

Five ways to make 'flexible work' actually work

If you are not open to malleability, you're putting your company at a competitive disadvantage

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OPINION

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The proliferation of flexible work continues. Whether the flexibility is related to hours (flex-time, compressed weeks, part-time work), or workstyles (telecommuting, flexible workspaces, job sharing), it is something that more employees want.

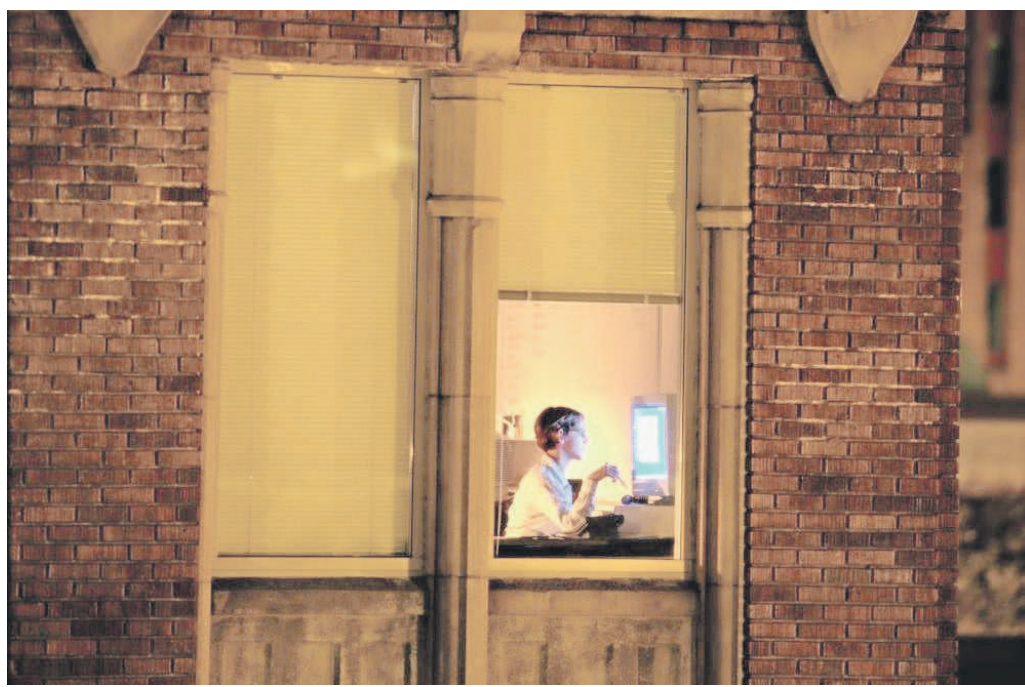
Flexible working arrangements are viewed as attractive because they represent freedom – to be productive, stay motivated and save time, all of which also benefits employers.

But not every organization has come around to appreciating the advantages. If an organization isn't open to the idea of flexible work, it is putting itself at a competitive disadvantage for recruiting, hiring and keeping the best and the brightest – which means it's worth your while to at least explore the possibility.

So what can you do to make flexible working a reasonable alternative in your organization? Here are five must-dos.

PLAN YOUR STRATEGY

Flexible working is so widespread and mainstream now that it



People view flexible working arrangements as attractive because they represent freedom – specifically, the freedom to be productive, to stay motivated and to save time. RYAN MCVAY/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

should not (and cannot) be managed on a case-by-case basis. So establish a flex-work strategy. Determine what options (in terms of hours or work styles) your business can reasonably support, who will be allowed to take advantage of flex-work opportunities and who will make the final yea-or-nay decisions. Seek feedback from your employees in terms of their level of interest, their needs and what jobs are best suited to flexible work alternatives. Ask them for their input on what the work guidelines should be and how productivity will be measured.

RECOGNIZE THAT NOT EVERY JOB OR EVERY PERSON WILL BE A GOOD FIT

It is important to acknowledge that not all roles nor all employees will be successful in flexible working arrangements. Ultimately, you still have to ensure that your customers are serviced and that your work gets done.

