



HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER INSIGHTS ON CREATING AND SUSTAINING SUCCESSFUL REDUCED-LOAD WORK ARRANGEMENTS

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Although human resource managers have critical insights into the successful implementation of reduced-load work arrangements, relatively few studies focus on their perspective. These arrangements are a growing work form for employees who choose to work less than full-time with a commensurate decrease in salary. Qualitative data analysis was used to identify key success factors noted in interviews with 52 HR managers in 39 companies. Individual employee characteristics (e.g., self-regulatory work habits) were viewed as most critical. Also important were the design of the arrangement (e.g., clarifying the arrangement in advance) and workgroup relationships (e.g., positive supervisor-employee relationships). We conclude with eight new takeaways for HR managers on how to create and sustain successful reduced-load work arrangements and directions for future research and practice. © 2008 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

A demographic transformation of the managerial and professional workforce has taken place in the last 50 years. For example, nearly two-fifths of all managers and professionals in the United States now are women (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Prottas, 2002), many of whom juggle high involvement in caregiving with work. In addition, fathers have significantly increased their involvement in household chores and child care in the past 20 years (Bond et al., 2002). Additionally, due to the

aging of the U.S. population, employees are also more likely than ever before to have elder-care responsibilities (Piktialis & Morgan, 2003).

Many leading employers today are increasingly responding to these changes by adopting an important growing work form: reduced-load work arrangements. Reduced-load work arrangements are a type of flexible work arrangement that involves a decrease in work-hours and workload with a corresponding decrease in salary and sometimes benefits (Lee, MacDermid, & Buck,

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2000). The arrangements also are referred to as “new concept” work, voluntary part-time, or customized work (Barnett, 2003; Barnett & Hall, 2001; Hill, Martinson, Ferris, & Baker, 2004; Meiksins & Whalley, 2002). While traditional part-time work often is low income, provides fewer opportunities for advancement, and is not voluntarily selected by the employee, reduced-load work arrangements typically are adopted by professionals and managers who want to attain a more effective time allocation between work and nonwork roles.

The goal of this article is to identify the conditions under which reduced-load arrangements are more likely to be successful from the perspective of HR managers.

Despite growth in the adoption of reduced-load work arrangements, many employers are working to improve their implementation of these arrangements. To date, relatively little knowledge has accumulated on how to do so. Although HR managers have critical insights into the key success factors in the creation and sustainability of these arrangements, their perspective on the essential elements of successful reduced-load work arrangements has yet to be studied. The goal of this article is to identify the conditions under which reduced-load arrangements are more likely to be successful from the perspective of HR managers. We reanalyze the HR manager data from the Lee, MacDermid, Williams, Buck, and Leiba-O’Sullivan (2002) study to unearth more detailed information on HR manager views of factors influencing the success of reduced-load work arrangements. This information will be useful to HR managers as they design, implement, and support reduced-load work arrangements.

Existing Research on the Success of Reduced-Load Work Arrangements

We begin with a discussion of the existing evidence regarding the success of reduced-load work arrangements. Although HR managers may define “success” based upon a number of important criteria (e.g., organiza-

tional bottom-line, division succession planning, employee absenteeism), prior research has focused on the effects of reduced-load arrangements on employee performance, turnover, and well-being. Research has largely shown that there are positive or null effects of employee reduced-load work arrangements on employee performance. Evidence indicates that individuals working reduced hours are “at least as productive as their full-time counterparts” (Barnett, 2003, p. 1) and have similar opportunities for promotion as full-time employees (Hill et al., 2004; MacDermid, Lee, Buck, & Williams, 2001). Additionally, Catalyst (1998) found that reduced-load managers and their supervisors did not believe that these work arrangements negatively affected employee productivity.

With regard to employee turnover, scant research specifically addresses reduced-load arrangements. But research on work-family practices more broadly suggests that they are often effective in reducing turnover. For example, Grover and Crooker (1995) found that individuals with access to work-family policies reported greater attachment to the organization and less intention to quit. Additionally, Batt and Valcour (2003) found that access to flexible scheduling policies (a type of work-family policy) was associated with reduced turnover.

The evidence is mixed regarding the effectiveness of reduced-load arrangements in enhancing employee well-being. Barnett and Gareis (2002) noted negative effects of reduced-load work on the marital role quality of female physicians. Herold and Waldron (1985) found that reduced-load employees reported greater problems with physical and mental health. Note that Wethington and Kessler (1989) suggest poor health might have been the cause for adopting a reduced workload for some participants in the first place. On the positive side, Lee et al. (2002) found that 91% of reduced-load employees reported increased satisfaction with their balance between home and work as a result of adopting such an arrangement (see also Hill et al., 2004).

Perspectives on the Critical Factors for the Success of Reduced-Load Work Arrangements

Thus, evidence suggests that reduced-load arrangements may not have unilaterally positive or negative outcomes. Below, we discuss the four most commonly examined perspectives on the critical factors for the success of reduced-load work arrangements: the culture of the organization, the design of the reduced-load work arrangement, the work relationships of reduced-load employees, and the characteristics of the reduced-load employees.

The Organizational Culture Perspective

The organizational culture perspective emphasizes the importance of family-friendly organizational cultures in the success of reduced-load work arrangements. Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness (1999) found that employees were more willing to use work-family benefits when the organization had a supportive work-family culture (i.e., managers support employee work-family balance, there is a lack of negative consequences for utilizing work-family policies/practices, and there are few organizational expectations about employee time that interfere with work-family balance). Lee et al. (2002) also found that one of the most commonly cited critical factors in the success of reduced-load arrangements was an organization with employee-centered values.

