

# Mastering the Art of a Flexible Culture

How the *Working Mother 100 Best Companies* Create a Flexible Culture

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## **MASTERING THE ART OF A FLEXIBLE CULTURE**

### **How the *Working Mother 100 Best Companies* Create a Flexible Culture Executive Summary**

The practice of flexible work is at a turning point – a change reflected in the 2009 *Working Mother 100 Best Companies* application. Recognizing that it's one thing to offer flexible work and quite another to create a culture and climate that legitimizes and encourages it, this year's 100 Best application had a new emphasis. In addition to asking companies what types of flex they offer and how much flex is used, companies were also asked how they had built it into their cultures systematically — a factor that is critical to making flex truly possible. In this report we find evidence demonstrating the key role flex plays in company culture. Additionally, the survey data are accompanied by case studies of seven companies that have institutionalized flexible work and describe what they learned in integrating it into the fabric of their organizations. Together, the science and the art of creating a flexible culture become clearer.

#### **Key Findings from the 2009 Working Mother 100 Best Companies Application<sup>1</sup>**

At the *Working Mother 100 Best Companies*, flexible work is part of the cultural DNA. It is the "new normal" – 95% say it is their standard way of doing business. The 100 Best see flexible work practices as more than formal flexible work arrangements but also occasional (informal) changes in when and where work is done, career flex, and a culture/climate that encourage and legitimize flexible work.

At the 100 Best flexible work practices are in full view:

- Their leaders promote or use them themselves (report 98%) and future leaders are drawn from a pool that includes people who work flexibly (report 98%).
- 87% feature flex in corporate objectives, mission, and vision and value statements.
- Flex is an explicit part of the employment brand (externally – 95% and internally – 91%).

Flexible work is a strategic business imperative:

- 94% report that it is essential to the business strategy (more than an accommodation benefiting employees).
- Flex is connected to other business objectives – to organizational change (94%), sustainability/ environmental strategies (86%), disaster planning (75%), and facilities planning (74%).
- Flex is included in such business processes as hiring leaders (98%), diversity and inclusion (91%), leadership development (90%), and training (87%).

<sup>1</sup>Self-report data from 2009 Working Mother 100 Best Companies application

**Next Up.** Still, there are tools and techniques whose full potential is unrealized. Emerging practices that can take it to the next level include:

- *Manager Rewards/Accountability.* Holding managers accountable for making flexible work a success is not yet common practice. Less than half of the 100 Best Companies (48%) now evaluate/reward/select managers based on their ability to support flexible work; less than one quarter (23%) include whether managers promote flex in their compensation.
- *Technology.* New technology tools are not yet fully leveraged. Only half use technology to handle flex requests (53% do) or track its use (55%) and less than three-fourths (72%) report having systems whose goal is to ensure consistent and fair application of flex.
- *Impact Metrics.* Although nearly all consider flex essential to their business strategy, only 50% measure the impact of flexible work practices on business performance. More, but still less than three-fourths (72%) measure the impact on talent goals.

So while flexible work is more often proactively integrated into business processes, there is still room to take advantage of new techniques and technologies to achieve even better results.

## CASE STUDIES

### Stories of How Flexible Cultures Are Created

How does flex become part of the cultural DNA? Seven *100 Best Companies*—P&G, CISCO, American Express, IBM, Citi, Ernst & Young, and Deloitte—revealed lessons learned as they endeavored to create a flexible culture.<sup>2</sup>

#### Success Tips

1. **Align with internal partners.** Join forces with other internal functions that benefit from remote/flexible work (e.g., facilities planning, IT). These partnerships can be a powerful catalyst for boosting the flexible work agenda.
2. **Leverage technology.** Use technology in new ways – to facilitate flexible work, to communicate flexibility policies and employment opportunities, to equip internal stakeholders (recruiters, talent managers, etc.) to integrate flexibly into their role, and to build employees'

and managers' skills at working and managing flexibly.

3. **Experiment to make it your own.** Evolve your own unique brand of flex over time, adding new approaches based on your core business, culture, and language. Be bold. You may even devise a new product or service that others will buy.
4. **Measure the connections.** Think data-driven. Establish a foundation of measurement systems and data to show flex's connection to established goals (to customer satisfaction, facilities savings, employee engagement, corporate awards). Continue to measure flexibility's contribution and adjust accordingly.
5. **Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.** Use every device at your disposal, including new ones like social networking, to get the message out and to keep it fresh.

At these *100 Best Companies*, change efforts have transformed large, complex businesses in significant ways over a relatively short period of time. The vision, skill, and tenacity with which they have been executed and the demonstrable positive results (for people and the business) have resulted in entrenched and irreversible changes. While there is perhaps more to be done, this is an accomplishment worth celebrating.

#### In Summary

These cases and the survey data, which give a behind-the-scenes glimpse at the 100 Best, tell us that the bar has just been raised. As of 2009, a great employment brand requires meeting a new criterion. It is no longer enough to "offer" flex. Flex must be simply how business is done — facilitated by systems and a culture that allow this way of working to thrive. A tipping point to celebrate, it signifies that a new standard has been set for companies that want to be employers of choice.

<sup>2</sup> For the full cases, request the full report, at <http://www.workingmothermediainc.com> or [www.flexemployer.com](http://www.flexemployer.com)

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## FlexPaths

FlexPaths helps organizations respond to the changing workforce and workplace landscape by delivering innovative software solutions and services that initiate, advance, and accelerate their flexible cultures. These solutions -- the Flex Management System™, Flex Tracking System™, and Flex Talent Acquisition System™ -- are used by Fortune 500 companies to embed flexible work practices and communicate them across the enterprise, engage critical stakeholders, align the actions of managers, promote their flexible employment brand and acquire diverse talent. The success of our solutions ([www.flexemployer.com](http://www.flexemployer.com)) is the result of industry-leading partnerships and client collaboration.

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**Request a complimentary copy of the full report, at <http://www.workingmothermediainc.com> or [www.flexemployer.com](http://www.flexemployer.com).**

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