

Mainstreaming Workplace Flexibility: Organizational Change in an Australian Construction Company

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Abstract

Purpose. This case study evaluates the efforts of an Australian construction company that decided to mainstream flexible work options for all professional employees to promote employees' work-life integration.

Approach. Stouten's model of organizational change is used to analyze how this company used work redesign to successfully create a flexible work culture and flexibility options for all employees. Evaluation of the initiative is provided.

Findings. Stouten's model proved very useful in interpreting steps needed for the flexibility initiative to be successful, starting off with overcoming resistance in the work culture where flexibility stigma and the ideal worker norm were dominant. We describe how project-based teams were trained to successfully redesign work to promote flexibility. Assessment indicated positive impact of increased flexibility on work attitudes and performance, teamwork, relations with supervisors, personal and family well-being and business outcomes.

Originality. Few studies consider how an organization can successfully change their culture and structure to support all employees' work flexibility. This case study provides practical information on how flexibility can be successfully implemented and permanently integrated into traditional companies dominated by male workforces as well as how to measure the impact of a flexibility initiative.

Implications. More companies will become drawn to developing flexible work arrangements after the pandemic increased interest in flexible work. Companies steeped in a traditional work culture based on long hours can change to create a work culture based on flexibility, with positive outcomes for organizational and employee well-being.

Key words: work flexibility, organizational change, work redesign, work-life balance, action research, case study

Introduction

Workplace flexibility offers employees control over where, when, how much, or how continuously they work. This can involve non-traditional scheduling of work hours, reduced work hours and working from home. This business practice can promote organizational well-being, particularly when offered company wide. Documented benefits include greater employee attendance, retention and organizational commitment as well as improved company productivity, innovation and performance (Bessa and Tomlinson, 2017; de Sivatte and Guadamillas, 2013; Drake and Brown, 2017; Matos *et al.*, 2016; Perlow and Kelly, 2014; Ray and Pana-Cryan, 2021). Positive employee outcomes have also been found, including workers' enhanced ability to manage life and work responsibilities (Masterson *et al.*, 2020; Moen *et al.*, 2016; Saks, 2022).

Before the pandemic, few companies made flexibility widely available and employees seldom used flexibility options (Berkery *et al.*, 2017; Dean and Auerbach, 2018; Matos *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, US surveys found no increase in employees' work flexibility between 2002 and 2018 (Ray and Pana-Cryan, 2021).

With the pandemic, companies were obligated to provide flexibility to a greater number of employees, a practice many employees appreciated. For example, at the pandemic's height, 71% of Americans were estimated to have worked from home and 54% said they wanted to continue after the pandemic (Parker *et al.*, 2022). Employees reported work flexibility was a positive benefit of the pandemic, helping them combine work and personal lives (Cornell *et al.*, 2022; De Klerk *et al.*, 2021).

Amis and Greenwood (2021:585) argue the pandemic has put pressure on companies to change, since the crisis allowed "surfacing of interests and values previously suppressed or subordinated." Social trends suggest many employees would benefit from flexible work arrangements to pursue interests and values. Adults increasingly seek to balance work with personal interests, including exercise, hobbies, education and religious and community activities (Kelliher *et al.*, 2019). The labor force is aging; older employees find it easier to remain employed if they can work flexibly (Dropkin *et al.*, 2016). Employees often need flexibility in order to balance employment with childcare and care of ill, disabled, or aging family members (Bainbridge, 2020; United Nations, 2011).

According to Bessa and Tomlinson (2017), few studies consider how an organization can successfully change their culture and structure to support all employees' work flexibility. To fill this gap, this paper provides a case study of an Australian construction company that decided to mainstream work flexibility to reduce dissatisfaction with work-life integration - offering flexible options to all employees and creating a work culture supporting work flexibility. This company employed mainly male professionals in workplaces where long hours were the norm; few studies examine how flexibility can successfully be put into practice in this population (Bessa and Tomlinson, 2017). We analyze change in this company with an action plan suggested by Stouten and colleagues (2018), which might be a useful blueprint for organizations interested in mainstreaming work flexibility.