The Design Perspective

Additionally, research has emphasized the importance of the design of reduced-load work arrangements. There is evidence that reduced-load work arrangements often are not well linked to the way work is designed and carried out (Bailyn, 1993; Hochschild, 1997). For example, there may be misconceptions and a lack of information about the very nature of “reduced load” in managerial and professional positions. In such jobs, full-time typically means 45–55 hours per week, with norms of

working even more hours (60–80) not unusual (Lee et al., 2000). However, the United States defines part-time work as less than 35 hours per week (Nardone, 1995). Thus, there may be confusion regarding how many hours of work per week “reduced load” translates to for professional and managerial employees. For example, Lee et al. (2002) found that 69% of professionals and 11% of managers in their study reported working more hours than they were contracted to work in their reduced-load arrangement (termed “work load creep;” p. 214). When arrangements are not designed to consider the ambiguous nature of managerial and professional work, their effectiveness may be limited. Additionally, the design of reduced-load work arrangements may fit better with certain types of work than others. Lee et al. (2002) found that project-based work and support work were more easily translated into effective reduced-load work arrangements.

The Work Relationships Perspective

This perspective highlights the importance of the work relationships of reduced-load employees for the success of their reduced-load work arrangements. Lee et al. (2002) found that the most frequently mentioned factor facilitating the success of reduced-load work arrangements was the supervisor of the reduced-load employee. The colleagues and work team of the reduced-load employees also were frequently mentioned as critical factors for success in the Lee et al. (2002) study.

The Individual Characteristics Perspective

This perspective emphasizes the importance of the characteristics possessed by reduced-load employees for the success of their arrangements. Lee et al. (2002) found that

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individuals with strong performance records and those who were very flexible in responding to work demands were seen as most likely to be successful in reduced-load work arrangements. Further, some research has focused on the beliefs that employees hold about the negative repercussions of using reduced-load work arrangements. For example, Eaton (2003) reported that one-quarter of the participants in her study feared that they would face negative career consequences for using work-family policies and that policy availability was not helpful

unless employees felt free to use the policies (see also Allen, 2001). On the other hand, Grover and Crooker (1995) found that the mere existence of family-friendly policies was associated with greater commitment and lower turnover intentions (even for those who were not able to benefit from their use). Thus, individual beliefs about reduced-load work arrangements may impact their utilization and effectiveness. Note, however, that although we discuss the fear of negative repercussions as a characteristic of individual employees, it is likely to be influenced by the organizational culture and the design of reduced-load arrangements.

Summary

Overall, there is evidence to suggest that reduced-load work arrangements may not always yield results valued by HR managers (including enhanced performance, decreased turnover, and increased well-being). In general, the four perspectives presented in this section suggest that this practice will be successful under some conditions but not others. An understanding of these conditions has been identified as a critical gap in the literature on reduced-load work arrangements (e.g., Barnett & Gareis, 2002). The purpose of this study is to examine these critical factors from the unique perspective of the HR manager.

The HR Manager Perspective on Critical Factors for Success

Although the assumption generally is made that HR managers play a critical role in ensuring the adoption and success of family-friendly policies and practices such as reduced-load work arrangements, relatively little research has focused on their perspectives. HR managers are often called upon to design, implement, promote, maintain, and evaluate reduced-load work arrangements. Among the complex roles that HR managers may play are ensuring that reduced-load arrangements are aligned with the strategic goals of the organization, managing organizational change efforts to instill an organizational culture that supports alternative ways of working, overseeing the performance of reduced-load employees and their work teams to ensure that quality standards are met, and developing training programs that support the supervisors of reduced-load employees (Ulrich, 1997). These roles involve efforts at many levels of the organization and interactions with many different organizational stakeholders. Our study takes the unique vantage point of HR managers to examine the impact of individual employee, interpersonal, and organizational dynamics on the effective implementation of reduced-load work arrangements.

Method

Sample and Data Collection

The current study fills a critical gap in the literature: examining the perspectives of HR managers on critical factors in the success of reduced-load work arrangements. The data for this study were collected by Lee, MacDermid, and colleagues from 1996 to 1998. This time period is critical to understanding reduced-load arrangements. Prior to 1996, reduced-load arrangements were not widely accepted and were not often publicized. Thus, little knowledge was accumulated by HR managers regarding the factors that influence their success. By the year 2000, reduced-load arrangements started to be

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viewed as a source of competitive advantage across organizations, and thus a willingness to share information regarding the critical factors for the success of such arrangements on the part of HR managers declined.

In the current study, we conduct original analyses of the HR manager interviews. The HR manager interviews were utilized in the Lee et al. (2002) study to help determine whether the reduced-load work arrangements were working well or badly, overall. No specific analyses were conducted on the HR manager interviews by themselves, as a subset of the data. Additionally, HR manager perspectives on the critical factors for success were not examined.

The first author of the current article conducted original content analysis of individual, confidential in-depth interviews with 52 HR managers in 39 companies in which at least one interview with an HR manager was conducted. Wherever possible, the HR managers interviewed were those with direct responsibility for work-life initiatives in the firm; often they had titles like Manager, Work-Life Programs. In cases where no individual was dedicated to this area, we interviewed the HR manager most knowledgeable and involved.

Broadly, interviews focused on the HR managers' perspectives on their organizations' approaches to work-life issues, the existence of formal work-life policies and programs, and the impetus for establishing such initiatives. HR managers were also asked whether their organization had any policies/practices regarding reduced-load work arrangements and, if so, why such programs were initiated. Importantly, HR managers were asked about the factors that contributed to reduced-load work arrangements working well or poorly. Their responses to this question form the basis of the current article (see Appendix). It is important to note that the HR managers were not provided with a definition of "success" and therefore were able to define "success" from their own perspectives (with the goals and responsibilities that this role entails). We have found no study to date other than Lee et al. (2002) that has directly addressed HR

issues related to the implementation of reduced-load work.

Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and primarily were conducted in person, with the rest being conducted over the phone. Each interview was recorded using an audio device and transcribed verbatim (see Lee et al., 2000, for additional methodology on this large-scale qualitative study of the experiences of 87 reduced-load managers, professionals, and multiple stakeholders ranging from the incumbent to the spouse to coworkers to managers). The complete study entailed hundreds of interviews on the experiences of organizational members regarding the effects of reduced-load work arrangements.

