

A theoretical framework on flexible work schedules

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Abstract

Flexibility in the workplace is about developing modern working practices to fit the needs of the 21st century. Flexible working schedules have recently gained a lot of attention from organizations as family-friendly policy. Nowadays, organizations are trying to incorporate a culture of trust by offering employees flexibility in the workplace. In addition, flexible working practices facilitate work-life balance, and with shifting family patterns such practices are beneficial for both women and men. Organizations globally are strategizing on how best to boost their productivity through enhanced performance by the employees. Motivation of employees by the recognition of the importance of balancing their work and family life has continued to gain ground. The main focus of this paper is to understand the conceptual framework and the importance of flexibility in working schedules and arrangements in organisations to both employers and employees. An attempt is also made to know how flexible working practices help organisations and employees to be more productive. Various types of flexible work schedules like Flex-time, compressed workweek, working from home, job sharing, and reduced work hours have been increasingly implemented by employers as responses to the conflicts between employees' work and personal life.

Keywords: Flexible working schedules, work-life balance, performance, motivation, trust

1. Introduction

"Flexitime has made our work force more efficient and more focused while they are working. It is a step backwards to go back to rock solid hours. As long as an employee is getting the job done, they should be treated like an adult."

- *Hernreich, (2008)*

The first wave of interest in flexible working schedules (known also as family friendly, work-life balance or work-life integration policies) recognised their importance for offering flexibility to workers, parents and others, to help reconcile work and (family) life in a pressured 20th century global business environment (Bailyn, 1993 ^[2]; Bailyn *et al.* 1997 ^[3]; Kamerman and Kahn ^[23], 1987). There have been dramatic changes in workforce demographics over the past few decades. Women comprise nearly half of the labour force, more employees are from "dual-earner" families, and adults are more likely to pursue further education. These changes have increased employee demands for more flexibility in the workplace so that they can better balance work and life. According to 2012 National Study of Employers (Matos & Galinsky ^[29], 2012), the majority of employers have adopted flexible work schedules that allow employees to better manage their working hours and locations. For example, 77 percent of employers reported that they have offered flexible work time, and 63 percent reported flexible work location.

Flexible work schedules such as flexitime, telework, or compressed work weeks, are examples of increasing

variation in the timing and duration of work hours, and the location of work. While standard work schedules have traditionally been the norm in organizations; growing numbers of employers are experimenting with a wide range of flexible work schedules at the same time as they are transforming employment systems and work processes across time zones and cultures. The increasing proliferation of flexible and more varied work schedules for organizational members is not only a U.S., but a global employment phenomenon (Jacobs, Gerson, & Gornick ^[21], 2004). *National country studies from the U.S. to Australia estimate that only about half of employees work a standard fixed daytime work schedule five days a week* (Golden ^[15], 2001). When implemented with both employer and employee interests in mind, flexible work schedules can increase efficiency, work focus, and empower individuals to self-manage work time (Halpern ^[17], 2005; Kossek ^[24], 2005).

Flexibility in the workplace (table 1) gives employees time to perform outside of the work roles and it helps balance employees' work and life. Trust between employer and employee is an important issue when it comes to flexible working hours. If not monitored by manager, flexible working hours might create some difficulties in the workplace. Further study on flexible working hours need to be taken to understand the drawbacks of such practices. Only after investigating flexible working practices from both positive and negative sides, organizations might consider applying flexibility to the workplace.

Table 1: Criterion of Flexible Work Schedules

Criterion of Flexibility in work schedules	Examples
Flexibility in the Timing of Work <i>Definition:</i> Flexibility in when work occurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexitime • Core Days • Results-Based Professional Work • Contingent Work • Rotating Shifts • Shift Work • Four Day Work Week • Compressed Work Week • Weekend, Evening, Night Work
Flexibility in the Location or Place of Work <i>Definition:</i> Flexibility in the location or place of where work occurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telework or Flex place Satellite Offices, Neighbourhood Work Centres • Required Travel or Client Office work • Split Locations • Informal Telework combined with Nonstandard Working Time
Flexibility in Amount of work (Reduced Workload and Hours) <i>Definition:</i> Flexibility in the amount of work or workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Sharing • Reduced Load or Customized Work • Part-Time Work • Temporary Layoffs • Temporary Shutdown • Required Reduced or Part-Time Hours • Overtime Mandates or Limits • Reduced Hours • Phased Retirement • Work-Study or Coops
Flexibility in Work Continuity (Short-Term Breaks in Employment or Time Off) <i>Definition:</i> Flexibility to allow for employment breaks or time off	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-Term or Long-Term Leaves (e.g., educational, travel, family, maternity, disability, military) • Sabbaticals • Extended or Indefinite Paid and Unpaid Leaves of Absence • Vacation • Sick Time or Disability Time Off • Part Year Work • Intermittent Leave

1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the conceptual framework of Flexible work schedules.
2. To study the benefits of flexible working in organisations to both employers and employees.
3. To study the need for flexibility in work schedules.
4. To identify and study the various types of Flexible work schedules prevalent in organisations.

