

Flexitime work arrangements

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The Canadian labour market has undergone a number of dramatic transformations in the last few decades. Notable among these are the tremendous growth in the number of working mothers, the expansion of the service sector, and the increased use of computers. As a result of these and other labour market dynamics, work arrangements have also been changing. Work schedules other than the traditional, and still popular, nine-to-five work pattern are emerging. One of these is the flexible work schedule, often referred to as "flexitime."

In November 1991, an estimated 1.7 million employees, accounting for 16% of the paid workforce aged 15 to 64, reported being on a flexitime work arrangement in their main job. These data come from Statistics Canada's Survey of Work Arrangements (SWA), the first comprehensive national survey on the work routines and schedules of Canadians, conducted in November 1991. A fuller description of this survey, as well as summary findings, appears in another article in this issue ([Akyeampong and Siroonian, 1993](#)).

Flexitime - what is it?

A flexitime work arrangement exists when an employee is allowed to vary, within certain limits, the beginning and end of the workday. In some enterprises, for example, those using assembly line production techniques, this option may be limited. But in others, such as those providing personal services, constraints on work schedules may be minimal or non-existent; however, even in these circumstances, there usually are some working hours, often referred to as "core hours," during which an employee must be on the job.

Many types of flexible schedules now exist. A flexitime arrangement may involve a detailed formal document spelling out rules and procedures, or it may be an informal agreement between the supervisor and the employee. In some of these arrangements, employees can modify the time they begin work and the time they leave every day. In other instances, they can accumulate extra work hours during a given period, which are subsequently taken as leave later on. A common thread in all flexitime arrangements is that the "core hours" requirement must be respected on the days worked. [\(1\)](#)

Flexitime - advantages and disadvantages

A flexitime work arrangement benefits both the employee and the employer. For some employees, especially working parents, such an arrangement can help balance work and family responsibilities such as child or elder care. It can also help commuters avoid time-consuming and stressful rush-hour traffic, and provide workers with larger blocks of "leisure" time.

The arrangement has many advantages for employers as well. Such schedules can help curb lateness and absenteeism, and even increase motivation at work. Also, it is often argued that flexitime schedules can increase efficiency by permitting the scheduling of activities to coincide with the ebb and flow of the workload.

Flexible work schedules have some disadvantages, however. Under this work arrangement, managers have the uneasy task of ensuring an optimal work flow and the coverage of critical functions; they are also often faced with the additional costs of increased supervision needed to ensure that the required hours are worked by employees. Finally, flexitime schedules can increase some overhead costs such as heating and cooling, since a building's environment must be maintained over the course of a longer working day.

Who works flexitime and where?

The foregoing discussions imply that variations exist in the incidence or rate of flexitime across industries, occupations and demographic characteristics of the workers themselves. These variations are examined below.

Industry and occupation variations

Flexitime work arrangements were most common among workers in the service industries. In finance, insurance and real estate, almost one in three paid workers were on this schedule, and in public administration, the ratio was about one in four ([Table 1](#)). The high incidence of flexitime in these two industries is linked to the high variations in the daily workload which are dictated mostly by customer convenience. Female workers in finance, insurance and real estate were less likely than their male counterparts to work flexitime (25% vs. 43%), while in public administration the reverse was true (31% vs. 22%).

**Table 1 Incidence of flexitime by industry, November 1991.***Source: Survey of Work Arrangements*

The flexitime schedule was least used by workers in the goods-producing industries where adherence to optimal work flow is critical. Indeed in manufacturing and in construction, only one out of every nine paid workers enjoyed this work arrangement.

**Chart A Teachers and medical professionals were the least likely to work flexitime.***Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, November 1991*

The chance of being on a flexitime schedule was almost three times as high among "white-collar" workers (20%) than among "blue-collar" workers (7%). Among the major occupational groups, the choice of varying work hours ranged from a high of about one in four persons in managerial and professional occupations to a low of one in twenty for workers in processing, machining and fabricating jobs ([Table 2](#)).

**Table 2 Incidence of flexitime by occupation, November 1991.***Source: Survey of Work Arrangements*

Demographic variations

The likelihood of an employee working a flexitime schedule varied by sex, age, marital and family status. However, the differences in flexitime rates by these demographic profiles were not as large as those recorded across industries and occupations.

Women very slightly outnumbered men among the 1.7 million employees who reported being on a flexitime work schedule in November 1991 (850,000 versus 819,000). The incidence or rate of flexitime work arrangement was also marginally higher among women: about 17% of women compared with 16% of men had such a work schedule ([Table 3](#)).



Table 3 Incidence of flexitime by sex and age, November 1991.

Source: Survey of Work Arrangements

Flexitime work arrangements were most common among workers aged 25 to 44 (19%), especially among working women in that age group. It was least prevalent (12%) among youths (15 to 24 years).

