

The Impact of Work Time Flexibility on Employees' Performance in Malaysia

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Abstract

This research was designed to obtain intimate knowledge of how employees feel toward the establishment of flexibility in the working environment. The definition of work flexibility in this study term refers to moderate working hours such as 25-30 hours weekly, and allowance to implement a system that would allow working-class families, such as single mums/dads, or newly married couples to be hired on part-time bases, so that they can balance their time between work, and private life. The literature review discusses various contextual factors that impact employee perceptions, such as public and organizational context and management and colleague support. It further explores outcomes such as work-life balance and discusses the existing theories on work effort change and work intensification in relation to flexible work arrangements. It ends with a discussion on the role of individual factors such as personality, motivation, life situation and gender.

Keywords: Working environment, flexibility, perception, management, colleague support

Introduction

Haworth and Lewis, (2005), point out that new technologies and work practices have emerged and the social and economic consequences of an increasingly global and competitive 24-hour marketplace are far-reaching. Globalization is demanding for more effort in employment with little concern for the effects on people or societies. In fact, Haworth and Lewis, (2005), asserts that a drive for efficiency leads to fewer people having to do the same amount of work.

Berg, Kalleberg, and Applebaum, (2003), note that there is no doubt that the increasing share of working mothers and dual earner families have forced governments to respond to the general interest among the public to allow for better combining of work and family life and implement public policies in response to these issues. Managing different roles such as being a parent, a partner, or simply being part of the community along with holding a job or constructing a sustainable career in nowadays' fast- paced environment can therefore be a challenge (Stredwick, & Ellis, (2005).

Flexible working environment have shown to be far more productive than traditional working environment. The research paper hopes to uncover the difficulties that heavy workload, and long hour work possess to employees, which can sometimes result to, less productivity within organization, and rendering the work environment extreme stressful for employees to thrive (Avery & Zabel, 2001).

According to Baltes et al., (1999), the main goal of introducing flexible work arrangements in an organization is to help employees manage these different elements in their lives. Flexible work arrangements have been referred to as "offered employer benefits which allow employees certain level of takeover when they work outside of the standard workday" (Christen, Iyer, & Soberman, 2006). At present another definition where flexible work arrangement as "individually negotiated conditions of employment involving adjustments in the timing, scope and/or place of work" the goal is to change time or/ place where work is usually carried out in the way that is controllable and predictable for both employers and employees (Lambert, and Marler, 2008).

Problem Statement

Working in a flexible environment or workplace flexibility arrangement have been one hallmark of working excitement resulting having countless crucial organizational outcome and attitudes. It's the stimulating engine of direct consistency of higher employee productivity, higher levels of engagement, lower levels of stress, overall job satisfaction, and lower absenteeism (Balts, et al., 1999; Richman, et al., 2008).

Not only has providing flexibility been shown to potentially increase productivity and help with recruitment and retention of qualified employees but it can also lead to lower costs for example through reduction in overhead and reorganization of offices by allowing employees to work from home (Avery and Zabel, 2001).

This study hopes to simulate the outcome of flexible working environment productivity as well as its financial efficiency comparatively to the traditional working environment by emphasizing on the endless profitability that emerges from implementing a flexible working environment.

Research Objective

1. To identify the impact of the implementation of flexibility on employees' performance and productivity.
2. To identify the main motivational factors in the flexible working environment.
3. To determine how much working effort to dispense in flexible working conditions.

Literature Review

According to Senge, (1990), to examine flexible work arrangements and other work-life policies designed to support employees with family or other personal commitments a framework such as that of systems thinking is useful. System thinking has been defined as a discipline for seeing the whole, a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things and patterns of change rather than the static, Flexible work arrangements are in a wider social system that is dynamic and ever-changing (Senge, 1990).

Moreover, Lewis & Den Dulk, (2008); and Voydanoff, (2002) identify that systems thinking provides a multi-layered approach of examining and recognizing that flexible working policies are situated in multiple layers of context such as within the working practices, structures, and culture of the organization. It also acknowledges the wider social context, which includes social and economic factors, models of social interaction, public policies, employment, family demographics and cultural, gender and communal norms and values. Furthermore, it even acknowledges flexibility from a global standpoint (Lewis and Den Dulk, 2008; Voydanoff, 2002).

