team Discussion (20 minutes)

As a team, discuss and negotiate the parameters of your team's flexible work model. Use these guiding questions:

About the Work

- What tasks can be done remotely, and what tasks are better done in the office?
- How will you make sure communication and collaboration stay strong if some people are remote?
- How will you measure productivity in a flexible environment?

About People's Lives

- How can you account for teammates with caregiving responsibilities, school schedules, or health needs?
- How might needs differ based on gender, race, class, age, ability, or sexuality?
- What kinds of support (childcare, technology, transportation) might make flexibility more equitable?

About Negotiation

- What arguments will you make to convince your employer that your plan benefits the company and your teammates?
- Where might you need to compromise to balance fairness, feasibility, and business needs?

Part II: Plan Creation (10 minutes)

Draft a short plan that includes:

- The parameters of your team's flexible work model (remote, hybrid, or in-person, and how often).
- Rules or norms you'll set for teamwork and communication.
- How you'll address equity across employees with different responsibilities and needs.

- Why this plan will benefit both your company and your team.

Part III: The Negotiation (15–20 minutes)

- Each team presents their plan to the class or instructor (acting as the "employer").
- Other groups or the instructor may ask critical questions: How does this help the company meet its goals? How do you prevent unfairness between employees?
- Be ready to defend and adjust your plan through negotiation.

Step 4: Reflection (5–10 minutes)

As a class, debrief:

- Which arguments were most persuasive in convincing the "employer"?
- What challenges came up when balancing individual needs with organizational needs?
- How does this exercise reflect real-world debates about the future of work?

Suggested Readings

The following readings were suggested by the Big Idea's presenter, sources that can potentially be integrated into course syllabi or assigned in advance or after the video presentation.

- Hasan, Mahamoud M., Sara Aparisi-Torrijo, and Francisco González-Ladrón-de-Guevara. 2025. "Change Management and Organizational Performance: Current Key Trends." *Cogent Business & Management* 12(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2478447