

Workplace Flexibility Case Study
MITRE's Flexible Work Arrangement
by Ken Giglio

Company: The MITRE Corporation (www.mitre.org)

Company profile: MITRE is a not-for-profit organization with expertise in systems engineering, information technology, operational concepts and enterprise modernization. MITRE manages three Federal Funded Research and Development Centers: one for the Department of Defense, one for the Federal Aviation Administration, and one for the Internal Revenue Service. MITRE was formed in 1958 and currently has about 5,800 full- and part-time employees, about two-thirds of whom are male. MITRE has no unionized workers. The average age of company employees is 47 with ten years of service. In its engineering staff, 15% have earned a bachelor's degree, 65% hold a master's degree and 20% have a PhD. The company has headquarters in Bedford, Massachusetts, and McLean, Virginia, with employees at more than 60 sites around the world.

Program profile: MITRE's Flexible Work Arrangement allows employees at all levels to choose from a variety of flexibility options, including a shortened work week, flexible hours and telecommuting. The program was begun formally in 2001 following a work/life and benefits survey in which employees identified a need for more flexibility. Approximately 90% of MITRE employees engage in some form of workplace flexibility.

The Challenge: In a survey, MITRE employees had identified two flexibility barriers that existed prior to the company's decision to implement its Flexible Work Arrangement program. Specifically, employees were required to work a minimum of 5 days per week. In addition, employees were not pleased with a requirement that they be forced to take a full-day absence for a missed partial day of work even if they essentially worked a full week the other four days of the week.

Benefits to employees: In surveys, MITRE employees rank flexibility as one of the top reasons to work at the company. One of the things they like the most about flexibility at MITRE is the fact that the flexibility is flexible. In other words, employees can decide, with their manager's approval, to opt to work a shortened work week or an alternative hours schedule for a limited time, as it suits their needs. As a result, employees report a greater feeling of having their work and their life in balance. In addition, employees say they enjoy an enhanced level of trust between staff and management due to MITRE's flexibility opportunities.

Benefits to employer: MITRE says it has realized a significant increase in its employee retention rate since adopting its flexible work arrangement program. While the entire improvement can't be credited to the program alone, the company does believe it has made a big difference. Consider that before the program, its voluntary attrition rate was about 8 percent (slightly higher for certain employees with high-demand skills). In the past 5 years that the program has been in place, MITRE's attrition rate has dipped to as

low as 3 percent, currently standing at 4 percent. MITRE is not able to provide any specific statistics on worker productivity, but it notes that the average hours worked by employees has remained steady, so it feels confident that productivity certainly has not decreased as a result of greater flexibility. Anecdotally, many employees tell managers that they feel they are more productive and that they work hard to support the company since it supported them in trying to achieve greater work/life balance.

Lessons Learned: In order to have a successful flexibility program, MITRE officials believe it is necessary to get top-level support and involvement, as well as to train both employees and managers up front. They also stress the need for good communication, including the expectations for the program as well as any modifications that are made along the way.

Personal profile: Tom Ervin is a principal engineer for MITRE in the company's Cyber Analysis and Investigations department. He lives in Olympia, Washington, with his wife and their young son. He has worked for the company since June 1997 and has been a telecommuter since the summer of 2002. Tom is in regular contact with his supervisors and co-workers through e-mail and phone conversations. He is able to telecommute from home full-time. This arrangement has also allowed him to keep the same job despite having moved twice in recent years. He has become the primary care provider for his son, given that his wife is on active duty with the U.S. Army as a pediatrician. Says Tom, "The telework program has just been great, not only to allow me the flexibility to work from home but also the flexibility to do other things. Telework hasn't hurt my effectiveness at work; in fact it has enhanced my productivity – I've won more awards with the company than before I teleworked." Tom says he has earned 1 or 2 citations per year for projects he's worked on since starting to telework. "In addition to making work more productive, it also benefits me on the family side. I'm a volunteer in my son's school, where I run a chess program. And I can do so because of our flexible hours policy, as long as I satisfy the time reporting requirements of the company. My kid loves it. The flexibility really pays dividends on the family side. Also, my son would not have been in half of the sports programs he's been in if we hadn't been in the telework program."

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