1.2 Literature Review

In the recent years, there is growing strand of research on flexible working arrangements, since there has been a significant indication of positive outcomes for the employee and the organization. The notion of “flexible work schedules” had developed, as primarily serving the needs of women and noncore workers. The 6-hour day initiative provides an important historical remnant for 21st century organizations, as flexible work scheduling has gradually become mainstreamed allowing for growing employee discretion over at least some aspects of work scheduling.

Workplace flexibility can be defined as ‘the ability of employees to make changes on where, when and the total time they would spend or engage in work-related tasks’ (Rau & Hyland ^[31], 2002; Hill *et al.* ^[19], 2008). Such flexible work practices have become widespread within organizations and are often used as a part of the human resource strategy to attract, motivate and retain key

talent. Government also encourages many employers to offer flexible working conditions, like flexi-hours, flexible or remote work places and part-time working options to their employees. In consequence, flexible working options have been offered by employers as the work condition for their employee (Cully *et al.* ^[11], 1999; Hogarth *et al.* ^[20], 2000).

According to Bond, Thompson, Galinsky and Prottas ^[8] (2002), the availability of flexible working options are more in demand because there are more dual-earner couples, women and single-parent families, as well as those who have geriatric care responsibilities, in the workplace. Under flexible working conditions, employees are assisted in their control of how they can work in order to mitigate the effects of work stress over their work (Halpern ^[17], 2005). Richman ^[32] (2008) perceived flexibility in working policies, which includes the ability to manage the demand of work and family matters, were strongly related to higher levels of organizational commitment. Meanwhile, other studies found that the availability of the flexibility working arrangements was differentially related to outcomes of affective commitment as well as work-to-family conflict (Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness ^[34], 1999). They also concluded that flexible work practices and policies are an indicator of greater employee commitment with lower intentions to leave the company.

Flexible work arrangements, like telework, flexible work hours, and flexible workplaces are often used to help employees in balancing their family and work life (Lim & Teo ^[26] (2000). The mere existence of flexible working policies in particular is associated with strong positive outcomes for employees who worked for middle to large size organizations. According to Thomas and Ganster ^[33] (1995), lower levels of work-family conflict were positively associated with the existence of flexibility support and policies like work schedule flexibility and supportive supervisors. While there is substantial literature review on the relationship between flexible working arrangement and work-family conflict, more evidence has been presented to prove the relationship between flexible working variables can influence outcomes for the individual and the organization, such as stress and work-family conflict (Batt & Valcour ^[5], 2003; Frye & Breugh ^[14], 2004; Madsen ^[27], 2006).

1.3 Most common types of Flexible Work Schedules (FWSs) offered across Asia

For the purposes of this study, FWSs are defined as any type of working arrangement that allows work to be carried out outside the spatial and temporal limitations of a standard working day. Specific arrangements were defined as follows:

- *Flexitime*. Vary beginning and end of workday.
- *Extended leave*. Sabbatical. Paid or unpaid leave for personal reasons.
- *Part-time work*. Working less than a 40-hour work week.
- *Compressed work week*. Fulfilling work week obligations in fewer than five days.
- *Telecommuting*. Some work taking place outside of the office.
- *Work from home*. All working hours carried out from home.
- *Job Share*. Two people sharing the job of one, by diving time.

Table2: Types of flexible work Schedules

Flexitime	A work schedule with variable starting and ending times, within limits set by one’s supervisor/manager. Employees still work the same number of scheduled hours as they would under a traditional arrangement.
Personal or Family Leaves or Extended Leaves	A block of time off while retaining one’s job. These leaves may be paid or unpaid.
Part-time Work	A work schedule that is less than full-time but is at least half of the regularly scheduled full time workweek.
Compressed Work Week	A work schedule that condenses one or more standard workweeks into fewer, longer days.
Telecommuting	A work arrangement in which employees regularly work at home or at an alternative worksite during part or all of a work schedule.
Job-Sharing	An arrangement in which two or more part-time (or occasional) employees share the responsibilities of one full-time job at a pro-rated salary.

