

Get some balance - make flexible work policies work

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Most organisations' flexible work policies sit idly in policy documents, employees too uncomfortable to implement them because they might be frowned upon by employers or co-workers for deviating from the workplace "culture".

But, says Professor Lisa Bradley, head of QUT's School of Management, who has extensively researched the use of flexible work practices in the construction industry, bosses who don't make it "okay" in the workplace culture to call upon flexible work policies could be missing out.

"Our research has shown that when flexible work options are supported in the workplace it helps organisations attract the best staff and it lowers staff turnover and absenteeism when workers are able to structure their work time according to their circumstances," Professor Bradley said.

"Flexible work options such as job sharing, working from home, early-start, early-finish, and concertina-ed four-day working weeks are often on the books somewhere but rarely enjoyed.

"To put them into practice and reap the benefits of less stressed, more productive staff, organisations must support the policies by having a culture which understands and approves of employees arranging their work hours according to need."

Professor Bradley said organisations needed firstly to pay more than lip service to their policies and encourage and support their use by all

employees. Secondly, the direct supervisors must support the policy's use by their employees.

"One of the most important facets of a supportive working environment is the support of the flexible work practices by co-workers," she said.

"We have found that where flexible work practices are seen as natural and used by everybody, not just women with children, they are more likely to be used because employees do not face disapproval from colleagues.

"This means no snide remarks such as 'It's nice for those who don't have to work a full day' as the person who started at 7am leaves at 3.30pm or someone who works from home on Friday who's told 'enjoy your long weekend'."

Professor Bradley said it was crucial, too, that it was known in the organisation that no negative career consequences would occur if people took up flexible working options.

"Employers should also take care not to reward those who put in extra 'face-time' by being there before they get in and leaving after them - reward and recognition should be based on what employees achieve, not on extra time spent in the office."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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