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# Employees With Flex Time Put in More Hours

## Good news for employers and employees: Flexible schedules often lead to happier -- and more productive -- workers.

By [Josh Clark](#) | Thu Feb 4, 2010 07:00 AM ET

### THE GIST:

- **Workers with flexible hours not only are more satisfied with their jobs; they also work more intensely.**
- **These findings apply to remote workers and employees who have reduced office hours.**
- **Researchers believe intensified work effort given to employers as exchange for more flexible schedule**

Every employee who's ever worked from home is probably familiar with the feeling: Your company pays you for a set amount of hours you work at the office. You're at home, though -- in your pajamas. You feel like your company has given you something extra. You feel as if you should return the favor, but how?

A recent study out of Cranfield School of Management in the United Kingdom suggests that workers given flexible hours by their employers tend to work more intensely than their counterparts with more rigid office hours.

The researchers posit that the reason for this phenomenon is a kind of payment to the employer from the worker in exchange for the freedom to choose where and when to work.

Management professors Clare Kelliher and Deirdre Anderson conducted the study, published in the January issue of the journal *Human Relations*. The researchers used a questionnaire to survey more than 2,000 employees at three large multi-national, UK-based corporations.

From the responses, the researchers found that employees who worked remotely one day a week and workers who had reduced their required weekly office hours tended to report higher job satisfaction, lower stress and higher loyalty to their company than employees who didn't have flexible hours.

These findings aren't new; research into flexible working schedules has yielded a number of positive outcomes.

However, in 37 random interviews with these so-called flex workers from the three companies studied, the Cranfield researchers discovered that flexible schedules are also linked to increased work intensity in the form of higher productivity and longer hours.

These findings may appear counterintuitive at first glance. Logically speaking, and as shown by previous research, a more intense work schedule is linked to negative consequences, like familial strain and increased stress.

Yet employees with flexible hours, especially those working remotely, not only reported working more intensely but also claims higher job satisfaction, lower stress levels and greater company loyalty.

In other words, working remotely appears to be connected with working harder and being happy with your job.

Anderson and Kelliher suggest that this phenomenon is based on an employee's willingness to maintain equilibrium between that worker and his or her employer. Since the employer has added a new dimension that benefits the employee -- in this case, the freedom of a flexible schedule -- the worker is interested in keeping an equal balance and adjusts the scales by working harder in return.

"We argue that flexible workers 'repay' the choice opened up to them, by means of extending a greater effort," Kelliher told Discovery News.

This argument is based on social exchange theory, a psychological and sociological concept asserting that payment between individuals can take place voluntarily and under informal arrangements.

Russell Cropanzano, a professor at the Eller College of Management at the University of Arizona, describes the basis for social exchange as the Golden Rule.

"In its simplest form, (the Golden Rule) argues that humans are motivated, in part, by a norm of reciprocity," he said. "You do unto others as they have done unto you."

Cropanzano, who isn't affiliated with the Cranfield study, says that over time, a series of positive social exchange transactions lead to strong relationships, whether it's between individuals or an employee and a company. These transactions provide individuals and institutions alike with a way to build trust, since these exchanges usually aren't obligatory.

The Cranfield study's findings that flexible hours can lead to harder work sounds like good news both for employers that offer flexible schedules and the employees afforded flexibility. The study's lead author warns that there may be a down side, however.

"In the article, we don't necessarily present work intensification as a positive thing. There is a whole body of evidence which suggests that in the longer term, there are costs to employee well-being," Kelliher points out. "We caution, therefore, that there may be longer-term costs associated with work intensification."

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