The current sample consisted of 39 companies. Eight companies had two HR managers interviewed, one company had three HR managers interviewed, and one company had four HR managers interviewed (with the rest having one interview per organization). When more than one HR manager was interviewed within the same company, they were either from distinct divisions of the company (e.g., headquarters in a major city versus a research division in the suburbs) or because the HR managers played unique roles within the organization (e.g., work-life manager versus HR generalist). Demographic data were not collected for a majority of the HR managers; therefore, demographic information is not described here. Additionally, those cases in which the manager of the target reduced-load employee also happened to be an HR manager were not analyzed for the current study, because the content of the interview questions asked of those HR managers focused primarily on their supervisory role in the reduced-load work arrangement.

Generally, the 39 participating companies were large, averaging more than 48,000 workers. The organizations in this study represented a number of different industries

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within the United States and Canada. Ten of the 39 companies were in the manufacturing sector (25.6%), and seven were in the financial industry (17.9%). Five companies were in telecommunications (12.8%), and four were in the professional and management services sector (10.2%). Three companies were in consumer goods (7.7%), and three were government owned or regulated (e.g., utilities; 7.7%). Two companies each were in natural resources, pharmaceuticals, and hotel and food (5.1% each). One company was in the health care sector (2.6%).

Note that the analyses for this article are analyzed at the individual HR manager level, rather than at the organizational level, as described below.

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Analyses

Analyses of the qualitative data focused on identifying content relevant to the HR managers' perspectives about the factors critical to the success of reduced-load work arrangements. The first author reviewed all data in each verbatim HR transcript and extracted any relevant text to an external data file.

Sections of the text that contained information about multiple success factors were broken into separate phrases, each corresponding to a single success factor.

For example, if the transcribed quote read, "The success of a reduced-load arrangement depends on having a supervisor who is supportive and a really conscientious employee," this quote would be divided into the direct quote phrases "supervisor who is supportive" and "really conscientious employee." There were a total of 196 such phrases extracted by the first author of the article. Note that each interview with an HR manager was treated as a unique data source, even though some organizations had more than one HR manager included in the study (because we were interested in the opinions of the HR managers

themselves, rather than drawing organization-level conclusions).

These phrases were then grouped by the first author into five categories: (a) those related to characteristics of individual employees working a reduced load, (b) those related to characteristics of the managers or supervisors of the reduced-load employees, (c) those related to work-unit relationships or processes, (d) those related to the design or structure of the reduced-load job itself, and (e) those related to characteristics of the organization, the HR department, or the HR manager. Next, a second coder (a research assistant naïve to the purpose of the study) read and coded the direct-quote phrases into these five categories. The first author and the second coder disagreed on the classification of 27 out of the 196 quotes (13.8%). The quotes upon which the two coders disagreed were not examined further.

After this initial coding, the first author grouped the quotes from each of the five categories into subcategories reflecting similar factors influencing the success of the reduced-load arrangement using an iterative process in which categories were created and refined. For example, within the area of quotes referring to reduced-load employees, some quotes referred to the talent and ability of the reduced-load employee, whereas others referred to self-regulatory behaviors of the employee. The first author labeled and described the subgroups that she formed (see Table I). This table was then provided to the second coder, who categorized all phrases into the subcategories described in the table. The second coder matched the subcategory of the quote for 144 out of 169 quotes (85.2%).

The two coders then discussed those 25 quotes on which there was disagreement regarding the subcategory that each quote fell into. Each coder gave her reason for putting each quote in a particular subcategory. Based on the reasons, the coders agreed upon a subcategory for 21 out of the 25 quotes. The coders did not perceive a need to refine the subcategories at this point. However, for the remaining four quotes, no agreement on subcategory could be reached (these quotes were

TABLE I Categories for Coding Direct Quotes**1. Those related to characteristics of individual employees working a reduced load**

- 1a. High Talent and Top Performers: The ability and performance of the reduced-load employee (e.g., smart, high performer)
- 1b. Proactive Personality and Flexible Attitudes: The personality and attitudes of the reduced-load employee (e.g., flexible, open, mature, realistic)
- 1c. High Commitment and Extra Effort: The commitment level and effort put in by the reduced-load employee (e.g., works hard, willing to do extra work when necessary, committed)
- 1d. Self-Regulated Work Habits: The self-regulatory behaviors and working style of the reduced-load employee (e.g., organized, self-motivated, able to prioritize, asks for help when necessary)

2. Those related to characteristics of the managers or supervisors of the reduced-load employee

- 2a. Supportive and Effective Managerial Behaviors: The managerial behavior and style of the supervisor (e.g., manages effectively, supports the arrangement, plans ahead)
- 2b. Flexible and Understanding Supervisor Characteristics: The personality and attitudes of the supervisor (e.g., trusting, understanding, open-minded, realistic)

3. Those related to work-unit relationships or processes

- 3a. Conducive Team Characteristics: The characteristics of the team members of the individual working a reduced load (e.g., team commitment, team support, team flexibility)
- 3b. Effective Communication Processes: The communication process regarding the reduced-load arrangement (e.g., constant communication, effective communication)
- 3c. Positive Supervisor-Employee Relationships: The nature of the relationship between the reduced-load employee and his/her supervisor (e.g., a good relationship, an open relationship)

4. Those related to the design or structure of the reduced-load job itself

- 4a. The Fit of the Reduced-Load Arrangement: Certain types of work or certain jobs may be more or less conducive to reduced-load arrangements than others
- 4b. Clarifying the Arrangement and Planning Up Front: The importance of clearly defining and planning the reduced-load arrangement up front
- 4c. Reevaluate When Necessary: The importance of reevaluating the reduced-load work arrangement periodically or when it becomes necessary (e.g., adjusting or eliminating the arrangement if something is not working)

5. Those related to characteristics of the organization, the HR department, or the HR manager

- 5a. Human Resources: Characteristics of Human Resources or the HR manager (e.g., is the HR manager supportive, flexible; is HR helpful, effective)?
- 5b. Organizational factors: Characteristics of the organization or top leadership (e.g., organizational communication, policies, organizational culture)?

extremely vague). Therefore, those four quotes were not included in the final results. This yielded a final total of 165 quotes. Given the high rate of agreement between the second coder and the first author, we adopted the coding categories seen in Table I.

