



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

---

8 July 2008

### **‘Flex’ Your Right!**

Flex-time is becoming more and more common in the workplace. Below are some terms to become familiar with as this trend continues to take off!

*Flex-time:* allows one a flexible starting and quitting time within management-set limits. For instance, the employee has the option of working for any 8-hour spell within, say, the 12-hour bracket of 7am to 7pm. It is a popular method, widely used in conjunction with punch cards, time clocks and time management software. However, it requires a vigilant supervision lest it should lead to chaotic situations with employees walking in and out at anytime, unaware of what others are doing.

*Annualized hours:* is a scheme where in the management only decides upon the number of hours to be worked in a year. The employee has the option of working whenever he can, as long as the required hours are put in. Such arrangements are more popular in industries where demand fluctuates through the year.

Though there are several different schemes, most simply multiply the 40 hr week with the number of weeks less the annual leave and public holidays. Thus it is a very popular method that allows individuals to pursue their family interests in complete harmony with the work.

*Zero hours contract:* Simply put, it is an “on call contract.” Employers have a pool of temporary workers, whom they employ, when the need arises. Such contracts are neither binding on the employer nor the employee. Generally, retired workers are offered such jobs for their rich experience as and when required. This kind of a working arrangement has been in the controversies, though. There is still some doubt as to whether such employment is employment at all. All considered it couldn’t be denied that such a nonobligatory relationship is mutually beneficial.

*Time accounts:* This is the good old method of recovering any extra work put in. For years, people have been working hard when work piles up. Then they take some time off when the work pressure is lower. Most time accounts specify ‘maximum credits (days off earned) and debits (working days owed)’. They also mention that time must be managed appropriately to avoid too many holidays or of getting over-worked. Overall, it gives the employee greater independence over work hours.

*Compressed time options:* These include the compressed workweeks and the shortened workdays.

A compressed working week would involve much greater regularity and predictability than other flexibility options. It has a large scope for altering the conventional 8-hour 5-day week. The popular options are “4/10 schedule” (working for 10 hours, 4 days a week) or the “9/8 schedule” (working for 80 hrs a fortnight, an extra day can be taken off every alternate fortnight).



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

---

A shortened workday allows a workday shorter than the regular 8hrs. It could be a 5, 6 or 7 hour day. Such shorter work hours give greater productivity, as the stress levels are low.

*Telecommuting:* Employees can work from home, at least part time. The worker can go to work for three days a week to attend meetings or just keep abreast of happenings at the workplace. The rest of the time he works from home. This allows an ideal blend of an active work and family life.

*Job sharing:* This method involves two (or more) different individuals working on the same job. Ideally, the management would want them to work together at least once a week so they could work as a team. This though might not be required in certain cases, where the job distinction is more pronounced.

*Term time working:* Most parents ensure that their annual leaves are scheduled during the holidays of their kids. This logic brings in the concept of term time working. Such a contract stipulates taking leave, along with the paid leave, during the school holidays. It allows parents to spend time with their children and give sufficient time to them.

*Phased or Flexible retirement:* Allows retired persons to continue in their jobs, with a reduced working hours scheme. It opposes the logic of a sudden and complete retirement. The management thus is better able to utilize the resources of their experienced staff and provide them with a regular, albeit, lesser pay. It also gives the individual employee the satisfaction of continuing work.

*Maternity/Paternity breaks:* Maternal leaves have been in vogue for a long-long time, and now paternal leaves are fast gaining popularity. Most organizations offer paid maternal leave as they have realized that the female workforce today is as important and can't be jeopardized. Paternal leave in the US allows parents to take an unpaid leave of up to 13 weeks, if the child is below 5.

*Sabbaticals/Career breaks:* Sabbaticals are no longer just for teaches or those pursuing higher studies. Today more and more people are taking breaks to unwind themselves, indulge in things they have always wanted to do, spend time with their families etc. Organizations are allowing this because they are able to retain their valued staff that return more satisfied after the break. The time and purpose of the sabbatical is generally agreed upon within the defining limits, set by the management.

### **Take your pick. Mix and match.**

There are indeed several ways to give employees a chance to reschedule their work. However, the right choice must be made keeping in mind "personal circumstances, preferences and the business context." There can be no 'right' answer, because work-life balance is a deeply personal issue. "To each his own," as it is said.

Organizations need to provide employees a strong support system. For this organizations can extend different options. Employees can thereby pamper themselves, spend time with their families and partake in the various activities at home.