

WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to examine the importance of flexible working arrangements on performance of business organizations in a competitive and complex environment of business, such as the recent Covid-19 pandemic. The period of Covid-19 lockdown and stay at home has brought about unbearable loss of jobs by employees, standstill of productivity and loss of profit by business organizations. The problems of high employee turnover and low productivity and profitability could be attributed to rigidity and inflexibility working arrangement by organizations. The study concluded that Tele-working, Tele-commuting, and Flexi-time as forms of workplace flexibility have positive relationship with organizational performance. Therefore, the study recommended that management should encourage teleworking as it will enhance productivity and employee retention since employees can work from any location with the use of technology. Management should promote telecommuting which is an arrangement for employees to work from home, hence it will enhance work-life balance and productivity. Also, management should emphasis on flexi-time which allows employees on full-time employment to discretionarily fix the convenient period to start and finish work, as it will enhance work-life balance and productivity.

Introduction

Workplace flexibility is particularly significant in increasingly hypercompetitive

markets and crisis situations like the current Covid-19 stay at home pandemic. In order to respond to the unpredictable environment

with better organizational flexibility, organizations employ Human Resources Management (HRM) practices that promote more flexible work (Stavrou, 2005).

Practices which can improve individual and/or organizational performance through employment of alternative forms of work schedules are known as flexible work arrangements (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). Workplace flexibility is useful for achieving the more efficient use of human resources because it provides an opportunity to allocate employees and their time depending on the nature of work that has to be done (Berkery, *et al.*, 2017).

Workplace flexibility has recently gained a reasonable popularity mostly in the European Union (EU) and Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (Battisti and Vallanti, 2013). Large scale surveys such as the European working conditions surveys (Eurofound, 2017), the workplace employment relations series and the work life balance study (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011), and a recent comparative analysis by Gialis and Taylor (2016) confirm the astronomical popularity of flexible working arrangements in both highly developed countries like the UK, Italy, Netherlands, and less developed EU countries like Greece, Romania, Portugal and so on. Other studies have also confirmed increasing proportions of workforce using flexible working arrangements in many countries worldwide such as Japan, Australia, USA and Canada (Spreitzer, Cameron, and Garret, 2017).

The early attempts of examining the impact of workplace flexibility dated from the 1970s and were focused on their effect on individual performance (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). Recently the research of workplace flexibility's impact on individual

performance expanded to work-life issues, health outcomes and work engagement (Rudolph and Baltes, 2017). More recently, studies explored the impact of specific workplace flexibility on firm performance in terms of productivity, profitability, turnover, absenteeism and so on (Berkery *at al.*, 2017). The significance of workplace flexibility include employer-driven flexible working arrangements that are stemmed at lowering costs. Also flexible working arrangement that are aimed at reducing work-life conflict (employee-driven). An increasingly global business context, new technologies, national and global economic crises, rising unemployment and increased competition have all contributed to the need for changing working methods. These changes became known as "flexibility concept/" and since the 1970s, people-oriented approaches have become part of business life. Businesses have created innovative working models to adapt to changing conditions to maintain their competitive advantage and to lead their workforce to better levels of productivity.

Today, businesses are expected to treat employees such that they are satisfied with their work and the business they work for. Businesses aim to retain their qualified workforce and to keep pace with changing business practices. Businesses that concentrate on providing employee satisfaction have a competitive advantage, because they have devoted employees. That brings along motivation and productivity, allowing the businesses to make a difference and to be a preferred employer for qualified employees at the same time (Altindag and Sillor, 2014). On the other hand, job creation and the management of unemployment is also an important aspect today. The main target of creating new work models and employment types is to promote

employment and eliminate unemployment. Positive results for employees' personal lives are also more and more being considered. For example, flexible working could potentially eliminate traffic problems for employees who previously had to face dense traffic in their daily commutes, especially in big cities. Increased work satisfaction becomes possible when employees have more flexibility to schedule their spare time outside of work and bring fewer personal concerns to their working environment. The reduction of employees being late, employees who are not exhausted, employees focused on their work when present, and their devotion to their work significantly increase how smoothly a business can be run (Altindag and Sillor, 2014). The study is aimed at filling the gap in literature concerning flexible working arrangements and organizational performance.