Results

We now describe our findings on HR managers' perspectives on critical factors in the success of reduced-load arrangements. Our results are organized according to the five

categories of important factors, by frequency of themes: (a) characteristics of individual employees working a reduced load, (b) the design or structure of the reduced-load job itself, (c) work-unit relationships or processes, (d) characteristics of the managers or supervisors of the reduced-load employees, and (e) characteristics of the organization, the HR department, or the HR manager.

Table II provides the number and percentage of quotes that fell into each of the five categories and subcategories. Our results indicate that HR managers were most likely

TABLE II Results: Quotes Falling Into Each Area and Subcategory

	N	Overall %^a	% of Category^b
1. Characteristics of individual employees working a reduced load	68	41.2%	
1a. High Talent and Top Performers	9	5.5%	13.2%
1b. Proactive Personality and Flexible Attitudes	20	12.1%	29.4%
1c. High Commitment and Extra Effort	18	10.9%	26.5%
1d. Self-Regulated Work Habits	21	12.7%	30.9%
2. Characteristics of the managers or supervisors of the reduced-load employee	24	14.5%	
2a. Supportive and Effective Managerial Behaviors	12	7.3%	50.0%
2b. Flexible and Understanding Supervisor Characteristics	12	7.3%	50.0%
3. Work-unit relationships or processes	30	18.2%	
3a. Conducive Team Characteristics	8	4.8%	26.7%
3b. Effective Communication Processes	16	9.7%	53.3%
3c. Positive Supervisor-Employee Relationships	6	3.6%	20.0%
4. Design or structure of the reduced-load job itself	31	18.8%	
4a. The Nature of the Reduced-Load Work	15	9.1%	48.4%
4b. Clarifying the Arrangement and Planning Up Front	11	6.7%	35.5%
4c. Reevaluate When Necessary	5	3.0%	16.1%
5. Characteristics of the organization, the HR department, or the HR manager	12	7.3%	
5a. Human Resources	8	4.8%	66.7%
5b. Organizational Factors	4	2.4%	33.3%
Total	165	100%	

Note. Main categories presented in bold. Subcategories presented below each main category.

^aThe number of the quotes in the category as a percentage of the total number of quotes (N = 165).

^bThe number of the quotes in each subcategory as a percentage of the quotes in the main category.

to regard characteristics of individual reduced-load employees as critical for the success of the arrangements (41.2% of the comments fell into this category). The next most frequently occurring comments related to work-unit relationships or processes (e.g., team characteristics, supervisor-employee relationships) and to characteristics of the design of the reduced-load arrangements (18.2% and 18.8% of the quotes, respectively). Next in importance were characteristics of the supervisor or manager, with 14.5% of quotes falling into this category. Finally, HR managers' comments about characteristics of the organization or HR accounted for the least number of comments (7.3%). We discuss in greater detail each of the five categories that emerged as important to the success of reduced-load arrangements.

Characteristics of Individual Employees Working a Reduced Load

As mentioned above, nearly half of HR managers' comments were associated with characteristics of the reduced-load employees themselves. Four major distinct characteristics of reduced-load employees were seen as critical for the effectiveness of reduced-load work arrangements. The most common type of quote about reduced-load employees focused on the importance of self-regulatory work habits (see 1d in Table II). Self-regulatory work habits refer to the ability of an individual to regulate, monitor, and adjust their work habits to meet their goals. In other words, HR managers believed that it was important for reduced-load employees to be organized and self-motivated, and to be able to manage their workload effectively. For example, one HR manager remarked, "Self-discipline is a big key to this," while another noted, "The discipline factor is a big piece of it." One HR manager commented, "You have to be very organized to make it all fit in," while another said, "You need highly organized people." Overall, the results suggest that HR managers view the self-regulatory skills and work habits of reduced-load employees as a critical factor in the success of reduced-load arrangements.

Nearly 30% of HR managers' comments regarding reduced-load employees were focused on their personality characteristics and attitudes (see 1b in Table II). In particular, HR managers felt that reduced-load employees need characteristics such as flexibility, maturity, and openness to be effective in reduced-load arrangements. For example, one HR manager commented that "someone who tends to be a little bit more flexible on their own personal style" is likely to be effective in a reduced-load position, while another highlighted the importance of flexibility by commenting that the reduced-load employee must be able to "operate in a way that may be different from how they've operated before." One HR manager pointed to the importance of maturity by saying, "So I think there is a maturity . . . that comes into account." Other HR managers noted the importance of other personality and attitudinal characteristics such as "a great sense of humor," "confidence," and, more broadly, "the right kind of attitude."

Additionally, HR managers noted the importance of reduced-load employees who have high levels of commitment and are thus willing to put in extra effort when necessary (see 1c in Table II). One HR manager commented that reduced-load employees who will say, "If you need me to come in, if you've got a meeting and everybody's here, and that's my day off, and that's the day you're going to schedule it, I'll come for a couple of hours" are likely to be the most effective in reduced-load positions. HR managers noted that it is helpful when reduced-load employees show "commitment to the job" and "commitment to making it [the reduced-load arrangement]" work. One HR manager stated, "A successful factor here is that employees will accomplish the work objective almost regardless of what it takes."

Finally, the least common category of comments was about the ability and per-

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formance of reduced-load employees (see 1a in Table II). These comments focused specifically on previous job performance and the intrinsic ability to be a high performer. The HR managers noted that reduced-load employees should be “very bright,” “very high achievers,” and have “a history of good, high performance.”

Work-Unit Relationships or Processes

A total of 18.2% of the total comments were associated with the importance of effective relationships in the work unit. Comments were divided into three subcategories: team characteristics, effective communication processes, and positive supervisor-employee relationships. With regard to team characteristics, nearly 30% of the HR managers' comments in this category were focused on the team of reduced-load employees (see 3a in Table II). In other words, these quotes focused on the coworkers of reduced-load employees. One HR manager commented, “I think it has a lot to do with teamwork. If you're in a team that's accepting the alternative work arrangement and everyone puts in the effort to make it work . . . It can't work if just the person on the alternative work arrangement wants to make it work.”

