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The bad news and the good news: the long-term consequences of having used an alternative work schedule.

Margaret Padgett, Lynn Harland, Steven B. Moser

Over the past several decades, the demographics of the workforce have changed. The number of women in the workforce has risen from 43% in 1970 to nearly 60% in 2007, a level that has remained relatively constant since 1999 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). There has also been a substantial increase in the number of women with young children employed outside the home. In 1975, 47% of women with children were employed, whereas 71% of mothers were employed in 2007. This percentage is somewhat lower for married women with children (69%) than for single women with children (76%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Finally, the number of employees who are part of dual-career couples has risen. In 2006, 57% of married couples had income from both people, up from 44% in 1967. Among married couples with children, the percentage of couples in which both parents work is slightly higher, at 62% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). These changes in the structure of families have had numerous consequences for both employees and organizations. It is not surprising that these changes have made it increasingly difficult for working parents to juggle both the demands of work and the demands of their families. Research looking at these changes from the employee's perspective has addressed the interaction between work and family (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Mennino, Rubin, & Brayfield, 2005), focusing primarily on understanding the conflicts between work and family (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999, 2002).

These changes in the structure of families have also affected organizations. Organizations have faced increasing pressure to become more "family friendly" and to find ways to make it easier for employees to handle the demands of both work and family. Although employees may have originally been the source of these pressures, the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act in 1993 has created legislative pressure as well. As a result, organizations have implemented a variety of programs to help employees manage conflicting work and family demands. Family-supportive workplace programs include child care and elder care assistance, as well as alternative work arrangements (AWAs). In general, AWAs provide employees with greater flexibility in the scheduling of work (e.g., flextime, compressed work week), the number of hours worked (e.g., job sharing, reduced workload/part-time work), or in the location of work (e.g., telecommuting). The focus of this study is on AWAs because they have been found to be both widely available and frequently adopted by employees. For example, research by Galinsky and Bond (1998) found that 68% of organizations with more than 100 employees offered some type of flexible work scheduling. Pitt-Catsouphes (2000) found that 80% of businesses with fewer than 50 employees reported that at least some of their employees had schedule flexibility. And the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reported that 58% of organizations responding to their survey offered flexible work schedules, whereas 37% offered telecommuting (SHRM Foundation, 2001). These studies indicate that AWAs are fairly widely available to

employees. Furthermore, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008), nearly 28% of the workforce had some form of schedule flexibility in 2004, demonstrating wide-scale adoption by employees. AWAs have been especially popular among Big Four and other large public accounting firms because demanding work schedules, especially during the busy season, make it difficult for these firms to attract and retain qualified women (Almer, Cohen, & Single, 2003; Almer & Kaplan, 2002; Cohen & Single, 2001).

The purpose of this research is to examine the career consequences of adopting an AWA. However, rather than focusing on women currently using an AWA, we examined the consequences for a woman who has returned to a regular work schedule after having previously been on an AWA. As noted by Kossek, Barber, and Winters (1999), it is not uncommon for people to adopt an AWA on a relatively temporary basis (several months to several years) to deal with an important life transition or experience (e.g., birth of a child or long-term illness of a family member). Once the transition has been made or the experience has been resolved, the employee may choose to return to a regular schedule. Prior research (e.g., Cohen & Single, 2001; Frank & Lowe, 2003; Morris & Padgett, 2004; Rogier & Padgett, 2004) suggests that a woman who adopts an AWA may be viewed less favorably than a woman working a regular schedule. The aim of this study was to determine if negative perceptions of these women remain even after they return to a regular schedule.

Organizational Perspective on Alternative Work Arrangements

AWAs have been the subject of extensive research (cf. Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999; Glass & Finley, 2002, for reviews of this literature). Much of this research has focused on evaluating the effectiveness of AWAs. These studies have tended to assess effectiveness from the perspective of the organization using "hard" criteria such as employee performance/productivity, absenteeism, and retention and "soft" criteria such as employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Baltes et al. (1999) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of 31 experimental studies that assessed the effectiveness of two flexible work schedules (flextime and compressed work week). The effectiveness criteria examined included productivity, supervisor-rated performance, self-rated performance, absenteeism, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with the work schedule. Their results indicated that flextime schedules positively influenced employee productivity, absenteeism, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with the work schedule. Compressed workweek schedules had a positive effect on self-rated performance and both satisfaction measures but did not affect either productivity or absenteeism.

