

Culture and Support for Workplace Flexibility Matter:

An Ecological Framework for Understanding Flexibility Support Structures

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Abstract

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) are important for helping workers manage their work and non-work demands by reducing stress and conflict for employees utilizing these policies, and increasing the capacity to attract, retain and satisfy human resource capital. Yet despite having such policies “on the books,” employees often do not use these policies because they perceive a lack of support from their organization or their supervisor, or they perceive they will be stigmatized for using such policies. Using an ecological framework, we examine factors that influence support for FWAs at multiple levels of analyses: the organization or business unit, the supervisor or work group, and the individual. We offer recommendations to address the mechanisms that affect FWA support at these levels of analyses, and we offer recommendations to organizational leaders about ways they may positively influence a supportive work environment with regard to working flexibly.

Keywords: Flexible Work Arrangements, Ecological Model, Supervisor Support, Employer of Choice

At a time when many high-profile businesses such as Yahoo, IBM, Bank of America and Aetna are pulling back on flexible work arrangements (FWAs) (Spector, 2017), the evidence for the importance of work-life flexibility practices continues to mount. Not only do flexibility practices reduce stress, increase job satisfaction and employee commitment to their organizations (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner & Hammer, 2011), they are a centerpiece of “Employer of Choice” strategies that companies embrace to compete for critical human resources (Kelliher & Anderson, 2008). Gallup estimates that 43% of the American workforce works remotely at least part of the time, and that 35- 51% would change jobs to have the flexibility to work from home or have flexible scheduling (Gallup, 2017). Among employed women with children, 33% indicate that their companies do very well in allowing them to work from home when needed, and an equal percentage say they do very poorly (Gallup, 2016). The business case for FWAs as well as other sources of work-family support, such as day care assistance, elder-care arrangements, and family leave policies is also strong: Human resource professionals overwhelmingly see flexibility as a business strategy to attract and retain a high quality workforce (Kelly et al., 2008; Kossek & Friede, 2006; Matos & Galinsky, 2011). In a national study of full time employees, 79% of high-wage employees whose companies offered several FWA opportunities reported they would likely stay with their employer compared to 57% of those with little to no FWAs (Matos & Galinsky, 2011). FWAs are likely to remain, if not increase, as an important organizational strategy for fostering work/life balance.

Despite their popular appeal, utilization of flexible work arrangements remains relatively low (Williams and Boushey, 2010). Research consistently finds that employees hesitate to use their company’s flexibility policies (Matos and Galinsky, 2001) and that managers convey skepticism or disapproval for requests to use FWAs (Williams and Boushey, 2010). For one,

managers may be concerned about the possible disruption that may occur when employees use FWAs (Powell & Mainiero, 1999) and may be concerned about approving alternative schedules for employees whose work is particularly critical to meeting the unit's performance or productivity requirements. Managers may also be concerned about approving alternative work arrangements for employees with performance concerns fearing that an alternative work arrangement may further weaken their performance (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008; Klein, Berman & Dickson, 2000). Employees may fear being stigmatized as less committed employees if they use their employers' FWAs, such as extended parental leave or reduced work schedules (Acker, 1990, Williams, 2000; Williams, Blair-Loy & Berdahl, 2013) and therefore resist using their company's FWAs. In some cases where FWAs are not officially offered, employees may fear that they will be fired for taking a sick day or dealing with an emergency (Kossek and Lausch, 2018; Williams and Boushey, 2010).