A second subcategory that HR managers focused on was the importance of effective communication processes. Over half of the comments in this area (see 3b in Table II) focused on the importance of high-quality and frequent communication. One HR manager commented on the importance of communication by noting, “Communication is really, really big, because if someone is working dif-

ferent hours, working from home, only working here 50% of the time, they need to still know what's happening and still be involved in projects that are happening.” Additionally, comments noting the importance of “open communication” and “frequent communication” were common.

Finally, HR managers addressed the importance of supervisor-employee relationships (see 3c in Table II). These quotes focused on the importance of the relationships between individuals working reduced loads and the supervisors directly responsible for overseeing their reduced-load arrangements. HR managers commented broadly that it is important for reduced-load employees to have a “good relationship with the supervisor.” One HR manager commented on the importance of the “right chemistry” between supervisors and reduced-load employees. Another noted the value of supervisors who are familiar with their reduced-load employees prior to the start of the arrangements, stating, “It's better if someone [has] established credibility with their supervisor at some point beforehand.” Although HR managers were not extremely concrete about the necessary components of an effective supervisor-employee relationship for an effective reduced-load arrangement, they nonetheless recognized its importance. Overall, the HR managers noted that the quality of relationships and communication between reduced-load employees and their main work stakeholders is critical for the success of reduced-load arrangements.

Design or Structure of the Reduced-Load Job

HR managers also made several remarks emphasizing that the design of reduced-load arrangements is critical to their success (18.8% of all quotes fell into this category). Three subcategories emerged. Of those three subcategories, the predominant theme was the suitability or fit of reduced-load work arrangements with the particular work context (see 4a in Table II). In particular, these quotes about fit address whether the arrangements are feasible and appropriate to the sit-

uations in which they are to be enacted. HR managers noted that there may be certain jobs or positions in which reduced-load arrangements do not fit with the goals of the team, department, or organization. According to one HR manager, “It is almost as simple as there are certain areas where it just doesn’t make sense.” Another HR manager commented, “There are probably some situations that might be a fit with the employee needs and not fit with the business.” In other words, the HR managers considered the type of work that would be conducted on a reduced-load basis critical to success. Creating a reduced-load arrangement for a job or position in which it is a poor fit is expected to result in an unsuccessful reduced-load arrangement.

Along a similar line, the second most common theme among comments associated with the design of reduced-load arrangements was the need to clarify expectations and plan the arrangements up front (see 4b in Table II). With regard to planning in advance, one HR manager commented:

A lot of it is the thought process up front—anticipating what are the different areas of responsibility, who are the different customers, who are the internal folks you have to make sure you have touched base with, what would be the impact of this arrangement on all those different parties, on the ability to get the results done, and discussions with that.

Another HR manager noted,

I think so much hinges on the rightness of the analysis at the beginning about the workability of a particular arrangement that somebody’s considering. The better that work is, the more careful the assessment of the ripple effects of a change, and the “what if” thinking so that you have your contingencies in place.

The HR managers also reported the importance of creating clarity around the

boundaries and structure of the reduced-load arrangements in advance. Clarity refers to being explicit about expectations and anticipating potential crunch points in advance. For example, an HR manager commented, “I think there needs to be clear expectations set forth, in writing, if possible, but certainly explicit in the oral agreements that they have, so the objectives need to be very clear.”

Finally, HR managers noted the importance of reevaluating reduced-load arrangements on a periodic basis or when necessary (see 4c in Table II). One HR manager noted one critical factor for success:

The ability to reevaluate it or evaluate it on an ongoing basis, so that you don’t let problems fester or sit there and then all of a sudden somebody says, “This is not working” when you haven’t had that dialogue throughout the program, to be able to have the chance to fix and tweak and work along with it.

Another HR manager commented, “Successful arrangements like this tend to be revisited. They are open-ended in terms that they are not signed and sealed forever.”

Characteristics of the Managers or Supervisors of Reduced-Load Employees

Many of the HR manager comments focused on the importance of the supervisor (14.5%). Supervisor characteristics were broken down into two categories reflecting supervisor characteristics (e.g., personality, attitudes; see 2b in Table II) and supervisor managerial behaviors (see 2a in Table II). While supervisor characteristics emphasized the stable personality, beliefs, and attitudes of the supervisor, supervisor managerial behaviors were more focused on the actual behavioral competencies that the su-

The HR managers also reported the importance of creating clarity around the boundaries and structure of the reduced-load arrangements in advance.

supervisor exhibits in managing a nontraditional work arrangement. There were an equal number of comments falling into each of these categories.

This HR manager noted that one important factor is "just a view from senior management, in this case being the president, that we're going to give this a try and see how it goes. And the first time something falls between the cracks, we aren't going to overreact and say, 'That's it. No more.'"

With regard to supervisor managerial behaviors, one example is an HR manager who noted that it is important to consider "the manager's capacity to manage something that's not traditional." With regard to managerial attitude and personality, HR managers commented on the specific supervisor traits and attitudes that help to make reduced-load arrangements successful. One HR manager commented that it is important to have an "understanding manager who realizes that somebody can get their work done either working from home or working fewer hours or maybe working different hours." HR managers also noted that the supervisors of reduced-load employees should be "understanding and . . . somewhat open-minded about how things should be done."

Characteristics of the Organization, the HR Department, or the HR Manager

Finally, 7.3% of the HR manager comments were related to broader contextual factors in the success of reduced-load arrangements. Of these comments, two-thirds were associated with the characteristics of the human resource department and HR managers that are influential in the success of reduced-load arrangements. One HR manager noted that it is important that HR "offer[s] the tools that are necessary" for implementing reduced-load work arrangements. Another HR manager commented about the HR role in the creation of a manual (or guide) for the implementation of reduced-load arrangements, noting:

That was part of our strategy in making it one guide. I know some organizations have created two: one for managers, one for employees. We again felt that didn't support what we were philosophically trying to accomplish here. There shouldn't be a sense of secrets. So by creating one guide, the managers got to see what we were expecting of employees, and the employees got to see what the manager was going to have to wrestle with too.

Finally, one-third of the comments in this category referred to organizational factors that influence the success of reduced-load work arrangements (see 5b in Table II). One HR manager pointed out the importance of "clear focus from the top" of the organization. Another noted the critical role of organizational leadership. This HR manager noted that one important factor is "just a view from senior management, in this case being the president, that we're going to give this a try and see how it goes. And the first time something falls between the cracks, we aren't going to overreact and say, 'That's it. No more.'"

