The Social Context of Schedule Control: Flexible Work Practices in an Information Technology Workforce

Anne Kaduk, Erin L. Kelly, and Phyllis Moen
University of Minnesota

work, family & health network

MPC Minnesota Population Center
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to Discover℠

Objective

To examine individual- and team-level job conditions associated with individual flexible work practices and perceived schedule control among IT workers in one organization

Background

- Growing interest in flexible work policies among employees and employers
- Sometimes employees use formal policies, but sometimes employees negotiate informal arrangements
- Prior research (e.g. Blair-Loy & Wharton 2002) shows that team and manager characteristics matter for employee use of flexibility policies
- But access to flexibility policies does not necessarily mean that employees feel they can use such policies, and sometimes flexible work practices (such as working from home or working a variable schedule) are arranged informally

Definitions

Perceived Schedule Control:
- "Employees' sense of latitude or control regarding the timing of their work, the number of hours they work, and the location where they work" (Kelly, Moen & Tranby 2011)

Flexible Work Practices:
- Working a Variable Schedule
- Working Away from the Office

Data

- Collected as part of the **Work, Family & Health Study** in 2009-2010 in the Information Technology division of a Fortune 500 company we call TOMO
- Analytic sample: 570 non-supervisory employees in 105 work teams

Research Questions

(1) Are employees' flexible work practices impacted by manager and work team power?
(2) What other characteristics impact employees' flexible work practices and schedule control?
(3) Do employees tend to perceive high schedule control and use flexible work practices in combination or separately?

Sample Characteristics

Flexible Work Practices and Perceived Schedule Control
- 98% of respondents do some remote work
    - Average hours worked off site 10.3 / week
    - 43% work 20% or more of weekly hours off site (extensive remote work)
- 21% work a variable schedule (rather than regular day time, regular evening, or regular night)
- Mean Perceived Schedule Control = 3.6
    - Falls between "a moderate amount" and "much" control over schedule (range = 1-5)

Results: Question 1

Employees' Flexible Work Practices ARE Impacted by Manager & Team Power (measured similarly to Blair-Loy & Wharton 2002)

Log Odds of Flexibility Use Comparing Blair-Loy & Wharton (2002) to TOMO

	Blair-Loy & Wharton 2002 (Table 3)	TOMO Extensive Remote Work	TOMO Variable Schedule
Team-Level Variables			
Percent of Team Married or Partnered	-2.305**	-2.311**	NS
Percent of Team with Children Age 18 or Under	NS	NS	1.341^
Percent of Team Female	NS	-1.905**	-1.453*
Manager Female	-1.773***	NS	.469^
Manager Married or Partnered	-.668*	NS	NS
Team Mean Ln Organizational Tenure	1.560***	1.078**	NS
Manager Organizational Tenure (in years)	-.065***	-.037*	NS
Team Mean Ln Salary	NS	NS	NS
Team Mean Age	-.112**	NS	NS
Staff Function	2.902***	not included	not included
Individual-Level Variables			
Job Autonomy	1.080***	N/A	N/A
Job Control	N/A	.256^	.572**
Woman without Children at Home (vs. childless men)	not included	.622^	NS
Women with Children at Home (vs. childless men)	not included	.623^	-.797*
Men with Children at Home (vs. childless men)	not included	NS	-.476^
Caregiver for Adult Relative	not included	NS	.503*