Given both the importance and skepticism over FWAs, clarity is needed to understand the issues that affect the need and desire for FWAs, the difficulties in accessing FWAs, and the sources of support that will help mitigate those problems so that employees can freely use these structures, and employers will reap their benefits. As we demonstrate below, relevant factors in this discussion exist at multiple levels ranging from the individual and their nuclear family unit, the business unit or department, the organization, and the nation or political entity. We provide a framework for organizing the relevant factors that impact the utilization of work/life balance initiatives across several levels of analyses. This framework distinguishes three foci or levels of analysis and nods to a fourth level – societal/political, which is clearly relevant for a comprehensive discussion of work/life balance, but beyond the scope of this paper. Our framework is ecological in nature (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Hill et

al., 2008) in that it recognizes embedded systems that shape and influence each other, and which are responsive to processes and conditions of their proximal environment at each level, and across levels. Furthermore, our model fits with modern strategic human resource management principles that seek to align human resource principles and practices with organizational strategy (Cascio, 2016). Central to the model is the role of support, defined as "the degree to which individuals perceive that their well-being is valued by workplace sources, such as supervisors and the broader organization in which they are embedded" (Kossek et al., 2011, p. 292). Support may come from multiple sources including their organizations, their supervisors, their coworkers, their family members, and more broadly from political entities that shape laws and funnel resources toward work and non-work integration. At each level of analysis, different contingencies affect the degree to which support perceptions and structures will facilitate the adoption of work-life balance programs and policies, as well as the degree to which the use of such programs will result in desirable benefits such as stress reduction, organizational commitment, and an ability to attract and retain a high quality workforce.

### **DEFINING FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS**

Work-life flexibility arrangements have been recently defined as "employment-scheduling practices that are designed to give employees greater work-life control over when, where, for how long, how continuously work is done" (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018, p. 10). This definition provides an organizational lens on flexibility because it signals various forms of support structures that organizational leaders and their managers can implement to increase flexible options for workers including, among others, flextime programs (when work is done), telework arrangements (where work is done), reduced work schedules (how long work is done), and parental leave (breaks in the continuity of work) (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). Similarly, a

worker perspective definition of flexibility “conceptualizes workplace flexibility as the degree to which workers are able to make choices to arrange core aspects of their professional lives, particularly regarding where, when, and for how long work is performed” (Hill et al., 2008, p. 151).

Although these definitions are congruent in that they both refer to dimensions of flexibility that are responsive to place, time and dynamic features of work and non-work roles, they differ in the locus of control: the organization, manager or employee. We argue that all lenses are important in understanding the need for and responsiveness to FWAs. Organizations may adopt flexibility structures to compete for scarce resources by attracting, retaining and motivating a high quality workforce, but there may be several contingencies related to organizational structure, size, culture, sector diversity strategy, and other considerations that affect their stance and strategy toward flexibility. Similarly, managers ultimately approve employees’ requests for flexibility and their considerations likely involve managing the performance and productivity of the business unit, and retaining key employees. Likewise, their implicit biases toward employees’ use of flexibility arrangements may affect their decisions. Employees themselves may vary in their need for as well as ability to use flexible arrangements. The structure of their nuclear family, e.g., marital status, parental status, elder-care status, as well as other considerations, such as their gender, sexual orientation, non-work pursuits and other individual differences affects both the need for flexibility as well as attitudes of others toward their use of FWAs.

## **ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF SUPPORT FOR FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS**

Figure 1 depicts our framework for organizing the concepts that affect the need or desire for FWAs as well as the forms of support structures needed to overcome barriers to implementation.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

The “micro” level refers to individual factors that impact the need for work-life balance structures and policies, and the ability to attain those benefits and factors. Employee gender and family structure are salient concerns. Employees who care for children, elders, or other family members are arguably at greater need for work-life balance structures than others. However, employees may desire such benefits for other reasons, such as to pursue educational or other professional development opportunities, or to engage in pro-social activities, such as volunteer work or political activities. Furthermore, it is important to consider the impact of work-life balance practices on non-parent employees who may be asked to take on additional work responsibilities to cover for those who are using FWAs (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017). We also highlight unique concerns of sexual minorities in accessing FWAs.