Discussion

The results reported here on HR managers' views of critical factors in the success of reduced-load work arrangements provide a unique perspective on effective implementation of this alternate way of working. While individual characteristics were the most commonly identified critical factor for success, issues related to work-unit relationships and the design of the reduced-load arrangements, as well as organizational characteristics, also were identified as important by the HR managers.

We now present a discussion of how the findings here contribute to the existing literature and propose important directions for future research. Finally, we provide eight key takeaways for HR managers based on our results and suggest actions that HR managers can take to enhance the likelihood that reduced-load arrangements in their organizations are successful.

Contribution to the Existing Literature and Directions for Future Research

One major gap that this study fills is the in-depth examination of this question from the perspective of the HR manager. We have argued that HR managers have a unique perspective within the organization regarding reduced-load work arrangements due to the wide variety of roles that they may play in relation to these arrangements. By focusing on their perceptions of the critical factors for the success of reduced-load arrangements, we add to the existing literature that seeks to understand how and why some alternative work arrangements are successful while others are not.

We now discuss the ways in which our findings converge with and diverge from the four most common perspectives on the critical factors for the success of reduced-load work arrangements described in the introduction. We noted that one common theme in existing research is the importance of the organizational culture. In the current study, however, the HR managers did not strongly emphasize the organizational factors that influenced the success of reduced-load arrangements. The HR managers placed a greater emphasis on the skills, abilities, and personality characteristics of important individual stakeholders in reduced-load arrangements (e.g., reduced-load employees, their supervisors, and their coworkers). It is important to note the possibility that the HR managers' emphasis on individual characteristics (as opposed to contextual factors) may be the result of attribution errors rather than due to the relative weight that individual and situational effects have on the effectiveness of reduced-load work arrangements (Gilbert & Malone, 1995).

Additionally, prior researchers have recognized the fact that reduced-load work arrangements are not always designed in ways that are well aligned with the requirements of the job or the way work is conducted (Bailyn, 1993; Hochschild, 1997). Similarly, comments about the design and structure of reduced-load work arrangements

were frequent in the current study, with a large number focused specifically on the fit between the reduced-load work arrangement and the design of the work being conducted by reduced-load employees. Further, prior research has noted that because professionals and managers do not necessarily work a pre-specified number of hours and usually work until the job is completed, there is ambiguity regarding what constitutes reduced-load work and what the expectations are for working beyond a predetermined number of hours (Barker, 1993; Lee et al., 2002). Along these same lines, the HR managers in our study commented that clarifying reduced-load arrangements and planning arrangements up front were important success factors due to the ambiguous nature of professional and managerial work.

As noted in the introduction, another theme in the existing research on the critical factors for the success of reduced-load work arrangements is the work relationships of the reduced-load employee. Note that similar to our findings, Lee et al. (2002) also found that the supervisors and work team of reduced-load employees were viewed as important. The current study adds to these results by emphasizing the importance of effective communication among all key stakeholders, more specifically.

Prior research also emphasized the importance of the reduced-load employees' individual characteristics. Similar to Lee et al. (2002), the current study found that the characteristics of individual employees working reduced loads were viewed as very important by HR managers. Both the Lee et al. (2002) study and the current study identified flexibility as an important personal attribute of reduced-load employees. However, the respondents in the Lee et al. (2002) study most strongly emphasized the importance of a "strong performance record" (p. 216),

*...the HR managers
in our study
commented that
clarifying reduced-
load arrangements
and planning
arrangements up
front were important
success factors due
to the ambiguous
nature of
professional and
managerial work.*

whereas the current study found self-regulatory work habits to be more frequently reported as an important characteristic of reduced-load employees. Note that in the current study the HR managers did not emphasize beliefs about the repercussions of using a reduced-load arrangement on career success. Perhaps this is because the HR managers in the current study were focusing on why arrangements are successful once they are adopted, whereas a fear of negative repercussions might primarily be associated with an unwillingness to adopt a reduced-load arrangement in the first place.

We now have a more complete picture of the critical factors that influence the success of reduced-load arrangements because we have examined the unique perspective of HR managers.

The commonalities and differences between the current study and prior research highlight the importance of future research on this topic. We now have a more complete picture of the critical factors that influence the success of reduced-load arrangements because we have examined the unique perspective of HR managers. Two main areas for future research emerge from our findings. The first stream of research that we recommend is aimed at providing a deeper understanding of how, when, and why certain factors are critical to the success of reduced-load arrangements. Thus, researchers should attempt to uncover the circumstances

under which individual, team, departmental, and organizational characteristics influence the success of reduced-load arrangements. For example, researchers can ask: Which individual characteristics are the most important for the success of reduced-load work arrangements in unsupportive and supportive organizational contexts? What communication techniques make some teams generally more effective in supporting reduced-load work arrangements than others, despite the differences across individuals within those teams? These questions will help to develop a more in-depth understanding of the conditions that

influence the success of reduced-load work arrangements and allow practitioners to make better recommendations for the improvement of reduced-load work arrangements.

The second stream of research that we recommend focuses on the differing perspectives of various stakeholders (e.g., HR managers, supervisors, organizational leaders) on the critical factors for success of reduced-load arrangements. We noted that the HR managers in our study emphasized some critical factors that were not commonly mentioned in the existing literature and other factors that were mentioned frequently. Future research should investigate why different stakeholders may perceive different factors as critical to the success of reduced-load work arrangements.

For example, future research could examine why the HR managers in the current study emphasized self-regulatory work behaviors while past research has emphasized individual work performance level (e.g., Lee et al., 2002). Each stakeholder group may have unique "blind spots" that limit its ability to identify the critical factors for success seen by other stakeholders. Alternatively, each stakeholder group may believe that some factors are critical to the success of reduced-load work arrangements when in reality they are not vital. Understanding when and why perspectives differ will allow us to develop a more complete picture of successful reduced-load work arrangements, to help supervisors and HR managers identify reduced-load arrangements that are likely to be successful, and to support reduced-load arrangements that show risk factors for failure.