People make choices about how to spend their time as a function of both their personal and work/life needs For many years, both business leaders and the public at large have heard anecdotal reports that employees who are given opportunities to work more flexibly are more dedicated and productive employees and are better able to manage their lives outside of work. A brief description of types of flexible work options is shown in Table 2.

1.4 Why Flexibility in Work Schedules?

Job flexibility can offer many benefits to both employers and employees, including improved job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism, greater commitment, and reduced turnover. Promoting a healthy work-life balance in workplace will help to retain skilled staff and boost productivity. For example, in a Boston College Centre for Work & Family study of six large companies, 70% of managers and 87% of employees reported that working a flexible arrangement had a positive or very positive impact on productivity; 65% of managers and 87% of employees reported that a flexible work arrangement had a positive or very positive impact on the quality of work; and 76% of managers and 80% of employees indicated that flexible work arrangements had positive effects on retention ^[30]. There are some factors which are clearly driving the introduction of flexible work arrangements in Asia as a whole:

1. Recruitment and retention. The shortage of talent in Asia is a reality. There is considerable competition among multinationals to attract talent, including women who are entering the workforce at a rapid rate. While flexible work schedules are still not widely practiced in Asia, they are seen by many companies as an important part of their value proposition. Indeed, an article by the Economist on talent shortage in Asia (August, 2007) lists flexible working hours and sabbaticals as among some of the more creative options employers can use to attract and keep their talent.

2. Technology and globalization. Employees in Asia are increasingly involved in global projects which place demands in terms of working non-standard hours. This leads to requests for some type of compensation, as people may require more time for their personal life. Improved technology allows for more and more flexible work options, although the infrastructure for this varies widely across Asia.

3. Generational shift. With a young generation entering the workforce, some traditional values are shifting, which in turn affects the demand for FWSs. Young people are less inclined to take on the type of work demands that their parents did. For young people who have not yet started a family, the main driver will be their social life: a desire to spend time with their friends out of work.

4. Overtime. The issue of high levels of overtime seems to be a particularly pervasive problem in Japan. Excessive overtime can drive turnover to a point where there is a realization that work has to be organized in a way that is more conducive to employees' life situations. As such, FWSs are primarily business-driven.

5. Traffic. Congestion is a significant problem in many parts of Asia and flexitime has proved to be a solution for many companies. In cases where commute time exceeds 2 hours, flexitime allows employees to avoid rush-hour traffic. In other words, sometimes a decision on where to locate a new office is based solely on the ability of employees to commute to work.

6. Family. Family is an extremely important factor in most countries in Asia. The situation will differ from country to country, depending on the type of support system available. In Hong Kong and Singapore, for example, there is a day care structure as well as the availability of live-in-maids and nannies to support working parents, while Japan, typically lacks such support structures. Thus, in certain countries, it may make sense to focus on the family as well as the employee when making a value proposition. Factors that might attract new employees may be to provide support for children's education or to help a family relocate to a community with more child care facilities.

1.5 Significance of Flexible Working in Organisations to both Employers and Employees

Flexible work schedules are an increasingly important issue for Industrial-Organizational (I-O) psychology as they reflect the adaptation of human resource practices to the changing nature of work, such as the shift in the labour force to be increasingly diverse in work time availability and the dramatic change in the design of work systems in response to a 24*7 global economy.

1. Employers

Flexible working opportunities can enable organisations to adapt to changing business conditions and individual employees to better balance their work and family life. For businesses, flexible working can help retain staff – and holding experienced and skilled staff is important in maintaining quality. Offering flexible hours widens the talent pool, so employers can recruit people with more skills, and also potentially recruit and retain committed and loyal staff members. This can in turn translate into improved productivity and by extension improved profitability. Employers recognise the benefits of two-way flexibility to ensure they can provide quality services when customers need them. A flexible workforce can also adapt quickly to changing business conditions. Interestingly, the global recession has provided more opportunities for flexible working: a trend to emerge from the recession is a shift towards flexible working in order to minimise redundancy. The CBI report, Employment Trends Survey (2009) ^[10], found that the most popular response to the recession was to increase the use of flexible working. The report found that more than two thirds of employers had increased flexible working (50 per cent) or intended to in the near future (30 per cent). Employers have shown greater flexibility in

dealing with the recession. However, there have still been a significant number of redundancies, broadly equivalent to the 1990s recession. Increased flexibility in the workplace is a necessity if the economy is to return to sustained growth. In order to increase productivity and to give the economy a competitive advantage it is necessary to draw on and develop all available resources.

