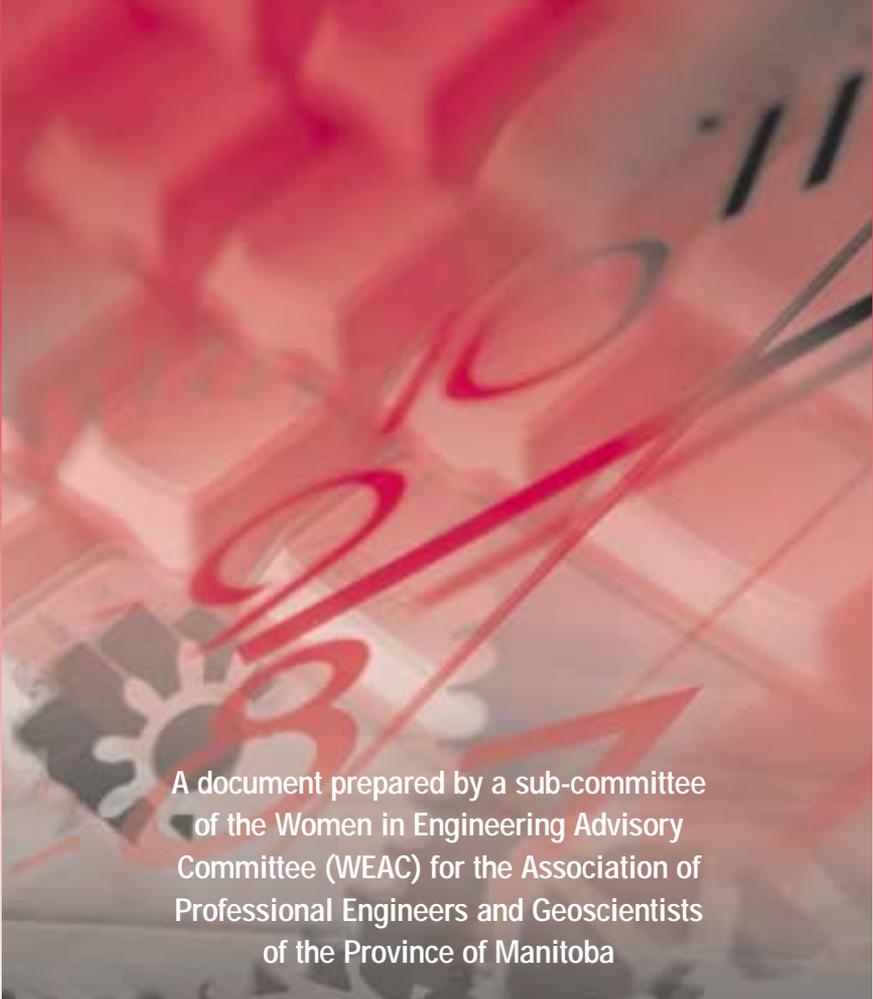


FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS



A document prepared by a sub-committee
of the Women in Engineering Advisory
Committee (WEAC) for the Association of
Professional Engineers and Geoscientists
of the Province of Manitoba

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to serve as a reference tool for professional engineers and their employers when considering flexible workplace arrangements. Such arrangements assist men and women wishing to balance their work and personal commitments such as family, community, education, professional development, religion and general interests.

In today's economic culture where dual-income households prevail, the need for alternative work arrangements has never been greater. The challenge of balancing multiple responsibilities can cause employees to experience fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and absent-mindedness. This in turn affects corporate profitability by reducing productivity and performance. Flexibility in the workplace is clearly a solution that benefits both engineers and their employers. Employees who find their lifestyles satisfying and rewarding because of the ability to balance all commitments will be hard-working, dedicated, and productive.

Described in this document are seven practical flexible working arrangements: flexible hours, job sharing, permanent part-time work, telecommuting, v-time, on-site day care, and phased retirement. Each section provides a brief description of the arrangement along with considerations, advantages, and disadvantages. At the end of the document are references for obtaining further information as well as those used to prepare this handbook. Interested parties are encouraged to pursue additional references through government offices, public libraries, and corporate libraries.