Key Takeaways for HR Managers

We next discuss the implications of our results for HR managers. We address implications of our findings in the form of eight takeaways that might be useful to HR managers in organizations wrestling with how to be most helpful around implementation of reduced-load work arrangements (see also Table III).

TABLE III Summary of Key Takeaways for Successful Reduced-Load Work Arrangements

- 1: Pay attention to characteristics of individual employees
- 2: Provide guidance to supervisors on the overall design and structure of reduced-load arrangements
- 3: Drive clarification of expectations and continuous reassessment
- 4: Facilitate communication processes among key stakeholders
- 5: Consider the dynamic team requirements of reduced-load arrangements
- 6: Address the challenges of supervising reduced-load employees
- 7: Support and promote culture change from the top
- 8: Capitalize on your unique vantage point

Takeaway 1: Pay Attention to Characteristics of Individual Employees

The most frequently occurring comment from HR managers about the success of reduced-load work had to do with personal qualities of the individuals wanting to work less. The observations suggested that individuals with self-regulated work habits and “proactive” personalities and flexible attitudes, who were also highly committed and tended to put forth extra effort, were those most likely to succeed. These findings have numerous implications for HR managers. HR managers will want to make sure that the immediate supervisors have the most discretion in making decisions about reduced-load arrangements, because they are likely to know the employees best. However, HR managers should oversee supervisor decision making to ensure that discrimination and favoritism are not influential in decisions regarding who has access to reduced-load work arrangements. HR managers also may query supervisors about the personal qualities of employees seeking to work reduced-load arrangements and engage in a dialogue about whether the individual employees either have or could develop the desirable qualities. HR managers also should communicate information about desirable individual characteristics that seem to facilitate success and encourage employees seeking reduced-load arrangements to do some self-reflection and even developmental work to acquire some of the qualities identified as

critical for the success of reduced-load arrangements.

Takeaway 2: Provide Guidance to Supervisors on the Overall Design and Structure of Reduced-Load Arrangements

The second most frequently occurring kind of comment from HR managers on critical success factors had to do with the design or structure of reduced-load arrangements. Yet, at this point, we have a limited understanding about what types of jobs are most amenable to reduced-load work arrangements. Therefore, HR managers may not want to develop broad policies regarding which positions are allowed to be worked on a reduced-load basis. Instead, HR managers should facilitate discussions with reduced-load employees and their supervisors regarding how the design of the job influences the ability to perform it effectively on a reduced-load basis. In particular, potential challenges due to the constraints of positions that are likely to arise must be addressed. HR managers must address the complexities of reducing the workload of reduced-load employees, not simply reducing the hours that they are expected to be in the office. For example, project-based workers may need to be given fewer projects and managers fewer subordinates to oversee. In other cases, work may be delegated to coworkers and subordinates, and they must be provided with the training necessary to take on new responsibilities. Ad-

dress the fit between reduced-load work arrangements and the jobs that are being reduced can be a critical function of HR managers. When arrangements and job design are misaligned, it is less likely that reduced-load arrangements will be successful.

Takeaway 3: Drive Clarification of Expectations and Continuous Reassessment

Additionally, HR managers noted the importance of clarifying and reevaluating reduced-load arrangements when necessary. It is important that HR managers recognize, discuss, and facilitate the clarification and reevaluation of reduced-load work arrangements. HR managers can work directly with reduced-load employees and their supervisors to clarify the nature and boundaries of reduced-load arrangements before they begin. In addition to clarifying the more technical aspects of the arrangements (e.g., hours worked, salary, benefits), HR managers may help to clarify how challenging or ambiguous situations will be handled (e.g., what will you do if there is an important meeting on a day that you are not in the office? Will you answer your cell phone at home?). Additionally, HR managers play an important role in driving periodic reevaluation of arrangements, whether they are going smoothly or challenges are emerging. If either reduced-load employees or their supervisors are experiencing difficulty, HR managers can mediate discussions regarding such difficulties and provide a safe environment for parties to share their opinions. Overall, because reduced-load employees and their supervisors may be reluctant or unaware of the need to address complex issues associated with

working a reduced-load arrangement (either proactively or once challenges arise), HR managers have a critical role in driving the up-front clarification and the reevaluation of arrangements.

Takeaway 4: Facilitate Communication Processes Among Key Stakeholders

Many HR managers commented on the importance of communication. HR managers have an important role in facilitating communication among the various stakeholders of reduced-load (or potentially reduced-load) employees. Additionally, reduced-load arrangements can be designed in such a way that encourages or requires regular communication. For example, regularly scheduled sit-down meetings between supervisors and reduced-load employees can become a contingency of maintaining reduced-load arrangements. Further, given the mixed evidence regarding the benefits and challenges associated with reduced-load employment, HR managers should facilitate proactive communication with both reduced-load employees and their supervisors about the challenges that they will face. Providing both parties with realistic expectations about the situation may allow them to avoid holding overly optimistic expectations about the arrangement as well as to develop coping strategies and contingency plans that will allow them to overcome the challenges of reduced-load work and take advantage of its many potentially positive opportunities.

Takeaway 5: Consider the Dynamic Team Requirements of Reduced-Load Arrangements

A number of the comments about work-unit characteristics had to do with the team members or coworkers of reduced-load employees. HR managers should acknowledge and address the fact that reduced-load work arrangements do not occur in a vacuum. When reducing the workload of one employee, other employees may be asked to take on additional

work. Additionally, reduced-load employees will be physically present in the office less frequently, thus decreasing their face-to-face availability to their team members. Thus, HR managers can take steps to make the transition easier for the coworkers of reduced-load employees and to make the arrangements positive and sustainable for all employees.

Such steps may take a number of different forms. HR managers may meet with the coworkers of the reduced-load employees to discuss questions, concerns, and specific plans. Additionally or alternatively, HR managers may advise reduced-load employees (particularly if the employee is in a managerial role) and/or their supervisors to prepare them to engage in important conversations with coworkers. HR managers must be prepared to address feelings of injustice on the part of coworkers if some employees (but not others) are allowed to work a reduced load. Some employees may have feelings of injustice when workload is reassigned to non-reduced-load employees. Although these challenges are formidable, HR managers are well served by proactively acknowledging and addressing the dynamic team issues that arise when one employee begins a reduced-load work arrangement.