Case study: KPMG

In February of this year, KPMG introduced a new scheme, Flexible Futures, designed to minimise the prospect of large scale redundancies in the current recession and enable the firm to retain its talented people. Under the scheme, staff were invited to sign up to the possibility of being asked to reduce their working week by a day with that day unpaid and/or take sabbatical leave of between four and twelve weeks at 30 per cent of pay. 85 per cent of staff signed up for the scheme. Over the past year, 99 per cent of flexible working requests have been accepted by KPMG.

2. Employees

For employees, flexible working allows them to better balance their home life with their responsibilities at work. Finding work with flexible hours, which involves minimal travel, to fit around family and childcare responsibilities is an emerging theme. Evidence has also indicated that the offer of flexible working options is important to employees when looking for or deciding to take a job. According to the British Market Research Bureau (June 2008) ^[12] of those employees who had at least one form of flexible working available to them, and who either knew, or thought, it would be available when they applied or were offered the job, 54 per cent said it was a 'very important', or 'quite important' factor in their decision to take up the job. This group is made up of a much greater proportion of female employees with dependent children than male employees with children, or those without children; and a greater proportion of those who care for someone with ill-health/disability than who do not have these responsibilities. For those that are not in paid employment, but who are looking for work, a substantial majority (78 per cent) regard flexible working arrangements as 'very important' or 'quite important' in a job.

Evidence Box 1

In a study on Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009) ^[13] working Better: Fathers, family and work-contemporary perspectives, the following observations were made:

- Although nearly half (47 per cent) of fathers thought that the father's role is to provide; only 23 per cent of fathers (compared to 34 per cent of mothers) thought that childcare is the primary responsibility of the mother.
- 62 per cent of fathers surveyed thought that fathers (in general) should spend more time caring for their children.

- Around half (51 per cent) of working parents feels their relationship with their children would improve if they could work flexibly.
- A third (33 per cent) of working fathers ^[9] said they miss out on and would like to be there for breakfast with their children and just under a fifth (19 per cent) would like to be there for bedtime.
- Flexi-time and working from home were the most favoured options by men ^[9]; 33 per cent of fathers and 28 per cent of non-fathers had used flexi time in the last year; 28 per cent of fathers and 21 per cent of non-fathers had utilised a working from home option in the same time period.

A CIPD report on 'Flexible working provision and uptake' in 2012 found that 72% of the employers surveyed believed that implementing flexible working practices had a positive impact on staff engagement and 73% felt that it had a positive impact on employee motivation. According to the survey, it was found that employees who are satisfied with their work-life balance and those on flexible contracts are more engaged with their work than those who are dissatisfied or not working flexibly. It found that those on flexible contracts tend to be more emotionally engaged, more satisfied with their work, more likely to speak positively about their organisation and less likely to quit than those not employed on flexible contracts. While there is never a guarantee that flexible working arrangements will have a considerable positive impact, if proper consideration is given to what options may be suitable, benefits can include:

- a more efficient and productive organisation
- a more motivated workforce
- better retention of valuable employees
- a wider pool of applicants can be attracted for vacancies
- reduced levels of absence, sickness and stress
- better customer service and increased customer loyalty
- working hours that best suit the organisation, its employees and its customers

1.6 Indian companies that let employees dictate their own work hours

1. No parking? Work from home at Philips

Electronics firm Philips, lets employees who drive to work and don't get parking, go back and work from home. The logic: logging in from home is quicker than finding parking. Employees can choose to reach between 8 am and 1 pm. "When we are aware of road diversions and blocks and advisories about traffic disruptions, employees have the freedom to work from home and head out once the traffic restrictions have eased," a Philips spokesperson said.

2. Traffic dictates office hours at the Future Group

When Mumbai-based retailer Future Group consolidated its offices in Vikhroli, 'traffic dynamics' dictated work hours. Future Group allows people to come in between 8.30 am and 10.30 am and leave after eight hours of working. Future Group chief people officer Kaustubh

Sonalkar said: "We changed work hours to flexi timings and that gave people lot of relief from traffic."

3. SAP Labs: Come and leave when you want

Bengaluru's SAP Labs doesn't monitor entry and exit timings-employees decide when to get to work and leave. SAP allows employees to work from home once a week, a frequency that can be increased by their reporting managers. "It's about output and not how many hours the employees spend on work," a spokesperson for SAP Labs said.

4. PricewaterhouseCoopers India has an employee friendly location

When PricewaterhouseCoopers India decided to open its third office in Mumbai, it chose the city's western suburb of Goregaon. In the National Capital region, the global consultancy firm is identifying a location at Noida. "At the end of the day, we want our employees to maintain a work-life balance. Otherwise, it will impact their productivity," PwC India human capital leader Jagjit Singh said.

