

Study suggests flexible workplaces promote better health behavior and well-being

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A flexible workplace initiative improved employees' health behavior and well-being, including a rise in the amount and quality of sleep and better health management, according to a new study by University of Minnesota sociology professors Erin Kelly and Phyllis Moen, which appears in the December issue of the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*.

"Our study shows that moving from viewing time at the office as a sign of productivity, to emphasizing actual results can create a work environment that fosters healthy behavior and well-being," says Moen. "This has important policy implications, suggesting that initiatives creating broad access to time flexibility encourage employees to take better care of themselves."

Using [longitudinal data](#) collected from 608 employees of a white-collar organization before and after a flexible workplace initiative was implemented, the study examined changes in health-promoting behaviors and [health outcomes](#) among the employees participating in the initiative compared to those who did not participate.

Introduced at the Best Buy headquarters in Richfield, Minn. in 2005, the workplace initiative—dubbed the Results Only Work Environment (ROWE)—redirected the focus of employees and managers towards measurable results and away from when and where work is completed. Under ROWE, employees were allowed to routinely change when and where they worked based on their individual needs and job

responsibilities without seeking permission from a manager or even notifying one.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Employees participating in the flexible workplace initiative reported getting almost an extra hour (52 minutes) of sleep on nights before work.
- Employees participating in the flexible workplace initiative managed their health differently: They were less likely to feel obligated to work when sick and more likely to go to a doctor when necessary, even when busy.
- The flexible workplace initiative increased employees' sense of schedule control and reduced their work-family conflict which, in turn, improved their sleep quality, energy levels, self-reported health, and sense of personal mastery while decreasing employees' emotional exhaustion and psychological distress.

"Narrower flexibility policies allow some 'accommodations' for family needs, but are less likely to promote employee health and well-being or to be available to all employees," says Kelly.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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