

Results-oriented work environment

An experiment in one US company, where employees work when they want to, is proving controversial.

1 Put a cross on the line below to show your 'work-life' balance. Compare your answer with a partner.

I have a very good work-life balance	<div style="position: absolute; top: -10px; left: 50%; transform: translate(-50%, -50%); border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 10px;"></div>	I work too hard – my home life suffers
--------------------------------------	---	--

2 Guess the answers to the following statistics. Check your answers in the last paragraph of the article.

Working in the US	
% of US employees who think they are overworked:	28% / 36% / 44%
Average national holiday:	14 / 21 / 28 days

'Work when and where you like!'

Imagine a company where you can work when you like! There is no fixed time to start in the morning or leave in the evening. Workers are not judged by the number of hours they spend at work but by their achievement of goals. In an attempt to address the problems of balancing work and home life, a Minneapolis company, electronic retailer *Best Buy*, is changing the very way people think about work. The experiment, now three years old, is called ROWE, which stands for 'results-oriented work environment.' The most important thing for workers is to complete their tasks. Managers have stopped counting the hours worked and some office departments can work when and where they like – nearly half the entire staff are involved.

Has it been successful? Employees have stopped feeling guilty when they have to pick up children from school, or avoid rush hour traffic. Job satisfaction is higher and performance is up. Moreover, staff have been forced to

rethink exactly what they do at work. Many teams realized that they need only one regular weekly or monthly staff meeting, and so they stopped holding a lot of unproductive meetings. More business is done by mobile phone and e-mails have become shorter and more meaningful.

Stress at work is nothing new. The average national holiday in the US is just 14 days a year. The number of people there who say they are overworked has risen from 28% in 2001 to 44% in 2004. However, the idea of total flexibility is not popular with everyone. In many national and company cultures, long working hours are traditional. Some managers are at first sceptical: can employees be trusted to work? Could this system work with part-time employees? This radical approach does involve a completely different attitude to work. Nevertheless, *Best Buy* claim the new approach to work helps them stay competitive, and supporters argue it is the perfect answer to the many women wishing to balance career and family.

3 Read the whole article. Would you like to work at *Best Buy*? Why / why not?

4 Use some of these words and expressions to create sentences about you and your company.

job satisfaction	performance	(un)productive	work environment
achieve goals	competitive	company culture	results

5 Discuss the following questions in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

- (a) Could a system such as ROWE work in your company? Which staff members would it affect?
- (b) Why are some meetings unproductive? Could the number of these be reduced in your company?
- (c) What ideas do you have to increase performance and productivity? Would these allow employees to maintain job satisfaction?