



The FlexWork Phase Model 2.0

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Background

Work Smart is a concept for mobile, flexible jobs where company employees can flexibly decide when and where to do their work. Depending on the specific needs, this can take on a wide range of different appearances. The FlexWork phase model can be used to calculate the extent to which a company or organization allows for mobile and flexible work. Five ascending phases of development are used to classify a range of flexibility ranging from minimal to extensive. Flexibility is furthermore differentiated along four dimensions:

- infrastructure/architecture (e.g. fixed or flexible workstations)
- technology (e.g. stationary desktop computers, mobile devices, or cloud solutions)
- working model (e.g. working from home only as an exception, or a broad acceptance of mobile-flexible working in the corporate culture)
- organizational structures (e.g. strongly hierarchical, or project-based)

The first three aspects focus on the conditions for mobile-flexible work per se, while the fourth aspect assesses the flexibility of the organization itself. The FlexWork phase model provides organizations with a quick, yet comprehensive way to assess workplace flexibility in their organization, both in terms of time and of place, and also provides guidance for further evolution.

For more background to the FlexWork Phase Model 1.0 (article in German):
Weichbrodt, J., Tanner, A., Josef, B., & Schulze, H. (2014). Die Entwicklung von Arbeitsflexibilität in Organisationen anhand des FlexWork Phasenmodells. *Wirtschaftspsychologie*, (2014-4), 11–23. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11654/4991>.

Application

A self-assessment is used to decide where the company falls among the five different phases and can be completed out by top-level or middle management. The HR department can also often make a good assessment of the company's overall attitude. For each aspect, the respondents select the phase that best describes the company. The overall score is then calculated by averaging the scores for each of the four aspects.

As part of the *FlexWork Survey 2016*, a survey of companies across Switzerland was conducted with version 2.0 of the phase model and the results can be helpful for comparison purposes. Companies in the "knowledge-intensive services" sector (IT, finance, consulting, etc.) are mostly in Phases 2 or 3, while about 12% are in Phase 4, and only a few in Phase 5. Government agencies are predominantly in Phase 2.

After the self-assessment, the results can be used to facilitate a structured conversation and to identify the direction(s) in which the organization might wish to move in the future: Towards which of the four dimensions? How far? How fast? The descriptions of the next higher phase would give companies an idea of how this might look.

For more background as well as a report on the findings of the *FlexWork Survey 2016*, go to: <http://work-smart-initiative.ch/en/smart-work/studien-publikationen/neue-flexwork-studie-2016/>

FlexWork Phase Model 2.0

| | PHASE 1: on-site-bound & strictly hierarchical | PHASE 2: flexible as an exception | PHASE 3: inconsistent & evolving | PHASE 4: flexible & project-based | PHASE 5: location-independent & networked |
|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| Infrastructure / Architecture Self-Assessment: (Circle the phase that best reflects where your company is currently at.) 1 2 3 4 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> assigned work stations work station reflects status (e.g. individual offices for senior management) meeting rooms mainly used for formal meetings lots of space needed for file storage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mainly assigned work stations experiments with work in other places (e.g. meetings in break room) lots of space needed for file storage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fixed or flexible workstations infrastructure changes actively used as opportunity for new, flexible structures places for individuals to retreats to for undisturbed work, telephone calls, or informal meetings less separation between informal and formal spaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fixed or flexible workstations space reconfigured to include everything from individual workplaces to meeting rooms (for formal as well as informal meetings) different zones for different activities in an open office landscape places to retreat for undisturbed work and/or to take a quiet break individual project or creative spaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a wide range of zones & retreat spaces available project and/or creative spaces available actual place of work and assigned location do not have to match decentralization of company locations use of hubs and co-working venues |
| Technology Self-Assessment: (Circle the phase that best reflects where your company is currently at.) 1 2 3 4 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no or almost no mobile devices (laptops/smartphones) no remote access to company servers no special collaboration tools apart from email and calendars if intranet available, only used for one-way communication (top-down) lots of paper-based processes (requiring on-site presence) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mobile devices generally not available only limited remote access hardly any collaboration tools intranet used for one-way communication (top-down) private devices individually used on an experimental basis, although not official company policy pilot projects to introduce next-generation technology (hardware, software, collaboration tools) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mobile devices available for many employees lots of diversity among employees in terms of how technology is used "anarchic IT" (lots of private/external tools and solutions used) isolated, non-centralized use of simple cloud-based collaboration tools (insular solutions) better/newer equipment provided to senior executives and/or those who make a strong demand for it intranet also used for multi-directional communication (e.g. discussion forums or internal blogs for employees) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> laptop, smartphone & remote access service standard for all unified communications & collaboration (UCC) solution has been introduced and is largely being used use of cloud-based collaboration tools that allow simultaneous editing of documents experiments with company-internal social networks or messaging, but not across the board intranet used for multi-directional communication: employees allowed to communicate content themselves "Bring your Own Device," i.e. an explicit option to integrate and use private devices; or employees can choose from a range of devices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> laptop, smartphone & remote access service standard for all, also UCC uncomplicated sharing of all types of media (documents, photos, videos) extensive use of internal social networks ("social enterprise") or messaging apps collaboration tools implemented to allow collaboration with documents; new tools constantly being tested and may be used if necessary. hybrid models for using cloud-based collaboration and management tools experiments with context-based support, recommendation systems, or bots to improve internal information and communication |
| Working Model Self-Assessment: (Circle the phase that best reflects where your company is currently at.) 1 2 3 4 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> work off-premises not permitted absolute separation between work and private lives fears: loss of control, disturbance of information flow, inefficiency, idleness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mobile-flexible work only as an exception with lots of controls and constraints home office as a favor or reward generally strong separation between work and private lives employees working from home perceived as absent; lack of trust | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mobile-flexible work is practiced, but not sufficiently regulated growing demand for mobile-flexible work and employees are frequently conducting their own experiments private and work lives are more intermingled; experiments with redrawing new boundaries pros and cons discussed intensively; lots of negotiations on the subject fear: loss of informal exchange and social environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mobile-flexible work is clearly regulated and supported by the company happens at the team level and constantly adjusted boundaries between work and private life are individually redrawn wide consensus on the advantages of mobile-flexible work (e.g. making an employer more attractive) social exchange must be organized for its own sake fear: overwork | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mobile-flexible work is the norm, so joint presence on site must be organized lots of experience and a common understanding of how collaboration works within the company; hardly any formal regulations necessary high levels of employee competence boundaries between work and private lives risks/problems (e.g. availability, overwork) actively addressed |
| Organizational Structure Self-Assessment: (Circle the phase that best reflects where your company is currently at.) 1 2 3 4 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organization and cooperation based on assembly line model steep hierarchies, little leeway for employees the organizational chart determines who works with whom thick walls, therefore little exchange between departments and teams | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in addition to working together in teams and departments, an increasing number of interdisciplinary project teams a little more leeway for employees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organization and cooperation based on matrix model somewhat flatter hierarchies projects determine who works with whom experiments with the inclusion of external employees (e.g. freelancers) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> lots of cooperation on interdisciplinary and interdepartmental project teams increased inclusion of external workers (e.g. freelancers) on project teams experiments with agile teamwork (e.g. Scrum) or other new forms of cooperation experience with "collaboration overload" (because communication/meetings don't leave enough time for real work) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organization and cooperation shifting to network model flat hierarchies Interdisciplinary, often changing project teams are the norm regular inclusion of external workers (e.g. freelancers) agile forms of collaboration (e.g. Scrum) are introduced in a targeted way and are used along other existing types of teams |