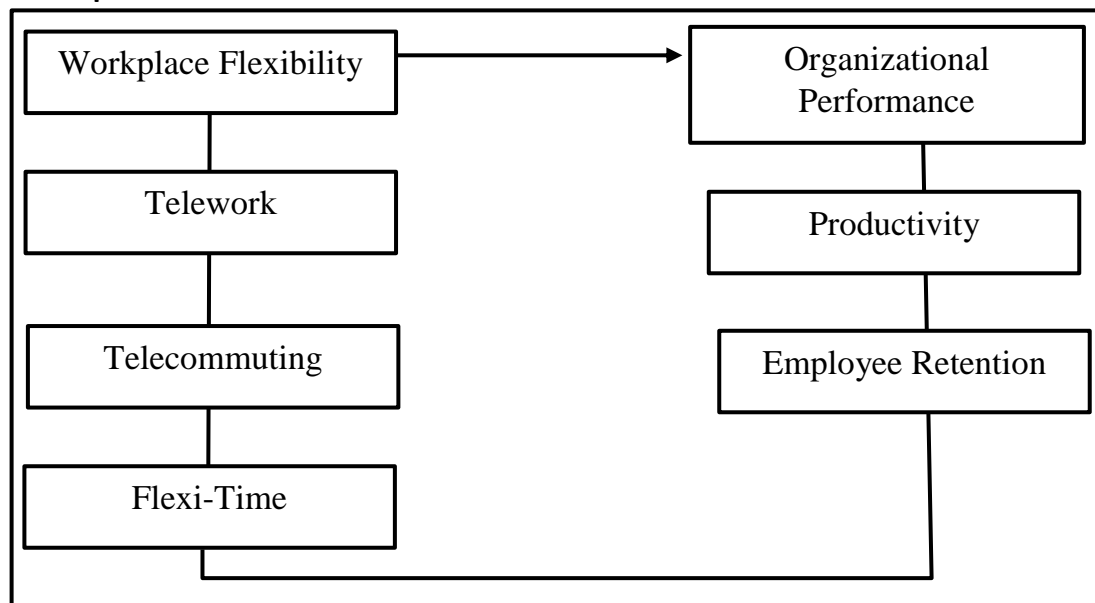
Statement of the Problem

Previous studies were aimed at exploring the impact of workplace flexibility

on organizational performance. Not much emphasis is laid on performance during crisis and complex situation on the country. The period of Covid-19 lockdown and stay at home has brought about unbearable loss of jobs by employees, standstill of productivity and loss of profit by business organizations. This situation would no doubt lead to untimely death by the employees due to stress and frustration, a total close down by many organizations, and loss of revenue to government to maintain law and order, leading to insecurity on the country. The problems of high employee turnover and low productivity and profitability could be attributed to rigidity and inflexibility working arrangement by organizations. Lack of state-of-the-art technology has made the employees not to perform tasks from remote locations. Employees cannot work from home. And employees are not allowed to fix their working period.

Therefore, the study is intended to find out if flexible working arrangements can influence organizational performance.

Conceptual Framework



Source: Researcher (2021)

Conceptual framework showing the relationship between workplace flexibility with its dimensions as telework, telecommuting, and flexi-time, and organization performance

Aim/Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between workplace flexibility and organizational performance.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. Ascertain the relationship between telework and organizational performance
2. Ascertain the relationship between telecommuting and organizational performance
3. Ascertain the relationship between flexi-time and organizational performance

Theoretical Background

The study is aligned with the Social Exchange Theory. According to Blau (1964) social exchange theory can be employed in every situation where exchange of social and material support occurs. The basic idea of this theory is that organizations can motivate workers by offering them incentives in return for their contribution (Caillier, 2016).

Berkery et al. (2017) adduce that it is possible that employees will increase their efforts if flexible working arrangements help them manage their work-life balance. Such a relationship where employers motivate their workers to work in accordance with the organization's plans is a typical example of exchange described in the social exchange theory. If available flexible working arrangements help employees manage their work-life balance are help employees manage their work-life balance are reduce levels of stress, exhaustion, burnout and so

on, and it is expected that they may want to return the favour to their employers. This desire to return the favour combined with a higher perceived level of autonomy (due to the possibility of flexi-time) could lead to the increased productivity of employees (Berkery et al, 2017), and in turn increased productivity of employees should have impact on improved firm performance.

