

STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL

September 12, 1985

PERSONNEL MEMORANDUM 5-85

TO: All Department/Agency Heads/Personnel Officers  
SUBJECT: ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES

Attached is a copy of the Labor/Management Committee's report on the status of Alternative Work Schedules.

This report represents a summary of comments, observations, and analyses submitted by the various departments and agencies which are participating in Alternative Work Schedule Programs. The Committee welcomes any additional comments or questions you may have on this matter.

Please distribute the report to all appropriate personnel.



DAVID W. BUSTIN  
COMMISSIONER

Attachment

MAY BE REPRODUCED LOCALLY TO MEET DISTRIBUTION NEEDS

LABOR/MANAGEMENT REPORT ON THE STATUS  
OF ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES

BACKGROUND - The initial and subsequent labor agreements between the State of Maine and the Maine State Employees Association (MSEA) provided that the Labor/Management Committee be charged with the responsibility of studying and developing recommendations for a variety of issues. Among those issues was the topic of alternative work schedules.

As part of the Committee's preliminary review, Personnel Memorandum 5-81 was issued to all State agencies. The purpose of that document was to briefly outline various alternative work schedule options and to elicit responses as to the feasibility of flex-time, compressed workweek, and job sharing arrangements. At approximately the same time, the 110th Maine Legislature enacted legislation (PL 1981, C. 270) encouraging "the development of alternative working hours employment" in State government.

As a result of the responses to Personnel Memorandum 5-81, the Committee issued an interim report in February, 1982. This report (enclosed with Personnel Memorandum 2-82) provided an analysis of agency responses, broad guidelines for developing alternative work schedules, and the procedures for implementing agency proposals.

The majority of State agencies have since implemented alternative work schedules on an experimental basis, many of which have exhibited creative and well-designed approaches meeting both employees' desires and operational requirements. The proliferation of alternative work programs and the unique character of some of the programs prompted the Committee to issue an informational report accompanying Personnel Memorandum 4-83.

This informational material provided more explicit definitions and further clarified the guidelines governing alternative work schedules. Additionally, the Committee requested that the participating agencies advise the Committee of the types of programs which had been implemented, the number of employees, and the classes of employees involved. The Committee also requested that agencies provide the Committee with a brief assessment of the programs currently in place.

FINDINGS

The Committee's study revealed that approximately 1,600 employees are participating in some form of alternative work schedules. That does not include the highway crews at the Department of Transportation. Many of those crews have seasonal programs which are in effect during the summer and fall months.

By far, the most popular option has been the compressed workweek. Approximately 75 percent of the employees engaged in alternative work schedules are participating in a compressed workweek. The majority of compressed schedules are of the four 10-hour day variety with either Monday or Friday established as a scheduled day off. The remaining employees on compressed workweeks have selected the 4 1/2 day workweek (four 9-hour days and one 4-hour day) or a bi-weekly schedule (5 days - 44 hours one week, 4 days - 36 hours the following week with one day off on alternate weeks).

Slightly over 300 employees have opted for a bona fide flex-time schedule. An additional 300 employees were reported by various agencies, to be on flex-time, but the information indicated that those programs would be more accurately defined as staggered work hours.

Another 70 employees are participating in job shared arrangements. It has been somewhat surprising that job sharing has encompassed such a wide range of classifications. In addition to the expected clerical positions, there are also jobs being shared as Physical Therapists, Nurses, Human Services Caseworkers, Custodial Workers, and Teachers, among others.

Formal studies of alternative work hours in other public sector jurisdictions have found that such schedules have lead to: reduced absenteeism; less use of sick leave to take care of doctor/dentist appointments; improved employee morale; lower turnover rate; and increased productivity. The Committee's review, however, was not designed to establish comprehensive findings, but to provide a general assessment of the programs implemented and an indication of the advantages and dis-advantages of these programs.

Overall, agencies employing alternative work schedules have reported favorable results. Naturally, the success of these experimental programs have been contingent upon the level of acceptance and commitment by management and anticipating employees. Labor/management cooperation and the recognition of the necessity to balance employee desires with operational needs and service to the public are the key ingredients in developing and maintaining a successful program. In the absence of that cooperation, alternative work schedules have become an issue of dispute rather than a tool to improve the workplace.

However, there are other factors as well which may determine the functioning of variable work hours. Frequently, the type of operations at a work site will determine which, if any, alternative work schedules are feasible. It was obvious from agency responses that social service programs with walk-in clients and caseloads experienced difficulties not prevalent in departments with little or no direct client service responsibilities.

The size of the work unit may determine which types of schedules can be successfully implemented. Generally, the larger the staff the greater the flexibility in accommodating employee requests. In some instances, however, a large group of employees or members of an entire unit are dependent upon each other because of itinerant services, access to computer systems, or a specified sequence of procedures.

The type of job itself may have a bearing on what, if any, alternative schedule may be implemented. For example, jobs with a considerable degree of stress or fatigue are not conducive to compressed workweeks and often, jobs of a highly technical nature may not be appropriate for job sharing.

The following represents the most frequently cited advantages and disadvantages of alternative work schedules as reported by participating agencies:

### ADVANTAGES

Child-Care - Several departments reported that alternative work schedules have provided employees with greater accessibility for child care services and in some instances, this has resulted in a cost savings for the employee.

