Definitions of Flexibility

+ “How and when work gets done and how careers are organized”
+ “Allows each person to work fully”

Expert Group Meeting on *Work-Life Policy, Practice and Potential*
United Nations, 9-11 November 2010
Participants

- Corporations totalling approximately 400 billion dollars of asset value and totalling approximately 1 million employees
- Harvard and Wharton Business Schools
- Cranfield University, U.K
- University of Navarra, Spain
- Non Profit Organizations dedicated only to Work-Life
- Civil Society representatives from four continents
Flexibility Implies:

**Organizational Culture**
- A culture of trust that allows employees to add flexibility to their lives

**Flexible Work Arrangements - Work Methods that are:**
- Beneficial to both men and women
- Reason neutral and without stigma
- Increasingly expected as routine work process by younger work force

**Career Flexibility**
- Career paths that incorporate differences in pace, workload, location, schedule and role over a lifetime
Case for Flexibility

Flexibility should not be positioned as a benefit or accommodation to employees

Rather, as a tremendous benefit to the organization and the individual alike - win: win

In our age of decreasing resources and increasing demands, must find ways to do more with less

Flexibility yields the “more” with relatively less cost infusion

Source: Corporate Voices for Working Families – www.corporatevoices.org/publications/workplaceflex
Flexibility Business Case – Needed?

+ Whether measured by productivity, retention, employee engagement, job satisfaction, reduced stress or client orientation, the evidence is heavily weighted towards its positive impact.

+ The question no is longer is whether there is a business case for flexibility.

+ Rather, only why an organization would not act with intensity to capitalize on its powerful workplace potential.
Flexibility Yields

Flexibility – even small measures – in when and where work gets done yields powerfully significant influence on:

+ a) job satisfaction - Some studies show a linear relationship between degree of flexibility and level of job satisfaction and that flexibility’s most powerful effect is an increase in employee engagement and commitment

+ b) employee commitment and level of engagement – Some studies show a linear relationship between degree of flexibility and level of job satisfaction and that flexibility’s most powerful effect is an increase in employee engagement and commitment

+ c) lower levels of stress - Stress is the leading cause across industries of unscheduled absences, and it is a major source of productivity loss due to presenteeism (i.e., when an employee comes to work too stressed to be effective)

+ Studies repeatedly demonstrate that FWAs reduce employee stress, yielding the product in the same or less time
Between 64% and 69% of FWA users reported higher levels of organizational loyalty and increased productivity, job satisfaction and motivation.

Nearly 75% of respondents indicated a strong interest in using the existing FWAs options.

67% indicated that FWAs are a modern tool allowing better work-life fit for employees.

73% of managers reported telecommuting arrangements were working well. (DM survey)
Challenges Identified in 2009 Survey

- **Organizational Culture: Management Support Deficit** - 20% and 27% of respondents perceived senior and middle management respectively as not supportive of the use of flexibility work arrangements.

- **Organizational Culture: Trust and Implementation Deficit** – Approximately half of respondents reported not exercising their right to request use of FWA primarily due to fear and certainty of refusal.

- **Flexible Work Arrangements: Knowledge Deficit** - A large percent of respondents reported poor or very poor knowledge of the flexibility policies – ranging from 50% for extended learning activity to 38% for staggered work hours.
Areas of Focus
Expert Group Recommendations

+ Organizational culture - Trust and respect constitute the foundational elements: You trust and respect my work-life needs and I will trust and respect your organizational needs; UN could do more in this area

+ Flexible work arrangements – organizational means to manifest culture of flexibility: UN has the basic policy package – needs only to broaden and strengthen implementation

+ Career path flexibility – flexibility to synchronize and meet larger life needs over a career path e.g. burdens of care: UN has partially achieved but more needs to be done, especially given demographic and generational attitudinal shifts
Organizational Culture
What more to do

- Good flexibility practices can currently be found throughout the United Nations system, but must be more embedded and woven into workplace culture.

- Objective: Transform the UN into an “employer of choice” – not notionally but measurably using standard metrics (available on-line free).

