

SMART

Journal of Business Management Studies

(A Professional, Refereed, International and Indexed Journal)

Vol-20 Number-2

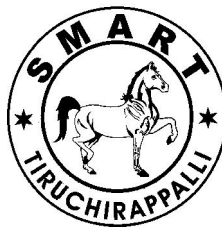
July - December 2024

Rs. 500

ISSN 0973-1598 (Print)

ISSN 2321-2012 (Online)

Professor MURUGESAN SELVAM, M.Com, MBA, Ph.D, D.Litt
Founder - Publisher and Chief Editor



**SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT AND ADVANCED RESEARCH TRUST
(SMART)**

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI (INDIA)

www.smartjournalbms.org

**THE IMPACT OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS ON
EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES PRE - COVID IN MALAYSIA**

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Abstract

Flexible working arrangements (FWAs) can be defined as any one of a spectrum of work structures, that alters the time and/ or place that work gets done on a regular basis. However, only a small percentage of organizations in Malaysia implement this work arrangement. This study first discusses the demographic profile of employees, who demand FWAs in Malaysia. It further examines employee outcomes such as work life balance, job satisfaction, task performance, organizational citizenship behaviour and turnover intentions. The

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research was conducted, using a survey approach among employees, in the age group of 18 to 60 years, in the service sector in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Descriptive analysis, chi-square analysis and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used and results revealed difference between employees in FWAs and non-FWAs. Young female employees, who have young children, living in urban areas, reported higher demand for FWAs. There was significant influence of FWAs on work life balance, job satisfaction and turnover intentions in Malaysia. This study recommends that the implementation of flexible working arrangements is important in an organization for employees to have a better work life balance, increased job satisfaction, and to reduce turnover intentions. This ultimately will benefit the organization in terms of organizational productivity and performance which is in line with United Nation's SDG 8, which highlights inclusive and sustainable economic growth and productive employment.

Keywords: Flexible Working Arrangements, Covid 19, Organizational Outcome, Job Satisfaction, SDG 8.

JEL Code : J81, D23 and J281.

Paper Received : 01.05.2024

Revised : 23.05.2024

Accepted : 31.05.2024

1. Introduction

Flexible working arrangements (FWAs) can be defined as any one of a spectrum of work structures, that alters the time and/ or place that work gets done on a regular basis. This workplace policy, which is gaining more attention post Covid-19, includes flexibility in the scheduling of hours worked, flexibility in the number of hours worked and flexibility in the place of work (Georgetown Law, 2010). The main aim of FWAs, is to achieve work-life balance and job satisfaction, which ultimately might lead to improved productivity. Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA) have taken the world by storm. Nearly 75% of companies globally were reported to have introduced FWAs to enable employees to vary their hours and use the latest technology to work remotely. Despite the success stories and international best practices of FWA, only a small percentage of companies in Malaysia pursue FWA policies and only 10 per cent of listed companies plan to enhance or implement the FWA policies.

Talent Corporation Malaysia (TalentCorp), categorises FWAs as compressed workweek,

employee's choice of day off, flexible work hours, job sharing, leaving work early, project-based work, reduced or part time work, school holiday work arrangement, seasonal work, shift swapping, staggered hours, telecommuting and weekend work. With the advancement in technology, the number of employees opting for FWAs has seen an upsurge globally. These changes have supported flexibility in the aspects of when, how and where the employees work to complete their tasks. Research by Thomson and Thomson (2010) shows that a company can increase its performance on service delivery and customer satisfaction when the company conducts flexible working projects. In addition, FWA can also increase company savings and reduce recruitment as well as retention costs, thus leading to a 25 per cent reduction in accommodation costs. More importantly, FWA can reduce work-related travel by as much as 30 per cent.

2. Review of Literature

There are several policies under FWAs, that are implemented by some organizations such as flexible time, home-based work, compressed

workweek, and tele-working (**Galinsky & Johnson, 1998**). In China, **Parker (2014)**, found that the increasing level of air pollution, deteriorating traffic conditions, and rising office rent prices, have led some of the American companies in China to offer more FWAs to white collar employees. He added that majority of companies allowed only two types of FWAs, which are flexible start and finish time or telecommuting.