Literature Review

Historically, opportunities to work flexibly have been negotiated by individual employees and their supervisors (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2012; Tomlinson *et al.*, 2018). They are often available only in emergencies or to select employees perceived as excellent performers. Employees who arrange with supervisors to work flexibly can suffer backlash or "flexibility stigma" (Bessa and Tomlinson, 2017; Putnam *et al.*, 2014). Managers often interpret flexibility use as a signal employees have become less committed and productive workers; employees who negotiate flexible work arrangements describe being penalized with less job security and advancement opportunities (Chung, 2018; Rudman and Mescher, 2013). Employees who work flexibly report co-workers tease, ridicule or socially exclude them (Berdahl and Moon, 2013; Bornstein, 2013). Awareness of stigma is an important reason employees refrain from using available flexibility options (Ferdous *et al.*, 2022; Williams *et al.*, 2013).

Flexibility stigma can negatively impact corporate productivity. Workers foregoing flexibility options may adopt personal strategies for combining work and personal lives that reduce their productivity, e.g., missing work, foregoing sleep (Miller, 2019). In companies with reported flexibility stigma, all employees regardless of flexibility option use report lower job satisfaction and engagement, higher turnover intentions and negative work-life spillover (Cech and Blair-Loy, 2014; Ferdous *et al.*, 2022; O'Connor and Cech, 2018).

A company interested in mainstreaming flexibility needs to create a climate where all employees feel they can use flexibility options without criticism (Li *et al.*, 2021). This is challenging since flexibility stigma occurs because companies have historically been dominated by the "ideal worker norm." Employees, especially men, are expected to display organizational commitment by continuous full-time employment, long hours and prioritizing work before family and personal life (Kelly *et al.*, 2010; O'Connor and Cech, 2018). Expectations surrounding the ideal worker norm make it difficult, especially for men, to seek out work-life benefits such as flexible work and for them to fully participate in family life or pursue important interests outside work (Atkinson, 2022; Burnett *et al.*, 2013).

Where the ideal worker norm predominates, work practices rely upon fixed and long hours, extreme job specialization and emphasis on individual rather than team effort (Drake and Brown, 2017). Such practices make it difficult for organizations to accommodate employees who work flexibly. Work policies designed to enhance reconciliation of work and personal life often fail because of the culture and structure of the traditional workplace (Bessa and Tomlinson, 2017; Galea *et al.*, 2014).

This study focuses on an Australian construction company. The ideal worker norm is most entrenched in industries such as construction that are historically populated and dominated by men (Hanna *et al.*, 2000). Male professionals and managers employed in construction have reported long and inflexible hours contribute to work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion (Lingard and Francis, 2005; Tijani *et al.*, 2020). Australian construction companies have traditionally required employees to work six-day weeks (Francis *et al.*, 2013).

Given the prevalence of the ideal worker norm in a male-dominated industry like construction, flexibility stigma seems unlikely to be eliminated without a paradigm shift. This shift requires organizations to move away from accommodating individuals' needs for flexibility on a case-by-case basis toward a broader implementation process. This would facilitate all employees' access to flexible work options through changes in the workplace culture and in how work is done and valued (Drake and Brown, 2013; Kossek *et al.*, 2010; Perlow and Kelly, 2014). Previous case studies suggest some steps companies can take to successfully mainstream flexibility. In one Australian insurance company, "signals of support" for using flexible work options were required (Williams, 2019; Williams *et al.*, 2021). Explicit signals included written policies and public statements of support for flexibility. Implicit signals included an organizational discourse stressing mutual benefits flexibility has for the organization and employees as well as organizational storytelling concerning positive examples of flexibility implementation. A US IT firm's field experiment successfully reduced work overload and increased work engagement when managers received training to support flexible work (Kelly and Moen, 2020). An international pharmaceutical firm successfully offered flexibility to most employees by developing a focus on results rather than face time and advertising positive business outcomes of the initiative to enhance support for flexibility (Muse, 2011). A large US white-collar organization reduced stigma by linking flexibility with team-based work redesign and deemphasizing importance of face time (Perlow and Kelly, 2014). Finally, Tran *et al.*, (2022) studied a global manufacturing firm to understand how the organization could change to support remote work after the pandemic. They suggest it is important to "trust, engage, and empower" employees (p.236), involving them in the decision-making process.

Methods

This paper reports on a case study of a company that successfully mainstreamed work flexibility - the Australian branch of Multiplex (MPX), which builds large-scale buildings and infrastructure. In Australia, it is up to companies to provide flexible working arrangements since legislation is weak. The Fair Work Act offers only some employees (caregivers, workers with disabilities, those over 55) the right to request flexible work and employers can refuse on "reasonable business grounds" (Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman, 2022). Research suggests a paradigm shift toward mainstreaming work flexibility calls for planned organizational change. Stouten and colleagues' (2018) model offers a framework used below to analyze how MPX successfully established work flexibility. Their model consists of ten action steps, developed by synthesizing popular prescriptive change models in management advice literature with academic studies evaluating whether specific factors lead to organizational change. Our study is apparently the first to use this model to analyze how a company changed to mainstream work flexibility.