Car-Pooling - The Compressed Workweek provides a greater opportunity for ride-sharing arrangements, particularly for those employees commuting relatively long distances. Flex-time has also been used to facilitate car-pooling with some minimal cost savings to employees.

Education - Employees have increasingly taken advantage of alternative work schedules to further education by attending college, graduate school, and vocational classes.

Personal Business Without Leave - Employees have greater flexibility to schedule personal business and appointments on their off-days or off-hours thus reducing time off during their scheduled work week.

Scheduling of Field Work - Field assignments and projects can be scheduled and completed in a more efficient manner thus reducing overtime and compensating time.

Use of Sick Leave - Alternative work schedules have enabled employees to arrange routine doctor's and dentist's appointments on off-hours which eliminate the need for sick leave for these appointments.

Productivity - Several agencies have reported improved productivity as early morning and late afternoon hours provide uninterrupted work periods. Agencies have also indicated that expanded computer access has enhanced productivity.

Physical Fitness - Some employees have participated in alternative work schedules in order to engage in fitness programs and related activities.

Morale - Agencies generally report an improvement in morale for those employees participating in alternative work hours.

Public Access - Although normal business hours have remained the traditional 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. employees on a longer workday have greater access to contact clients and the public, particularly via telephone.

### DISADVANTAGES

Office Coverage - Even in cases where adequate staff coverage is provided, key personnel may not be available to address specific problems or questions causing delays.

Work Assignments - Some managers have reported a problem in balancing work distribution between groups of employees. This is especially true in programs requiring direct client services and caseloads.

Scheduling Meetings Agencies have reported difficulty in scheduling staff meetings on Mondays and Fridays due to compressed workweeks. As a result, core days can be overburdened with meetings.

Backlogs - Occasionally, work can be backlogged due to scheduled time off which may cause a delay in responding to telephone calls, correspondence, etc.

Increased Management Responsibilities - Managers have reported that their internal management activities may increase in an effort to direct staff assignments, to determine availability of staff, and to schedule meetings, etc.

Morale - While the morale of participating employees may improve, managers indicate that the morale of non-participants may be adversely affected. This is of particular concern in programs that experience a high rate of walk-in traffic and telephone inquiries. There is a sense of inequity among employees working a traditional schedule.

Record Keeping - Personnel responsible for payroll and leave records report that their workload increases with the need to distinguish records for the various schedules.

Access to Clients - Some agencies have reported difficulties which develop when a client contacts the agency with an inquiry or a problem only to find that the employee assigned to the case is either off-duty or on a scheduled day off. As a result, an employee less familiar with the case must substitute.

Absence of Supervisory Personnel - This issue was among the more common problems or disadvantages cited by agencies. Managers expressed concern that employees working a longer work day on a compressed workweek may not be as diligent or productive during the early morning or late afternoon periods when no supervisory staff is present.

## CONCLUSIONS

Since the committee did not conduct a comprehensive study of alternative work schedules there are no hard data to substantiate the list of pros and cons - only comments and observations. However, there is no reason to dispute some of these observations. Alternative work schedules clearly have aided employees seeking to continue their education. These schedules have just as clearly caused some problems in maintaining office coverage and scheduling staff meetings.

There are other areas where the committee found either no evidence to support an argument or contradictory evidence to support both sides of an argument. In terms of employee morale, it appears reasonable to accept the observation that morale has improved for employees participating in a variable work schedule. It also appears reasonable that some employees who do not participate (either by choice or operational restrictions) feel that extra workloads and/or office coverage are placed upon them. In the eyes of these employees, it doesn't really matter whether this inequity is real or perceived.

While the Committee has received reports of improved productivity at certain work sites, most responses indicated that there was no identifiable changes in productivity as a result of alternative work schedules. Several departments reported that compressed workweeks posed the potential problem of unproductive time in the absence of supervisors during the early morning and late afternoon periods. Conversely, the Committee was advised by other agencies that these periods were used effectively by employees as uninterrupted time for processing necessary records/reports and planning workloads.

The only definitive conclusion that can be drawn from the Committee's review is that each program must be judged on its own merits. Just as operational requirements and job content vary significantly so do the personalities and attitudes within the workplace. The Committee acknowledges that some managers view alternative work schedules with considerable trepidation fearing an erosion of control or an unnecessary obstacle in fulfilling the agency's mission. The Committee also recognizes that employees may seek alternative work schedules which are more responsive to their self-interests than they are to the objectives of the department in serving the public.

Not surprisingly, experience clearly demonstrates that variable work schedules are most successful when managers and employees have jointly participated in the development and implementation of those programs and both parties have been flexible - willing to recognize each other's concerns and to adapt the programs accordingly. Similarly, the Committee would argue that when disputes do occur, they are best resolved locally at the department or work unit level.

In the final analysis, alternative work schedules are neither the scrouge nor the panacea of the workplace. They are merely another vehicle to provide a work environment which is conducive to the efficient and responsive service to the public.

Alternative work schedules should continue to be developed and employed within the parameters and guidelines previously established by the Labor/Management Committee. Variations and new approaches are welcomed provided the Committee is advised these proposals and agencies are encouraged to share their experiences with each other and the Committee.

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