In Singapore, the Report of the Ministry of Manpower's (MOM) Conditions of Employment shows that regarding staff retention, workers are bound to remain with organizations that offer FWAs (**Sim, 2019**). The extent of firms offering, at any rate one formal FWA, had increased from 50 per cent in 2017 to 53 percent in 2018. In the meantime, firms offering at any rate one specially appointed FWAs, went up from 75 per cent to 84 per cent in the same period. In other words, 72 per cent of employees work in organizations, that offer at least one formal FWA. According to a study by global workspace provider **Regus (2017)**, greater levels of flexible working would save businesses money, reduce operating costs, and increase profits significantly. Before the pandemic hit Malaysia, *Talent Corp's Life at Work Awards* had always been the platform to recognise employers and individuals who advocate the best practices, to strike the right balance between work and personal life, as well as advocating diversity and inclusion.

In 2017, companies that implemented FWA policies, won the *Life at Work Awards* such as Price Waterhouse and Coopers (PwC), winning the Best International Organisation and Albern Murty Digi being conferred CEO Champion, who champions diversity and inclusion without compromising on efficiency. This category acknowledges their efforts in creating both family and women friendly facilities at workplace. **Tsen**

(2021) also found that all FWAs led to an increase in organizational commitment and a decrease in turnover intentions, all of which imply the beneficial outcomes of FWA.

2.1 Demographic Factors and Flexible Working Arrangements (FWAs)

There are several demographic factors such as gender, age, education level, marital status, family responsibilities, industry of employment, years of employment, monthly income, advancement in technology, distance to and from workplace, transportation to workplace, and living area, which have an effect on work arrangements. A study by **Wallace and Cousins (2004)** established that gender plays a significant role towards Work-Life Balance of Employees. In a recent study in Canada, **Dilmaghani, (2020)** found positive association between FWAs and work life balance to be stronger among men and women with dependent children. Even though age does not impact the use of workplace policies, the choice of the practice differs with age (**Allen, 2001**). Women, between 25 to 34 years of age, were more likely to opt for flexibility in their jobs (**DiNatale & Boraas, 2002**). This is attributed to the care responsibilities, associated with this age group, as women spend more time for the young ones as well as old people at home. **Choo (2021)** also found moderately strong and positive relationship between FWA and job performance in Klang Valley, Malaysia. In a similar study in 2015, **Subramaniam, Overton, and Maniam (2015)** found that higher educated women, particularly those holding university degrees and earning a higher income with higher occupational status, were more interested in FWAs at the workplace compared to women who did not possess higher education qualification. This is because married women, with higher education and higher income, faced a bigger challenge in balancing work and family (**Subramaniam et al., 2013**).

An earlier study also suggests that married employees were more likely to use these policies compared to unmarried employees (Allen, 2001). Family responsibilities included having young children and taking care of elderly parents or relatives (Subramaniam, 2014). Frone and Yardley (1996) suggested that the age of the youngest child of the employee influenced the use of policies like flexitime and compressed workweek. Having children less than six years old, exerted positive impact on work from home (WFH) (Sarbu, 2014).

The industry in which employees work, plays a crucial role in the need for WFH. In particular, IT-related jobs or jobs that belong to the service sector are often considered suitable for flexible work (Sarbu, 2014). A higher qualification level among employees and the use of computers, prompt employees to opt for WFH while employees, who work in middle-sized or large firms, are less interested in this work arrangement (Sarbu, 2014). Kirchmeyer (1992), way back in the 90s, had already pointed out that employees in the same organization, for a long period of time, tended to make use FWAs. Subramaniam et al. (2015) found that Malaysian employees, earning an income above RM7000 (equivalent to USD 1700), are more interested in FWAs at the workplace. Peters et al. (2004), in dealing with the topic of telecommuting, mentioned the distance to the workplace as a relevant determinant.

One of the major determinants of the need for FWA is the use of transport modes such as a car or public transport or bicycle (Loop et al., 2017). A study, by The Malaysian Institute of Transport (MITRANS) in 2011, shows that only 17 percent or approximately 1.24 million trips per day, were made by using public transport while the remaining 83 percent, or 6 million trips, were made by using private

transport, which were mostly single-occupancy vehicles. According to Unidas, (2003), a major contemporaneous problem in all industrialized countries is the traffic congestion in urban areas, especially the traffic jams in the mornings and the evenings when commuters travel to and from their workplaces.