Results

Previously, MPX had a formal policy where individuals had the right to request working flexibly, but individual accommodations were limited. Early discussions with the Executive Team indicated management did not fully recognize what deterred flexibility use: flexibility options' reliance upon negotiations between individual employees and supervisors, flexibility stigma, reluctant supervisors and work practices based on the ideal worker model (e.g., long hours, high specialization). Stouten *et al.* (2018)'s steps for successful organizational change are applied to analyze how MPX embedded work flexibility in work culture and work practices.

Step 1: Collect facts about problem

In 2010, management faced pressure to change their traditional perspective on flexibility. An employee survey revealed 44% of women and men selected "lack of work/life balance" in response to the question: "What circumstances would be most likely to cause you to leave your role in the next year or so?" Research supports the expectation that retention will suffer when employees report negative personal and family well-being (Hausknecht *et al.*, 2009; Shockley *et al.*, 2017). Faced with possible high turnover, a managerial team collaborated with the first author, a business consultant, to consider the business need for company wide flexibility and recommend how all employees' access to flexibility could be improved in a sustainable way.

Step 2: Assess change readiness

Constraints were apparent from the beginning in terms of work culture and work structure. Interviews conducted with 18 staff before the experiment began revealed how taken for granted traditional work practices were. Asked what they thought about a proposed experiment of offering flexibility to everyone involved in an upcoming project, two-thirds expressed serious doubts, including:

- The culture won't support it; individuals will be stigmatized and suffer career-wise.
- It won't work because of work demands.
- Project deadlines won't be met.

Step 3: Communicate a compelling change vision

The first author worked with leaders to develop a vision for enhancing flexibility, presented to MPX's Australian Executive Group. Research suggests employers must demonstrate seriousness about offering flexible working arrangements if stigma is to be reduced (White *et al.*, 2020).

The new flexibility vision states: "Flexibility is embedded in our DNA, empowered in our people, and promotes innovation, productivity and engagement, leading to outperformance across the business." Guiding principles included:

- Flexibility is for all members of the team.
- The team respects the flexibility needs of individuals.
- All employees are given the opportunity to discuss their needs for flexibility during regular one-on-one and performance conversations with their managers.
- Implementation and decision-making about flexibility are based on trust between MPX, the team and the individual.
- Flexibility solutions are sought by both managers and employees that result in benefits for MPX, the team and individuals, while ensuring project goals are met in relation to Safety, Budget, Program and Quality.
- Flexibility solutions take account of required face-to-face components of particular roles.
- Communication and responsibilities across the team are considered to ensure appropriate staff are responsible for all activities.

Step 4: Identify an appropriate intervention that aligns individual, work group and organizational goals

The first author proposed a new approach for instituting flexibility, based on research and experience with promoting flexibility. This involved a team-based approach to work redesign that challenged the traditional structure of work with its underlying assumptions such as the importance of face time. The following principles for a new team-based approach to flexibility were established:

- Flexibility is defined broadly - it can be formal or informal, involve scheduling, varying amount or location of work, leaves and flexibility in career continuity.
- Work is redesigned for flexibility at a team-level, by team members and their managers.
- The process involves identifying and challenging biased assumptions about how work must be organized and what it means to be a flexible worker (e.g., they are less committed to the organization, some jobs cannot be redesigned for flexibility).
- The redesigned jobs which are more flexible must maintain or improve performance and well-being of the organization and individual employees.

Step 5: Work with existing social networks

MPX's new approach to facilitating flexibility involved the team of professionals working together on a particular construction project; they would decide upon flexible working arrangements and how work could be restructured to promote flexibility.

This approach was first piloted in the construction of a shopping center. The outside consultant worked with this project team before construction began in a series of workshops to develop flexible work arrangements and redesign work. The team was divided into four groups; each was asked to design a solution to a hypothetical flexibility-by-design challenge (two teams had the same challenge). Challenges encouraged them to think creatively about flexibility, jobs and work. Research suggests that companies need "design thinking" to develop innovative solutions to company problems (Elsbach and Stigliani, 2018). To engage in design thinking, Martin (2007) recommends challenges that create two or more potentially opposing ideas (in this case, flexibility vs productivity and flexibility vs project outcomes). The goal was to have the team reach a synthesis containing elements of both ideas, driving increased flexibility and more effective work.