*** p<0.005, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, [^ p<0.10 for TOMO only]

Results: Question 2

Individual Job Demands and Status
- ↑ Job Demands (Hours Worked) = ↑ odds of Extensive Remote Work
- ↑ Job Demands (Psychological Job Demands, Hours Worked) and Status (Decision Authority) = ↑ odds of Variable Schedule
- ↑ Job Demands (Psychological Job Demands, Hours Worked) = ↓ Schedule Control
- ↑ Status (Lead Professional Job Role, Decision Authority, Born in US) = ↑ Schedule Control
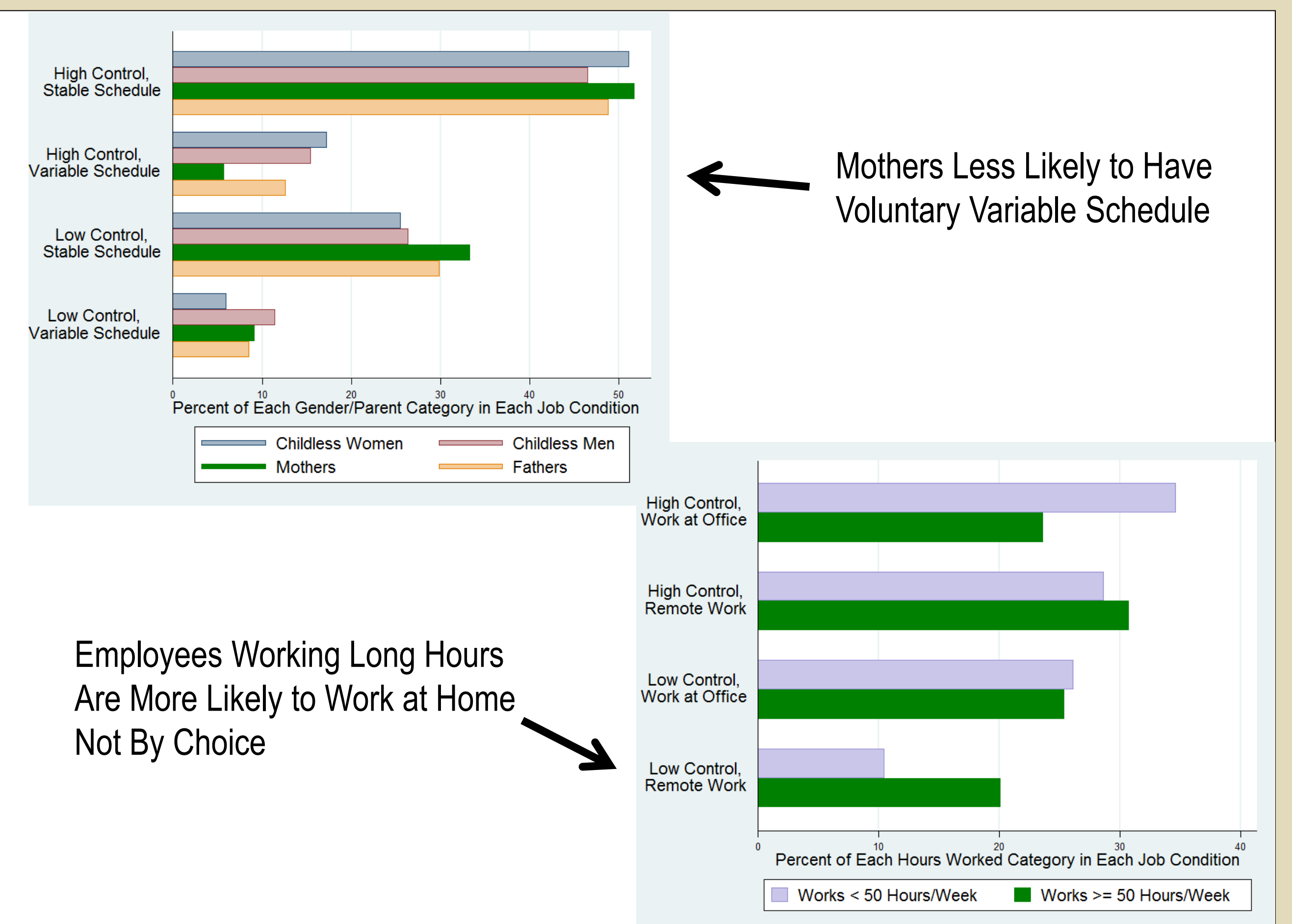
Institutionalization of Extensive Remote Work at the Team Level
- Common and Integrated with Work Practices at the team level (Manager doing Extensive Remote Work and the Employee & Manager Working in Different U.S. States) = ↑ odds of Extensive Remote Work for Employees
- Culturally Accepted (Supportive Organizational Work-Family Climate) = ↑ Schedule Control

Mothers Less Likely to Have Voluntary Variable Schedule

Childless Women — Childless Men — Mothers — Fathers

Employees Working Long Hours Are More Likely to Work at Home Not By Choice

Works < 50 Hours/Week — Works >= 50 Hours/Week

Results: Question 3

The four categories below illustrate what we mean by a combination of Schedule Control and Flexible Work Practices.

Perceived Control Over When Start/Stop Work — High / Low

	Stable	Variable
High	**Choose to Work a Traditional Pattern** (e.g. software developer feels they could work a variable schedule, but chooses to maintain a regular schedule)	**Voluntary Flexible Work Practices** (e.g. software developer chooses to work a variable schedule, presumably for their own benefit/to manage non-work responsibilities)
Low	**Traditional Work Environment** (e.g. software developer whose job includes fixing problems with production software and thus needs to be in the office at specific times to make sure systems are running)	**Involuntary Flexible Work Practices** (e.g. software developer must coordinate with offshore workers, so sometimes needs to work very early in the morning or late at night to communicate with them while they're at work)

Work Schedule

Figures above and to the right show how gender/parental status and working long hours are not equally distributed across these four categories (or analogous categories for remote work)

Conclusion

- Flexible work practices are impacted by manager and team power
- Individual job demands/status and team institutionalization of flexibility also matter, especially for remote work
- Not all "flexible" work practices are voluntary / things that employees feel they control
- We are able to investigate these relationships because of our nested data, even though it's not a nationally representative sample.

Acknowledgements