

1 Work in pairs. Think of five things companies often do when they want to cut costs. Then tell the class your ideas.

2 Read about what happened at Acuity, an insurance company in Wisconsin, USA. Do you think their productivity fell or improved as a result? Why?

In the late 1990s Acuity wanted to cut costs. To save money, it closed and sold 12 of its 13 branch offices and told its employees that they had to work from home instead. Flexitime and telecommuting became part of the corporate culture. Employees who needed to travel received a company car, a laptop, a cell phone and pager and \$100 to buy audio books. The company paid for internet access and computer software but not for office space.



3 In fact productivity improved and Acuity has won many awards for being one of the best companies to work for in the US. Read about another company where employees do not work fixed hours. How is it similar to or different from the organization you work for?

Best Buy, the leading electronics retailer in the US, has a new way to manage its staff. It focuses on results and not on how long employees spend at work. Employees mustn't miss their targets but they can work when they want and where they want. The system seems to be working. Staff turnover is down and productivity is up by 35 per cent on average.

4 Listen to Best Buy employees talking about the system. Are these statements true (T) or false (F)? Correct the ones which are wrong.

- 1 Everyone has targets that they need to meet.
- 2 Employees can only work from home if their manager agrees to it.
- 3 They have to attend important meetings.
- 4 They mustn't talk about the hours they work.
- 5 Some managers think that people should work in the office.
- 6 It's easy for everyone to switch off from work.



Americans don't use the contracted form *mustn't*. Instead they often say 'not allowed'.

We're **not allowed** to talk about the hours anybody works.

5 Listen to the interview again and complete these questions.

- 1 So, \_\_\_\_\_ work from home any time you want?
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ ask for permission from your manager first?
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ go into the office for meetings?
- 4 So, \_\_\_\_\_ allow their employees to work from home?

6 Work in pairs. Discuss these questions.

- 1 How many hours do you work a week? Officially and actually?
- 2 Does your company log your time? For example, do you have to fill in time sheets?
- 3 How do your managers judge your productivity?
- 4 Could the Best Buy system work in your workplace? Why?/Why not?

