

Flexible Work Strategies: Attitudes & Experiences

Executive Summary

Corporate Voices for Working Families commissioned Harris Interactive last fall to conduct a survey to assess executive perceptions of flexibility. Survey questions were added to the Fall 2007 Executive Omnibus survey, a national telephone survey administered to a random sample of 150 senior-level executives at large corporations. The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation sponsored the survey.

The goal of this research was to gain insight into the views of senior-level executives regarding why flexible work strategies are used and what kind of an effect they can have on companies' productivity. The results of this research on executive perceptions will be used to develop an effective messaging strategy around workplace flexibility to close the gap between what executives think, versus what we want them to know.

Corporate Voices believes that to achieve further acceptance of workplace flexibility as a key management tool, and to better frame the national dialogue around this issue, a clear, concise message that resonates with key executive corporate decision makers must be developed. The following provides the highlights of the first phase of this research, the results of which will be used to further the development of such a message.

Key findings in the study include:

- Respondents reported an overwhelmingly positive experience with flexible work strategies.
- More than 75 percent of the business executives interviewed define flexible work strategies as an alternate time or location arrangement; for instance, a nonstandard 40-hour workweek or working from home.
- The respondents, by a ratio of 9-to-1, report that flexible work strategies have a positive effect on helping organizations reach business goals.

- However, in practice, the respondents said that the primary reason that their organization provided flexibility was to help employees achieve a better balance between work and family – and that various accommodations were made available to some employees on a case-by-case basis.
- From the standpoint of their organizations, those interviewed said flexible work strategies are not recognized as being the most important contributor to attracting and retaining qualified employees or for being the most effective option for driving business results.
- Very few of the businesses represented in the survey offer flexible work strategies as a recruiting tool; none view flexibility as a way to save money.

Second Phase of Research: Testing Message Strategies

Based on the findings of our initial research, there are some key courses of action that can be taken to increase awareness of the importance of flexible work strategies through improved messaging on the topic. One major area of focus would be the positive experiences with flexible work strategies that executives overwhelmingly reported. An effective messaging strategy should leverage these positive experiences, as well as the high level of familiarity with these strategies.

Second, messages should connect flexible work strategies to both attracting and retaining qualified employees, and to driving business results. Results of this research indicate that flexible work strategies are often not a consideration in achieving these two business goals. However, by reframing them as strategic solutions rather than case-by-case accommodations, flexible work strategies can play a bigger role in attracting and retaining employees and driving business results, ultimately benefiting both employees and businesses.

Testing these messaging strategies will represent the second phase of this important research project.

A more comprehensive overview of the initial Flexible Work Strategies research – containing a statistical look at the responses from senior-level executives – is available from Corporate Voices for Working Families. To obtain a copy, please contact Linda Kearney at 202-333-8924 or lkearney@cvworkingfamilies.org.