

# Mastering the Art of a Flexible Culture

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

\*Self-report data from 2009 Working Mother 100 Best Companies award application.

### PART I: TRANSFORMING FLEXIBLE WORK OFFERINGS TO CULTURAL DNA

What do the *Working Mother* 100 Best Companies do to embrace flexibility and ensure that their cultures and systems support and optimize it?

#### HOW DO THE 100 BEST COMPANIES DEFINE FLEXIBILITY NOW?

##### Formal Flex + Informal Flex + Flex Culture + Career Flex

Flexible work was once equated with formal, pre-arranged changes in when or where you worked. In 2009 nearly all 100 Best Companies also included in their definition occasional "informal" flexible and a culture/climate that makes flexible work legitimate. Career flex (non-linear path-like: the ability to leave and return or slow the pace of advancement without a disproportionate penalty) is quickly becoming a core element, with 84% including it as well in their definition of a flexible workplace.

#### HOW INTEGRATED IS FLEXIBILITY ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION?

Not only do the 100 Best "offer" flexibility, they integrate it throughout their people practices and systems, making a point of including it in:

- Hiring Practices

98% announce the opportunity to work flexibly in their recruiting process and employment messages

96% train recruiters and hiring managers on how to effectively present the company and specific jobs to candidates for whom working flexibly is important

- Diversity & Inclusion Efforts

91% have a diversity strategy that promotes and facilitates flexible ways of working and creation of a flexible workplace  
99% recognize career and life differences as an aspect of diversity and inclusion

- Employment Brand

91% have incorporated flexible work and their flexible culture in its internal employment brand

95% have incorporated flexible work and their flexible culture in their external employment brand

- Talent Management Processes

90% have incorporated flexible work in their leadership development processes

99% make flexible careers viable and possible (i.e. enable an employee take time out and return without penalty, slow the pace of advancement proportionally or step down from management responsibility and remain on a strong career path)

100% of companies include employees who choose a flexible career path in mentoring programs and give them opportunities to stay connected and maintain relationships while they are working less or not working

87% offer training to managers on implementing and managing employee flexible work arrangements; 37% have trained managers in the past year

97% encourage managers and employees to experiment with flexible work and 'pilot' new ways of working to pursue continuous improvement

48% evaluate, reward, and select managers based on their ability to support flexible ways of working

23% of companies say manager or supervisor compensation is impacted by employee utilization of alternative work arrangements

- Operational Systems

98% have the technology systems/tools in place to facilitate flexible work and eliminate barriers to success

92% have work/distribution systems and planning processes in place to create greater predictability about what work will need to be done and when

89% have accounting systems that support flexible work (e.g., use FTEs instead of headcount for budgeting)

72% have systems for monitoring whether opportunities to work flexibly are implemented consistently and fairly

53% have an intranet or extranet site to allow employees to request a flexible work option and be notified of approval or denial of their request

55% have a technology-based mechanism for tracking the use of flex

- Measurement

88% have assessed whether there are any roadblocks to attracting, hiring or retaining employees who value the ability to work flexibly

72% measure the impact of their flexible culture and practices on talent goals (e.g., achievement of diversity goals, employee engagement and resilience, success at promoting and retaining candidates/employees who work flexibly)

50% measure the impact of their flexible culture and practices on business performance

measures such as customer retention, overhead cost reduction and shareholder value  
90% benchmark their flexibility practices against peer companies

- Business Strategy

94% consider flexible work practices as essential to the business strategy rather than primarily an accommodation or benefit to employees

98% identify flexible ways of working as part of a human capital approach that treats people as assets, rather than costs

### How do the 100 Best put flexibility to work?

94% include it in organizational change - cultural transformation to include new ways of working

86% include it in sustainability and environmental impact - via telecommuting, compressed work schedules, etc

87 % include it in strategic planning, e.g. incorporating new ways to work into workforce planning

75% include it in emergency/disaster preparedness (e.g. training and equipping teams to work remotely)

74% include it in facilities planning - reducing facilities costs by enabling more mobile/virtual/flexible work

### CULTURE CHANGE: HOW ARE THE 100 BEST EVOLVING THEIR FLEXIBLE CULTURES?

These include the environmental assumptions and conditions in which flexible work happens.

95% consider flexible ways of working a standard way of doing business, rather than excep-

tion

100% grant requests to working flexibly on a reason-neutral basis (decisions are based solely on whether work goals can be met)

100% give equal access to advancement, and quality of assignments to employees who request to work flexibly or who already work flexibly

86% have a process for continuous improvement of their flexible work practices (e.g., re-evaluating jobs or work units where flexible opportunities could be made available in new forms)

87% feature their commitment to flexible work in organizational communications about the culture - in corporate objectives, mission, vision and value statements

98% report that top management demonstrates a commitment to flexible work (e.g. in executive statements or by utilizing flexible schedules or practices)

98% choose and develop leaders from a pool that includes employees who work flexibly

## EMERGING TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Creating a flexible culture clearly goes way beyond simply issuing a set of policies or guidelines. As flexibility has matured, it is a complex undertaking to do it right – as illustrated by the companies who are best at it.

Commonalities among the 100 Best are as follows:

- Define flexibility broadly
- Integrate it across organizational stakeholders
- Connect it to the business strategy
- Recognize and emphasize the cultural context and systems that are part of it

### 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 (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), 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 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.

In short, for the 100 Best Companies, flexibility has become part of the fabric of their business, integral to processes and performance — and a key factor in business success. Still, there is room to take advantage of new techniques and technologies and use flexibility in how, when and where work is done to achieve even better business results.

*Note: These are self-report data from the 2009 Working Mother Working Mother 100 Best Companies application, completed in Spring 2009.*