



Summary

Company organisation and work-life balance.

Temporal flexibility: examples of win-win situations

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This information dossier uses eight cases studies to describe examples of requests on the part of employees for more temporal flexibility, and the win-win situations this creates in companies. The companies involved are examined to determine how and why employers adapt the organisation of work to deal with this demand. In win-win situations, both employees and employers experience the measures taken as a benefit.

Below a brief indication is given of what in the case studies makes the difference. The companies take initiatives in the area of personnel policy, work scheduling, reduction of working time and part-time work, holiday schemes, remote and home working.

Personnel (policy)

The case studies indicate that three elements have a major impact on the ability of a company to meet demand for temporal flexibility. These are recruitment and selection, competence policy and management skills.

In the companies present in the case studies, the work-life balance is included in the selection process. Sometimes a specific profile with respect to the desired flexibility is explicitly recruited and further discussed in the job interview. An option here is to attract multi-skilled people and/or complementary profiles. Multi-skilled employees can more easily replace colleagues. Complementary profiles usually have complementary wishes in the area of temporal flexibility. We are thinking here of women with young children who complement older employees whose children are already grown and thus are less bound by school holidays.

To ensure the continuity of the production process and services, it is important that employees can assume each other's tasks. A proactive competence policy can augment the multi-skilled approach to employees.

Supervisors and managers can play an important role in the even distribution of temporal flexibility. In this, a short communication channel (short distance between the supervisor that makes the assessment and takes the decision) is an advantage.

Flexitime

Flexitime is a success story in the companies in the case studies. However, this is usually limited to white-collar workers. The systems differ regarding the freedom available with respect to starting time: for example any time between 7 AM and 9 AM, or only at fixed times between these hours. The hours can be mutually agreed upon according to the department's needs. Flexitime is useful to bring children to school, avoid traffic congestion, share a car, etc. Flexitime is usually accompanied by the introduction of electronic registration. Electronic registration makes it easier to work different hours each day.

Working extra and less

This is a scheme in which extra hours can be accumulated – and deficits possibly made up – within a specific period, for which a recuperation or compensation scheme is implemented. In a number of case studies, this is calculated annually. In essence, this consists of employees being able to work less or more hours. The extra hours are usually at the request of the employer or to meet a deadline that the employees themselves impose. The compensation hours are used to handle practical matters. A system is set up to monitor the maximum extra and deficit hours.

Working hours on an annual basis

Flexitime arrangements with the possibility to save hours and freely take them can also be used to accumulate a number of extra days off. In a number of companies in the case studies, the accumulated hours can be freely taken within the year. In these companies, working time is not calculated per week, but per year.

Adapted work schedules

Typical examples of these are the four-day workweek or working 4.5 days/week, different hours every other week to handle childcare needs, etc. The case studies contain examples of how extra machines or material can be used to reorder the work to make these work schedules possible.

Reduction of working time (RWT)

All companies have implemented the traditional RWT (from 40 to 38 hours), and the extra (2) hours that are worked per week are usually accumulated and taken as extra holidays. In one of the companies, both blue-collar and white-collar workers are awarded one hour or a few hours extra per week. This makes it possible for management to allow more employees to continue to work full-time. The fact that almost all employees work full-time has advantages for the company.

Part-time jobs

The number of part-time jobs increased considerably in the past, together with the introduction of more women into the labour market. Subsidising systems such as time credits, career breaks and thematic leave certainly had something to do with this.

The voluntary nature of part-time work remains an issue. Do employees opt for part-time work because a proper work-life balance is not possible otherwise, in other words due for example to the absence of day care? Or is part-time work viewed as the ideal combination of both work aspirations and family ideals?

Vacation planning and distribution

This undoubtedly is an underestimated management element to better adapt work and personal life to each other. Yet there are simple – usually free of cost – actions to take here that can make a difference. The most simple is allowing early requests for and allocation of holidays. This makes it easy to make arrangements with others and with the family, and offers more possibilities to respond to bargains obtained by booking early. Rotation systems ensure that everyone has a turn at choosing a favourable holiday schedule.

Remote and home working

Remote and home working can save time and avoid traffic congestion. For a number of companies in the case studies, home working was the only possibility to continue to work full-time or remain employed at the company.

The home working scheme is framed with arrangements concerning deadlines and is evaluated in the performance reviews. Employees work part-time at home especially in large companies and in executive positions. Small companies or companies with a family structure are more reluctant.

Gert Verdonck (2010), Bedrijfsorganisatie en Werk-privébalans. Temporelle flexibiliteit: voorbeelden van win-winsituaties. StIA/SERV, Brussels, January 2010