2.2 Flexible Working Arrangements (FWAs) and Organizational Performance Work Life Balance (WLB)

Flexible working arrangements report positive relationship on employee wellbeing, employee engagement and work-life balance (WLB) (Ayoub, J., 2022, Subramaniam et al., 2015). The work-life balance concept has recently gained some attention due to its relevance and importance to the employees, despite their relationship status, family size, and number of children (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). FWAs have been introduced as a benefit for parent/caring employees in order to help them fulfill work and life responsibilities and achieve work life balance. Subramaniam G. et al. (2021) found that majority of the participants emphasized on how WFH provided them greater control over their work schedule, which allowed them to look into the needs of their personal life such as tending children or doing household chores while maintaining work productivity at the same time. In a work-life balance survey, researchers found that employees believe that flexible work practices improve workplace morale, which positively influences work-life balance. Employees also believe that employer is able to help them balance their work and life roles.

Ch. Endah Winarti et al. (2023) in their study, demonstrated that work life balance has positive and significant effect on employee performance, as reported by the Bureau of Organization and Governance in Indonesia. In

fact, FWA practices are believed to help employees manage their work and personal roles, which in turn, lead to job satisfaction and boost company performance and productivity (Wells-Lepley et al (2015). Eversole et al. (2012) found that when employees experience less tension between work and family or when offered programs to balance work-family conflict, they tend to remain employed, and experience decreased thoughts or intentions to leave their current jobs. Studies show that there was significant and positive association between FWAs and employees' perceived productivity, quality of work and organizational commitment. Besides, it was reported that happiness plays a mediating role in the relationship between FWA and employee outcomes (Hashmi, M. A., et. al, 2021).

3. Statement of the Problem

Many potential employees in the labour market, cite reasons for not actively participating in the labour market, which range from housework or family responsibilities, to continuing studies, being disabled, and not having interest in the idea of working (DOSM, 2019). As stated by TalentCorp, only a small percentage of organizations implemented FWAs at their workplace. Overworking can lead to many negative consequences such as chronic build-up of stress, which also causes suppressed immune system and increased risk of cardiovascular diseases. Organizations, with overworked employees, generally experience a decline in both morale and productivity, thus witnessing significant increase in the rate of absenteeism. The survey, conducted by previous studies, indicated that awareness of FWAs is still vague among employers in Malaysia.

While many studies have shown that FWAs increase company productivity and improve work life balance, only a few studies contradicted

that FWAs and company productivity are not significantly related. Therefore, this study, proposed to examine the impact of FWAs on work life balance and organizational outcomes, including job satisfaction, task performance, and organizational citizenship behaviour and turnover intentions of employees in Malaysia.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To identify the demographic factors, that affect the demand for flexible working arrangements (FWAs) in Malaysia
- To examine the relationship between variables, that influence flexible working arrangements (FWAs) and work life balance and organizational outcome in Malaysia.

5. Hypotheses of the Study

The hypotheses to be tested in this study, are:

- H1:** There is significant relationship between demographic factors and flexible working arrangements
- H2:** There is positive relationship between flexible working arrangements and employee outcomes.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Sample Selection

To answer the two research objectives on FWA and effect of employee outcomes, 300 employees, working in the services sector in Klang Valley, were identified. Klang Valley is the area in central Selangor, Malaysia, comprising the Malaysian capital city of Kuala Lumpur plus administrative city of Putrajaya. The data were gathered from employees in FWA organizations and non-FWA organizations.

6.2 Source of Data

Using primary survey, the data were obtained, by using self-administrated questionnaires, which were distributed to the

employees with the help of human resource personnel. Nearing the end of the survey, as MCO was enforced, the survey had to be completed, using online surveys to get the targeted sample size. Care was taken to ensure that equality was observed in terms of gender and age.

6.3. Period of Study

This study was conducted in the months of January to March 20220, just before Covid - 19 pandemic struck the world and the Movement Control Order (MCO) was enforced.

6.4. Tools used in the Study

Descriptive analysis, reliability test, factorial analysis, chi square analysis and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used to discuss and examine the influence of FWAs on employee outcomes. All data were keyed in and analysed, using Windows Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) 24.

