

## **Motivating by Flexibility: Which Role Plays the Company's Culture**

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*Abstract.* Economic-life has been changing rapidly the last years: digitalization enables an increasing number of possibilities in working environments; digital collaboration softens limits and widens horizons (Seiler 2016, 32).

In addition to that employees can no longer be seen as a homogeneous group of people for their manager but as a melting pot of individuals with different nationalities, personal back-grounds, expectations and requirements. Many of them - well educated and with a strong vision of how their working life should develop - do not set their financial safety on top of their priorities. They as well want to have a social-life, a Work-Life-Balance and use the possible opportunities to structure their work as flexible as possible. Researches show that flexibility is – especially - for young people one of the most important issue among the other requirements (Kultalahti, and Viitala 2017, 107). Enterprises need to follow this trend to keep up and increase their employer branding for external candidates but also for their employees on this strong employee specific market. Where companies battle for every qualified young talent, it is more than essential to not only convince with the brand and monetary components but to stand out of the crowd and motivate the talents with the factors they are demanding.

This paper is showing the necessity of flexibility in this new working practices. Based on Cranet-International-Report and other researches it investigates with an own survey if flexibility - in aspects of job design like work-time models and work-place strategies - helps to recruit and retain motivated employees (Beauregard, and Henry 2009, 17).

The article shows tools and trends of flexibility to reach the employees divers needs. By creating the right Company Culture, room for sustained engagement (Ulrich and Brockbank 2016, 52) and trust is unfolding - mandatory requirements to make flexibility a successful part of the organization. Offering a balanced work environment gives their employees a work experience and - at the same time - keeps the companies output on a high level.

*Keywords:* flexibility, motivation, Company's Culture

### **1 Introduction**

Flexible working is demanded more and more in the last years (Klaffke 2014, 178). Not only companies ask for flexibility of their staff but as well employees call for flexible conditions in their working life. Last but not least it is the digitalization which is making many ways of flexible working possible. Flexibility cannot longer be seen as a need of a childcaring mother but as a respond to the different needs of markets and different generations of employees in an environment which allows to work with virtual teams and other forms of collaboration when and wherever you want. The job market is becoming more and more an employee driven market.

This means: the battle for talent is declared open and companies are trying to offer a wide range of flexible benefits. Though it is obvious that especially the younger work force is interested in flexible working options, more and more generations see the positives aspects of flexible working conditions (Klaffke 2014, 196).

As the motivation of the staff is one of the main today's challenges in times of fast changing organizational environments, companies keep themselves busy with the question how to stay out of the crowd and make qualified employees come and stay? While employees report instantly in their dynamic social communication networks about how working live and conditions are like, companies have to answer quickly to the different requirements of their staff.

What kind of role does the management have? How do they get their staff together? And how can the management establish flexibility as a motivational tool?

Leaders are facing the challenge that it is more and more difficult to have a classical meeting agenda where they can transport their culture. It is nearly impossible to get the workforce around the same table and the good old staff-newspaper looks dusty and old on publishing-day already. There have to be found new ways to transport corporate values, goals and - on the other way - employees voices, opinions and ideas - to build a healthy communication and work environment in a winning culture (Ulrich and Brockbank 2016, 51).

