

## POINT



## COUNTERPOINT

## Telecommuting Makes Good Business Sense

In a sense, telecommuting and flexible schedules are old news. Many companies have allowed and encouraged employees to work flexible schedules for years. However, in another sense, the logic and impetus for flexible schedules is stronger than ever.

The first and most obvious reason is changes in how and where work is done. Confining the “workplace” to some arbitrarily chosen office makes less and less sense for more and more organizations. The global consulting firm Accenture is so unwilling to maintain the hoary old “office bunker” mentality that it actually asks its 178,000 worldwide employees to make reservations for office space when they need it. Accenture finds its non-office culture fits the distributed, global nature of its business and better connects employees to clients.

Second, organizations are realizing that offering telecommuting and other flexible schedules allows them to attract and retain the best talent. New entrants into the workforce value autonomy, creativity, and virtual access over routines, structures, and dress codes.

Third, while managers are a main source of opposition to telework, once exposed to it they become much more positive. As a *Wall Street Journal* article noted in describing flexible workers, “Allowed to find their own equilibrium between work and private lives, they tend to put work first.” Managers see this through experience. A review of 46 studies on telecommuting revealed positive effects on employee productivity and morale.

There are too many arguments in favor of telecommuting and flexible schedules for organizations to ignore. A recent survey of employers indicated 63 percent offer flexible work schedules; they are ahead of the curve.

Telecommuting and other flexible schedules are among those management fads the business press loves to shower with praise. Like most other fads, however, they don’t stand up to close scrutiny and logical analysis.

Managers don’t view telecommuters very positively. And if you respond honestly and objectively, you would have a hard time advising employees to indulge in flexible work schedules when doing so hurts their career. A recent study gives some interesting support.

More than two-thirds of employees surveyed (68 percent) thought working at home made them more productive. However, when managers were surveyed, more than one-third (37 percent) thought that if allowed to work at home, staff would use their so-called working hours for personal activities.

Sure, employees want flexible schedules and rationalize their preferences by arguing that it helps them get more done. But a lot of managers know better—while some of “working at home” does include work, another part is spent doing nonwork-related activities such as chores, personal or family activities, and so on. That’s exactly why employees want it so much.

If you asked employees “Would you like to get paid the same for working half as many hours?” most employees would probably say “Sure!” But that doesn’t mean management should give employees something for nothing. Effective HRM sometimes means not giving employees what they want.