A more recent review by Glass and Finley (2002) reached similar conclusions about the effectiveness of flexible work schedules. They further concluded that flexible work arrangements enhanced organizational commitment (see also Grover & Crooker, 1995; Scandura & Lankau, 1997) and employee retention (see also Almer & Kaplan, 2002; Hannah, 1994; Hyland, 2000; Rodgers, 1992). Finally, organizations offering AWAs may also be more effective in attracting job applicants. As found by Rau and Hyland (2002), the availability of AWAs increased attraction to the organization for applicants with a

high level of role conflict, although they had no effect on attraction for applicants with low role conflict. Taken together, these studies suggest that there may be a number of benefits for organizations choosing to implement AWAs for their employees.

Employee Perspective on Alternative Work Arrangements

Although research from an organizational perspective is important and helps to provide a relatively tangible justification for implementing AWAs, they were originally developed as a mechanism to help employees achieve a better balance between their work and family lives. The extent to which they have been successful in achieving this goal is less clear. Furthermore, research suggests that there may be barriers that keep employees from adopting AWAs even when they are available. The relatively limited research from the employee perspective suggests that AWAs may not be as positive for employees as they are for organizations because there may be some unintended negative consequences for employees who choose to adopt them.

Beneficial consequences of adopting an AWA. A key reason that many employees (especially women) adopt an AWA is to help them better manage the demands of work and family (Sharpe, Hermsen, & Billings, 2002). Consistent with this, Frone and Yardley (1996) found that the perceived importance of family-supportive programs to employees was positively related to the extent of work-family conflict they experienced. Several studies have examined whether adopting an AWA does reduce work-family conflict. Although there are a few exceptions (e.g., Mennino et al., 2005; Secret & Sprang, 2001), the small number of studies that have examined the relationship between adopting an AWA and work-family conflict tend to confirm that individuals using AWAs experience less stress and work-family conflict. For example, Galinsky, Bond, and Friedman (1996) found that employees feel less stressed when they have more control over their schedules. Almer and Kaplan (2002) also found that employees on flexible schedules reported lower levels of burnout and role stress than employees on regular schedules. Meyer (1997) found that having schedule flexibility is associated with decreased work--family conflict, whereas Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, and Weitzman (2001) found that perceived (rather than actual) schedule flexibility improved work-family balance.

Barriers to adopting an AWA. Despite these benefits to employees, there are several reasons that employees may not adopt an AWA. Some studies have suggested that certain groups of employees have less access to AWAs than might be expected based on the general availability of AWAs. For example, Golden (2001) found that employees who are female, less educated, and non-White are less likely to have the opportunity to take advantage of flexible work schedules, whereas Swanberg, Pitt-Catsouphes, and Drescher-Burke (2005) found that employees in lower wage jobs, with less education, and doing hourly work had less access to AWAs. Consistent with these results, flextime users are more likely to be male (Presser, 1989), to be White, and to have higher education and income levels (Sharpe et al., 2002) and, among women, to have young children (Billings & Sharpe, 1999).

Furthermore, even if AWAs are available to employees, they may be reluctant to use them if they perceive that the work environment is not supportive of their use or if they believe using the AWA will have negative consequences for their career advancement. A number of studies have looked at the role of the organization's culture in the adoption of an AWA and most have concluded that a supportive culture (either support from the direct supervisor or coworkers or an organizational culture that is family friendly) is critical in the decision to adopt an AWA (e.g., Almer et al., 2003; Colton, 2004; Kossek et al., 1999) or that it influences employee outcomes associated with flexible schedule usage (e.g., Colton, 2004; Hyland, 2000; Lee, MacDermid, Williams, Buck, & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 2002). For example, Colton (2004) found that employees using AWAs experienced more positive work-to-family spillover when coworker support for using the AWA was high than when coworker support was low.

In a similar vein, employees may also be reluctant to adopt an AWA if they believe that doing so will negatively influence their career advancement. According to Hammonds, Furchgott, Hamm, and Judge (1997), "career derailment" is a common concern of employees who are using, or who are considering using, an AWA. Employees are concerned that they will be seen as less committed to their career if they adopt an AWA. They also fear that because they are not at the office during all normal business hours, they may be less visible to management and, thus, less likely to be chosen for promotions. Others have noted that AWAs typically change the nature of the work employees do, how much work they do, or both and, thus, may affect their career progression (Almer & Kaplan, 2000). For all of these reasons, employees who adopt an AWA may be seen as less suitable for promotion.

Only a handful of studies have examined the career consequences of adopting an AWA. This research generally supports the conclusion that individuals using an AWA may be viewed less favorably and, as a consequence, experience more negative career outcomes. For example, MacDermid, Lee, Buck, and Williams (2001) interviewed 78 professional women on a reduced workload schedule. She found that although these women believed that their performance had been unaffected by adopting an AWA (a perception confirmed by their supervisors), they nevertheless felt that they had given up some upward mobility, at least in the short term.

