Establishment of flexible work as organizational development: Results from a qualitative case study

EAWOP Small Group Meeting “Working Anywhere, Anytime: Work Flexibility from a Management and an Occupational Health Perspective”
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Establishment of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) as organizational development:

How do organizations have to change in order to support successful FWAs?

Which challenges and solutions can be identified?

What impact do previous experience with FWA and the “maturity” have on how to establish FWAs?

As work changes, how do organizations change?
# The FlexWork Phase Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
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<th>Technology</th>
<th>Policies</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
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Weichbrodt, Tanner, Josef & Schulze (2014)

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Methods: Qualitative case study

13 cases (teams)          9 different (large) companies          4 “beginners”, 9 “advanced”

for each case:
• interview with team leader (1h)
• group interview with team (1.5h)

topics covered: development on architecture, technology, policies, leadership, norms & values

plus: 3 interviews with experts from IT, facility mgt, HR

qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2014) with MAXQDA, group coding

6 deductively developed main categories, each 10-30 inductively developed sub-categories

→ content analysis lead to roughly 1200 coded text passages
Deductive main categories for the qualitative content analysis

- challenges around flexible work
- enabling conditions: given (or lacking) conditions which make flexible work easier or harder, “static”
- hindering conditions
- control processes: organizational level
- control processes: supervisor level: Management processes, decisions, deliberate change, “fluent”
- control processes: team level
## Challenges around flexible work

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<td>flexible work for whom and how much?</td>
<td>new competencies for employees</td>
<td>technological solutions for highly mobile and distributed work</td>
<td>shared physical presence as scarce resource</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>new leadership styles and skills</td>
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<td>creating and sustaining “flexwork-friendly” culture</td>
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Enabling and hindering conditions

Phase 2: flexible as an exception

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- open offices, desk sharing, zoning concepts
- flexible & distributed work is the norm, physical presence must be organized
- technology for highly distributed work
- too much regulation

- shared physical presence is the norm, absence must be managed
- insufficient technology
- lack of regulation
## Control processes: organizational level

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<td>detailed regulation (organizational policy)</td>
<td>cross-functional cooperation</td>
<td>pilot projects, experiments, evaluations</td>
<td>regulation as “guard rail corridor”</td>
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Control processes: supervisor level

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- monitor and control flexible work
- adjust leadership style and behavior
- purposefully check for employee’s workload
- regulate flexible work only minimally
- clarify availability

- only minimally purposefully check for employee’s workload
- adjust leadership style and behavior
- regulate flexible work only minimally
- clarify availability

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Control processes: team level

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- Managing flexible work with explicit or implicit rules
- Purposeful use of technology for team communication
- Actively spread knowledge about content of work
- Managing work-family boundaries
- Managing physical presence
Conclusion

• “Beginner” and “advanced” teams with different challenges different solutions
• Establishment of FWAs can be seen as a developmental process
• “Beginners” worried about regulating absence, while “advanced” have to organize co-presence
• Shift in mental models on what is “normal” flexible work
• “Advanced” teams can make use of a greater repertoire of management processes

➢ As work becomes more flexible, managing it becomes more complex
➢ Recommendation and “best practices” should take into account the maturity level!
Three open questions

- How can our results be generalized (quantified)?
- What about small companies?
- How can we take into account “bad FWAs”? 

Thank you for your attention!