For the first challenge, two groups were told: "Assume MPX has agreed to a new working arrangement on this job so that individual staff are able to work five days a week. The site will continue to operate six days. Your task is to design a solution to enable this. Consider ways to redesign different aspects of the project and the way work is done. This could include the team structure, who is on site at particular times, who has responsibility for different aspects of the work, when, and where." For the second challenge, the remaining two groups were told: "One major barrier to implementing effective flexible work in the construction industry is the accepted team structure. Your task is to design a different structure to enable greater flexibility in how, when and where work is conducted. Consider a range of options including role flexibility, who does what, levels of responsibility and supervision, rotations, overlapping work zones, how technology might enable a different team structure and work to be conducted off-site."

All groups were told: "Take account of the 'Business Boundaries' (i.e., Safety, Budget, Program and Quality) and MPX's new policy to flexible work; your solution has to be realistic, i.e., it should be able to be implemented and be workable."

Small teams were then challenged to evaluate proposals in terms of:

1. Individuals' ideas for how their jobs could be more flexible as well as flexible options for the team
2. Options and perspectives that challenged common assumptions
3. Supervision needed
4. New skills and new forms of communication needed
5. How to maintain client relationship quality
6. Whether new tasks and responsibilities were appropriate for job levels
7. Challenges in implementing various options
8. What was needed to ensure success
9. Evaluation of whether proposal was likely to enhance company profitability (on-time finish, on-budget completion) and employees' job engagement, well-being and career opportunities

A "creative synthesis workshop" was conducted (recommended by Harvey, 2014), to review and integrate proposals and agree on specific flexibility and job/work redesign elements for the pilot. Regional management reviewed and agreed to final flexibility options. The most significant new option reduced individuals' work week to five days while the site operated six days. Staff members were expected to learn new responsibilities and tasks, collaborate and communicate more and engage in more team-based planning.

Step 6: Develop change leadership

To encourage management and employees to question traditional work practices and cultural beliefs, two premises were emphasized by the outside consultant leading up to the first pilot, to counter initial negative feelings about change:

- It is easier to act your way into a new way of thinking, than to think your way into a new way of acting.
- Individuals, teams, and organizations have the capacity to change, and to create better and more productive workplaces.

Change leadership was developed overtime as champions were identified. Employees committed to the new approach to flexibility became speakers at staff forums and management development programs.

Step 7: Engage in practices to support implementation of change

Workshops were conducted with the first pilot team to make changes addressing concerns. A workshop was also carried out with pilot Project Managers, their direct managers and Executive Team members to discuss concerns and enhance management support. HR regularly updated higher management and communicated stories about the success of the first pilot.

Step 8: Promote experimentation

The company started small, with the first pilot project being the shopping center. When this project was completed 105 days early, indicating tremendous success, four additional pilots were immediately established to see if the success could be replicated, using the same procedures.

Step 9: Assess change progress and outcomes over time

For flexibility to be mainstreamed, positive business outcomes need to be demonstrated (Muse, 2011). Considerable resources were devoted to assessing outcomes of the five pilot projects in terms of work flexibility, work attitudes and performance, teamwork, relations with supervisors and personal and family well-being. The vast majority of employees in the pilots (91%) completed on-line surveys before projects began concerning experiences in their last construction projects (N=82); the vast majority (88%) also completed a second survey after pilots' completion (N=100). Responses could not be matched by name but the two groups were judged similar enough to compare because of high response rates in both surveys, implying most employees completed both. About one-fourth of those participating were women; about one-third with employees with caregiving responsibilities; about one-fourth were employees with managerial responsibilities.

Survey results were used to establish whether there were statistically significant improvements in employee experiences before and after the pilots. To assess this, summary independent sample t-tests were calculated comparing item means. Post-surveys also included questions that solicited employees' opinions about the impact the flexibility initiative had on their work attitudes and performance, teamwork, relations with supervisors, and

personal and family well-being.

Lastly, 62 employee interviews conducted after project completion offered insights into reasons for success of the flexibility initiative.

Flexibility outcomes.

The five pilots were associated with a significant improvement in access to flexible work, increased employee satisfaction with work flexibility and the development of a more flexible work culture. (See Table I.)