The results of several more rigorous experimental studies confirm this conclusion for a variety of different types of AWAs and for both men and women. For example, research suggests that both men and women who adopt reduced workload schedules may be seen as less desirable for work projects, less likely to advance, and more likely to leave the firm than employees on a regular schedule (Cohen & Single, 2001). Examining just women on a reduced workload schedule, Rogier and Padgett (2004) found that they were viewed as less dedicated to the job and as having less advancement motivation than women on a regular schedule. Dorsett (1999) found that parents who had adopted an AWA (part-time, flextime, or flexplace) were perceived to have less work orientation (i.e., job involvement and willingness to exert extra effort toward the job and career) than parents working full-time, although they were not perceived to be more family involved or as more likely to quit. Frank and Lowe (2003) found that the career

progression of individuals on AWAs (flextime and telecommuting) was expected to be more negative than for individuals on traditional schedules but that telecommuters were perceived more negatively than individuals on flextime. Finally, Morris and Padgett (2004) found that the reason employees adopt a flexible schedule is more important in determining how they are perceived than being on a flexible schedule per se. Specifically, they found that individuals who adopted a flexible schedule for child care reasons were perceived as being less committed to their job and to the organization, more committed to their families, and less productive on the job than individuals on a regular schedule, whereas individuals who adopted a flexible schedule to pursue graduate education were perceived no differently from individuals on a regular schedule. In summary, although these studies examined a variety of different AWAs and outcomes, they all suggest that there may be some unintended negative consequences for individuals who take advantage of AWAs. These individuals run the risk of being perceived as poor organizational citizens who are uncommitted to their jobs and therefore unworthy of promotion.

Hypothesis

Although some employees make use of an AWA on an ongoing (i.e., long term) basis, for others, the AWA is adopted on a more temporary basis (i.e., several months to several years) (Kossek et al., 1999). This is particularly likely to be the case for individuals who adopt a reduced workload AWA. Once the life transition or experience that initially created the need for the reduced workload is resolved, the employee may choose to return to full-time work. A question unanswered in the previous research is whether the negative perceptions of the employee's job dedication and desire to advance that might be engendered by the original adoption of the AWA will remain even after the individual returns to a regular schedule.

When examining the psychological processes involved in the person perception process, the recency effect predicts that an employee's most recent behavior will have the greatest influence on how others perceive her. Because the more recent behavior by the employee is her choice to return to a regular schedule (even though she could have remained on the AWA), this should exert more effect on others' perceptions of her than her previous behavior (her decision to adopt the AWA). Based on this reasoning, we would expect no differences in perceptions of the employee who has always been on a regular schedule and the employee who was previously on an AWA but has resumed a regular schedule. On the other hand, once impressions of people are formed, they are notoriously difficult to change and often are not changed even when the person's subsequent behavior is inconsistent with the initial impression. An employee who is perceived to be more committed to her family than to her job based on her initial decision to adopt an AWA may continue to be perceived this way even when she returns to a regular, full-time work schedule. This suggests that the woman previously on a flexible schedule would still be viewed less favorably than the woman on a regular schedule. Although both are possible, based on prior research on first impressions (e.g., Macan & Dipboye, 1988; Miller, Westerman, & Lloyd, 2004; Phillips &

Dipboye, 1989), we believe the latter is more likely. Therefore, we tested the following hypothesis in this study:

Hypothesis 1: A woman who has previously been on a reduced workload AWA but has returned to a regular schedule will be viewed less favorably (lower advancement motivation and advancement capability and less likely to be recommended for a promotion) than a woman who has always been on a regular work schedule.

Method

Participants

A convenience sample of MBA students from two large Midwestern universities participated in the study. Participation was voluntary and students were not given extra credit for their participation. Participants were recruited by our visiting MBA classes and requesting their participation in the research. Participation was requested from 125 students and all agreed to participate. Sixty-seven participants were male and 46 were female (12 did not identify their gender). An approximately equal number of participants were married (44%) and single (45%) and 23% had children. The median age of the participants was 26 years (range = 21-45). Most participants (84%) were employed full-time and 68% had supervisory experience.

Procedure

Data were collected during a regular class session. Students participated in groups ranging from 15 to 35 participants each. The researcher explained to participants that the purpose of the research was to determine how people make recommendations for promotion. After obtaining informed consent, the researcher provided the participants with the mock personnel file of the target employee. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (previous alternative schedule and regular work schedule only) based on the personnel file they received. Participants reviewed the information about the target and then completed a questionnaire assessing their perceptions of the target. They were asked to respond to the questionnaire as if they were the target employee's manager and were assessing the target's suitability for promotion. Because the majority of the participants had supervisory experience, they should have been familiar with, and capable of, making this type of judgment.

