

***Talent, work and life:
Building a people and values oriented workplace***

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Changing technology, demographics and business models are affecting patterns of work in developed and developing countries, and the emerging skills of the future. As work evolves, companies and employees will have to deal with the blurring of traditional boundaries between work and family life, between offices and remote locations, between manager and employee, and between nationalities and cultures in the global economy.

Knowledge workers complain of a blurring line between the personal and professional aspects of their lives brought on by the same tools and technologies that promised to boost productivity and create more leisure time. Since these workers can be online, the expectation is they will be.

As work becomes more virtualized — performed anywhere, at any time, over the network — so will the structures, relationships and institutions designed to facilitate it. Almost every aspect of work must be reconsidered: when it gets done, by and for whom, where and for how long.

In the near future, the concept of “worker” and “employer” may sufficiently change so as to render the terms antiquated. As innovation occurs rapidly, skills and expertise change just as rapidly, creating more fluid relationships and work styles.

What does this mean for management? Many companies are already struggling to help managers who may never see most of their employees. In IBM, on any given day, over 40 percent of the workforce does not report to a traditional office. Advance that scenario to a world of ad hoc work agreements. What does that imply for benefits and other services traditionally offered by employers? What would it imply for workplace cultures? How does a company balance the needs of individuals with those of the organization, given the dispersed and shifting nature of its workforce? How does it cultivate a sense of belonging and loyalty that is at the heart of any group accomplishment?

Assuming that employers still select workers on the basis of skills and expertise, on what basis will workers choose who they work for? Will a company need to use a core set of values — what it is; what it hopes to accomplish in the communities in which it operates; how it conducts itself in its dealings — to convince highly talented workers to affiliate themselves with it?

Perhaps most intriguingly, what will these changes portend for the societies in which they occur? Reforms in the way people work and live must eventually

trickle up and transform the larger structures of society, making this an area that bears close watching.

Twenty years ago, the idea of adjusting one's work schedule by 30 minutes was a revolutionary concept. IBM called it flex time, and it was meant to assist our employees with balancing their work and personal lives.

That novel concept has evolved along with our company's growing realization that ours is a global workforce that serves global clients – with 24/7 activity that spans the world's time zones and accommodates a range of local holidays. Such an environment requires a far more flexible environment, and that means work/life balance has become work/life integration. Innovative flexible work options are enabling IBMers to create the lives they want by devising individual work schedules that integrate their professional and personal responsibilities. This kind of flexibility also enables IBM to better serve its clients, meeting their needs when and where they exist.

This flexibility is fast becoming a reason why people are attracted to and stay at IBM.