The optimal is then to implement processes in an attempt to achieve systematic change at multiple levels, therefore recognizing the interconnectedness between them (Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2006). Carlson & Grzywacz, (2008), argue that systems thinking is critical to understanding the complex relationship between work and personal life and to thoroughly be able to analyze both domains. The challenge is that social systems are constantly changing and impacting other systems.

Organizations therefore need to constantly be aware of these changes because they will keep happening whether they adapt to them or not. However, adapting to changes is difficult and often leads to opposition. This can be seen, for example, through how traditional managers struggle to manage non--traditional ways of working.

Evidence shows that Supportive public policies such as childcare provision and enhancing young people's feeling of entitlement to support when it comes to managing work and family both from the public sphere but also from the private sector. This kind of supportive public policy therefore also increase pressure on the private sector to accommodate to the need of the employees and provide support (Lewis and Smithson, 2001). In light of individual differences, the importance of acknowledging the diversity of society seems apparent. Experiences and motivations of individuals with different work and leisure lifestyles vary and need to be understood, allowing for recognition of the diversity of human experience and wants (Haworth and Lewis, 2005).

Lewis & Den Dulk, (2010), stated that economic factors also have an impact in this context as well as labor market conditions. In low-wage economies, families must rely on two incomes while in more prosperous countries families can get by with one. Factors such as unemployment and job insecurity also affect both organizations and employees and how they offer or make use of flexibility options (Lewis & Den Dulk, 2010). Furthermore, Lewis & Den Dulk, (2010), highlighted that flexible working policies, although in place and implemented from a national and organizational standpoint, are increasingly neutralized and undermined by global contextual factors. These include the fast pace of change, growing connectivity, and globalization of economic and social systems as well as the intensification of work associated with global competition or efficiency drives (Kossek et al., 2010; Lewis and Den Dulk, 2008). Sustained by Dr. Peter Senge (1990).

Methodology

Research Base

This research is qualitative research as described by Silverman (1993). Qualitative research puts weigh on words rather than numbers and allows for theory to emerge from the data.

Semi-Interview Question

- i. What is your job title, and can you describe your work responsibilities shortly?
- ii. How long have you worked here?
- iii. Do you have a family? If so, do you have children and can you describe their demographics?
- iv. How long does it take you to travel/commute to work? And how do you travel to work

Interview Structure

An interview framework (Table 1) was created based on the research questions so that the same major questions were asked each time, however, at the same time the researcher was free to collect more information by asking unprepared questions. The research questions were covered through a series of questions on the nature of the working situation and the conception or the attitude towards flexible working arrangement. It's often thought to involve the effects work structure, and workload, plays a fundamental role in employees' personal lives, especially those with children. The interviews were therefore in--depth and semi-structured and carried out in a way to allow additional information regarded as important by the respondents to emerge.

Respondents perceived their arrangements. Additional questions were then added to allow a better idea of the organizational context of each participant. The course of interviewing the respondents as well as the data analysis process the research questions were slightly modified several times to include these organizational factors as well as other unexpected factors that emerged during the analysis.

Table 3.1: Semi-Interview Participants

Gender	Number of respondents	Nationality	Field of work	Weekly working Hours
Male	1	Malay	Human Resource	25
Male	2	Malay	Sales department	20
Female	3	Malay	Marketing	36
Male	4	Malay	Teacher	30
Male	5	Guinean	IT department	21
Male	6	British	Human resource	36
Female	7	British	Human resource	25
Female	8	French	IT department	16
Female	9	Malay	Sales	25
Male	10	Malay	management	19
Female	11	Malay	Teacher	16
Female	12	Malay	Teacher	20

Semi-Interviews Data Collection

The collection of interview Data was done through interviewing 20 individual, both local and few international employees (foreign workers). The interview occurred on 30th of June 2022 through face-to-face meeting, and Via Skype. We utilized qualitative approach Methods to gather interview data. There were 5 Participants were contacted through e--mail. They were sent a brief description of the research as well as a more thorough research information sheet, which contained a summary of the research proposal. The time and place of the interviews were then arranged the same way. Ten interviews were conducted using English. Three interviews were conducted using Icelandic but translated into English in the transcribing process.