The “meso” level concerns that dynamics of the office, department or work-unit within an organization. Employees’ uses of work-life balance benefits are likely to affect their local work context the most. Relevant considerations are the degree of coordination and integration among group or team members needed and whether flexible benefit use disrupts that coordination (Powell & Maniero, 1999). The extent to which the department has the ability to work around or take advantage of an employee’s use of a work-life benefit, such as a flexible work arrangement, is also important. The degree to which the work unit depends on specialized and valuable skills or other attributes of benefit-seeking employees may affect managers’

disposition toward the policy approval (Klein, Berman & Dickson, 2000). In addition, the local culture of the organization with respect to flexibility will likely impact benefit approval and use. Members of a department with a strong “work-devotion” culture, for example, may express disdain toward a benefit-seeking employee (Williams, et al., 2013).

The “macro” level examines the organization as a whole. Relevant factors include organizational culture, which can include competing dimensions of internal vs. external orientation, and flexibility vs. control (Quinn & McGrath, 1985; Denison & Sprietzer, 1991), as well as the organization's orientation toward a highly committed workforce (which requires greater deference to autonomy and flexibility) vs. command and control (Osterman, 1995; Peters, den Dulk & de Ruijters, 2010). Other considerations include the degree to which the organization is in competition for recognition as an employer of choice, which includes the degree to which it offers family-friendly policies and practices and other commitments to workplace diversity (Cascio and Young, 2013). Finally, connected to these factors is the tightness of the labor market in which the organization exists. If it is competing for a tight labor market and thus is keen on attracting and retaining top employees, then it will promote family-friendly and related work-life balance policies in order to compete for those human capital resources (Poelmans, Chinchilla, and Cardona, 2003).

The broader societal-political external environment is also critical to organizations’ strategies toward the adoption of work-life balance structures and policies. As Poelmans, et al. (2003) point out, nations differ in their view that such balance is a public or a private concern; or more specifically, whether the responsibility for managing work-life balance lies with the state, the market, or individual family units. The U.S. and UK, for example, favor a market (liberal) approach, whereas Sweden favors a state (social democratic) approach. Those that assign



responsibility to nuclear families, labeled “conservative,” include Italy and Germany. Mediterranean, postsocialist, and hybrid classifications have also been discussed for nations in other parts of the world (den Dulk & Peper, 2016; see also Esping-Andersen, 1990). Dimensions for classifying nations in relation to their national work-family policies include (a) traditional-family, where policies are designed to support women primarily raising children without pay, such as part time day care allowances and other subsidies and incentives to permit mothers to stay at home; (b) dual-career, which supports both parents working for pay, such as full-time day care support and paid parental leave; and (c) dual carer, which stimulates fathers to engage in more parenting activities, such as paternal leave (den Dulk & Peper, 2016; Korpi, Ferramomo & Englund, 2013). These public approaches tend to align with their nation’s cultural values regarding gender equality (e.g., nations high on dual career policies value gender egalitarianism; whereas countries high on traditional-family value maternal care for children) (den Dulk & Peper, 2016). Of interest to our discussion, Allen, et al., (2014) found that the extent to which individuals used national work-family policies depended on the level of support from their organizations and particularly their supervisors. Supervisor support to use national policies mitigated employees’ experiences of work-family conflict.

With these broader national and cultural issues in mind, our discussion focuses on the relevant factors that shape considerations of work-life balance practices and their adoption at three levels of analyses: the individual (micro level), the immediate work context (meso level), and the organization as a whole (macro level). In addition, we discuss the forms of support relevant to each level and their functional relationship to important outcomes such as policy use and policy benefits.

### **The Micro Level – The Individual and Their Family**

At the micro level of analysis, family structure and other individual differences affect the need for FWAs as well as potential barriers to the full enjoyment of FWA benefits. Employees with children, or elder-care responsibilities, as well as single parents, are more likely to have potential work-family conflicts and greater need for flexible scheduling and other family-friendly accommodations (Shockley & Allen, 2009). Individuals working in low-wage, typically hourly jobs, may have a keen need for flexibility mostly because their jobs do not afford the luxury of formal or informal flexibility benefits: time off to care for family (or related) matters means no income (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). Beyond family and occupational characteristics, individual differences, such as need for affiliation (Shockley & Allen, 2009), and pursuit of outside interests like education, community engagement and political involvement may affect individual motivations for working flexibly.

