More than Remotely Possible: Flexible Work Arrangements for Inclusive Recruitment and Retention

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Abstract:

This research provides a rationale and conceptual framework for emplacing flexible work arrangements (FWAs) in academic libraries within larger discussions of equity, inclusion, and diversity (EID). Flexible work arrangements have been used in libraries for more than three decades. This approach to human resource management is mutually beneficial; as employer and employee needs change over time, work tasks and where they are completed vary. During the COVID-19 pandemic, interest in FWAs increased exponentially. However in libraries, implementation was largely utilized to maintain public services, instruction, and access to library resources, and not deployed as an inclusive workplace practice.

The authors make a case for recalibrating and normalizing FWAs as a strategy for inclusiveness. Inclusion accounts for a spectrum of diverse life experiences and feelings of professional belonging. In the workplace, inclusivity is grounded in relationships; it is "two-way accountability; each person must grant and accept inclusion from others." The research provides an overview of multidisciplinary literature about the benefits and challenges of implementing FWAs in library contexts, and delves into the intersections of academic librarianship, FWAs, and EID. In the sections that follow, the authors describe how libraries can make FWAs the norm and not the exception. Practical steps offered include engaging in ideation activities and conducting workplace culture-mapping exercises to identify elements of inclusivity that resonate at the local level. By embracing FWAs, organizations can authentically embody inclusiveness.

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