Table I. Experiences with flexibility

	Pre-test (N=82)		Post-test (N=100)		T-test results
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	
Access to flexibility:					
Reported flexibility in scheduling start, end times (range 1-5)	2.57	1.12	3.10	1.24	-3.04*
Reported use of specific flexibility options (range 1-2)	1.32	.470	1.49	.502	-2.36*
Satisfaction with flexibility:					
Satisfaction with the flexibility of hours in the job (range 1-5)	3.29	1.23	3.92	1.31	-3.34*
Job allowed flexibility needed for work/personal commitments (1-5)	3.21	1.17	3.21	1.32	2.97*
Flexibility culture scale (range 1-5):	3.80	.892	4.34	.704	-4.446*
Comfort using flexibility options	3.22	1.24	4.12	1.16	-5.03*
Flexible work promoted and encouraged	2.85	1.29	4.23	1.23	-7.34*
Supervisor's strongly supports flexible working arrangements	3.91	1.02	4.50	.80	-4.27*
Supervisor approachable to discuss flexibility	3.99	1.01	4.38	.83	-2.81*
Supervisors sensitive to personal and family life demands	4.40	.843	3.93	1.10	3.27*

* Indicates statistical significance, with post-survey answers higher, according to one-tailed t-tests ($p < .05$).

Improvement in access to flexible work was assessed with two measures. Significantly more employees (71%) indicated they had some, a great deal or complete flexibility in scheduling the start and end times of their work, compared to employees reporting about their jobs in their most previous projects (52%). Significantly more employees (49%) reported using at least one flexibility option in the pilots, while 33% reported this for previous projects. The only option employees reported using in previous projects was arriving or leaving early; in the pilots, five different options were used (some employees used more than one). Most common was the newly designed full day off (taken by 30 of 49). Next most common (used by 19) was early arrival or departure. Three new options used by one or two employees included working half days, working from home and reduced hours. Men were significantly more likely to report using a flexibility option in the pilot than they had for their previous project ($t=3.11, p < .05$). Men, women, and employees without management responsibilities all reported having significantly more schedule flexibility in the pilots compared to their previous projects ($t=1.09, 1.86, -2.07; p < .05$).

Employee satisfaction with opportunities for flexibility also improved, according to two measures. Significantly more employees (77%) agreed or strongly agreed they were satisfied with the amount of flexibility in their jobs in the pilots compared to their last projects (58%). Significantly more employees (73%) agreed or strongly agreed that their jobs allowed them the flexibility they needed to meet their work and personal/family commitments, compared to 51% in their last projects. Compared to their previous projects, men, employees with caregiving responsibilities and employees without management responsibilities all reported significantly more satisfaction with hours flexibility and reported their jobs allowed more flexibility for work/personal commitments than did their previous projects ($t=-3.19, 3.40; 3.73, 4.17; -2.58, -2.82; p < .05$).

Respondents indicated their pilot projects exhibited a significantly more flexible work culture, based on five survey items. The vast majority agreed or strongly agreed they felt more comfortable using flexibility options in the pilots (84% compared to 50% in their past projects), that flexible work was more promoted and encouraged (85% vs

41%), supervisors more strongly supported flexibility option use (94% vs 79%), supervisors were more approachable to discuss flexibility issues (94% to 80%) and supervisors were more sensitive to demands of personal and family life (93% to 79%). These five items formed a reliable Flexible Culture Scale (Cronbach's α s = .85, .85). Employees' scale scores were significantly higher for the pilots (See Table I.) All six subgroups of employees studied were found to report a significant improvement in the culture of flexibility at MPX - men as well as women, managers as well as employees without management responsibilities, and caregivers as well as employees without caregiving responsibilities (t = 3.78, 3.68, 2.38, 3.93, 3.73, 3.75; p <.05).

These findings suggest that MPX was successful in fulfilling the first principle of their new flexibility policy, "Flexibility is for all members of the team."

Work attitudes and performance.

The vast majority of employees reported flexibility pilots were responsible for improving their work attitudes (see Table II). (Pre-pilot data were not gathered for comparison.) About three-quarters reported improvements in job satisfaction (72%) morale and motivation (73%), and commitment and loyalty to the company (69 %). A large majority (73%) indicated the flexibility initiative had a positive or very positive impact on their work performance; 68% agreed there was very positive or positive effects on their productivity.