The conditions that impact need for flexibility also trigger barriers to the use of flexibility benefits. Employees with competing role demands who want to limit their work hours are perceived as less committed to their careers (Williams, et al., 2013). Men's requests for paternity leave, on the other hand, may be met with ridicule and ostracism because they appear to be violating masculinity norms (Berdahl & Moon, 2013). Women's requests for extended maternity leave or schedule reductions may trigger a "motherhood penalty," which lowers perceptions of their competence (Fuegen, Biernat, Haines & Deaux, 2004; Munsch, 2016). On the other hand, childless women tend to be viewed less favorably and are more likely to elicit moral outrage due to their violation of cultural norms (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017); thus it stands to reason that voluntarily childfree women who request the use of a flexible working arrangement may be stigmatized due to a perception that they do not need to use a flexible working arrangement.

Sexual minorities, such as lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) employees, risk other threats in contemplating FWAs because doing so may require disclosure, which may lead to discrimination and harassment (Maxwell, 2017; Ragins & Cornwall, 2007). Transgender individuals requesting leave of absence for medical reasons may be denied such benefit because gender transition is not considered a “serious medical condition” and as such, employers are not required to grant sick leave for such purposes (Maxwell, 2017).

In order to alleviate the work and family demands that employees may face, as well as the potential for discrimination of individuals that utilizes a FWA or work-family initiative, research suggests the importance of social support (Goh, Ilies, & Wilson, 2015). At the family level, employees that receive substantial support from their partners in the form of both emotional (empathy, encouragement) and tangible support (helping out around the house) are much more likely to be able to manage their work and family responsibilities (Greenhaus, Ziegert, & Allen, 2011). At the managerial level, when supervisors are supportive of work/family balance, employees are not only more likely to access a flexible working arrangement but they are also likely to experience a subsequent reduction in daily work/family conflict (Allen, 2001; Goh, et al., 2015). Both partner support and supervisor support play a key role in helping employees manage competing responsibilities; however, it is a combination of both partner support and supervisor support that provides the greatest reduction in an employee’s work/family conflict (Greenhaus, et al., 2011).

### **The Meso Level – The Immediate Work Context**

The situation in which the employee works - their business unit, department, or team -- plays an important role in whether flexible working arrangements are needed, approved or even available. Line managers are concerned with how they will be able to, on the one hand, organize

their human resources in order to meet performance and productivity demands, and on the other hand, motivate and satisfy their employees (Peters et al., 2010). As such, managers may weigh concerns about the extent to which employees' use of flexible arrangements will disrupt the performance of the unit (Powell & Maniero, 1999) with their dependence on high quality employees' whose flexibility requests they may want to accommodate (Klein et al., 2000).

den Dulk and de Ruijter (2008) found in their study of managers in the UK and the Netherlands that both dependency and disruption considerations shaped their opinions toward utilization of work-life policies. Short-term leaves and flexible arrangements for non-managerial employees were seen to be less disruptive; however managers were inclined to approve flexible arrangements for employees with higher education levels and when labor market conditions were tight, suggesting that managers were keen to accommodate high-value employees. Managers also were more likely to accommodate women's flexibility requests over men's suggesting they believed that women should maintain primary caregiver roles (den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008). Peters et al. (2018) similarly found that employees' education level and skill levels positively influenced managers' opinions about teleworking, but they also found that managers in the European countries they studied (which included those typically considered the most progressive, such as Sweden) tended to hold conservative views toward telework, opining that they could not trust such workers to be as productive as they would be if they were in the office, or that it would be harder to coordinate work among team members.