Conceptual Review

The study is generally reviewed by highlighting the related literature on workplace flexibility and organizational performance. Flexible, non-standard or alternative work arrangements are options that allow work to be accomplished outside of the traditional boundaries of a standard organization of work in terms of different dimensions: amount, distribution of working time and place of work (Spreitzer et al., 2017). Based on the literature, relevant FWAs usually include: flexible working hours, part-time work, job sharing, shift, and weekend work, overtime, annual hours, flexi-time, temporary work, fixed-term contracts, subcontracting, teleworking, paid parental leave, flexible leave arrangements, choice of rosters and shifts, variable year employment, annual hours contracts, compressed working weeks and working from home (Berkery et al, 2017).

Based on different perspectives of FWAs, as emphasized by Kotey and Sharma (2016), there are two main types of FWAs: 1) the employee's, which enables employees to manage their work-life balance (e.g. paid parental leave, flexible leave arrangements,, choice of rosters and shifts, variable year employment); and 2) the employers' which allow organizations to adjust costs of employment in line with production volume or to secure a more competitive and motivated workforce. Several of the

employer-driven FWA practices have been analyzed in this study: weekend work as a type of arrangement that enables employees to extend their work hours during the weekend while taking time off during the rest of the week (Stavrou, 2005); shift work which allows continuous production as workers are assigned to work in different time periods (shifts) during one day (Kierin & Aguirre, 2005); overtime as additional working hours that are above standard workweek hours (ILO, 2011); annual hours contract as an agreement between employer and employee which specifies how many work hours annually the employee is required to work (Stavrou, 2005); temporary/casual work is an agreement for employment for a limited short period of time (Thomas Wandera, 2011); and fixed-term contracts as short or long-term employment contracts with a specific duration (De Cuyper, De Wiite, & Van Emmerik, 2011).

Employee-driven FWA practices included in the study are: part-time work where employees agree to work fewer hours weekly than a standard workweek (Zeynnoğlu, Cooke, & Mann, 2009); job-sharing which is characterized by splitting work between two employees in a way that their joint weekly work hours are equal to the standard week working hours of one employee (Kotry & Sharma, 2016); flexi-time which allows workers who work full-time to choose when to start and finish work (ILO, 2011); telework as a type of arrangement where employees work from remote locations using technology (Mamaghani, 2012); home-based work also known as telecommuting as an agreement that allows employees to work from home (Kotey & Sharrna, 2016) and, finally, compressed work -week or a working week which consists of less than the standard five days, but requires that employees work increased

work hours during each workday (Baltes et al., 1999).

Flexibility is not a new concept. In fact, various working methods of the past and of today can be considered flexible working. Flexibility can be looked at from viewpoint of laborers, professional employees, and employers. Moreover, a number of factors require flexible working, such as increasing competitive pressure, technological changes, changes in sectoral structure, convenient working hours, and unemployment (Celenk and Atmaca, 2011; Lee, 1996).

According to a publication of the Metal Industrialists Union of Turkey (MESS), Flexibility and Flexible Working, "businesses must renew themselves continuously because of continuously changing economic and industrial environment". This is why now businesses are expected to focus on diversity and complexity instead of standardized structures, simplicity instead of size, liquidity and openness instead of normativeness and sternness, and flexibly adapting to change instead of stagnation. These expectations are defined as "flexibility (Trey, 1992; Mess, 1999). According to this definition, flexibility is, in short, the ability to adapt to environmental changes, in other words, the ability of employees and businesses to most efficiently adapt to changing business environments. Flexibility In working time is referred to as "a significant and efficient means for adapting to fluctuations." New business concepts and modern regulations support flexible working systems worldwide (Sezgin, 2005).

Reasons of Using Flexible Methods

While the concept of flexible work times is not new, flexibilization of work times is continuously gaining importance. This will be even more so in the coming

years for various reasons. For example, advances in technology require new working methods and the adjustment of work hours to these changed working methods. To summarize, the reasons for increased flexibility in work time are: the necessity to increase and maintain competitiveness, the necessity of switching to flexible production due to international competition, and advances in technology. Developments in technology allow some more injury-prone jobs to be taken over by machines. As a result, employees have more spare time and are more creative at work. When evaluated from the viewpoint of the business, it is important to adapt work schedules in the business with investments made in technology, according to the machine's operating capacity and operating time. Flexibility of working times is important not only for the business but also for employees, because it enables them to manage their own time. Developing industrial countries aim to diminish unemployment both by creating flexible working hours and by shortening working hours, an approach that seems rather simple and suitable economically (Ekonomi, 1994).

