



The end of clock-punching?

In a results-oriented workplace, you can sleep until noon if you want—just don't blow your targets

You might not think the federal government, with its layers of bureaucratic inefficiencies, would be the natural place to test a radical new concept in human resource management. But that's exactly what Peter Hadwen, a veteran Ottawa workplace consultant, is determined to do.

Hadwen, who has worked for more than 20 years with public service clients including Transport Canada, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Treasury Board Secretariat, is pitching to transform all of these government departments into "results-only work environments," or ROWE. Essentially, this means employees will no longer be responsible for showing up to work at a certain time, or attending particular meetings, or even working in the office at all. As long as they're meeting goals and achieving results in

their job, they're working.

Unlike the flex arrangements that many workplaces, including many in the public sector, currently use, a ROWE makes no demands at all when it comes to where, how or when people get their work done. While flex programs accommodate employee schedule alterations on a case-to-case basis, a ROWE makes working around each employee's personal schedule its starting point. So if an employee wants to take a three-week vacation, they can go right ahead, as long as they're still meeting results.

Not surprisingly, the idea that *less* oversight leads to greater productivity is not an easy sell to managers accustomed to working in a more regimented way. "There's always a bit of skepticism regarding the ability to measure results," Hadwen says. "But with enough effort and discussion, we can get past that. Especially when dealing with organizations that are transaction focused, and which have a defined process and manner of doing things."

ROWE has already seen a bit of a boom in the U.S., where com-

panies like Best Buy, Netflix and IBM have adopted the system with the goal of creating a happier, more efficient workplace. The idea is the brainchild of Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson, former HR employees for Best Buy who now run CultureRx. They recently wrote a book about it, *Why Work Sucks and How to Fix It*, and now they work to help businesses adopt a ROWE model.

In 2007, the University of Minnesota conducted a study of employees of Best Buy, one of the earliest adopters of the ROWE model. The resulting *Flexible Work and Well-Being Study* found more job satisfaction and better job organization than those who didn't. The study also found that there wasn't a significant change in the number of hours employees worked compared to their pre-ROWE days. More recently, the Human Services and Public Health Department in Minneapolis migrated to a ROWE last spring, with encouraging early results.

Advocates of the practice say personal accountability and a

greater work-life balance make the system beneficial to employees, who have reported enjoying perks such as getting more sleep each night and a decreased commute time. "People have a feeling that they are less beholden to a clock than they are to a work result on their own time. As such, it leads to less stress and a better morale," Hadwen says.

ROWE also helps managers become more efficient. "A lot of management time is dedicated to the nitty-gritty of assigning people here and there, dealing with scheduling and the like," says Hadwen. "[With ROWE,] they're less concerned about whether their employees are present, as opposed to achieving what they want."

According to Stephen Harvill, a workplace consultant based in Dallas, ROWE seems to work best in creative fields. He says it's common for companies to adopt ROWE one department at a time, often beginning with the marketing team. "Very few literally dive into it," he says. "It's more like they stick their toe in, and if they like it, they wade in."

The process to bring ROWE into a workplace isn't quick—for a company that employs about 3,000 people, it could take up to three years, says Thompson. Migration starts with a pilot test of about 300 to 500 employees. As the test is ongoing, co-workers and colleagues often become interested in ROWE, and campaign for their department to provide the same options.

The trend has been slower to take off in Canada. But Ressler says that's changing. "We've had interest from Canada. We're in talks with a few companies right now, exploring it and talking with leadership teams," she says. Harvill says it's important for businesses to consider an arrangement like ROWE in order to stay competitive in today's business world. "If you're going to work more effectively, you better be ready to make adjustments, especially when it comes to the relationship between work and production, and job satisfaction and success," he says.

—LYNSIE BOURGON