Stimulus Materials

Two sets of stimulus materials (the target employee's personnel file) were created. The independent variable was manipulated within these materials. The personnel file contained the target's resume from the time at which she was hired, the target's most recent performance evaluation, and information about the target's benefits. The target's resume and performance evaluation were the same in both sets of materials. According to the resume, the target person was a woman who had graduated from college with a

3.86 GPA and who had received several honors while in college. The materials indicated that the target had been employed by the accounting firm for about 5.5 years and was currently at the manager level in the firm. The most recent performance evaluation for the target contained numerical performance ratings on each of 21 job-related dimensions (e.g., work style, project management, and team orientation). These dimensions had ostensibly been rated by the target's supervisor on scales ranging from 1 (key strength) to 4 (a development need). The target received the highest rating on 5 of the 21 dimensions and the lowest rating on 2 of the 21 dimensions. Across all 21 dimensions, the target's average rating was 2.0, indicating that although the target had clear strengths, she also had room for improvement. In addition to the numerical ratings, the performance review indicated that the target had accomplished two of the prior year's three goals. Finally, the performance review described (in brief paragraphs) two key strengths and two weaknesses of the target. The performance review was intentionally designed to suggest that the target's overall performance was somewhat above average to avoid both floor and ceiling effects in participants' evaluations of the target person.

In addition to the resume and performance evaluation, the target's personnel file contained three pieces of information related to the target's benefits: two letters and a benefits election form. These materials varied depending on the experimental condition (regular work schedule or previous alternative schedule). The benefit election form included the benefits offered by the company with a check next to those chosen by the employee. One of the benefits included on the form was an alternative work schedule. In the control condition, the benefits election form indicated that the target worked a standard schedule. The two letters (one from the benefits administrator to the target and the other a response from the target) concerned a required change in the target's selection of a health insurance plan.

In the prior flexible schedule condition, the benefits election form indicated that the target had previously worked an alternative schedule but had returned to a regular schedule. The benefits election form included the date that the target began working the alternative schedule, the type of alternative schedule she worked (a reduced workload), and the date she returned to a regular schedule. These dates indicated that the target had worked a reduced workload schedule for 3 years and that she had returned to a regular schedule 6 months ago. The two letters included in the file concerned this change in the target's work schedule. The first letter, from the target to her supervisor, indicated that she had originally requested the reduced workload (a 4-day workweek schedule) because of the birth of a child and to enable her to care for an ill parent. It further said that she wanted to return to a regular schedule because her child was now in day care and her parent was fully recovered. The second letter was from her supervisor and confirmed her return to a regular work schedule.

To enhance the realism of the materials, the performance evaluation form was created after reviewing sample forms from several accounting firms. In addition, the options included on the benefits election form were developed after consulting with a manager working in human resources. A reduced workload schedule was chosen because this

type of schedule is widely available in accounting firms (approximately 79% of accounting firms offer it) and because use of this type of schedule has been increasing (Baldiga & Doucet, 2001). This type of schedule has also been used in several previous studies on the career consequences of alternative work schedules (Cohen & Single, 2001; MacDermid et al., 2001; Rogier & Padgett, 2004).

Dependent Variables

Twelve attributes likely to be seen as relevant in assessing an employee's career advancement potential were measured on the questionnaire. These attributes were based on some of the concerns about AWAs that have been identified in the literature (e.g., Almer et al., 2003; Cohen & Single, 2001; Hammonds et al., 1997) as well as our judgment about the possible consequences of using an AWA. We selected employee attributes that we believed might be negatively affected by the adoption of an AWA, including motivation, ambitiousness, leadership ability, commitment, drive, dependability, and competence. These items were all measured on 5-point scales with the endpoints labeled very poor (1) and very good (5). There was also a single item assessing the likelihood that the participant would actually recommend promoting the target employee. This item was measured on a 5-point scale with the endpoints being very unlikely (1) and very likely (5).

Results

Factor Analysis

Because we had no a priori hypotheses concerning the dimensional structure underlying the variables measured on the questionnaire, we began by conducting an exploratory factor analysis on the dependent variables using a varimax rotation (Nunnally, 1978). Only factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 were retained. The resulting factor analysis produced two factors that, combined, accounted for 57% of the variance in the items. Based on the individual items that loaded on each factor, a factor label was developed for each factor. The first factor, labeled advancement motivation, captured the extent to which the target was perceived as being ambitious and as having the drive to advance. It included items such as motivation, commitment, ambitiousness, energy, and drive. The second factor, labeled advancement capability, captured the extent to which the target was perceived as having the ability and skills necessary to be successful. It included items such as competency, leadership ability, suitability for promotion, and intelligence.