It is important to note that successful flexible workplace arrangements are achieved through mutual trust, compromise, negotiation, and above all FLEXIBILITY between the employee and employer. Both parties are responsible for ensuring that the arrangement is suitable and is working. Some employees may prefer to prepare a detailed proposal outlining their interest in a flexible workplace arrangement or that their employer adopt formal policies to address these issues. Others may slowly migrate to an arrangement preferring the informal arrangements that are made between themselves and their immediate supervisor. Every situation is different. Formal policies are designed to protect the employee but in some instances are too rigid or, on the contrary, too open to interpretation. Informal arrangements may initially work well but are subject to re-consideration in the event that supervisors change.

Recognizing a general lack of understanding of flexible workplace arrangements, this document has been prepared by the Women in Engineering Advisory Committee (WEAC), a sub-committee of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of the Province of Manitoba (APEGM), with the hopes of heightening people's awareness of their options. It is available on the APEGM website at www.apegm.mb.ca. We encourage all readers to share the information presented with their peers and their Human Resources department.

2.0 FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

2.1 FLEXIBLE HOURS

2.1.1 Description

Flextime is a system by which employees are provided some degree of freedom to choose their working hours.

Typical flextime arrangements define core hours during which all employees must be present on the job. Such arrangements include flex bands at the beginning and at the end of each day during which employees make up the necessary number of hours of work.

Typically, employees will be paid under the assumption that they are working a standard number of hours; some adjustment may be necessary if the paid hours differ from the actual hours worked. These adjustments are made at the end of a “settlement period” which may be anywhere from a day to several weeks. In this way, employees can work extra hours every day in order to gain an extra day off during the settlement period. Alternatively, many flextime programs also allow for some degree of work week *compression* by which employees complete the prescribed number of weekly hours in fewer than five full days.

2.1.2 Considerations

Flextime allows some flexibility to an individual’s work schedule without any effect on income or benefits. Typically, flextime will not address the problem of overwork. It may, however, reduce stress if the work schedule is one of the main problems.

Advantages

- improves comfort and efficiency on the job
- can tailor workday to family commitments and schedules (such as taking children to and from care givers or being home when children return from school)
- allows changes in schedule without any reduction in hours and, thus, income
- may accommodate non-routine commitments such as family illness, health care appointments, or special events
- potential for more convenient commute

Disadvantages

- staff may be more difficult to supervise
- greater difficulty in coordinating group activities
- can sometimes run afoul of overtime legislation

2.2 JOB SHARING

2.2.1 Description

Job sharing is a voluntary work arrangement in which two or more people share the responsibilities and duties of a full time job. The benefits and salary are prorated based on the hours of work of each individual. Generally job sharing involves only two people sharing one full time job.

The act of sharing a job varies depending both on the individuals involved and on the job itself. For some jobs, tasks or projects are specific and defined. Two people sharing this type of job may not have to interact regularly and may work essentially independently. In jobs where specific duties will be shared by the individuals, frequent interaction and team work is required. In addition, job sharing schedules may be based on sharing days, sharing weeks, sharing months, or sharing years. Most practically, individuals share days or weeks. One partner may work more hours than another. For example, one person may want to work three days a week and the other only two. Again, depending on the individuals, the company, and the job tasks, job sharers may fill in for each other during vacation time, sick days, and extended leaves.

2.2.2 Considerations

The likelihood of significant team work should be considered. This may require shared decision making and responsibilities. Communication and organizational skills are significant to success and may require extra hours. These factors should be recognized both when considering the job sharing work arrangement and when choosing a job sharing partner.

Advantages

- reduces absenteeism due to illness, personal appointments, vacation, or extended leaves
- reduces staff turnover (and loss of experienced people)
- increases productivity – either due to the diverse skills of job-sharing partners or due to decreased fatigue of individual workers
- more time and opportunity for professional development
- reduces working hours in high-stress jobs
- more time for family responsibilities

Disadvantages

- both employee income and benefits will be significantly reduced
- less potential for advancement
- increased administration and/or training costs required by two employees

2.3 PERMANENT PART-TIME

2.3.1 Description

A part-time working arrangement means working less than the full-time hours (40 hours per week in many instances). Salary should be prorated for the actual number of hours worked and hourly wages should be equal to those of the full-time employee. Benefits are generally prorated in proportion to the number of hours worked compared with a full-time employee. The employee is recognized as permanent. Working schedules vary widely and may include a certain number of hours each day or certain days of the week or a combination of these.

Part-time work has changed over the last few decades. Part-time workers are no longer in the category with term or temporary employees. Most depend on their job financially and, like their full-time counterparts, expect training and career development.