- (1) Economic Crisis and Unemployment: Increasing economic immobility and unemployment because of the crisis in the petroleum sector that occurred in the 1970s was an important factor in the spread of flexible working (Gediz and Yelcunkaya, 2000).
- (2) Technological Developments: Technological developments have an important place in the flexibility concept. Technology advanced rapidly after the economic crisis of the 1970s and the use of computer controlled systems in production became widespread (Tregaskis, Brewster, Mayne & Hegewisc, 1998).

In this period, the labor market was transformed by the use of information communication technology, and the need for knowledge workers with the ability to adapt to change and development increased (Horwitz and Smith, 1998).

- (3) Globalization and Competition: Another significant finding of flexibility research is that economies go beyond their national frameworks, and in parallel to that, competition becomes gradually more international (Yavuz, 2000). Deregulation is not the synonym for "flexibilization." Deregulation, the reduction of hectoring norms, has a flexibilizing effect, because it leaves more room for flexibility in work contracts. However, the reverse is not always true. In fact, flexibility is only possible with numerous rules (Yunus, 1993). Flexible working often means working off the books especially in developing countries such as Turkey. Flexible working is a product of development in the fields of information and communication. Moreover, flexible working makes it possible for the employee to have more spare time for himself. However, flexible employment and flexible work methods create an insecure and unsteady environment for the worker, because the work relationship is often skewed in favor of the employer, reducing the protection of the worker (Iozlu, 2011). The main idea of the concept of flexibility is to express flexibility in different ways, remaining open to the ability to adapt to change and to external factors. In this respect, flexibility is a determining factor

during phases of dramatic change (Karakoyun, 2007).

- (4) Intrinsic motivation: According to Akdemir (1996) motivation can be defined as "fomenting individuals towards a specific purpose and specifying variables that may be influential in fomentation According to the statement of Yankellovich (1982); which is discussed as a different view on the relationship between motivation and flexible working methods, the number of people who feel satisfaction and self-realization by means of working is not great. It was indicated that working is not deemed significant by most people. Fomenting people to working life requires prioritizing non-material means as well as providing material resources. In this case, flexible management applications that allow employees to spend less time at work should be introduced. Lu et al. (2008) find that flexibility has a consistently positive effect for work outcomes, but an exacerbating effect for feelings that family life interfered with work.
- (5) Healthy Physical Working Conditions: Technological developments and changes affect people psychologically in work life and the interaction is assessed as positive in terms of increasing the quality of work, but it is assessed as negative in terms of physical working conditions. Being able to adapt to technological development and to advance consciously through its utilization are Important. Technological innovations may have negative consequences for the business and the employee when misused or used outside of its scope.

For example, a newly purchased device can create more noise, light, or heat in the work environment. When approached in terms of physical conditions, this case rapidly affects employees' working lives. In such a case, being able to employ people with flexible working methods allowing them to spend less time at the work place would be rather healthy (Altindag and Siller, 2014).

Empirical Review

Workplace Flexibility and Organizational Performance

FWAs can directly or indirectly influence a range of both organizational and individual (behavioural and work-related) beneficial outcomes (Kattenbach et al., 2010; de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). Outcomes of FWAs on firm performance can be classified into non-financial performance and financial performance. Absenteeism, turnover and retention have been the most frequently studied non-financial performance variables in the context of flexible arrangement. The idea is that without options for flexibility at the workplace, employees will try to improve their work-life balance by reducing the amount of work and/or reporting they are sick even when they are not (Battisti & Valianti, 2013). Due to its negative consequences (Dalton & Merely 1990), absenteeism is perceived as negative by organizations and they are looking to reduce it as much as possible.

It is argued that absenteeism of employees should decrease under the influence of FWAs, because their stress levels will be lower (Baltes et al, 1999). Accordingly, in the meta-analysis of de Menezcs & Kelliher (2011), it was confirmed

that 60% studies are reporting that FWAs are associated with lower levels of absenteeism.