The interviewees were in control when it comes to the time of the interview as well as the interview location. The interviews took from 10 to 25 minutes in length depending on the respondent. All interviews were recorded using a laptop after the respondent had given his or hers consent and then transcribed shortly after they took place by the researcher. The recording of one interview failed so the researcher wrote up everything she remembered shortly after the interview took place and then allowed the respondent in question to review it to make sure the information was correct.

Data Analysis

The data acquired through the semi-interviews were examined based on the methods sustained by (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The steps include development of segments that has several appropriate cases to show their relevance. These categories are then developed into more general frameworks or theory that can be shown to have relevance outside the setting of the research in question (Silverman, 2010).

All interview repeses were separately studied, and the relevant segments that corresponded with research objective were heighted, and finally the transcript were included in study. These coded segments were then drawn into categories and the categories into themes. The categories and themes were then compared across interviews and different perspectives contrasted. Already during the interview process certain themes began to emerge.

The data collection thus became iterative where analysis and data collection proceeded in tandem, repeatedly referring to each other (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Findings

In order to ensure quality in business research it is necessary to be familiar with a few important terms. Reliability refers to the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable. This is related to other criteria of research: replication. To be able to assess the reliability of a measure of a concept the methodology and procedures that make up that measure must be replicable (Bryman and Bell, 2007). These concepts are more commonly of concern in quantitative research. However, they also refer to qualitative research in two ways. On one hand the origin of the data needs to be put forth in a way that makes it clear to distinguish between statements of the subjects in question and the interpretation of the researcher. On the other hand, the procedures of the data gathering need to be clear and explicit to make the comparability of different interviewers better. Thus, in short, the procedures and handling of data need to be clear because the reliability will be better when the whole research process is described in detail (Flick, 2006).

Validity is another criterion relevant to qualitative research as it refers to the question of whether the researcher sees what he thinks he sees and therefore refers to the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research. The question is whether the relationships would look the same if they were not being researched and whether the researchers' version is indeed grounded in the field or in the issue itself (Flick, 2006). LeCompte and Goetz (1982) divide validity in the context of qualitative research into internal validity and external validity. Internal validity refers to whether there is a good match between the data and the theories that are developed from it while external validity refers to whether the findings can be applied to social settings.

Additionally, it suffers from a lack of transparency in the sense that it is difficult to establish what exactly the researcher did and how he came to these conclusions (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In view of these criteria concerned with qualitative research, when working on data gathering and analysis the researcher emphasized applying the same methods every time, be as objective as possible and treating and analyzing every piece of data the same way. In fact, during the process of analysis, several different categories emerged that the researcher had not anticipated in the formulation of the research. Generalization to a greater public will however not be justifiable as only 13 respondents are not enough to be able to generalize the findings. The findings will however provide indication and increased understanding of flexible work arrangements and provide a basis for further research.

Limitation Of Study

As with most other existing research in the field of work effort and work efficiency, the evidence presented here is based on self-report. This entails that the study relies on the recollections, perceptions, and personal opinions of the respondents. However, as the interest of the study was to get a comprehensive picture of how they experience and perceive flexible work arrangements, the self-report serves a purpose in this case. Furthermore, ten out of the thirteen interviews on which this study is based were conducted in English. This can be regarded as a limitation as English is not the mother language of most of the respondents in question. However, the respondents all spoke good English, so presumably, this did not affect the outcome of the study.

Conclusion

Besides the research questionnaires, which were designed, to collect accurate data with respect how employees nowadays feel towards the implementation of working environment flexibility in industries such as information technology, firms and marketing departments. The study however developed structured semi-interview questions which are set to interview acquaintances who are currently working in IT companies. The study has also redirected the interview towards random people both local and foreign workers who hold employment in Malaysia. The finding of study will be elaborated in the subsequent chapter.

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