2.3.2 Considerations

A permanent part-time working arrangement offers the employee the same benefits as job sharing and many of the other flexible working arrangements. The specifics of the job must be considered since some jobs require a full-time employee. Unfortunately, the shift to part-time from full-time work may draw negative reactions from coworkers and employers may view the switch to part-time as less of a commitment to the job and employee's career. The potential loss of responsibility and accountability may leave the employee with a feeling of demotion.

Advantages

- reduces absenteeism due to illness, personal appointments, vacation, or extended leaves
- increases productivity due to decreased fatigue of employee
- potential cost saving for the employer
- reduces working hours in high-stress jobs
- more time and opportunity for professional development
- more time for family responsibilities
- opportunity to maintain a career while raising a family

Disadvantages

- both employee income and benefits will be proportionally reduced
- less potential for advancement
- responsibilities may be reduced

2.4 TELECOMMUTING

2.4.1 Description

Telecommuting is a work arrangement in which an employee carries out all or some of the duties of the job from home (or, in some instances, at a location other than the normal workplace). Although millions of North American workers have been taking work home for decades, many people are finding it practical and beneficial to spend some or all of their regular work hours at home.

Telecommuting can be an exclusive arrangement, whereby the employee carries out all or almost all of their job assignment from home. In this case, the employee may have extensive computer and/or communication equipment for staying in touch with the office. Another option is partial telecommuting, whereby the employee spends part of the time in the office and does some work at home; for example, when complete privacy or undisturbed working time is required. Satellite telecommuting is also a possibility whereby a small group of employees work out of a neighborhood office connected electronically to the main centre. Although it does not strictly qualify as telecommuting, some of the benefits include less commuting time and the opportunity for more enjoyable endeavors (e.g. lunch with family members).

2.4.2 Considerations

Telecommuting may be a suitable flexible work arrangement if a position is one in which an employee works completely independently. This type of arrangement would not be suited to a position that is part of a team or requires a significant amount of interaction with others as part of the job responsibility. Many positions may fall somewhere in between these two extremes and may be suited to partial telecommuting. Although telecommuting can allow more flexibility in scheduling childcare and family responsibilities, it is by no means an alternative to daycare. This arrangement may be well-suited to employees who are recovering from a serious accident or illness or who have a physical disability that impedes access to an office. Employers are often attracted to telecommuting by the promise of happier and more productive employees. Sometimes they welcome the opportunity to reduce overcrowding at the office.

Formal written proposals may not be the best way to raise the issue of telecommuting with employers. A better solution may be to begin telecommuting in a casual manner and with the involvement of only the employee's immediate supervisor. Working at home on a short term, casual basis at the start may also give both the employer and employee an idea of what would be involved if the arrangement evolved to a more permanent basis.

Advantages

- improved employee morale
- less lost time due to socializing and/or breaks
- less overhead cost for employer
- freedom to work independently at your own pace and without distractions or interruptions
- less commuting time
- better integration of work and family life

Disadvantages

- feeling of isolation and alienation from co-workers
- may be passed over for promotions due to lack of visibility in office
- increased chance of workaholism and/or burnout
- vulnerability to abuse by supervisor
- potential for lawsuits by workers hurt off-site



2.5 V-TIME

2.5.1 Description

V-time (short for “voluntary reduced work time”) is a time/income trade-off which gives employees a range of choices for reducing their hours (and income) by a fixed percentage over a set period of time. V-time programs incorporate a variety of work reduction percentages, typically 2.5, 5, 10, 20, 25, or 40 percent of full-time. Employees may be given a choice of time off in the form of a shorter work day, shorter work week, or extended vacation time. Employees are usually given periodic opportunities (every three, six, or twelve months) to enroll/renew and must commit for a fixed amount of time (six or twelve months for example) to facilitate staff planning. V-time can be a creative alternative to lay-offs by spreading the available work around. For a standard work week of 40 hours, the following table illustrates the effect of the various options:

| Pay Reduction | Hours off per day | Days off per month | Weeks off per year |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 2.5% | 12 minutes | .5 | 1.25 |
| 5% | 25 minutes | 1 | 2.5 |
| 10% | 45 minutes | 2 | 5 |
| 20% | 1.5 hours | 4 | 10 |
| 25% | 2 hours | 5 | 12.5 |
| 40% | 3.25 hours | 8 | 20 |

