

Flexible schedules, results-oriented workplaces reduce work-family conflict and turnover

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New research from the University of Minnesota finds that a workplace environment that allows employees to change when and where they work, based on their individual needs and job responsibilities, positively affects the work-family interface and reduces turnover.

Led by U of M sociology professors Erin Kelly and Phyllis Moen, the research is published in an April [American Sociological Review](#) study, "Changing Workplaces to Reduce Work-Family Conflict: Schedule Control in a White-Collar Organization," and a February Social Problems study.

Kelly and Moen base their findings on data from surveys of more than 600 [employees](#) and company records from Minnesota-based Best Buy before and after the implementation of a so-called "Results Only Work Environment" (ROWE) workplace initiative. Best Buy introduced the ROWE initiative at its Richfield, Minn., headquarters in 2005.

ROWE redirected the focus of employees and managers towards measurable results and away from a set work schedule and location. Employees could routinely change when and where they worked without seeking permission from a manager or even notifying one. Moen and Kelly examined whether the initiative affects work-family conflict, whether schedule control plays a role in these effects, and whether work demands (including long hours) moderate the initiative's effects on work-

family outcomes.

"Previous research has not been able to assess whether workplace policies or initiatives succeed in reducing work-family conflict or increasing work-family fit," Kelly says. "The study points to the importance of schedule control for understanding job quality and for management policies and practices," Moen says.

"With these changes in the workplace, employees gained control over the time and timing of their work in ways that benefitted them and, by extension, their families and communities," Kelly says. "It is feasible to broaden access to schedule control and thereby relieve work-family conflicts and improve work-family fit for more workers," Moen says.

The research also demonstrates positive impact of the ROWE initiative for the company. The researchers found that ROWE reduced turnover by 45%—after controlling for multiple factors like job level, organizational tenure, job satisfaction, income adequacy, job security, and other turnover intentions. Specifically, only 6% of ROWE participants left the company during the eight month study period while 11% of the comparison group left. ROWE also reduced turnover intentions among those remaining with the corporation.

"By showing that a policy initiative like ROWE can reduce turnover, this research moves the 'opting out' argument—whether one chooses family over work—from a private issue to an issue of how employers can change the workplace to better meet the needs of employees," Moen says.

Additional key findings:

- ROWE reduced turnover for all types of employees. Moen and

Kelly found no differences in the ROWE turnover effects by employees' gender, life stage, organizational tenure, job satisfaction, income adequacy, or perceived job security. This finding is important because employers sometimes assume that these initiatives will primarily benefit parents or women.

- People with high levels of work-family pressures do tend to "opt out" of the workforce; however, ROWE reduced the "opting out" of both men and women.
- ROWE reduced work-family conflict and spillover and improved work-family fit and time adequacy.
- ROWE increased employees' schedule control. This is important because some flexibility policies and programs do not actually increase employees' control over the time and timing of their work, because managers still determine who can use them.
- ROWE increased schedule control for mothers, for women without children at home, and for men without children at home. Fathers with kids at home benefited less than other groups, probably because they had the highest schedule control to begin with.
- ROWE increased schedule control for employees regardless of their work demands. Employees' increased schedule control, in turn, resulted in less work-family conflict and better work-family fit among employees with the highest work demands and those with lower work demands.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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