

Transformative Flex – Disrupting “Work-First” Work Cultures

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Want more flexibility? Sure, work 70-hours a week anywhere you want. Striving for work-life balance? That’s fine, just don’t let it get in the way of the expanding list of tasks we’ve assigned to you. Care about diversity? Work the same as I do and we’ll be happy to consider you potential leadership material. Sound familiar? These are the mantras of a “work-first” workplace.

To balance work and life more successfully requires a paradigm shift, reframing this singular focus on work into one that recognizes that both work AND life matter. It also requires discarding the outdated notion that a *work-first* and *work-only* approach is essential to business and the only route to success.

To follow this approach, ThirdPath has watched “integrated” professionals become experts in two dimensions: Flexibility and Capacity Management.

Flexibility defines where and when someone works. It requires agility and thinking outside the box when faced with competing goals.

Capacity Management relates to how much work is expected to be done individually, as a team and within an organization. Capacity Management requires innovation in how the work itself gets done such as prioritization, expectation management, and strategic delegation.

Professionals who develop this new mindset, who are then promoted to managers, begin to spread this approach more widely - see diagram on page 2.

A few definitions:

- **Balance:** this happens in the moment - something that one physically “feels” as in “*I feel out of balance*”
- **Integration:** this happens in the long run – it’s how you create multi-faceted lives, with paid work happening alongside other components
- **Work-First Work Cultures:** in these organizations, life needs are always subservient to work and career priorities
- **Triple-Win Solutions:** flex options that are good for the individual, the work you do, *and* the people you work with
- **Collective Boundary Setting:** working together to set thoughtful limits around your capacity for work, so you have time and energy for life responsibilities, while helping your organization thrive

The leaders in the ThirdPath community also used Transformative Flex to help better navigate the pandemic. Together they worked with their teams to find triple-win solutions and set collective boundaries around their capacity for work. This allowed everyone to better manage the unprecedented changes both at work and home.

Integrated Leaders often begin their journey in the lower left box by negotiating change at the individual level. To do this requires courage, foresight, and the belief that individuals have the power to make change.

FLEX – Where & when we work	Org. Flex			Whole organization supports integration
	Team Flex		Team supports flex & capacity management	
	Ind. Flex	Individuals flex and set triple-win boundaries		
		Few boundaries	Triple-win boundaries	
CAPACITY MANAGEMENT – How much we work				
		Individual Accommodation →	Whole Team Supported →	Whole Organization Supported

In Will’s case, he started his journey in the top left box. His organization had always supported lots of flexibility around where and when people work, but it was also a work-first workplace that set very few limits around how much people worked. Regardless, Will found the courage to negotiate a 4-day work week when his children were born because he and his wife jointly agreed that they both wanted to play an active role in raising their children. This joint perspective also gave him the courage to later negotiate a 6-month sabbatical so he and his family could tour the country in a Winnebago when their children were school-aged. Then later in his career, it gave him the courage and clarity to set limits around how much work he could take on as he and his wife balanced work with the care of their aging parents.

Integrated Leaders can influence change within a box, or by moving across the matrix. Their success depends in part on their individual skills and in part on the openness of their organization’s culture - ***openness the leader may be able to influence, or openness because leaders leave for more supportive organizations, or start their own organizations.*** Leaders can create movement across the matrix by role modeling. Leaders can also intentionally develop the skills of their teams to support better work-life integration for everyone.

Our work with Integrated Leaders has also shown us that once leaders experience the deep satisfaction, joy, and improved work effectiveness from following this approach – it often strengthens their commitment to influence even greater change.

**Know someone who would like to start their work-life integration journey?
Tell them about ThirdPath’s Overwhelm Mitigation Groups – OMG!
Learn more by searching: [ThirdPath OMG](#)**