Table II. Reported effects of flexibility initiative –post survey (N=100)

	Mean	Standard deviation
Effects on work attitudes and work performance:		
Overall job satisfaction	4.16	1.19
Morale/motivation	4.25	1.14
Commitment/loyalty to MPX	4.20	1.17
Work at MPX	4.23	1.16
Productivity	4.11	1.14
Team:		
Teamwork	4.04	1.20
Effective communication in team	3.97	1.20
Personal and family well-being scale:		
Personal stress level	3.83	1.11
Ability to manage work and personal/home responsibilities	3.94	1.06
Overall impact of flexibility on personal/home life	3.91	1.10
Quality of family relationships	3.86	1.04

Responses: 1=very negative, 2=negative, 3=no impact 4=positive, 5=very positive

These five survey items formed a reliable Work Attitudes and Performance Scale (α =.97). Enhanced work flexibility appeared to play a role in improved work attitudes and self-reported productivity. Employees who reported greater flexibility outcomes (access, satisfaction and a flexible workplace culture) were significantly more likely than others to report higher scores on the Work Attitudes and Performance scale. (See Table III.)

Table III. Correlations between employees' flexibility and work and personal outcomes

	Amount of flexibility in scheduling start and end times of work	Use of specific flexibility options	Satisfaction with flexibility	Flexibility culture scale
Work attitudes and work performance scale	.18*	.33*	.49*	.30*
Teamwork scale	.37*	.05	.37*	.61*
Relations with supervisors scale	.48*	.24*	.38*	.72*
Personal and family well-being scale	.56*	.28*	.75*	.80*

* Indicates statistical significance, according to one-tailed tests ($p \leq .05$).

Interviews suggested why pilots may have improved work attitudes and performance. Top explanations fell into three categories:

- returned to work more refreshed, with improved mood and morale (mentioned by 63%)
- experienced greater independence and flexibility in decision-making with greater trust between co-workers (58%)
- experienced enhanced focus and productivity, especially on workdays preceding day off (43%)

Teamwork.

The process of creating and implementing new flexibility initiatives had a positive impact on how teams worked together. (See Table IV.) Six of eight items measuring teamwork showed significant improvements, comparing most recent work experience to pilot experience. Employees were more likely to agree or strongly agree that the more flexible workplace encouraged significantly more positive team outcomes, including team discussions (42% vs 23%), openness to change (35% vs 16%), ownership for mistakes (33% vs 15%), cooperation (38% vs. 24%) and working together to set expectations (29% vs 20%). Almost all employees (97%) agreed or strongly agreed their teams were flexible when people had family/personal demands that make it difficult for them to do their work effectively in the pilot, although it was also high (87%) in their previous projects. The flexibility initiative did not change co-workers' supporting each other to do a good job or information-sharing. These eight teamwork measures formed a reliable Teamwork Scale ($\alpha = .87, .88$); significant improvement overtime in teamwork was found.

Table IV. - Impact of flexibility initiative on teamwork

	Pre-test (N=82)		Post-test (N=100)		T-test results
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	
<i>Teamwork scale:</i>	3.93	.7	4.21	.61	-2.28*
I get support from my co-workers to do a good job. #	4.24	.76	4.38	.65	-1.31
We work together to set expectations.	3.83	.99	4.14	.77	-2.32*
Each takes ownership for our problems and mistakes.	3.88	.87	4.14	.830	-2.05*
We are open to change.	3.73	.99	4.12	.89	-2.76*
We freely share information and knowledge.	4.00	.99	4.20	.92	-1.40
We encourage each other to contribution to discussion so different points of view help inform decisions.	3.94	.91	4.31	.73	-2.98*
There is a spirit of cooperation.	3.90	.96	4.30	.67	-3.18*
We are flexible and prepared to adjust to get a job done.	3.91	.98	4.34	.73	-3.29*

* Indicates statistically significance, with post-survey answers higher, according to one-tailed tests ($p \leq .05$).

In pre-surveys, questions posed in past tense.

Responses: 1=strongly disagree/2=disagree/3=unsure/4=agree/5=strongly agree.

Improvement in work flexibility in the pilots was associated with better teamwork. The more employees reported workplace flexibility for three of the four measures, the higher their teamwork scale scores (see Table III). Employees also felt the pilots increased teamwork - 60% reported the more flexible workplace had positive or very positive effects on teamwork, while 59% reported improved team communication. When asked in interviews to elaborate on the impact of flexibility on team effectiveness the three most mentioned answers involved:

- Greater spirit of teamwork (mentioned by 73%)
- Improved structure (53%)
- Increased understanding of/appreciation for others' roles (23%)

Relations with supervisors.