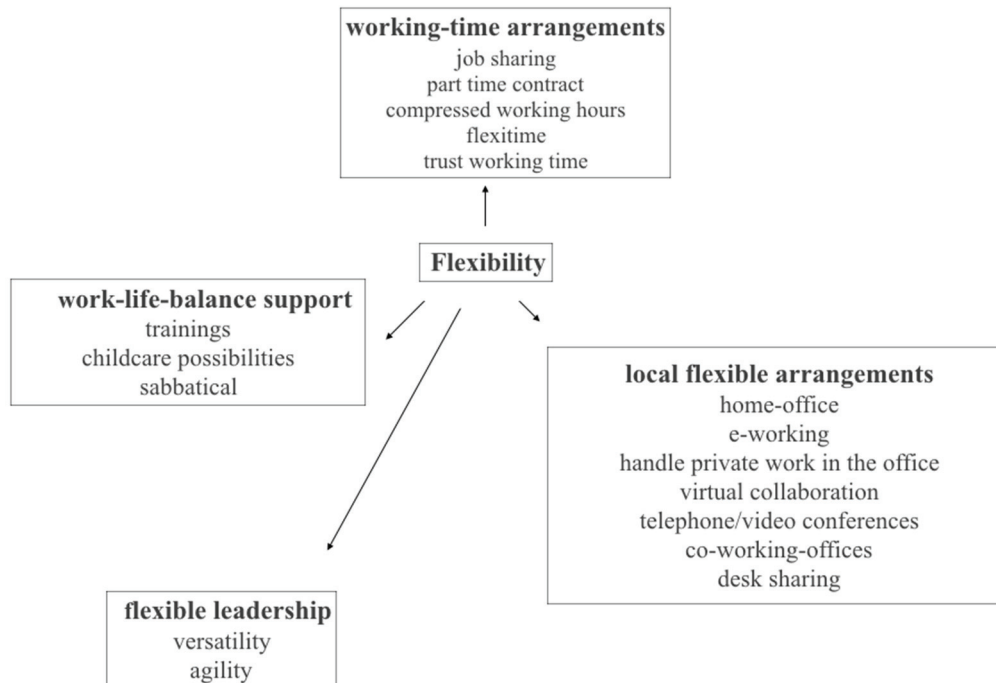
## **2 Literature review**

### ***2.1 Flexibility***

Many researchers have targeted flexibility and its importance in many different aspects. Especially in context with progressive digitalization, the upcoming possibilities and advantages play a dominant role. Flexibility is mostly born by Work-Life-Balance aspects: to let employees benefit from or give working conditions that make it possible for them to find a balance between work and non-work demands (Cascio 2000, 166). Many sources see the origin of flexibility in context with childcaring mothers.

Mostly, there is the differentiation between working-time flexibility and other flexible working conditions, mainly meaning local flexible working. But there is a lot more flexibility when you take a close look to the organizations of companies.

Figure 1: main expressions of flexibility



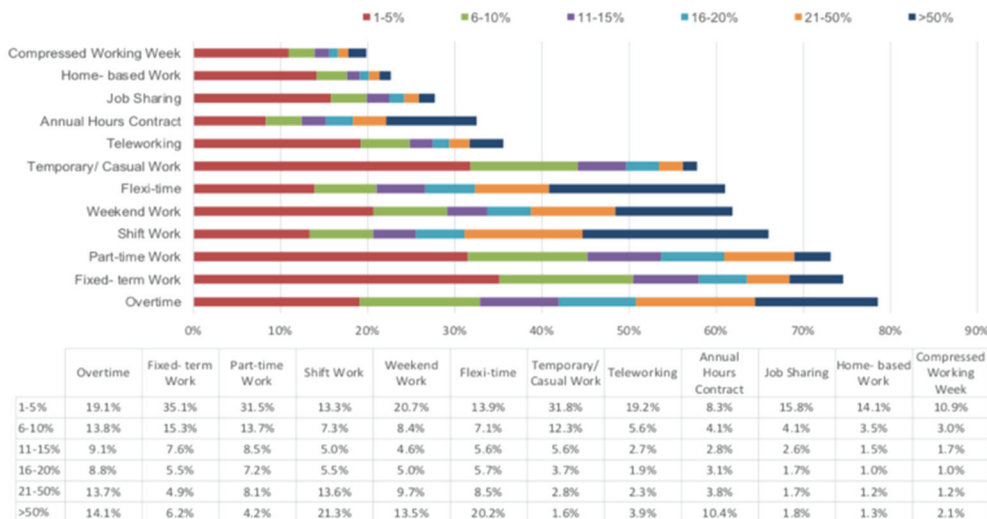
Source: own research

One well-known source taking a look at researches regarding flexibility is the Cranet Survey on Comparative Human Resources Management. Full information on the CRANET project can be found in the CRANET SURVEY ON COMPARATIVE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT International Executive Report (2017).

The survey is examining with its International Executive report 2017 different aspects of Work-Life-Balance and working arrangements in a large number of countries across the globe (2017, 76 – 86). The data were collected in the years 2014 - 2016 and allow the investigation of trends and changes in Human Resources management.

Cranet is stressing, that flexible work arrangements have become a more and more common way to react to the market's and the employee's needs. Their advice is, that keeping up the Work-Life-Balance for employees should be the objective for both: employees and companies. (2017, 86).

Figure 2: proportion of workforce in flexible working arrangements



Source: CRANET SURVEY ON COMPARATIVE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT International Executive Report (2017, 84)

It is obvious, that flexibility has become a common instrument and that companies have to establish an environment to make flexibility a successful part of the organization, which is as well keeping an eye on possible risks of flexibility, just as loss of control, loss of relationships and difficult work processes.