Baltes et al, (1999) and Kauffeld, Jonas, and Frey (2004) report positive effect of flexible work-time design on absenteeism. Similarly as in the case of absenteeism, employee turnover is perceived as negative from the employers' perspective.

Stavrou (2005) and Berkery et al. (2017) suggest that organizations that use FWAs will benefit from both lower levels of absenteeism and turnover. Employees perceive employers who offer FWAs as attentive to their well-being, and in turn they gain motivation to be more committed to them, which could eventually lead, to reduced levels of turnover, absenteeism and improved retention (Berkerv et al., 2017).

Accordingly, Stavrou (2005) and McNall, Masuda, and Nicklin (2010) confirm in their studies that the availability of FWAs decreases employee turnover Besides non-financial measures of organizational performance, there is also a significant number of financial measures studied in the context of FWAs such as profitability, productivity, profit, return on assets, return on equity and return on investment (Baltes et al. 1999; Stavrou, 2005; de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). Berkery et al. (2017) highlight that HRM practices that increase workforce flexibility may boost productivity and innovativeness, and ultimately could lead to increased financial performance, which can manifest itself as increased profitability Most of the studies on financial measures reported no association with FWAs. However, a positive relation was supported by 44% of them (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011).

Shepard III, Clifton, and Kruse (1996) argue that FWAs could have an impact on productivity due to increased effort, better cooperation and the ability to attract talented workers that prefer flexible work

schedules, but due to more changes in the schedule it is also possible that toe costs of supervisors will increase. Results of previous studies are in line with the idea that FWAs axe positively related to productivity (Baltes et al, 1999, Shepard III et al, 1996), however, when compared to remote work from home is positively associated with profit and perceptions of organizational performance (Meyer, Jukerjee & Sestero, 2001; Stavrou, 2005), while flexi-time is positively associated with profitability, employee retention, and negatively to turnover and absenteeism (Stavrou & Kilaniotis, 2010), Home-based work and telework are also positively related to organizational performance, while they do not have a significant association with turnover (Stavrou, 2005). Interestingly; Berkery et al. (2017) did not find significantly different associations between any of the flexible work bundles and organizational profitability.

Employer-driven arrangements are expected to be found predominantly with positive effects on organizational performance in order to justify its purpose (increased productivity). However, previous findings are mixed, or suggest that their effects on organizational performance are predominantly negative. Weekend work, .shift work and Overtime have a positive relationship with turnover, while, interestingly, no significant association with organizational performance was found (Stavrou, 2005: Stavrou & Kilarsiotis, 2010). Abo, shift work is associated with increased absenteeism, and increased turnover of employees with higher tenure in organizations (Shers & Dicker, SMffi). Therefore, previous findings indicate the need for research of employee-driven and employer-driven arrangements, as well as their effects on organizational performance

in order to substantiate the fact that effects of FWAs vary depending on the primary beneficiary.

Summary

The study indicated that workplace flexibility has a positive and significant relationship with organizational performance. Workplace flexibility is the ability of management to design tasks in such a way that will create work-life balance and enhance firm performance. Based on the literature, various flexible working arrangements include telework, telecommuting, and flexible-time, others are flexible working hours, part-time work, job sharing, shift and weekend work, overtime, annual hours, temporary work, fixed-term contracts and so on.

Firm performance is the overall effectiveness and efficiency of a firm to sustain and improve upon its success. This can be classified into financial and non-financial performance.

Conclusion

Based on the literature, the study concluded that among other relevant flexible working arrangements:

1. Teleworking is positively related to firm performance.
2. Telecommuting is positively related to firm performance.
3. Flexi-time is positively related to firm performance.

Recommendations

The study recommended as follows:

1. Management should encourage teleworking as a type of working arrangement where employees perform tasks from remote locations using technology which could improve performance.

2. Management should promote telecommuting as an arrangement that allows employees to work from home as this will enhance work-life balance and improve productivity.
3. Management should encourage flexi-time which allows employees who work full-time to choose when to start and finish work which could lead to efficiency and increased productivity.

Contribution to knowledge

The study has contributed to knowledge by discovering that flexible working arrangements such as teleworking, telecommuting and flexi-time have greater impact on organizational performance such as productivity and employee retention.

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