Relations with supervisors was reported to be significantly better in the flexibility pilots than in participants' previous projects (see Table V). Strong agreement increased significantly over time for supervisors recognizing employee contributions (34% to 51%), giving employees honest feedback (31% to 47%), asking employees for ideas (31% to 41%) and accepting employees' feedback (35% to 53%). [Table V here]

Table V. Impact of flexibility initiative on relations with supervisors

:	Pre-test (N=82)		Post-test (N=100)		T-test results
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	
<i>Supervisor relations scale</i>	3.97	.808	4.31	.69	-3.04*
I feel free to give my immediate supervisor direct and honest feedback.	4.01	1.04	4.34	.89	-2.29*
My supervisor gives me honest and open feedback on my performance.	4.01	1.04	4.33	.80	-2.39*
My supervisor recognizes me for my contribution.	4.00	1.02	4.38	.79	-2.77*
My supervisor asks for my ideas.	3.85	1.12	4.18	.91	-2.14*

* Indicates statistically significance, with post-survey answers higher, according to one-tailed tests ($p < .05$).

In pre-surveys, questions were posed in past tense. Responses: 1=strongly disagree/2=disagree/3=unsure/4=agree/5=strongly agree.

These four items formed a reliable Supervisor Relations Scale (α s = .78 and .80). Significant differences in pre- and post-survey scale scores were found, confirming improvement in this aspect of work life. This scale was also significantly and positively related to all measures of flexibility (see Table III), suggesting the flexibility initiative was strongly associated with improved employee relations with supervisors.

Personal and family well-being.

MPX decided to mainstream flexibility because it was concerned employees might resign to seek jobs with more potential for personal and family well-being. The percentage of employees who agreed or strongly agreed that their jobs allowed them the flexibility they needed to meet their work and family/personal commitments significantly increased from 52% on their last project to 73% in the pilots (t -test = -2.94, $p < .05$). Another measure of well-being was a reliable three-item scale for Missed Family Events, which included a significant personal/family obligation, significant family event or celebration, all or part of a planned vacation (α s = .75, .60). Employees reported missing significantly fewer family events in the last three months, compared to past projects (t -test = 3.323, $p < .05$).

About two-thirds of employees in the post-survey reported positive effects of the flexibility pilots on personal and family well-being. Participants reported the flexibility pilots reduced stress (62%), enhanced ability to manage work with personal/home responsibilities (67%), improved personal/home lives (67%) and enhanced family relationship quality (65%). A reliable Personal and Family Well-being Scale was developed from these items (α = .92). All correlations between the Personal and Family Well-Being Scale and the four measures of flexibility were statistically significant, suggesting the flexibility initiative had a positive impact on employee well-being (see Table III).

Interviews suggested how flexibility improved personal and family lives:

- More time to spend with family, engage in family outings and events (mentioned by 43%).
- More relaxed, less stressed relationships (33%)
- More time to spend with friends, engage in social outings (27%).

Business outcomes.

At MPX, employee flexibility needed to be balanced with business outcomes – meeting deadlines, meeting expected profit margins, maintaining safety and positive client feedback. According to a company report on the first three pilots, these were achieved or exceeded. For example, the first project finished 105 days ahead of contract; in another, the tendered profit margin was exceeded; in two cases, clients were so satisfied they immediately negotiated new contracts with MPX. Two managers interviewed after the pilots suggested retention was the strongest business outcome of the flexibility initiative.

Despite initial reluctance, ambivalence and cynicism about flexibility in the beginning, nearly all (97%) staff interviewed after the pilots indicated flexibility was important to the business. Interestingly, the top three reasons focused on improvements in work-personal lives:

- Employees enjoy greater involvement and activity in family life (mentioned by 46%)
- Employees have improved health and well-being (45%)
- Employees have enhanced work/life balance (45%)

Step 10: Institutionalize change.

Presentations were made to all levels of the company concerning positive pilot outcomes. After the five pilots, MPX made flexibility mandatory for all future projects. A flexibility training program was developed and delivered to 217 managers to increase capabilities of facilitating team-based flexibility company-wide. The methodology described above was used for the first six projects following the pilots. Thereafter, HR took on the role of facilitating development of team-based flexibility plans based on experience and success of previous projects.