From workers' perspectives, the work-specific needs or desires for flexibility may be grounded in the nature of their work or working context. High demand jobs may require greater autonomy about when and where work is done in order to reduce the risk of stress, such as work-family conflict (Goh et al., 2015; Karesek & Theorell, 1990).

Support structures relevant to the meso level include both supervisor support and organizational support. Supervisors' disposition toward FWAs for employees under their span of control is a function of both their mental models toward the employment relationship between managers and employees (Peters et al., 2010) and their general attitude toward family supportiveness (Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness, 1999). A *governance* mindset views the role of management to control and coordinate employees' work and is often coupled with distrust toward those who work under alternative, flexible arrangements. An *exchange* mindset presumes a psychological contract where managers and employees expect (often implicitly) to exchange flexible working conditions and other forms of autonomy for high commitment, creativity, and productivity (Peters et al., 2010). A high degree of trust characterizes a *cooperation* mindset, which exists when supervisors, team members, and employees perceive themselves to be partners with mutual goals (Peters et al., 2010). Support for work-life balance and for using FWAs may be strongest under such mindsets as long as such arrangements do not undermine trust. Organizational support for work life balance can be achieved by not only the provision of FWA benefits but by also fostering and supporting a culture of flexibility, described next in the Macro level of analysis.

### **The Macro Level – The Organization**

Organizations vary in their perceived need to address employee work-life balance with flexible policies and practices. Employees who work in low-wage, typically hourly occupations are less likely to have access to and utilize FWAs than professional employees, and there is significant variation in sick leave access among different industrial sectors (i.e., hospitality/tourism, retail, manufacturing, teaching, health services). Kossek and Lautsch (2018) noted that (usually full-time) middle and upper level employees are more likely to be offered and

to enjoy FWA benefits than low-wage hourly workers. Indeed, 70-97% of low-income employees are not able to adjust their work schedules (Williams and Boushey, 2010). Organization size may also be a factor that impacts FWA access. Matos and Galinsky (2011) found that larger organizations (over 500 employees nationwide) are more likely to have formal FWA policies than smaller organizations. Larger organizations may be more capable to provide formal policies for work-life benefits, but smaller organizations may be better able to create informal norms surrounding flexibility (Bardoel, Tharenou, and Moss, 1998).

The percentage of female employees and skilled employees predict organizations' adoption of formal family-friendly policies (Bloom, Kretschmer, and Van Reenen (2011). Labor market conditions and competition for scarce, valuable human resources may also drive up the adoption of FWA policies and practices (Bloom et al., 2011; Poelmans et a., 2003).

Organizational diversity strategy and commitment to a high commitment workforce also shapes policies and practices toward work-life balance and FWAs. Viewing the demographic diversity of their workforce as a strategic advantage (Ely & Thomas, 2001) coupled with a commitment to advancing women stimulates adoption of these practices. In an era of "employer of choice" strategies, organizations often vie for "Top 100" or "Best Companies for Women" and related distinctions. *Working Mother's* Best 100 award is based on how organizations rate on childcare, flexibility, new parent leave, work-life benefits, and advancement of women, and are markers of top employers. In addition to gaining and retaining more talented employees, organizations with such distinctions may attract more investors. One study found that although *Working Mother* Best 100 firms were not necessarily more or less profitable than S&P 500 and Russell 3000 firms, their stocks outperformed those of other firms (Cascio and Young, 2013). Employer of

choice strategies often promote the adoption of FWAs (Sladek & Hollender, 2009; Totta & Burke, 1995).

These factors represent pressures on organizations in liberal (market-driven) economies to adopt FWA policies and practices. However, organizations often concede substantial discretion to managers in deciding when, which, and how much employees may use FWAs (Kelly & Kalev, 2006). For employees to access and utilize FWAs, organizations first need to examine their culture and implement policies that are mutually beneficial for the organization and employees. Because simply introducing flexible work policies may not be enough to increase usage and reach organizational goals, it is critical for HR professionals to understand the culture in which they operate.