7. Data Analysis and Interpretation Regarding the Impact of Flexible Working Arrangements on Employee Outcomes in Malaysia

In this study, descriptive analysis was used to capture demographic information such as gender, wage, education, and age. Reliability analysis was used to determine the steps that are free from ambiguity and error and ensure the consistent measurements over time and device changes (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Factors analysis was done to identify whether the set of items on a scale were all designed to measure the same construct (Hair et al., 2006). Chi square analysis was applied in order to measure and compare the correlation between two variables.

To achieve the first research objective, chi square analysis was used, to measure the significant relationship between demographic

profile of the respondents and the demand of FWAs. Regarding the second, MANOVA was used to identify the impact of the working arrangements on the employee outcomes like work life balance, job satisfaction, job performance, organizational citizenship behaviour and turnover intentions.

7.1 Preliminary Analysis

Cronbach alpha values, for the five dependent variables, namely, work life balance, job satisfaction, task performance, organizational citizenship behaviour, and turnover intention, were all more than 0.5 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The variables were measured by using a 5-point Likert-scale value, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), using various items for each variable.

7.2 Factorial Analysis

KMO indicated that all the dependent variables were more than 0.6, with work life balance at 0.810, job satisfaction at 0.814, task performance at 0.869, organizational citizenship behaviour at 0.764 and turnover intentions at 0.854.

7.3 Demographic Profile

Majority (76%) of respondents were females. Many of them (45%) were young, at the age group of 24 – 29 years old and they had to take care of their children (57%). They lived within five km to their workplace (29%) and majority (76%) used cars as medium of transport. Finally, majority of the respondents (74%), in the services sector, always made use of the internet for their daily work and only 41% worked in organizations, which practised FWAs.

7.4 Demographic Factors and FWA in Malaysia

Table-1 shows that only 7 out of 12 factors, exerted significant effect on the demand for FWAs in Malaysia. These factors were,

parents with children, aged less than 6 years old, years of working, monthly income, distance to and from workplace, transport to work, living area, and industry.

7.5 Effect of FWAs on Selected Employee Outcomes

Table 2 shows that out of the five selected employee outcomes, only three factors exercised significant effect on work arrangements. Based on the MANOVA analysis, work life balance, job satisfaction and turnover intentions reported positive and significant effect on employees, who work in organizations, with FWA policies.

8. Suggestions

Results from the above discussion provide practical implications for the policy makers, and employers, which include managements of organizations in the services sector in Malaysia. Policy makers should consider introducing FWA and restructure the flexible working policy so that it will result in financial benefit for both employers and employees. Moreover, government and private sectors should implement this policy to increase the work life balance of the employees.

9. Conclusion

Based on this study, it can be noted that more than 80% of employees who were females, aged between 24 to 29 years old, possessing bachelor's degree, demanded FWAs. The first objective of this study was to identify the significant demographic factors, that influenced the demand for FWAs in Malaysia. With the help of chi square analysis, it was found that there was significant relationship between females, with young children and fresh employees, who had worked for less than one year, employees earning high income and stay faraway from the workplace, demanded FWAs. The second objective was to examine the relationship between FWAs and employee

outcomes. The MANOVA analysis revealed that out of the five selected outcomes, FWAs reported positive and significant effect on only work life balance, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions.

10. Limitation of the Study

This study suffered from some limitations, that need to be recognized. The sample did not represent the entire population as it focussed only on Klang Valley. Further, only the services sector was surveyed.

11. Scope of Further Research

Future research should be conducted to examine a nationwide study in the current scenario. Post Covid 19, many employers have realised the importance of FWAs and this should be examined. This might capture findings that could further explain the relationship between implementation of FWAs on employee outcomes. The future research could use a sample size large enough to generalise the findings in the Malaysian population.