- Unisolate the UN – partnering with external processes e.g. Work Family Institute; Obama Initiative for Work Life Dialogue in all federal offices in all states (created a work life office in the white house), Sloan Institute, Brain Drain Task Force and public reporting on developments in them.
Organizational Culture ..cont’d

- Communication and awareness-raising strategy
  - Continue consistent and frequent highest-level support (SG and DSG)
  - Reframe the discussion to position flexibility not as a “perk,” staff accommodation; rather as a powerful organizational tool and necessary component of optimal and modern management, productivity and outcomes
  - Designate “champions” within each large department and/or large unit for FWA
  - Use new and validated instruments to generate important metrics to measure for example employee engagement and commitment
  - Make the organization aware of the results of the metrics pre and post flexibility
  - Stakeholder analysis which maps receptive and less receptive units – broadening systematically the success stories, working with pilot entities or departments or units to set examples
  - Publicize good examples of management and staff stories
Flexible Work Arrangements at the UN

- Flexibility is not new to the UN: it exists in many forms and actually is more than just the FWA. Therefore, not so much a change – as a broadening and realigning of understanding and practice

- Flexible work arrangements available to UN staff:
  - Staggered working hours
  - Compressed work schedules: ten working days in nine
  - Scheduled break for external learning activities
  - Work away from the office (telecommuting)
  - Job Share (but often limited to one host country nationals due to visa issues)

- Entitlements in support of work life: maternity, paternity, sick leave/personal days, emergency leave
Flexibility
From what to what

**Accommodation-based Flexibility**
- Private deals based on individual's needs
- Inconsistent implementation, often secret
- Restricted Access to Flexibility

**Business-Based Flexibility**
- Decisions based on both businesses and individual needs
- Policy infrastructure that defines scheduling options and supports consistent implementation

**Culture of Flexibility**
- Incorporates options for formal arrangements as well as widespread, informal flexibility
- Culture that rewards results achieved rather than time spent
- Flexibility viewed as a management strategy
Flexible Work Arrangements

+ MYTH – Massive Exodus of Staff clamouring to use FWA simultaneously and universally – especially telecommute
+ Evidence – at any give time only about 20 percent will use any given arrangement
+ Establish a Steering Committee to oversee and encourage implementation of flexibility
+ Have it adopt principles for flexibility (exist) that guide in establishing, monitoring and contributing to successful FWA outcomes
+ Integrate Flexibility into mainstream management practices e.g. establish flexible management as a competency or requirement so stated in job descriptions
+ Encourage use of team approach vs. individual approach to plan FWA in a given office or unit
+ Select some managers to lead by example (and convince themselves that it works) i.e. Output and not face-time based staff assessment
+ Systematically use metrics instruments such as surveys to document change in perceptions and use, as well as educate
+ Publicize/designate FWAs FPs tasked to assist with informal resolution of FWA cases in each department without burdening administration
+ Monitor requests, approvals and general issues with implementation
+ Showcase current good practices
+ OSAGI/ EO survey is now underway
Career Path Flexibility

+ Flexibility need not be limited to conceptualizing or applying it to the organization’s daily or weekly work –
+ Rather, equally to longer term horizons – monthly, yearly work or careers over a life time (truth is there are many such long term staff despite contractual differences)
+ Encourage experimentation with sabatticals or seasonal schedules that reflect the ebb and flow of work, personal pursuits and most importantly, human well being e.g. to combat burn out or brown out
+ Creation of Leave Bank – team gifting of unused leave to an individual with pressing need to care for an elder
+ Succession Planning – rather horrified at its lack in the UN
+ Incorporate meaningful discussion on career vision in the epas
+ Encourage discussion on what matters to individuals – it is not unmanagable.
+ Rather a function of will and style

+ Example of good practice:
  + Deloitte – Mass Career Customization
    + Employees work with manager to customize career pace, workload, location and schedule, and role based on individual needs at current stage of life
    + All of the above dimensions can be dialed up or down
UN Women

The composite entity will have eight functions, as outlined in the Deputy Secretary-General’s papers of August 2007 and July 2008. These include the following:

(h) Monitor and report on system-wide compliance with intergovernmental mandates on gender balance, including at the senior and decision-making levels. (Page 6 of A/64/588)

C. Headquarters-level functions
11. At Headquarters, the composite entity will provide substantive support to Inter-governmental processes. In addition to other global functions, it will support regional and country-level activities. For its key Headquarters functions, the composite entity will:

(e) Monitor and report on United Nations system compliance and efforts to develop and apply internal United Nations gender equality policies, including achieving gender balance, eliminating harassment and promoting work-life balance; (Page 10 of A/64/588)
Role of UN Women

Strengthen coordination, accountability and implementation of policy and practice in all matters related to gender parity including ....work life

Organizational Culture
+ Communication and Advocacy Strategy at the highest level
+ Coordination of network of focal points
+ Create a UN award to recognize good practices

Flexible Work Arrangements
+ Provision of package of potential policy and tools
+ Periodically survey staff and managers for qualitative monitoring

Career Flexibility
+ Advocacy and assistance to organization to embed various forms of career flexibility
+ Highlight examples of women and men with successful flexible careers
OFPW Contact Info

Aparna Mehrotra
Focal Point for Women
mehrotra@un.org

Marilyn Dawson
Social Affairs Officer
dawsonm@un.org