

CHAPTER 13

BEFORE YOU READ take an *Overview* of the subject matter by *Assessing Your Prior Knowledge*. AS YOU READ apply the new *Reading Technique*, learn the *Vocabulary*, and complete a *Language Activity*. AFTER YOU READ check your understanding through *Fact and Idea Review*, *Critical Thinking Question*, *Guided Discussion*, *Authentic Assessment*, and *Mini-Quiz*.

9 to 5 Isn't Working Anymore

by Michelle Conlin

For all the country's New Economy ways, most jobs are still modeled on the clock-punching culture of the industrial past. Like wired-up **assembly-line drones**, people are expected to show up Monday through Friday and do their work in eight-, nine-, or ten-hour chunks of time. This rusty arrangement is exactly what IBM's vice-president of global workforce **diversity**, Ted Childs, wants to smash to pieces. Sounding like a corporate **General Patton**, Childs warns: "We're going to grab that old model by the throat and choke it to death."

That's strong talk for a human resources executive. But Childs is waging a difficult campaign. So far, most of Corporate America's response to the skin-tight labor market has been to lather job candidates with juicy options packages and perks. But there's fresh evidence that those companies are missing the boat. New studies, including one from the Boston College Center for Work & Family, find that most workers' No. 1 concern has nothing to do with getting free flying lessons or health insurance for their pets. It doesn't even have to do with chopping the hours they work or fattening their paychecks. Rather, employees' top priority is getting the flexibility to control their own time and when, how, and where they do their jobs—giving them the freedom to **finesse** their own work-life balance.

SPOOKED SHAREHOLDERS. Sounds easy. But that requires no less than rethinking and reengineering people's jobs. Called "work redesign," these projects often involve clipboard-toting consultants who nose around in every department, sometimes tearing apart people's routines for months. Plus, if word gets out that a company is in the midst of one of these mini-revolutions, shareholders could get spooked. Some companies are so secretive about these projects that they won't talk about them even if they're going smoothly.

But a handful of savvy CEOs and human resource types like Childs are forthcoming about such workplace transformations. They're aiming to cure

today's biggest human resources headache—retention of rising stars and would-be retirees—by **rejiggering** jobs so that workers' lives are a top priority, alongside customer expectations and the P&L. And by making things easier at home, these businesses are getting the worker loyalty and productivity and efficiency gains they sought all along.

Today at IBM, the company that was once so rigid that it banned floral ties, managers are allowed to work part-time—and from home—so they can better juggle the demands of their children and their jobs. From a den in the family colonial, Joanna Dapkevich manages 50 software customer-service representatives at IBM's office park in Raleigh, N.C., 10 miles away.

After Dapkevich got pregnant in 1997, she asked her boss if she could work part-time from home but still keep her job. Accommodations had to be made. Since Dapkevich would only be working part-time, a third of her business had to be spun off to two other managers itching for more responsibility. And Dapkevich had to retrain her people to not think they were bothering her every time they phoned her at home.

Since her new schedule went into effect, Dapkevich's customer-satisfaction ratings have risen sharply, from 80% to 85%. Her team's morale is also the highest of the four that make up her division. Says Dapkevich: "This way, I can give 120% to IBM and 120% to my newborn, and this **nets out** to zero guilt for me."

GUILT-FREE. Working parents at Merck & Co. are feeling a lot less guilty, too. A year ago, the Whitehouse Station (N.J.)-based company embarked on a massive work-redesign effort, asking employees what maddened them most about their jobs. People in the payroll department made big noises about the mounds of overtime that had become as habitual as coffee breaks. The pharmaceutical giant realized how much of the department's work wasn't computerized, and how the 9-to-5 workday didn't match the cyclical pileup of work. Automation and new schedules helped sink department overtime 50% and allowed the number of people with flexible work arrangements to double, to 45%.

The benefits of work redesign have even shown up in some unlikely places—like the bedroom. After

moving 200 bankers from pricey downtown Boston office space to cheaper digs in Framingham, Mass., Fleet Financial Group got pounded with a raft of complaints about longer commutes, smaller support staff, and a focus on pumping out as many loans as possible instead of providing quality and customer service. With the help of researchers from Radcliffe's Public Policy Institute, telecommuting options were offered. A new backlog manager was hired to handle the overload, and officers were allowed to swap loans with each other. It didn't take long for the bad feelings to die down. The number of employees who reported struggling with insomnia dropped by 35%.