Table 1 shows the items that made up each factor, the factor loading for each item, and the factor label. It also presents the mean and standard deviation for each item. The two scales created based on the results of the factor analysis became two of the dependent variables used in the analyses. The third dependent variable was the single item, promotion recommendation. Coefficient alphas were computed for the two scales and are presented in the diagonals of Table 2. As can be seen, scale reliabilities are at an acceptable level (Nunnally, 1978). Table 2 also includes the overall mean and standard

deviation, the means and standard deviations for each work schedule condition, and the correlations between the dependent variables.

Preliminary Analyses

We did not expect participant characteristics to influence perceptions of the target employee. However, because many individuals who adopt AWAs do so to care for children (Cohen & Single, 2001; Sharpe et al., 2002), we wanted to see if participants with and without children responded differently to the target. We also wanted to see if participants who are themselves using an AWA responded differently to the target than participants who have not adopted an alternative work schedule, t tests comparing participants with and without children and comparing participants who are and are not using an alternative work schedule were computed for each dependent variable. Results for these t tests are shown in Table 3. Although there were significant differences between participants who had children and those who did not on perceptions of the target's advancement capability, there were no differences for perceptions of the target's advancement motivation or for the promotion recommendation. Comparing the means for advancement capability revealed that individuals without children perceived the target to have greater advancement capability than individuals with children. When comparing participants working an alternative schedule with those working a traditional schedule, we found a similar pattern of results.

There was a marginally significant difference for advancement capability but no differences for advancement motivation or promotion recommendation. Participants who have themselves adopted an AWA tended to rate the target higher on advancement capability than did participants on a regular work schedule. Of more importance, subsequent analyses of variance (ANOVAs) showed that neither of these variables interacted with the target's work schedule to influence perceptions of the target's advancement motivation or advancement capability or her likelihood of being recommended for a promotion. As a result, these variables were not included in the analyses to test our hypothesis.

Hypothesis Testing

We hypothesized that a woman who has returned to a regular work schedule after having previously been on an AWA would be viewed as having less advancement motivation and advancement capability and would be less likely to be recommended for a promotion than a woman who has never worked an alternative schedule. This hypothesis was tested using separate ANOVAs for each of the three dependent variables. Although we did not have any specific hypotheses relating to the gender of the participant, participant gender was also included as an independent variable in the analysis because of the possibility that men and women might respond differently to an individual who has been on an alternative work schedule. Because women with children are more likely to adopt AWAs than are men (Cohen & Single, 2001; Sharpe et al., 2002), they may be more sympathetic to another woman on an alternative schedule and

rate her more highly than a man would. Support for our main hypothesis would be shown by a significant main effect for the work schedule independent variable.

Results did not support our hypothesis (see Table 4). Although the work schedule main effect was significant for advancement motivation, $F(1, 101) = 4.24$, $p = .04$, results were in the opposite direction from that hypothesized. The schedule main effect was also marginally significant for advancement capability, $F(1,101) = 3.29$, $p = .07$, and promotion recommendation, $F(1, 101) = 2.75$, $p = .10$, but, again, the results were not in the direction hypothesized. A woman who was previously on an AWA but who had returned to a regular schedule was actually perceived as having greater advancement motivation and advancement capability than a woman who had never been on an alternative work schedule. She was also somewhat more likely to be recommended for a promotion than a woman who had never been on an alternative work schedule.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Factor Loadings for Items

Item	*N*	*M*	*SD*	Factor Loading[a]
Factor 1: Advancement motivation				
1. Motivation	111	4.29	.76	.821
2. Commitment	111	4.23	.68	.654
3. Inner drive	111	4.23	.85	.825
4. Dependability	111	4.13	.73	.63
5. Ambitiousness	111	3.86	.80	.656
6. Level of energy	111	4.10	.71	.779
Factor 2: Advancement capability				
7. Leadership ability	111	3.70	.68	.705
8. Confidence	111	3.77	.70	.613
9. Competence	111	4.15	.68	.684
10. Suitability for promotion	111	3.85	.68	.702
11. Intelligence	111	4.17	.73	.697
12. Advancement potential	111	3.95	.73	.715

a. Factor loadings are based on a varimax rotation.