5. Coca Cola: flexi work hours

The local units of Coca-Cola have introduced flexi work hours that help employees avoid rush-hour traffic. "We start 30 minutes early at 8:30 am and close by 5:15 pm in order to beat the peak traffic hours," said Sameer Wadhawan, Vice President for Human Resources & Services at Coca-Cola.

6. KPMG India: work from anywhere

KPMG India has an agile working policy, which allows people to "work from anywhere" - be it a client location or home, provided that the role can be executed virtually and that productivity, performance and timelines are not hampered, said Shalini Pillay, head of people, performance and culture.

7. Microsoft offers buses and cabs

In Hyderabad, Microsoft has a fleet of buses for point-to-point pick up and drop of employees within the campus and cabs for home pick up and drop after office hours.

8. Infosys: buses, cycles and cabs

Elsewhere in the country, Infosys is promoting options such as buses, cabs and cycles for its more than 1.79 lakh employees. In Pune, Infosys has launched a campaign, "Ab Bus Karo," to encourage employees to take company buses to its development centre. In Bengaluru, the tech major is encouraging employees to cycle to office.

9. AmEx South Asia: Pushing for a car-free Tuesday

"We are asking all our employees to make maximum use of the increased public transport facility on car-free Tuesdays. The reduction in the number of cars will also help reduce pollution," said Sanjay Rishi, president of AmEx South Asia, which has offices on Golf Course Road and Cyber City.

10. Other Gurgaon firms: carpooling and flexi-timings

Bacardi, Ericsson, Samsung and Amway, which are headquartered in Gurgaon, have introduced flexi timings. "Traffic in Gurgaon is a big challenge," said Bacardi managing director Vijay Subramaniam. "We have had to resort to means such as three work timing slots in a day, encouraging working from home and car pooling to drive around this issue... We encourage members to use the metro, too."

According to Altman and Golden ^[1](2008), there are six conditions in which companies may offer more employees more options for flexible working time, such

as more flexible scheduling to better fit work to employees' preferences.

Table 1: Six reasons employers may offer more employee-centred flexible work schedules

Reason	Motivation to match employee's preference for work schedule
1.	Employee's preferred work schedule deviates from the employer's preferred operating or shift schedule, which may increase absenteeism, tardiness, unauthorized use of sick leave or on-the-job shirking.
2.	Replacement cost of turnover and filling job vacancies increases, e.g. an emerging shortage of labour or of a specific type of human capital.
3.	The supervisory and administrative costs of delivering flexible work options decreases, e.g. technological innovations, the spread of work scheduling software and improvements, telecommunication devices and self-managed team working practices.
4.	Employees' discretion over their own work schedules enhances daily work performance and/or organizational performance, e.g. a "high-performance" tool.
5.	The firm's time horizon for considering labour costs becomes longer, resulting in lower Discounting of the potential future cost savings associated with more flexible scheduling.
6.	To improve their employees' work/life quality, in lieu of wage increases or other employee Benefits

Thus, we may conceive of two, often separate classes of flexible work arrangements in terms of their potential impact on firm performance: those that enhance individual or organizational productivity, and thus directly restrain unit labour costs of production; and those that improve employee well-being and satisfaction with job or life, without raising current labour costs, and thus lead to a longer run suppression of labour costs in that they save the relatively more hidden costs associated with turnover and human capital investment.

2. Conclusion

"...the company trusts workers to do their work rather than regulate too much...treating them as adults...everybody wants to be treated as if people trust you."

– Director, Mgmt & Org. Dev., Asia Pacific

Flexible working hours are becoming important to the workplaces. A lot of organizations offer flexible working hours to employees due to the benefits that flexibility gives to both employee and employer. Greater employee productivity and higher organization profitability are the most common benefits. In today's society, both men and women want to find a balance between work, family and caring responsibilities which are shared more equally than ever before. Flexible working hours promote and facilitate work-life balance. Reduced stress and increased employee wellbeing are out-comes of the work-life balance. Flexible work requests may include arrangements around working time, work organisation or the work environment. A change to work arrangements may occur just once or be ongoing (for a fixed or indefinite time). A flexible work-hour policy comes with its fair share of advantages and disadvantages. Companies need to weight both and take an astute call on whether flexi-hours will work for them or not, keeping in mind the intricacies of their operations, business patterns, client requirements and resources As an employer, you also have a legal responsibility not to refuse flexible arrangements for an employee with parental or career responsibilities, unless it is reasonable to do so in the circumstances.

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