Some jobs simply require more rigid hours or work styles. Some employees just need the structure of a workplace environment to thrive. And there will also be staff who feel that flexible work options will actually cause them more stress and dissatisfaction, because work responsibilities will encroach on personal time.

MAKE COMMUNICATION YOUR PRIORITY

Unless you thoughtfully seek to offset it, communication and collaboration usually decline as flexible work expands.

So make it a priority. Do not rely solely on e-mail to keep in touch. Conduct regular information-sharing staff meetings to keep everyone in the loop, either in person or at least over the telephone. Make it a point to reach out and connect with each of your staff members on a recurring and frequent "check-in." Use one of the many online tools available to keep your employees connected. Slack and Yammer are just two of myriad possibilities.

As you roll out your flexible work initiative, communicate repeatedly to everyone involved that this can only work if identified goals are met and deliverables completed.

CHANGE YOUR LEADERSHIP APPROACH

Managing a flexible work force isn't the same as managing a traditional one. If you believe that time at the office proves a strong work ethic, then your foray into the world of flexible work is destined to fail.

It is critical to focus on results rather than on process. Seek to monitor and assess outputs rather than tasks. Make sure that your employees understand that they will be evaluated and measured on what is produced or delivered.

LAUNCH A PRELIMINARY PILOT

Start small. Run a pilot program with a few key departments. Set a deadline, perhaps in six months, at which time you will evaluate successes, roadblocks and failures. A trial run will help you identify problems and work out the difficulties. Once you discover the obstacles and issues, you can make adjustments and roll out the program to the rest of your organization.

Don't immediately nix the possibility of flexible working arrangements because of past experiences and biases. Flex-work opportunities have been proven to increase staff productivity, enhance employee engagement, offer scheduling and coverage advantages, and reduce facility costs.

Special to The Globe and Mail

Diversity is integral to building a strong, adaptable work force

ROLA DAGHER

OPINION

President of Cisco Canada

What does diversity mean to you?

Is it a person's age? Gender? Cultural background?

For me, diversity encompasses all these things. But more importantly, it also applies to the way people think as well as their ability to adapt to constant change. Diversity of thought is not something that is discussed nearly as much as it should be, and yet I consider it to be a vital foundation when building a successful, adaptable work force.

From an early age, I learned firsthand the strength of adaptability. When my family fled the civil war in Lebanon and immigrated to Canada, we were faced with adapting to a new environment. But rather than be intimidated by a new lifestyle, we em-

braced the challenge and reinvented ourselves – strong in the belief that hardships can not only improve you as a person, but can also make you better prepared for the future.

And we live in a time when we need to be prepared, because the current rate of change in global societies is unprecedented. Think of all the disruptive technologies that have surfaced in the past 40 years alone: home video, the internet, broadband, wireless and 5G, to name a few.

For businesses, these constant disruptions bring a greater need for constant improvement and adaptability. In fact, your success directly depends on it. Today, the average lifespan of a company on the S&P 500 has decreased to 15 years, from 90 in 1935.

Bottom line: You either embrace change and adapt or get left behind.

But corporate culture requires continuous evolution and adaptability, which is why diversity is so crucial. A diverse work force

brings with it different experiences, different ideas and opinions, and different approaches.

For some, dealing with something or somebody that is "different" makes them uncomfortable. Yet I was taught that being uncomfortable is a good thing, because comfort and growth don't co-exist. And in order to survive and thrive in this new, disruptive environment, you need to be challenged continuously and adapt yourself to new ways of thinking. Surround yourself with people who will push you to grow, evolve and give you new perspectives. Diversity of thought and adaptability will lead to innovation, and that's what will lead you to success.

As a leader that aims to bring diversity of thought to my workplace, I look for more than just a person's education. Degrees are important, but they are only one part of a longer equation. Attitude, willingness, hunger, drive, determination and the ability to adapt to rapid change – these are

the qualities that truly give people a competitive edge. I'm less interested in where they've come from and more concerned about where they want to go and how they plan on getting there. They need to be passionate about life and unique in their approach. Diversity can be found anywhere and everywhere, but you need to be open to it.

