

# Workplace flexibility still a myth for most

March 18 2014

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Workplace flexibility – it's a phrase that might be appealing to job seekers or make a company look good, but a new study by the Sloan Center on Aging and Work at Boston College shows flexible work options are out of reach for most employees and that when they are offered, arrangements are limited in size and scope.

"While large percentages of employers report that they have at least some workplace flexibility, the number of options is usually limited and they are typically not available to the entire workforce," says Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes, Ph.D., Director of the Sloan Center on Aging and Work at Boston College and one of the researchers of the study. "We're trying to help employers understand that flexible work initiatives work best if their organizations offer a comprehensive set of options. Employers who implement limited programs might become frustrated if they don't see the outcomes they had hoped for saying, 'Gosh, this didn't help us at all' or, 'it didn't help us with recruitment' or 'it didn't help us with retention.' In fact, it may not be that the flexible work options didn't work. Rather, that the companies didn't offer a sufficient range of options to the employees."

The study, published in the journal, *Community, Work, and Family*, examined the flexible work arrangements of 545 U.S. employers and found most arrangements center around allowing employees to move where they work and when they report in, but didn't include reduction of work or temporary leaves from jobs. Additionally, any flexibility options that are available aren't being made to the majority of a company's employees.

"We should probably set our standards and expectations a little higher," says Dr. Pitt-Catsouphes. "Business leaders as well as academics have been trying to promote the adoption of quality [flexible work](#) initiatives for the past three decades. We have come to realize how important it is for employers to offer different types of flexibilities so that employees and their supervisors have some choice and control over when, where and how much they work. Employers and employees are better able to reap the benefits of workplace flexibility when the initiatives are comprehensive and well aligned with business priorities."

The study, co-authored by Stephen Sweet of Ithaca College, Elyssa Besen of the Center for Disability Research, Lonnie Golden of Penn State Abington along with Boston College's Pitt-Catsouphes, found only one in five companies offered more than one approach to workplace flexibility, despite the fact that different employees need different options.

"What we're saying is flexibility can work if you make a commitment to making it work," says Pitt-Catsouphes. "Workplace flexibility is important to employees across the life course and can support the productive engagement of older [employees](#) as well as younger workers. In today's business environment, organizations need to be adaptive and nimble. Flexible work options offer tools that can help companies remain competitive."

Provided by Boston College

Citation: Workplace flexibility still a myth for most (2014, March 18) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-03-workplace-flexibility-myth.html>

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