## 2.2 Culture

First of all, it is important to know, that in this article the terminologies “Company’s Culture” and “Corporate Culture” are used interchangeably. Even though some researchers see a difference between both phenomena, for the understanding of this article the phrases are set equal.

The Corporate Cultures of Companies are increasingly attracting the attention in the last years. Especially young employees try to get an impression of the culture when entering the market or changing their jobs. Researches show, that, when focusing on younger staff, companies should try to make work values a central subject in the employee-ship of these employees and make the relation to the managers a central key factor as well (Winter and Jackson 2014, 312 - 323).

Taking a closer look at Company’s Culture it is essential to understand the word culture and especially the meaning and importance of the Company’s Culture as well as its effects on the organizational structure (Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault 2017, 114).

One of the forefathers of the definition of culture is Edgar A. Schein. He has provided a ways of defining culture by differentiating three levels of culture: observable artifacts, espoused beliefs and basic underlying assumptions. Schein is stressing that culture is defined by what a group of people, in this case the organization, has learned while dealing with challenges of external adaptation and internal integration (2016, 6).

Out of this learning process, routines, processes, reports – and other repetitive procedures – result. These can be seen as the visible signs of culture of the company and give certainty, stability and affiliation to many members of the staff.

Another good known concept of culture is presented by G. Hofstede (2010, 55 - 296). Hofstede has defined culture as a set of values and beliefs as well as norms about what is right in the life of individuals of the same historical experience. His study is concentrating on characteristic ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. Hofstede's model was first based on five dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism / collectivism, masculinity / femininity, long-term / short term orientation and he later added a sixth dimension: indulgence vs. restraint.

To name a third source, the Globe-study - as one of the largest and most prestigious study of its kind in the social sciences - is investigation the influence of culture on societal and organizational effectiveness. It works with 32 items distributed into nine dimensions: performance, assertiveness, future orientation, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, ingroup collectivism, gender egalitarianism, power distance and uncertainty avoidance (2004, 45-48).

The organizational culture is a complex phenomenon. Focusing on flexible job designs, it seems on first sight, that flexibility has to be in conflict with the predictable and recurrent processes of culture mentioned earlier in this article. But culture is more than processes, it is as well the completion between organizational structures. Culture lives with and from the employees. In a fast-changing environment, culture is the possibility of staying flexible and to be attractive for several generations without losing focus. Mostly companies' leaders are living and transporting the culture. This could be one key factor for success of the flexible components used in motivational aspects.

### ***2.3 Motivating by flexibility***

When talking about flexibility it is always implicating a certain degree of self-governance, which is motivating most employees (Martindale 2016, 2). To allow self-governance in a company, it could be helpful to manifest flexibility in the Company's Culture.

Researches show, that - when defining a winning and positive culture - it comes to open communication with a focus on and a high standard of internal communication. There is as well the demand for a flat and clear hierarchy and for the possibility of relationships among the staff. Employees as well need recognition and the possibility to get contributions. This new and diverse organization needs to be adaptable, sustain and should promote life-long learning. A culture of performance, of customer attention as well as of engagement for innovations is encouraging the employees (Klaffke 2014, 118).

Over all, flexibility is increasing the employer branding as it is in general offered by attractive organizations as well as it makes it easier for the staff to fulfill their job and lifestyle / private needs. Many of these organizations stand for these goals: have performance and compensation in balance, support the individual responsibility of each employee, offer perspectives respecting individuality and live flexibility (Klaus and Schneider 2016, 184).

When companies turn external promises - which they are giving to their customers - into internal promises for the staff, it will be followed by employee engagement and organizational action (Ulrich and Brockbank 2016, 155).

Summarized, when motivating by flexibility, trust will be followed by engagement. Last but not least it can lead to healthier and more satisfied team members (Martindale, N. 2016, 2). Especially in times of multigenerational organizations, flexibility satisfies different needs of different generations. It also creates diversity and could lead to higher productivity (Beauregard and Henry 2009, 10).

### **3 Method of own research**

This paper is focused on the role of the Companies Culture in an environment where employees are motivated by and with flexibility. The current state of this issue was analysed in selected companies in Germany while concentrating on the most significant parameters and the effect that the existence of culture is having on them. All respondents are working in administrative positions, which was the key factor for the selection of them. Most of the companies of the respondents are already offering flexible job designs, and many of the respondents are already practicing flexibility in some ways. The situation has been studied on the basis of a questionnaire survey, which was available online. Each respondent received an individual link to enter the platform and to fill in the survey. It was not possible to forward the link or to fill out the survey more than once.