MPX has now integrated flexibility into HR procedures and management systems. Continued assessment, along with new HR procedures and training, have accompanied this stage of organizational change.

Employees are asked annually about their commitment to and engagement in flexibility. The online Human Resources Information System offers employees opportunities to record and update their flexibility goals and arrangements. Pulse surveys assess flexibility implementation and plans for improvement.

The employee opinion survey also includes these questions to continually monitor flexibility:

- My work schedule allows sufficient flexibility to meet personal/family needs.
- I have a good understanding of what flexibility is available to me.
- I work in a team where flexibility is encouraged.
- My immediate manager encourages me to utilize the flexible work options available.

Reports on work flexibility are regularly presented to and discussed within Executive Groups and flexibility is embedded into the Performance Management assessment process. Executive Management considers flexibility in contract discussions and prioritizes how flexibility can continue to be achieved when making decisions about resource allocation.

Discussion

While the results of the flexibility initiative at MPX were overwhelmingly positive, it would be important to know if this company has sustained change over time. It is also necessary to remember that this is a study of only one company. Further research is needed to see if the process can be replicated in other companies before we can say with more confidence that Stouten's model is useful in helping companies undergo organizational change that changes the culture and structure of work to mainstream flexibility. Our case study of an Australian construction company that decided to undergo planned organizational change to mainstream work flexibility for its professional, male-dominated workforce nevertheless offers important lessons. Mainstreaming flexibility seems particularly relevant after the pandemic since many employees now express interest in flexible work.

First, it is feasible for a traditional company to take a dramatically different direction making flexibility a strategic business concern. Mainstreaming offers opportunities for work flexibility to all employees, increasing employee satisfaction with their work flexibility, and developing a work culture that supports use of flexible work options. It requires moving away from the ideal worker model involving face time and long hours toward emphasizing work outcomes. This change requires work design at the team level to promote new flexible ways of working.

A second lesson is that company leaders interested in mainstreaming flexibility should assume that attitudes will be negative in the beginning, because of the entrenched ideal worker model, especially in male-dominated industries. Initial skepticism was dispelled when the first flexibility pilot yielded considering cost-saving and assessment showed positive impact of increased flexibility on work attitudes and performance, teamwork, supervisory relations, personal and family well-being and business outcomes.

A third lesson is that the action steps proposed for organizational change by Stouten *et al.* (2018) can be used successfully to move toward greater work flexibility designed to promote work-life integration. This process begins with diagnosing the business problem - in this case potential employee turnover related to low work-life integration - and understanding how this relates to outdated cultural norms and work practices. A new vision for flexibility needs to be established as a goal for all employees and a team-based approach to work redesign established which can facilitate flexible work options. Support for flexibility must be developed among stakeholders at all organizational levels through gradual implementation, workshops, management training, and champion recruitment, guided by human resource management.

A fourth lesson is that it is worthwhile to invest resources in developing pilot projects and in pilot assessment, essential steps in Stouten's change process. Experimentation helped to increase support for the initiative over time. MPX recognized business goals were quickly realized or exceeded in the pilot projects, concerning deadlines, profit margins, safety, and client expectations. To understand the pilots' potential impact, MPX supported extensive employee assessment involving interviews and surveys, before and after pilots. In addition to establishing that individuals' access to and use of flexible work options increased, employees in pilot projects reported more satisfaction with job flexibility and enjoyed a more flexible workplace culture, an important change in workplace norms. Assessment also suggested how mainstreaming flexibility positively impacted work attitudes and performance. This included job satisfaction, morale, motivation, organizational commitment, teamwork and relations with supervisors. The latter finding is important since managers are often at odds with their employees over flexibility arrangements.

Last, our case study suggests that mainstreaming work flexibility can dramatically improve the work and personal lives of professional employees in a traditional male-dominated industry like construction, historically most affected by the ideal worker norm. Of all the subgroups studied, men reported the most gains when it came to experiencing a more flexible workplace. One interview revealed the transformation some men experienced. Lucas, a site supervisor in the first pilot project, was originally strongly opposed to increased flexibility. However, because of the pilot, he could be home on Saturdays as well as Sundays and reported a remarkable improvement in relationships with his children: "I am now going to play a role in my children's lives." He credited improvement in his home life for making him a better employee, which resulted in two quick promotions. At the time of the interview, he was serving as the worksite manager on a construction project where he was the one responsible for upholding the company's policy of flexible work.

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