2.5.2 Considerations

Advantages

- increases productivity due to decreased absenteeism and turnover
- inexpensive way to improve employee morale and reduce burnout
- potential cost saving for the employer
- creative opportunity to retain staff
- gives employees a range of choices for reducing their working hours
- more time and opportunity for professional development

Disadvantages

- employee income and benefits will be proportionally reduced
- typically, it is not suitable for an individual employee within a department/organization – it is a system for a group of employees

2.6 ON-SITE DAY CARE

2.6.1 Description

It is possible for companies to offer many different services with respect to assisting employees with child care. These options include company provided on-site day care, company provided or assisted near-site day care, subsidies, financial support at community child care facilities, and family child care networks for temporary or emergency situations.

On-site day care would involve a company setting up and running a child care facility for its employees. This may or may not be subsidized by the company. Such child care sites may be tailored to the hours of operation of the company. Company supported child care facilities could be very beneficial to employees who work unusual shift schedules, whereas typical “day” care facilities might not provide adequate service.

Similarly, where company location or operation does not permit, near-site day cares might be established. These may be run by the company and may or may not be subsidized.

Some companies might choose to financially support local day care facilities already in existence. Companies can also have reserved spaces in local centers for the use of employees in emergencies or when their normal arrangements temporarily break down.

As a minimum some companies may be able to provide a referral service on locating reliable, quality child care arrangements for their employees.

2.6.2 Considerations

Before approaching a company about developing a child care support, whether it be in the form of subsidies, a referral service, or on-site day care, research should be done at the company to determine the acceptance or need at the site or the company as a whole. If there is not significant enough need at a single place of business, it may be possible to partner with other businesses nearby to develop a joint child care facility sharing both costs and responsibilities. Employers might have to deal with feelings of discrimination by employees without children, however most individuals believe that a better upbringing for children benefits society in general.

Advantages

- parents can spend lunch and or break times with children
- parents/employees might have more input into the operation of the day care center
- may be a less expensive option for an employee's child care
- could allow for child care during irregular shifts or when overtime is necessary
- less time commuting if children are not taken to separate locations

Disadvantages

- potential liability issues for the company
- may not be suitable for school age children who attend schools near their home



2.7 PHASED RETIREMENT

2.7.1 Description

Phased retirement can occur in a variety of ways enabling senior workers to reduce their hours of work in the final years preceding retirement. This may be beneficial to the employee as it may cushion the sudden shock or loss of identity and/or self-worth that some retirees experience. It may also afford the opportunity to develop new roles, relationships and/or interests prior to full retirement. It is also beneficial to the company in that it reduces the sudden loss of experienced personnel and allows a more gradual transition for whoever is replacing the retiree.

Phased retirement can be undertaken by working fewer hours for some months or even years before full retirement, extended vacations, or a gradual reduction in the amount of time spent on the job.

2.7.2 Considerations

Phased retirement can begin anywhere from a few months to a few years prior to full retirement. This type of arrangement could be carried out in the form of extended vacations, a shorter work week, or some such combination allowing a gradual, progressive reduction in the amount of time spent on the job. Some type of pension protection may be required depending on the type of pension plan the employee belongs to.

Advantages

- beneficial to employers in that it cushions the loss of experienced, key personnel
- more time to develop other interests, volunteer opportunities
- chance to “try out” retirement
- insulates somewhat against a sudden drop in income level

Disadvantages

- potential loss of income
- may be taken less seriously on the job
- may affect pension benefits

3.0 SUMMARY

The preceding section has described seven different flexible working arrangements. It is not, however, meant to be an exhaustive list. It is important to remember that many situations will have their own unique set of circumstances that will have to be considered. Some situations may have associated government legislation and readers are encouraged to seek information about current laws when considering a flexible work arrangement.

Awareness, Two-Way Communication and *Role Models* are three building blocks we'd like to leave with you:

Awareness of flexible workplace options is an important step towards ensuring employee well-being. In addition, employers also need to stay abreast of government and corporate legislation regarding maternity leave, parental leave, leave for sick relatives, retirement, etc.

Two-Way Communication between employees and their supervisors is mandatory for these arrangements to work. Success stories will only prevail if this is in place.

Finally, successful arrangements will serve as encouraging *Role Models* for others.

So limber up and start negotiating for *flexibility!*



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