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Table-1: Demographic Factors and the Demand for Flexible Working Arrangements

| Variable | Category | Demand for Flexible Working Arrangements | | | | Significance Level |
|----------|--------------------------|--|-----------|----|----|--------------------|
| | | Yes | | No | | |
| | | Y | % | N | % | |
| Gender | Female | 193 | 84 | 36 | 16 | 0.963 |
| | Male | 60 | 85 | 11 | 15 | |
| Age | 18 – 23 years old | 24 | 83 | 5 | 17 | 0.273 |
| | 24 – 29 years old | 110 | 82 | 24 | 18 | |
| | 30 – 35 years old | 36 | 88 | 5 | 12 | |
| | 36 – 41 years old | 34 | 87 | 5 | 13 | |
| | 42 – 53 years old | 41 | 85 | 4 | 15 | |
| | 54 – 60 years old | 8 | 67 | 4 | 33 | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| Education | SPM | 32 | 84 | 6 | 16 | 0.106 |
| | STPM | 14 | 93 | 1 | 7 | |
| | Diploma | 59 | 79 | 16 | 21 | |
| | Degree/ Professional Course/Postgraduates | 148 | 86 | 24 | 14 | |
| | Non-Malays | 37 | 92 | 3 | 8 | |
| Marital Status | Married | 121 | 85 | 22 | 15 | 0.896 |
| | Single | 132 | 84 | 25 | 16 | |
| Children aged 6 years and below | | 79 | 78 | 22 | 22 | 0.038** |
| Children aged between 7 and 12 years | | 42 | 84 | 8 | 16 | |
| Children aged between 13 and 18 years | | 39 | 87 | 6 | 13 | |
| Years of Working | Below 1 years | 76 | 76 | 24 | 24 | 0.032** |
| | 2 - 3 years | 46 | 92 | 4 | 8 | |
| | 4 - 6 years | 34 | 92 | 3 | 8 | |
| | 7 - 9 years | 23 | 79 | 6 | 21 | |
| | Above 10 years | 74 | 88 | 10 | 12 | |
| Monthly Income | Below RM 3000 | 138 | 80 | 35 | 20 | 0.033** |
| | RM 3001 – RM 5000 | 76 | 93 | 6 | 7 | |
| | RM 5001 – RM 9000 | 26 | 96 | 1 | 4 | |
| | RM 9001 –Above RM 11000 | 13 | 91 | 1 | 9 | |
| Distance between Home and Workplace | Below 5 km | 67 | 78 | 19 | 22 | 0.046** |
| | 6 - 11 km | 73 | 77 | 13 | 23 | |
| | 12 - 17 km | 47 | 90 | 5 | 10 | |
| | 18 - 23 km | 30 | 91 | 3 | 9 | |
| | Above 24 km | 66 | 90 | 7 | 10 | |
| Transport to work | Walking | 3 | 50 | 3 | 50 | 0.018** |
| | Public Transport | 10 | 77 | 3 | 23 | |
| | Car | 190 | 86 | 38 | 17 | |
| | Motorcycle | 50 | 94 | 3 | 6 | |
| Currently Staying | Rural area | 88 | 91 | 9 | 9 | 0.035** |
| | Urban area | 165 | 81 | 38 | 19 | |
| Industry | University (Private) | 34 | 92 | 3 | 8 | 0.001*** |
| | University (Public) | 21 | 78 | 6 | 22 | |
| | Banking and Financial | 40 | 87 | 6 | 13 | |
| | Transportation | 11 | 100 | 0 | 0 | |
| | Telecommunications, Technology, Internet & Electronics | 17 | 90 | 2 | 10 | |
| | Retail | 26 | 93 | 2 | 7 | |
| | Healthcare | 18 | 67 | 9 | 33 | |
| | Consultant | 51 | 73 | 19 | 27 | |
| Other | 35 | 100 | 0 | 0 | | |
| Flexible Working Arrangements | Yes | 160 | 86 | 27 | 14 | 0.452 |
| | No | 93 | 82 | 20 | 18 | |

Source: Primary Data and Computed using SPSS

Table-2: Work Arrangements, work life balance, and organizational outcome

| Source | Dependent Variables | Type III Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|--------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|----|-------------|--------|-----------------|
| FWA | Work-Life Balance | 6.890 | 1 | 6.890 | 13.056 | 0.000*** |
| | Job Satisfaction | 2.172 | 1 | 2.172 | 3.750 | 0.054* |
| | Task Performance | 0.404 | 1 | 0.404 | 1.138 | 0.287 |
| | Organizational Citizenship Behaviour | 1.128 | 1 | 1.128 | 2.451 | 0.119 |
| | Turnover Intentions | 41.625 | 1 | 41.625 | 67.923 | 0.000*** |

Source: Primary Data and Computed using SPSS