The likelihood of working a flexitime schedule also varied by marital status and family circumstances. Widowed, separated or divorced persons recorded the highest rates, at around one in five workers, while single (never-married) persons registered the lowest, at one in seven ([Table 4](#)).



Table 4 Incidence of flexitime by marital and family status, November 1991.

Source: Survey of Work Arrangements

The practice was more common among unattached individuals and lone parents (20%) and less frequent among husband-wife families in which only one spouse worked outside the home (14%). About one in six workers in dual-earner couples had a flexible work arrangement, but in dual-earner families with at least one pre-school age child, the practice was marginally more common, at one in five.



Chart B Flexitime was least prevalent in Atlantic Canada.

Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, November 1991

Other characteristics of flexitime workers

The likelihood of working a flexitime schedule was slightly higher among part-time workers (18%) than among full-timers (16%). Also, persons who worked on a regular daytime shift tended to have more

flexibility to vary their work hours (17%) than those working other shifts (14%) ([Sunter](#), 1993). For persons working more than five days during the week, the chance of being on flexitime was even greater, at about one in three. Not surprisingly, a flexitime schedule appears to be less frequent among people who work overtime. Of the 800,000 employees who reported paid overtime during the survey reference week in November 1991, only 12% were on flexitime work arrangements ([Cohen](#), 1993).

The incidence of flexitime work schedules was lower among union members (12%) than among non-union members (19%). But the difference appears to be partly explained by the fact that unionized workers tend to predominate in industries with lower than average flexitime rates (for example, manufacturing and construction).

The likelihood of working a flexitime schedule in a second job was also much higher than in the first. One-third of the 359,000 multiple jobholders who were paid workers in their second job enjoyed this work arrangement, compared with one-sixth of paid workers in their main job.

Future prospects

It is difficult to conclude from the SWA data whether flexitime work schedules are more prevalent today than in past years and by how much, since no comparable historical data exist. However, three factors point to future growth of this work arrangement. First, U.S. data show that the incidence of flexitime among full-time employees increased from 12% in May 1985 to 15% in May 1991 - the comparable Canadian rate in November 1991 was a bit higher, at 16%. Second, this work arrangement has been shown to be more typical among workers in the service sector and in white-collar occupations, two areas that are expected to see further expansion in the future. Third, discussions on balancing conflicting family and work responsibilities have taken centre stage in recent years. In these debates, increased use of the flexitime work schedule is being put forward as one possible solution to the problem.

Note

Note 1

The question used in the Survey of Work Arrangements to elicit information on flexitime reads as follows:

"Is ... on a flexible schedule that allows **workers** to choose the time they begin and end their work day?

Yes

No

Don't know

References

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 - Sunter, D. ["Working shift."](#) *Perspectives on labour and income* (Statistics Canada Catalogue 75-001E) 5, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 16-23.
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Source

Perspectives on Labour and Income, Autumn 1993, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 75-001E). This is the third of six articles in the issue.



Table 1

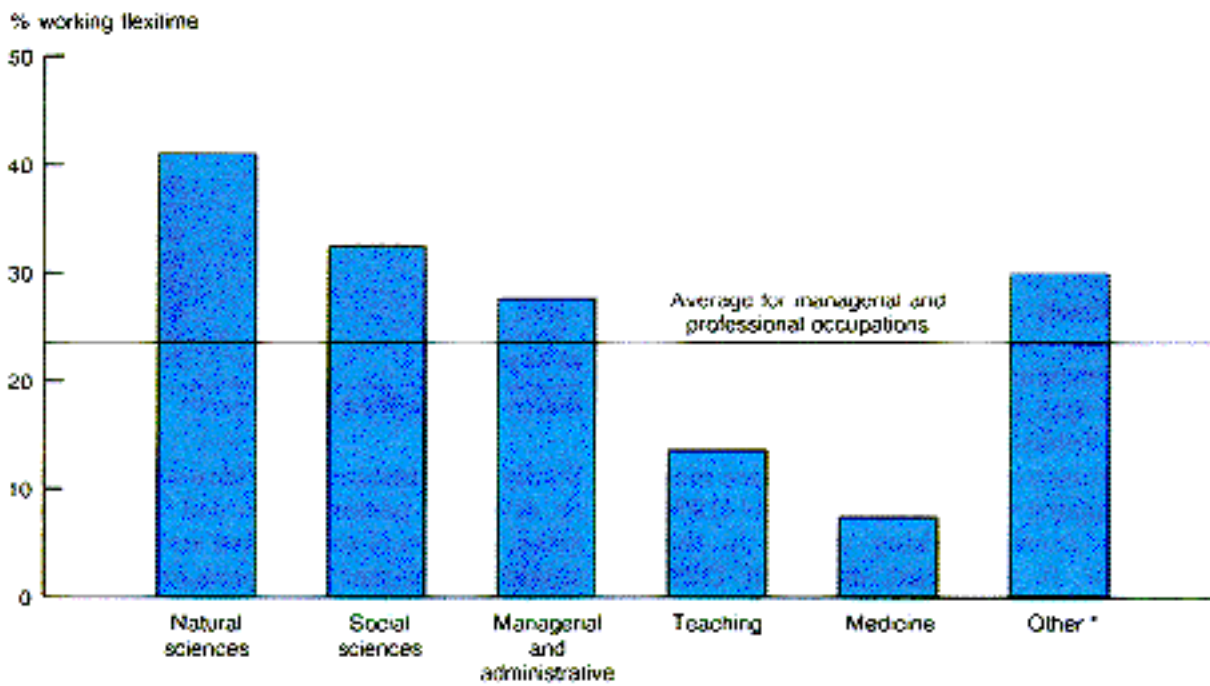
Incidence of flexitime by industry, November 1991