The upsides aren't surprising, considering a recent poll by Los Angeles-based Flexible Resources Inc., in which 56% of managers say employees with flexible schedules are more productive per hour. That kind of positive buzz is what has driven work redesign successes at such places as Ernst & Young, Hewlett-Packard, Bank of America, and Lucent Technologies.

But for all the demonstrated benefits of these changes, the majority of companies have yet to sign on. David Meador is vice-president and controller of DTE Energy Co. in Detroit, where he fought hard to implement what he calls work redesign "interventions." Prior to his stint at DTE, he sweated just as much over pushing through work redesign changes at Chrysler Corp., where he was the controller of the Mopar parts division until 1997. At both companies, most employees were unhappy with their work-life balance. But their

cultures did not allow the matter to be discussed, says Meador. "At first, executives said, 'it's not an issue here,' and 'we don't need it,'" he says. "This happened to be coming from white males who had worked 70 hours a week their whole lives. They didn't see it as a problem for them, so they didn't think it was a problem for anybody else." The face-time, company-first culture at DTE was so pervasive in the account and finance departments that people took vacation days when they were ill for fear that having sick days on their records would mar chances for promotions.

Meador set about changing this mindset in a work redesign **pilot program** launched this year. Gone is the hall-monitor atmosphere in which some workers felt they had to sneak out early even when they were legitimately owed time off. "Now, the focus is on whether we produce, not on how or where or when we do it," says DTE financial consultant Lisa Sexton-Garon.

Not long ago, DTE might have gone the way of the faddish fix-it: \$200 nights on the town and complimentary dry-cleaning pickups at employee cubicles. But a new generation of smart companies isn't hesitating to admit something's wrong and throw out the old playbook. These are essential moves for those corporations that don't want to be considered the **crotchety holdovers** of another work-life age.

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BEFORE YOU READ

Overview

Progressive corporations are redesigning projects by giving employees more control over their own jobs at an unprecedented degree. There is mounting evidence that employee empowerment increases workers' morale and satisfaction, hence productivity, efficiency, mental and physical health, and company loyalty abound. Such organizational transformations have become corporate America's prescription for preventive medicine.

Assessing Prior Knowledge

1. What is more important to you—intangible lifestyle qualities such as freedom, balance, peace of mind, and control over your own time, or physical/material rewards such as money, clothes, and possessions? Have you ever been in a situation where you had to choose between the two? Think about that decision and the reasons why you made it.

2. When you have a lot of homework, do you get more done if you are happy or depressed? Under what conditions do you work faster, more accurately, or more efficiently? Think about how your emotions affect the way you work.

AS YOU READ

Reading Technique

Suppose that you have been working at a job full-time all summer, and now that school is about to start again, you have to give it up. However, you heard about the new trend of companies transitioning full-time positions into part-time positions. You plan to approach the manager with this possibility. Read the article to find out ways in which you could persuade your boss to keep you part-time.

Vocabulary

assembly-line drones People working in a robot-like fashion, usually in factories. "Drone" is derived from the name of an idle male honeybee, which neither stings nor works.

diversity The quality being completely difference.

General Patton George Smith Patton, Jr. (1885-1945) was an American general of the Second World War. His dramatic manner, outspoken comments, and reckless behavior won him both applause and criticism. His toughness and rough speech earned him the nickname "Old Blood and Guts."

finesse Delicacy of execution; the skillful handling of a situation to one's advantage.

rejiggering Changing or rearranging of something, especially by clever handling or juggling.

net out To gain or yield as clear profit; remaining after deductions.

intervention Interfering in any affair or matter in order to influence its outcome; mediation.

pervasive Tending to spread; to penetrate.

pilot program A formulated plan that serves as a preliminary version of some action to be carried out on a larger or more elaborate scale.

crotchety holdover An outdated tradition; an old ritual that has outlived its usefulness

Language Activity

The author writes in a more creative style than most. Examine the following sentence in which three very descriptive adjectives or verbs are used in nonconventional ways: "So far, most of corporate America's response to the skin-tight labor market has been to lather job candidates with juicy options packages and perks." Rewrite this sentence in a more direct way by replacing the underlined words with simpler terms.

