Flexible workplaces are here to stay, according to a recent study released by tax and finance firm Deloitte, it's just a matter of how "elastic" an organization wishes to make them that matters. While most assumed it was just the young workers who wanted a flexible workplace and schedule, the study found that the generations are aligned. Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y all want workplace flexibility.

According to the report, the workplace flexibility movement began to accommodate working mothers. Over time, flexibility options mushroomed: from compressed workweeks to job sharing, telecommuting to adjustable schedules, career lattices to career reentry. From its birth as an employee entitlement, workplace flexibility has grown to become a requirement for organizations that want to make the most of its people's productivity.

"While workplace flexibility is vital for many employees and a welcome option for others, it can be just as beneficial to organizations - but only if well executed," according to the report. "That means seeing it from a business strategy perspective. Technology made today's brand of flexibility possible, but companies can't view workplace flexibility as a management challenge. Leaders should be prepared to nurture and grow an effective flexible work environment over time - it can't be left to chance."

So like the open office movement, workplace flexibility depends entirely on the organization to be successful. "Every organization should think through and define how flexibility will work in its particular case. It's advisable to define broad parameters that establish clear boundaries and give people flexibility within those boundaries, allowing employees to embrace arrangements that work for them. One size does not fit all."

The report cited some interesting statistics about how important workplace flexibility is to employees. Consider:

-- Women without children would rather have more free time than make more money (68 percent), even more than those with children (62 percent).

-- About 40 percent of professional men work more than 50 hours a week. Of these, 80 percent would like to work fewer hours.

-- One of every five employees cares for elderly parents, a number that could increase to almost half of the workforce over the next several years.

-- By 2025, Gen Y employees, now in their 20s, will grow to represent 75 percent of the workforce. For this emerging generation, work-life fit is valued more than compensation growth or skill development.

Like many office issues, this is a management issue cloaked in technology change. Just like flexible office spaces, flexible work schedules is made possible by technology, but can be a positive or negative depending on
how the situation is managed.

"Managers accustomed to face-to-face supervision worry that homebound employees will fritter away work time," according to the report. "Remote team members fear they will miss a midnight e-mail. And sometimes employees who remain in the office believe they're taking on heavier workloads while others take 'flex time' -- and they'll resent it, whether or not it's true. Management should be prepared to nurture and grow an effective flexible work environment over time."

Some telework programs have foundered under the weight of poor approaches that created more managerial problems than they solved, the study notes. Workplace flexibility is being driven by technology and the need to recruit and retain skilled employees. Workers want flexibility regardless of if employers are prepared to give it.

"High unemployment rates have not created the talent surplus some predicted," the report said. "Instead, many executives are experiencing talent shortages in critical functions. When vying for top talent, workplace flexibility can be a deciding factor: one in three workers report that being able to flexibly integrate work and life is the most important factor in choosing a job."

Office furniture makers might wonder where that leaves its most important asset: the functional, comfortable, productive office. The study's findings are not comforting. "No longer are employees bound together by place -- in the open talent economy, they can work together from anywhere on the globe. As more teams work across time zones, the traditional 9-to-5 workday could become obsolete."

Again, this desire for workplace flexibility stretches across all generations. Nearly all millennials (92 percent) say that flexibility is a top priority. Almost half (45 percent) of working parents are very concerned about having more time to spend with their families -- and that number increases to 72 percent for those who are simultaneously balancing parenting and care giving responsibilities. Boomers say that the freedom to choose when and where they work motivates them to give discretionary effort, according to the Center for Work-Life Policy's 2009 study, Bookend Generations.

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