One broad scheme for classifying organizational cultures is outlined by the competing values framework (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1981), which situates organizations along dimensions concerning responsiveness to external market demands versus internal firm needs, and to control over processes versus flexibility. The four archetypes of organizational culture are group, developmental, hierarchical, and rational, and have been associated with various organizational outcomes. For example, “group” organizations focus on flexibility and internal organizational health, and tend to have higher organizational commitment, job involvement, empowerment, job satisfaction, along with lower turnover intention. By contrast, hierarchical organizations focus on control over processes and internal firm health (Goodman, Zammuto, Gifford, 2001). A recent study found that organizational schedule norms were critical in guiding managers’ decision to grant flexible schedule requests (flextime). In organizations with rigid, traditional norms (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.), managers were less likely to grant requests; and the employee's reason for a non-standard work schedule was important in predicting flextime schedule approval. In a culture

described as valuing flexibility in its internal processes and structures, flextime requests were more likely to be approved and the rationale for the request mattered less (Gilmer & Stockdale, 2018).

Cultural acceptance of idiosyncratic ideals or “I-Deals,” which promote goals of both the individual and the organization, can lead to increased FWA policy adoption and employee utilization (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2008). An I-deal culture conveys the message that breaking traditional schedule and work-process norms is acceptable and may even help business in the long run. Some organizations may easily see value in FWAs as a resource and, hence, a critical aspect of business strategy. Because employees are resources as well, and FWAs may increase employees’ organizational commitment (Goodman et al., 2001; Poelmans et al., 2003), offering and encouraging responsible usage of FWAs offers many firms a competitive advantage.

Organizations should work to change norms surrounding flexibility, such that they eventually bridge the gap between employees and managers. This may occur via promotion of I-deals, reframing of FWAs as critical resources, and using FWAs to invest in employees across income and skill levels. As organizations compete to secure an “employer of choice” reputation, offering equal access to and support for FWAs will likely become a distinctive boon to business.

### **SUMMARY AND ACTION STEPS**

Our ecological model of support for flexible work arrangements identifies the embedded conditions that affect the needs, desires and opportunities for workplace flexibility, as well as the contingencies that may augment their utilization. The model also identifies support mindsets and structures that catalyze the benefits of flexible working.



Flexibility arrangements are clearly important for helping employees achieve work/life balance, especially for those with family-care responsibilities; and they are perceived to be especially important for women's career success, as women still manage the lion's share of home-care responsibilities (Gallup, 2016). Flexible work arrangements are also important for employees who need to balance other non-work responsibilities such as pursuing education; or for those who desire to work at times of days where their productivity will be maximized, such as later in the day for "night owls" (Gilmer & Stockdale, 2018). Yet stigmas against those who request to use flexible work arrangements need to be eradicated. Adopting exchange or cooperation mindsets of the employer-employee relationship may reduce these stigmatizing attitudes. Training, supervisor accountability, and leadership role modeling are also important ways to increase support for workplace flexibility and to diminish potential stigmatizing influences.

Work units may reap benefits when members are free to access flexible arrangements, such as greater unit-level job satisfaction, lower turnover of high value employees, and even greater engagement of pro-social behavior that benefits the entire group (Lambert, 2000). The work unit concomitantly may have concerns about coordination and productivity. What needs to go is the cultural expectation that "face-time" (physical presence in the workplace -- as well as 24-hour responsiveness to e-mail) is the measure of commitment to work. This needs to be role-modeled by supervisors and peers alike, and performance needs to be measured by results, as well as by actions that support a culture of work/life balance. Larger organizations may have the resources to implement flexibility policies more easily than smaller organizations, for example by investing in technologies that may assist coordination and communication or having back-up resources for employees reducing their schedules. However, small organizations may be able to

offer informal sources of support, so that employees may make impromptu shifts to their schedules as needed without fear of repercussion.