The questionnaire was developed and designed only for this purpose and has been conducted in August 2018. Respondents full anonymity was ensured as they were not obliged either to sign nor to enter their individual personnel information.

The first part of the questionnaire contained 12 questions and included semi-open and closed questions. The second part of the questionnaire, with 3 questions, collected the socio-demographic variables of the respondents (gender, age and - level of - position).

The first unit aimed to measure the markedness of flexibility and of motivating with flexibility as well as the degree of existence and visibility of the Companies Culture. The questions were developed to adequately find out the correlation between and possible influence of culture on motivating with flexibility.

The task of the respondents was in some questions either to mark their agreement level ranging from 1 (not agreeing) to 5 (very much agreeing) or to tick their expected effects on certain issues on a scale offered. In some questions it was also possible to select multiple choice (e.g. tick the selection of flexible working arrangement the company is offering).

The survey involved 79 respondents, the return rate of the questionnaires was 70 %, 5 % of the filled-out survey forms had to be discarded as they had been incomplete.

48 % of the respondents who completed the survey were women, 52 % were men. The main group of respondents had been between the age of 41 - 50 years (42 %), followed by the group above 50 (25 %) and the group of age of 31 – 40 years (19 %).

### **4 Results and Discussion**

As it was mandatory for the selection of the participants of the survey that their job description is based on an administrative focus, it was guaranteed that the observed companies are or would be able to offer flexible job designs. In contrast to that, job descriptions including shift work would - in general - not be able to offer flexible working conditions.

Taking a look at flexible working-time arrangements, only 24 % of the respondents stated that there is no or rarely the possibility of using flexible working-time arrangement, whereas 76 % partially to fully agreed, that there is the possibility of using flexible working time arrangements in their company. 40 % of all respondents are agreeing to be satisfied or fully satisfied with the offer of flexible working-time arrangements.

Over 50 % of the peers are not or not at all agreeing that the flexible arrangements are offered in the same way for all employees in their company.

Among the offered flexible working-time arrangements, part-time working is the most common with 71 %, followed by the flexible working-hour model (Flexitime) with 54 % and trust working time with 52 %.

More than 50 % of the participants are using the flexible working hour model (Flexitime) whereas 36 % of them would wish the implementation of this model. Only 6 respondents are not using any model of working-time flexibility.

83 % of all participants are agreeing in a certain level that their company has got a culture which they know, and which is perceptible for them. Of this, 71 % agreed in a certain level that their company is meeting the employee's needs with these flexible arrangements.

65% of all respondents stated that the offered flexible working arrangements are even part of their companies' culture.

A total of 56% of the survey participants are identifying themselves with the flexible working-time arrangements and stated that they are important for them. 59 % respondents stressed that they would work even more motivated if there would be a wider range of offered flexible working-time arrangements.

On the other side 9 % of the participants are working in organizations which do not offer any working-time flexibility. None of these participants fully agree that the company has got a culture and none of them agrees or fully agrees that the company has got values or leadership principles the respondent knows. It is alarming that no one of these respondents fully agrees that he is identifying with the working time conditions and that all of them state that they would work more motivated when there would be the implementation of flexible working-time arrangements.

Further the survey is evaluating the existence and correlation of other flexible job arrangements / flexible job designs, like locally flexible working. Except one participant, the surveyed employees stated, that there are offered other flexible job designs in their company. Home Office is one of the most offered arrangements as 54 % of the companies of the respondents are already offering this model. Interestingly 46 % would like their company to implement Home Office working models. 54% of the respondents are working with representation rules as a flexible design, followed by the model of mobile working (42%) and temporary working (23%).

Over all, 79 % of the respondents are partly or fully satisfied with the offer of the flexible job design in their company. Of this 37% are fully satisfied.

Out of these fully satisfied respondents, 73 % are sure, that a flexible working environment is strongly related to a rise of motivation of the staff.

A total of 80 % of them see the correlation to an increased employer branding / attractiveness and to the possibility to meet the employees' needs in a certain level.



Coming back to the group of the partly and fully satisfied surveyed employees (79 %), 66 % of them think, that flexible job designs lead to a higher productivity and 63 % of them see positive effects in terms of loyalty.