As a leader, you have the ability to impact your environment and prepare your work force for the disruptive changes in your industry. Nobody is saying it won't be a challenge; there may be those within your organization that are resistant to change. But the fourth industrial revolution has brought different kinds of pressure on leadership and you simply don't have the luxury of taking a passive stance. Leadership is about being nimble, coping with new challenges and bringing the best out of our human strengths.

When I joined Cisco Canada, I was thrilled to see the company

had already established a corporate culture built on respect, enablement and trust. Cisco has long held the belief that the company's success and competitive edge doesn't come from our technology but from our people. We didn't just help build the internet, but we continue to build it today. Our ability to adapt through space and time has enabled our success, helped our customers grow and touched the lives of people around the world. And they're all connected – it starts with people and ends with people. It's a manifesto that aligns seamlessly with my personal and corporate outlook and influences many of my leadership decisions.

Leadership is an action, not a position. When you surround yourself with diverse and adaptable people who challenge even you, together you will be able to overcome any adversity and emerge stronger and more resilient.

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PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

Dalhousie University is conducting an extensive international search for a President and Vice-Chancellor to take office in July of 2019, and invites expressions of interest, applications and nominations.

A member of Canada's U15 group of universities, Dalhousie is Atlantic Canada's leading research-intensive university. Located in the heart of Halifax, Nova Scotia, with an Agricultural Campus in Truro/Bible Hill, Dalhousie is a truly national and international institution, with more than half of its nearly 19,000 students coming from outside the province. The university's 6,000 faculty and staff foster a diverse, purpose-driven community, one that spans 13 faculties and conducts more than \$150 million in annual research. Dalhousie is celebrating its 200th anniversary in 2018, embarking on its third century of achievement with renewed energy, inspired partnerships and a deepened commitment to diversity and inclusion, and to making a lasting impact on our world. For more about Dalhousie University, visit dal.ca.

Reporting to the Board of Governors, the President and Vice-Chancellor provides the overall leadership of the University's activities. The President will ensure achievement of Dalhousie's mission of creating a hub

of world-leading research and innovation, adding to the intellectual, social and economic capital of its communities. The President will also ensure Dalhousie provides an environment of teaching and learning excellence, built on collaboration and respect, with a commitment to academic freedom. In addition to managing a team of leaders responsible for all the university's policies, programs and services, the President must foster a culture of cooperation and collegiality that ensures and enhances both student success and the student experience.

Dalhousie's next President and Vice-Chancellor brings a tenure of relevant academic and leadership experience expected from the leader of a U15 university. As Dalhousie's leading advocate, you have a clear understanding of the unique role Dalhousie plays in the region, across Canada and globally and a leadership style that enables this. As the ideal candidate, you are a respected visionary leader with a demonstrated track record of success. You must have a demonstrated commitment to the values of diversity and inclusion and champion them as integral components of your current organization. You create collaborative, dynamic

and innovative cultures and have an aptitude for people leadership. You are also an excellent relationship builder who will foster open and productive dialogues both across campus, with students, faculty and staff, and with external audiences, including all levels of government, community partners, industry, other academic institutions, alumni, donors, and the international community. Your experience includes working in large, complex institutions and with nationally and globally top-ranked programs that meet and exceed rigorous standards and accreditations.

Dalhousie University is committed to fostering a collegial culture grounded in diversity and inclusiveness. The university encourages applications from Aboriginal Peoples, persons with a disability, racially visible persons, women, persons of minority sexual orientations and gender identities, and all candidates who would contribute to the diversity of our community.

Consideration of candidates will begin immediately. Nominations or applications should be submitted, in confidence, to Jane Griffith jane.griffith@odgersberndtson.com or Sarah Adams sarah.adams@odgersberndtson.com.