Finally, there remains a strong business case for companies to institute policies and practices to develop a culture of support for work/life balance. A company's reputation for work/life balance strongly affects their ability to recruit, attract and retain high quality employees. This is particularly important for companies with an earnest and strategic ambition to increase the diversity of their workforce. Companies with a strong reputation for their culture and practices of work/life balance win highly coveted awards and recognition, such as *Working Women's 100 Best Place to Work for Women*, *the Catalyst Award*, *Fortune's 100 Best Places to Work*, *Fortunes 50 Best Workplaces for Parents*, and *the DiversityInc Award*. These awards, bring national attention to these companies helping them compete for the best and brightest talent.

What do these award-winning companies do? First, they have a commitment from top management to make work/life balance a priority and they back this up with training and accountability. It is not sufficient for a company to espouse flexibility and work/family support; they need to make sure that the managers and supervisors who approve the use of these benefits are fully on board as well. Second, a company that takes work/life balance seriously also tends to have a strong commitment to advancing women. We argue that these benefits go beyond support for women, but also for diversity management more broadly, and for becoming a true employer of choice. Developing a culture of work/life balance is clearly aided by the ability to provide abundant bundles of policies and practices, including flexible work arrangements, but can also be achieved by adopting an attitude of support -- an attitude that needs to be embraced throughout the organization.

Ultimately, in order to capitalize on the benefits that flexible work arrangements (such as reduced stress, increased productivity, and job satisfaction) and to minimize the stigmatization of those employees who take part in these arrangements, there are specific steps that individuals and their organizations can take. At the micro or individual level, both partner and supervisor/managerial support is instrumental to helping employees manage their competing responsibilities. Managers should seek to understand employees' needs, and talk to their staff about their objectives and how best to support them. At the organizational level, providing training for managers on how to effectively support and manage a diverse team can be effective in increasing managerial support for work/life balance. Furthermore, supervisors should be supported by their own managers when they demonstrate support for their employees' flexibility needs.

At the meso level, support structures of both supervisor and peer support play an important role in defining the availability and use of flexible working arrangements. Actionable steps such as evaluating performance in terms of results rather than how much time is spent in the office, or training managers on how to coordinate and communicate with employees using flexible working arrangements can be used to increase managerial buy-in of workplace flexibility. Additionally, managers should also model work/life balance by evaluating the necessity of sending emails late at night or over the weekend, or the need to work late at the office every day. Working remotely one day a week may send a welcoming message that employees are able to do so themselves. When employees see that their managers are practicing work/life balance, they will be more likely to practice work/life balance themselves without fear of repercussions.

At the macro level, organizational culture and norms surrounding flexibility are of particular importance. In order for an organization to truly espouse work/life balance, and for flexible working plans to be successful, endorsement from top management is necessary. The leaders of the organization must model flexibility and their use of flexible working arrangements must be highly visible and consistent. Steps such as communication from top management supporting work/life balance via email or video message can show to employees that the organization values flexibility. Additionally, managers should also be held accountable for both modeling and supporting work/life balance. When flexible working is treated as an expectation, rather than a privilege, employees are more willing to adopt the use of flexible working practices. Information technology (IT) resources may help employees who work remotely be able to access and maintain the security of company resources, as well as to communicate and work effectively with teams, clients and other important stakeholders.

We offer the proposed ecological framework (Figure 1) to conceptualize both the different concepts that affect the need or desire for FWAs and the forms of support structures needed to overcome barriers to implementation, but also to serve as a framework for which organizations and their managers can assess the current state of flexibility in their organization. By examining the organization in terms of the three levels provided in this model, organizational leaders and managers can identify areas of strength, as well as areas to improve upon, so that they can more effectively build an organization that supports flexibility at all levels.

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Figure 1: An Ecological Model of Flexible Work Arrangement Support