Takeaway 6: Address the Challenges of Supervising Reduced-Load Employees

As noted above, HR managers also focused on the supervisors' behaviors and their characteristics associated with overseeing reduced-load arrangements. Although this result suggests that the characteristics of reduced-load employees themselves are more critical to the success of the arrangements than the supervisors of those employees, there is nonetheless evidence that some supervisors may be better prepared to manage reduced-load work arrangements than others. Given this situation, HR managers can help guide reduced-load employees seeking more effective managers. However, they are also well positioned to advise supervisors on how to approach managing reduced-load employees. Or HR managers

may design training or orientation programs for supervisors of reduced-load employees or facilitate networking among supervisors with and without experience overseeing reduced-load employees.

Takeaway 7: Support and Promote Culture Change From the Top

Some HR managers commented on the importance of top leadership and the overall culture of the organization in supporting and promoting reduced-load work arrangements. Given these comments, it is important for HR managers to recognize the importance of clear support for reduced-load policies and practices from the leadership of organizations. Such support is expected to result in a broad culture change in which individuals recognize and respect the value of reduced-load work arrangements (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999).

While culture change is certainly not easy, there may be steps that HR managers can take to encourage it. HR managers can share with organizational leaders the ways in which reduced-load arrangements help the organization to meet its strategic goals (e.g., reduction of turnover) and thus encourage leadership support for culture change. For example, having organizational leaders share their support for reduced-load work arrangements publicly (e.g., over e-mail, newsletter, or face-to-face) may facilitate a general shift in the prevailing mind-set regarding such arrangements. Additionally, organizational leaders who have had positive experiences working reduced-load arrangements or supervising them can share their experiences with others.

To the extent that HR managers help facilitate culture change, reduced-load

...it is important for HR managers to recognize the importance of clear support for reduced-load policies and practices from the leadership of organizations. Such support is expected to result in a broad culture change in which individuals recognize and respect the value of reduced-load work arrangements

arrangements may be perceived with a less negative stigma (e.g., less fear of negative repercussions for using such an arrangement). It is clear from the quotes provided here that HR managers believe the starting point for such culture change needs to begin with organizational leaders. Note, however, that organizational-level culture and leadership issues only accounted for a small portion of the total quotes in this study. Therefore, efforts focused on changing the overall culture may not be as critical as efforts focused on specific reduced-load employees, supervisors, and team interactions and communication.

Takeaway 8: Capitalize on Your Unique Vantage Point

The final takeaway from this study addresses the unique vantage point of HR managers in the organization. Note that while only a small percentage of the HR managers' comments focused directly on the role of the HR manager, these takeaway messages highlight the range and scope of a number of actions that HR managers may take to increase the likelihood of successful reduced-load arrangements—in the design, implementation, evaluation, and sustainability of reduced-load work arrangements.

The previous seven takeaways highlight the different ways that HR managers can get involved in the oversight of reduced-load work arrangements based on the data regarding the critical factors for the success of reduced-load work arrangements. This final takeaway serves as a reminder that HR managers are in a very unique position within

the organization to facilitate the success of reduced-load work arrangements. Because HR managers interact with a wide variety of stakeholders and may be involved with multiple cases of reduced-load work arrangements, they are in the position to see and create opportunities for change and growth within the organization. HR managers also have the challenging position of having to wrestle with a number of difficult questions that may arise (e.g., Should all employees have access to reduced-load arrangements? Are all supervisors qualified to manage reduced-load employees?). HR managers should recognize that they are in an important position to evaluate such questions and thus to ensure that reduced-load arrangements are implemented both fairly and successfully.

Conclusion

This study addresses the finding that reduced-load work arrangements may not always lead to positive individual and organizational outcomes by exploring the perspective of HR managers on what makes such arrangements most likely to succeed. We identify critical factors for the success of reduced-load arrangements and derive eight key takeaways for HR managers based on our results. While it is clear that more research is needed, this article provides an important step in helping HR managers increase the likelihood that reduced-load arrangements in their organization will be successful, while also recognizing some of the challenges associated with the design and implementation of such arrangements.

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APPENDIX Summary of Key Takeaways for Successful Reduced-Load Work Arrangements*Section 1 of Interview Protocol—Questions pertaining to work-life policies and programs*

Note: HR managers' responses to Question 12 from Section 1 provided the data for the current study.

Section 1: Questions pertaining to work-life policies and programs

1. Describe the approach that your organization has taken to work-life issues.
 2. Where has the motivation or impetus come from?
 3. What types of work-family programs or initiatives exist within your organization?
 4. At whom are these initiatives aimed? Or why were these programs developed?
 5. Who oversees the work-family programs/initiatives within your organization?
 6. What types of training do managers and supervisors receive for implementing these programs within their workgroups?
 7. Are managers and supervisors held accountable for the implementation of work-family policies and programs within their workgroups? That is, are they evaluated on their ability to assist their employees with these issues?
 8. In your opinion, how knowledgeable are employees of the work-life programs, policies, or initiatives that exist within your organization?
 9. How are work-life programs communicated to employees?
 10. Now turning more specifically to reduced workload for professionals and managers, is there a formal program or policy? Tell me how it is negotiated.
 11. As far as you know, what's the extent of reduced-load work among professionals and managers in the company?
 12. From what you have observed/experienced within this organization, what kinds of things make reduced-load arrangements work well or badly?
 13. From what you have seen and experienced within this organization, what are the short-term career implications of reduced load? The long-term implications?
 14. From what you know of the career advancement structure in the company, what are the barriers to upward mobility for managers who choose a reduced-load arrangement for a period of time early in their career?
 15. Do you think that fewer or more individuals are likely to adopt reduced-load arrangements in the short run? In the long run? Why?
 16. Do you see a future for reduced-load arrangements within your organization? If so, what do you think it is?
 17. What could other companies learn from the experience of this company with reduced-load work?
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