Of the earlier mentioned 9 % (participants who are working in organizations which do not offer any working–time flexibility) only 43 % are working in companies where other flexible working arrangements, beside flexible working-time arrangements, are offered. None of them is fully satisfied with the offer of flexible job designs.

39 % of all surveyed people do not think, that the implementation of flexible job designs has any negative consequences. On the other hand, the most possible negative consequence mentioned (multiple nomination possible), when offering flexible working arrangements, is the danger of less communication (33 %), possible unfairness (25 %), difficult processes (25 %) and lack of team feeling (21 %).

It could be said, that the main negative aspects, in the respondent's opinion which could occur when implementing flexible job designs are connected to the Company's Culture or the lack of a Company's Culture.

83 % of all respondents stress that the management level has to stand behind the implementation of flexible arrangements as well as 69 % state, that the communication within the change management process leading to a flexible working environment, has to be made by the management level.

Overall, more than three out of four respondents are satisfied in a certain level with their companies offers of flexible job designs. The remaining quarter is stating, that they would like to work in Home-Office- and other mobile working-arrangements. Of this quarter, half of them do not have any flexible working-time offer, to the other half have been mainly offered part time and / or Flexitime models.

It is alarming, that no one of the respondents which are not satisfied with their offer of flexible working arrangements agrees fully that there is a culture in their company, which they are knowing, and which is perceptible and concrete for them. Neither one of them agrees fully to know either the company's values nor the leadership principles. Only one respondent of these stresses, that the communication between the employees is encouraged by the management. Only 27 % of these respondents say that they agree or fully agree that there is a communication between employees and management. It is interesting, that there is not one gender which is more not satisfied with the offer of flexible arrangements as there are 55 % women and 45 % men in this group of not satisfied persons. Most of the women which are not satisfied are under the age of 41 (66%) and might be mothers or mothers to be.

When implementing flexible job designs, the main requirements seen by the participants are digital premises and the role of the leaders: 85 % of all respondents stress that it is essential to have the digital and technical requirements updated and 83 % see it as mandatory to have the management behind the process.

28 % of all participants are fully satisfied with the offer of flexible job design. More than 90 % of the fully satisfied respondents are motivated and like to work in their company. All of them work in companies which offer a wide range of flexible working-time and other flexible models and each respondent of them uses flexible working arrangements in different forms.

All of them identify themselves with the flexible working arrangements to some degree and fully agree, that the flexible working arrangements help to balance their work and life.



47 % of them even stress the flexible working time conditions as one reason why they would like to keep on working for their actual company. All of the 28 % of the fully satisfied respondents agree partially to fully, that there is a culture in their company, which they know, and which is perceptible and concrete for them. 87% of the fully satisfied respondents mark that the flexible working arrangements are part of their Company's Culture.

Satisfaction is a very subjective parameter but seen as one significant measure of new (Human Resources) work. The satisfaction for employee's job design - especially for employee's working-time arrangement – seems to be mandatory for a general satisfaction of the employee, as the results show, that employee's satisfaction is related to the offer and the use of flexible working models - especially flexible working-time arrangements.

The survey shows as well, that people, who are satisfied with their working flexibility, know and see a culture in their company and on the other hand, employees, having no flexible job design, are not aware of any culture.

## **5 Conclusion**

The Company's Culture plays the important role for the success of flexibility in an organization. A winning culture is not only important for establishing and working with flexibility but mandatory for being successful with the demanded flexibility. On the other hand flexibility is important for creating and should be a part of a winning culture.

The survey findings show, that achieving flexible conditions embedded in a healthy company's environment leading to motivated and satisfied employees' needs a Company's Culture which is perceptible and concrete. Flexibility should be even a part of the culture of the company when motivating with flexible working conditions. For the success of motivating by flexibility, companies need supportive manager, leading by example - having a focus on trust and engagement – helping to implement, to communicate flexibility and to follow it up.

It is obligatory, that there needs to be a high standard of digital requirements and the workforce as well needs to be trained to use this equipment. The main aspects are: changing communication environment, flexible possibilities, digital collaboration and up to date working conditions. Each team member needs to work on its attitude, work transparent and follow knowledge management. Companies should stay flexible within the organization. In this way they react to flexible conditions of the market and to flexible young generations, who are waiting to enter the employees' market. They should offer a balanced work environment, give their employees a „work-experience“ and keep - at the same time – their companies output on a high level.

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