Participant gender did not affect the results. The gender main effect was not significant for any of the dependent variables: advancement motivation, $F(1, 101) = 1.3$, $p = .26$; advancement capability, $F(1, 101) = .1$, $p = .76$; and promotion recommendation, $F(1,101) = .27$, $p = .61$. Furthermore, the schedule by gender interaction was not significant for any of the dependent measures: advancement motivation, $F(1, 101) = .8$, $p = .37$; advancement capability, $F(1, 101) = .33$, $p = .57$; and promotion recommendation, $F(1, 101) = .48$, $p = .49$.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential long-term consequences of using an AWA. In particular, we wanted to find out whether a woman who had returned to a regular schedule after having previously been on an AWA would be perceived

differently from a woman who had always been on a regular schedule. Although the recency effect would predict that there would be no differences between the two schedule conditions (because both women are now on a regular work schedule), we thought it was more likely that having previously used an AWA would create a long-lasting negative impression that would result in the employee being viewed more negatively, even after returning to a regular schedule, than a female employee who had always been on a regular schedule. What we did not anticipate was the possibility that the woman who had previously been on an AWA would actually be viewed more positively than the woman on a regular schedule. Yet, this is what we found. Specifically, results indicated that the woman who had previously been on an AWA was perceived to have significantly greater advancement motivation and advancement capability than the woman on a regular schedule. She was also somewhat more likely to be recommended for a promotion.

One possible explanation for this unexpected finding stems from our use of a reduced workload AWA as compared to flextime or flexplace options. With both flextime and flexplace AWAs, employees typically continue to work a full-time schedule and merely adjust when or where those hours are worked. However, unlike these two options, a reduced workload AWA, by definition, involves working fewer hours (in our study, the target worked 20% fewer hours), which then requires a reduction in job responsibilities. Thus, the voluntary decision to return to a regular, full-time schedule (and, therefore, to increase one's job responsibilities), in particular when there is no apparent pressure from the organization for this to occur, might be interpreted by observers (e.g., coworkers, supervisor) as evidence that the employee is unusually committed to her career and/or that she has advancement aspirations. It might even be interpreted as an indication that she did not originally want to reduce her work hours (because she is returning to a regular schedule as soon as she can) but felt that she had no choice given her personal situation. Furthermore, during a time of transition (having a child), when some women decide to leave the workforce, the target woman chose to continue working, although in a somewhat reduced capacity, which again might signal to observers that she has a very high level of commitment to her job and career. Attribution theory (Kelley, 1967) may partially explain this interpretation. Because some women choose to stop working when they have children and this woman did not (illustrating low consensus), observers should be more likely to attribute her decision to return to full-time work to internal causes, such as her possessing an unusually high level of commitment to her job and a desire to advance. The higher rating on advancement capability may be due to the belief that she must be very capable if she was able to handle several difficult personal situations and still continue to perform effectively on the job.

Table 2
Overall Means, Group Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Dependent Variables

	Overall		Prior Flexible Schedule		Regular Schedule				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
1. Advancement motivation	4.1	.59	4.3	.52	4.0	.62	.86		
2. Advancement capability	3.9	.51	4.0	.49	3.8	.52	.62***	.83	
3. Promotion recommendation	3.5	.82	3.7	.87	3.4	.75	.43***	.63***	—

Note: Numbers in diagonals of correlation matrix are coefficient alpha reliabilities for scales.
***$p < .01$.

Table 3
Preliminary Analyses: t Tests for the Effect of Participant Characteristics

Variable	*t*	*df*	Sign.
1. Children/no children			
Advancement motivation	−1.32	108	.191
Advancement capability	−3.38	109	.001***
Promotion recommendation	−1.48	113	.142
2. Alternative work arrangement/no alternative work arrangement			
Advancement motivation	1.28	84	.204
Advancement capability	1.68	84	.096*
Promotion recommendation	0.69	87	.493

*$p < .10$. ***$p < .01$.

It is interesting that participant characteristics (gender, whether participants had children, and whether participants used an AWA) did not influence the results. Although two of these variables had significant main effects for advancement capability, none of them interacted with the work schedule condition to influence perceptions of the target. Because prior research suggests that there is a relationship between gender, family composition, and use of AWAs (e.g., Billings & Sharpe, 1999; Presser, 1989; Sharpe et al., 2002), one might expect, through a "similar-to-me" effect, that women, employees with children, and employees who themselves used an AWA would be more sympathetic toward the target who had previously been on an AWA and, thus, rate her more highly, but we found no evidence of this. The finding that participant adoption of an AWA did not interact with work schedule to affect perceptions of the target contrasts with research by Frank and Lowe (2003), who found that type of work schedule only affected perceptions of the target for participants who were on a regular schedule. When participants who had adopted an AWA themselves were examined, the significant effect for work schedule disappeared. This inconsistency in findings may have occurred because in our sample, a fairly small number of participants were using an AWA. Similarly, the number of participants with children was small as well. Further research using a larger sample of AWA users and participants with children would help to clarify if, or how, these participant characteristics influence perceptions of employees who have adopted an AWA.

Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

Table 4
Analysis of Variance Results for Study Dependent Variables

Dependent Variable	*df*	*F*	Sign.
1. Advancement motivation			
Schedule	1	4.24	.042**
Gender	1	1.31	.255
Schedule × gender	1	0.80	.373
Error	101		
2. Advancement capability			
Schedule	1	3.29	.073*
Gender	1	0.10	.755
Schedule × gender	1	0.33	.567
Error	101		
3. Promotion recommendation			
Schedule	1	2.75	.10*
Gender	1	0.269	.605
Schedule × gender	1	0.477	.491
Error	101		

*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$.

In comparison with the results of other research in this area (e.g., Cohen & Single, 2001; Rogier & Padgett, 2004), the findings from this study may be good news for employees. Although the results of previous studies suggest that women who adopt a reduced workload AWA may be seen as having less commitment to their jobs, as having less desire to advance, and as being less desirable colleagues while they are on the AWA, this study suggests that those negative outcomes may not be permanent. Furthermore, the results of this study suggest that, under some circumstances, employees who return to a regular, full-time schedule after having been on an AWA may actually be perceived more positively than employees who were always on a regular schedule.

Regardless of whether employees on, or previously on, AWAs are viewed more negatively or more positively, from a practical point of view, it suggests that there may be a need for organizations to better educate managers on how to fairly and accurately evaluate employees and assess their advancement potential. Evaluations of employees should be based solely on their job performance and should not be influenced by whether an employee is, or has been, on an AWA. It would also be worthwhile to educate managers on the benefits of making AWAs available to employees. These benefits include higher employee job satisfaction and performance as well as lower absenteeism and turnover (e.g., Baltes et al., 1999; Glass & Finley, 2002). If managers better understood the potential benefits of AWAs for the organization, they might be less likely to negatively evaluate employees who adopt them. Finally, it may be necessary to help managers develop effective strategies for implementing AWAs and dealing with the conflicts between employees that they can create. It is possible that part of the reason managers perceive employees who adopt AWAs less positively than employees on traditional schedules is because they blame these employees for creating the additional work that is required to implement the AWA. If managers felt more comfortable

implementing AWAs, adoption of an AWA might be less likely to influence their perceptions of the advancement potential of employees.

Our findings are suggestive that having previously adopted a reduced workload AWA may positively influence perceptions of women. It is not clear whether a similar result would occur for employees who use other types of AWAs (e.g., flextime or telecommuting) or for employees who take a leave of absence from work, or if they would occur for men. As suggested previously, because flextime and telecommuting usually do not involve a reduction in work hours, returning to a regular schedule after being on one of these AWAs may not have the positive effect on perceptions of career advancement potential that we observed with the reduced workload AWA. In addition, because the flextime and flexplace options are full-time options, they involve no reduction in pay, as is typical with a reduced workload. This makes it more likely that employees will adopt these AWAs on a long-term basis, again, unlike a reduced workload, which is more likely to be adopted as a temporary response to a specific event. These differences mean that the beneficial consequences of returning to a regular, full-time schedule may not generalize to other types of AWAs.

In contrast to flextime and flexplace AWAs, taking a leave of absence from work results in the employee's complete absence from the workplace for a period of time. Because of this, it is possible that any negative perceptions of employees that might exist while they are on the leave of absence would persist even after they return to the workplace. However, the reason for the leave of absence (like the reason for the reduced workload) could influence perceptions of the employee (Morris & Padgett, 2004). Taking a leave of absence (or reduced workload) to care for children or ill parents or to tour another country while a spouse is working there may be perceived differently from taking a leave to get additional education. The latter reason is less likely to result in negative perceptions of the employee's commitment to his or her career than the other reasons as found by Morris and Padgett (2004). Further research should examine the long-term consequences of using flextime and flexplace AWAs and leaves of absence as well as the effect of returning from these AWAs to a regular schedule to see if results similar to those found in this study occur. In studying these AWAs, it would be important to also vary the reasons for adopting these AWAs.

With respect to the gender of the individual on the AWA, most of the research so far has found no evidence that it interacts with work schedule to influence how the target is perceived (e.g., Cohen & Single, 2001; Frank & Lowe, 2003; Morris & Padgett, 2004), which suggests that male targets would be affected similarly. Studies examining just men (e.g., Cordeiro & Wayne, 2001) tend to confirm this conclusion. Nevertheless, further research using both male and female targets would be helpful to demonstrate this finding more conclusively.