AFTER YOU READ**Fact and Idea Review**

1. What was determined about worker preferences and priorities by the study conducted at the Boston College Center for Work and Family?

2. Why can it be difficult or even dangerous for some companies to implement these "work redesign" programs? What are two factors that cause these businesses to hesitate, resist, or be secretive about restructuring their organizations in this way?

3. How did the massive work-redesign efforts by Merck & Co. and Fleet Financial Group respond to staff concerns and increase the companies' productivity?

4. According to a recent poll by Los Angeles-based Flexible Resources, Inc., what was the most convincing upside of flexible work schedules? What other benefits are mentioned in the article?

Critical Thinking

Evaluate the reasons why the team organizational structure would be better suited for the flexible work arrangements, greater employee freedoms, and self-direction than other corporate structures.

Guided Discussion

Consider the role that a CEO and board of directors' play in implementing unconventional organizational structures, such as the work redesign projects discussed in the article. Answer the following questions in your discussion.

- 1) How are the leadership decisions of business executives and advisors directly reflected in their companies' operations?
- 2) What personality qualities would a CEO have who encourages job flexibility and freedom?

Authentic Assessment Hold a Class Flexibility Experiment

Freedom, flexibility, and control over one's time are all privileges that can be easily abused. If an employee is not trustworthy, responsible, mature, or accountable, these benefits might not be granted. Usually it is necessary to prove oneself in an office environment before being allowed to work in an unstructured situation. Do you think you could pass the test? The following exercise will give you the opportunity to test your ability to handle freedom and flexibility in a productive manner.

- 1) Imagine that you are attending an experimental school that gives its students the opportunity to achieve a "life-school balance." Does this mean less homework? Being able to start school later, or being able to take a long break in the middle of the day? How would this balance improve the quality of your life? On a separate piece of paper, write a paragraph about what this means to you.

- 2) Suppose the class you are in right now is part of this experiment. With your teacher's approval, schedule one entire period within the next few days to be completely devoted to experiencing freedom and flexibility—similar to what an employee might be allowed in their job. From the moment you walk in the door until the bell rings at the end of the class, you will be allowed to engage in a totally unstructured learning environment, as long as this special privilege is handled in a mature, constructive, and responsible manner. Any sign of misbehavior will automatically halt the experiment and class will return to normal with teacher at the helm.
- 3) The next day hold a class discussion about how the experiment went. Were you able to handle the situation well, or did things get out of control? Were you able to be productive on your own, without any supervision? Was the freedom format preferable to your normal class situation, or do you prefer someone else to structure things for you?

Mini-Quiz

Please circle the letter of the idea or phrase in each of the following groups that does not fit in with the other selections.

1. a) workplace transformation
b) rejiggering jobs
c) work redesign pilot program
d) hall-monitor atmosphere
e) job "interventions"
2. a) fattened paychecks
b) mini-revolution
c) health insurance for pets
d) nights on the town
e) faddish fix-its
3. a) reduction of overtime
b) telecommuting options
c) flexible work schedules
d) computer automation
e) skin-tight labor market
4. a) biggest human resources headache
b) cyclical pile-up of work
c) mounds of overtime
d) employee insomnia
e) insufficient support staff
5. a) higher customer satisfaction ratings
b) improved morale
c) juicy-option packages
d) increased loyalty
e) reduced guilt feelings
6. a) crotchety holdover
b) clock-punching culture
c) assembly-line drones
d) company-first culture
e) work-life balance

7. a) New Economy smart companies
b) executives working 70 hours a week
c) clipboard-toting consultants
d) corporate General Patton
e) savvy CEO's
8. a) retention of rising stars
b) work spun off to managers itching for more responsibility
c) retraining employees to call her at home
d) a new backlog manager hired to handle the overload
e) officers swapping loans