	Paid workers on flexitime schedule	Percent of all paid workers
	'000	%
All industries	1,669	16.4
Goods-producing industries	301	12.2
Agriculture and other primary	57	18.0
Manufacturing	193	11.3
Construction	51	11.3
Service-producing industries	1,367	17.7
Transportation, communication and other utilities	124	15.4
Trade	242	13.6
Finance, insurance and real estate	198	31.4
Community, business and personal services	592	16.0
Public administration	210	25.9

Source: Survey of Work Arrangements

Chart A

Teachers and medical professionals were the least likely to work flexitime.



Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, November 1991

* Consists of religious, artistic, literary and recreational occupations.

Table 2

Incidence of flexitime by occupation, November 1991

	Paid workers on flexitime schedule	Percent of all paid workers
	'000	%
All occupations	1,669	16.4
White-collar	1,476	19.7
Managerial and professional	791	23.6
Clerical	352	18.2
Sales	188	22.4
Services	145	10.5
Blue-collar	192	7.1
Processing, machining and fabricating	69	5.5
Other*	123	8.5

Source: Survey of Work Arrangements

** Consists of primary, construction, transport equipment operating, material handling and other crafts.*

Table 3

Incidence of flexitime by sex and age, November 1991

	Paid workers on flexitime schedule	Percent of all paid workers
	'000	%
Both sexes, all ages	1,669	16.4
Men	819	15.5
Women	850	17.2
15-24 years	220	11.7
25-44 years	1,080	18.6
Men	528	17.7
Women	552	19.4
45-64 years	369	14.7

Source: Survey of Work Arrangements

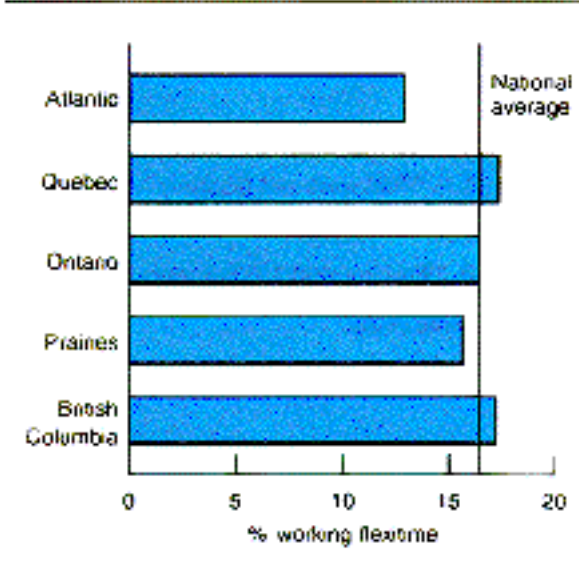
Table 4

Incidence of flexitime by marital and family status, November 1991

	Paid workers on flexitime schedule			Percent of all paid workers		
	Both sexes	Men	Women	Both sexes	Men	Women
	'000			%		
Marital status						
Married	1,083	533	550	16.7	15.7	17.8
Single	437	226	211	14.9	14.3	15.5
Widowed/separated/divorced	149	60	88	19.1	20.0	18.6
Family status						
Unattached individuals	297	152	145	19.8	19.6	20.0
Dual-earner husband-wife families	866	383	483	17.8	16.8	18.7
With at least one child under 6 years	240	110	130	19.4	18.6	20.0
Single-earner husband-wife families	194	140	55	13.5	13.8	12.8
Lone-parent families	77	18	59	19.8	24.6	18.7
Other families	235	126	109	11.6	11.1	12.3

Source: Survey of Work Arrangements

Chart 6
Flexitime was least prevalent in Atlantic Canada.



Source: Survey of Work Arrangements,
November 1997