Another interesting avenue for further research would be to examine the amount of time employees are on the AWA and the amount of time that has passed since they returned to a regular schedule to see if this influences how they are perceived by others. In this study, the target was on the AWA for 3 years and had been back on a regular schedule

for 6 months. It is possible that if the target had been on the AWA for a longer period of time before returning to a regular schedule, we would be less likely to find the positive effect on perceptions of the target that we did in this study. Similarly, we think it likely that the longer the target has been back on a regular schedule, the less likely the positive effect. Further research should examine both of these possibilities.

Limitations

Overall, the results of this study suggest that using a reduced workload AWA does not have long-term negative consequences for employees and may even have positive consequences. Nevertheless, our results should be interpreted with some caution because of several limitations in our study methodology. First, because of the experimental methodology employed, our results may not generalize to individuals who are actually using AWAs and to actual promotion decisions. Unlike in an actual organization, participants had limited information about the employee to use in making their judgments and had never actually interacted with the employee. Because of these differences, actual promotion decisions may be influenced less by the work schedule of the employee and, thus, may differ from the decisions made here. It is also possible that the participants in our study, given their relatively young age (median age = 26), may have had a difficult time putting themselves into the position of a manager evaluating an employee's suitability for promotion. This also could make their decisions less likely to be representative of actual promotion recommendations. This concern is lessened somewhat by the fact that 68% of our sample had supervisory experience and, thus, should have had some experience in making such assessments. Furthermore, preliminary analyses revealed that neither participant age (1) nor whether or not participants had supervisory experience had a significant effect on their responses. Although our findings are interesting, they should be accepted with caution until they are replicated in other studies and with managers having more extensive supervisory experience.

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Note

(1.) Although participant age had a significant correlation with advancement capability, it did not interact with schedule condition to influence responses on the dependent variables.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Factor Loadings for Items

Item	N	M	SD	Factor Loading (a)
Factor 1: Advancement motivation				
1. Motivation	111	4.29	.76	.821
2. Commitment	111	4.23	.68	.654
3. Inner drive	111	4.23	.85	.825
4. Dependability	111	4.13	.73	.63
5. Ambitiousness	111	3.86	.80	.656
6. Level of energy	111	4.10	.71	.779
Factor 2: Advancement capability				
7. Leadership ability	111	3.70	.68	.705
8. Confidence	111	3.77	.70	.613
9. Competence	111	4.15	.68	.684
10. Suitability for promotion	111	3.85	.68	.702
11. Intelligence	111	4.17	.73	.697
12. Advancement potential	111	3.95	.73	.715

(a.) Factor loadings are based on a varimax rotation.

Table 2 Overall Means, Group Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Dependent Variables

	Overall		Prior Flexible Schedule		Regular Schedule	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1. Advancement motivation	4.1	.59	4.3	.52	4.0	.62
2. Advancement capability	3.9	.51	4.0	.49	3.8	.52
3. Promotion recommendation	3.5	.82	3.7	.87	3.4	.75

	1	2	3
1. Advancement motivation	.86		
2. Advancement capability	.62 ***	.83	
3. Promotion recommendation	.43 ***	.63 ***	--

Note: Numbers in diagonals of correlation matrix
are coefficient alpha reliabilities for scales.
*** p <.01.

Table 3
Preliminary Analyses: t Tests for the Effect
of Participant Characteristics

Variable	t	df	Sign.
1. Children/no children			
Advancement motivation	-1.32	108	.191
Advancement capability	-3.38	109	.001 ***
Promotion recommendation	-1.48	113	.142
2. Alternative work arrangement/no alternative work arrangement			
Advancement motivation	1.28	84	.204
Advancement capability	1.68	84	.096 *
Promotion recommendation	0.69	87	.493

* p < .10. *** p < .01.

Table 4

Analysis of Variance Results for Study Dependent Variables

Dependent Variable	df	F	Sign.
1. Advancement motivation			
Schedule	1	4.24	.042 **
Gender	1	1.31	.255
Schedule x gender	1	0.80	.373
Error	101		
2. Advancement capability			
Schedule	1	3.29	.073
Gender	1	0.10	.755
Schedule x gender	1	0.33	.567
Error	101		

3. Promotion recommendation			
Schedule	1	2.75	.10 *
Gender	1	0.269	.605
Schedule x gender	1	0.477	.491
Error	101		

* p < .10. ** p < .05.