A Comparative Study on IT and Education Sectors for Preference over Flexible Work Arrangement

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ABSTRACT

Flexible work arrangement is a growing concept in today's organizations. Lot of organizations are using this for various purposes. It can either be used to increase the level of job satisfaction among employees or allow them maintain balance between work and life. This also lets employees to manage stress at workplace and offer them some freedom in the working arrangement. This study analyses the benefits of flexible work arrangements for different gender. A thoughtful analysis has been done to know the preference of employees belonging to above sectors. This study will be helpful for the organizations who are seeking to find out which factors lead to decision of flexi work arrangements.

The study is conducted on IT and education sector employees considering males and females separately. A structured questionnaire is used to obtain data from 200 respondents equally divided over these sectors. Mean square analysis and ANOVA are applied to achieve the objectives of the study. The results of study show that male employees from IT sector prefer telecommuting while males of education sector like to have flexitime work arrangements. On the other hand, females in IT sector finds a compressed work week a choice over available options, whereas female educationists prefer part time work arrangements.

KEYWORDS: Flexible work arrangement, Telecommuting, Compresses work week, Part time arrangement, Flexi time, Work-life balance, Employee preference

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INTRODUCTION

In the world of digital explosion and technologically driven systems, boundaries between work and home is becoming hazier and blurred. This era of fast paced world have resulted into flexi work arrangements being a necessity and a required policy conditioning the emotional and functional well-being of employees. The arrangement can benefit both the employer and the employee through increased productivity and creativity from employees as well as ease of management for employers because of satisfied and contented employees with right work-life balance. Flexible work arrangement is important both for male and female employees of any organization. However, it is more important to females as they need to maintain balance between both work and families.

Flexible work arrangement is the arrangement where employees are given flexibility in terms of their working arrangements such as flexibility in timings or locations. Flexibility given to the employees in terms of timings i.e. they are empowered to choose their working time is known as flexitime. Another flexible working arrangement is compressed work week, under this arrangement the standard work week is decided to be for lesser than 5 days. Third in the list is flex place here employees are empowered to choose the location to work from. It can be either from office or from non-office location. Job sharing is another type of flexible working arrangement (FWA) wherein, two people

share the roles and responsibilities of one full-time position and get the salary and benefits of that position. Expanded leaves is an option given to the employees wherein, they can request for extended leaves for any purpose i.e. education, family issue etc. partial retirement, phased retirement, work and family programs and work sharing are the other types of flexible work arrangement. The various types of FWA considered in this study are telecommuting, flexitime, compressed work week and part time arrangement.

The most important reason for introducing flexible working arrangements in the organization is retention. Flexible working arrangement might have a positive impact on the productivity of the employees. Moreover, in the current scenario where work-life balance is more important for employee's flexible working arrangements has gained its importance rapidly. From the organization view point flexible working arrangement can help organization create a vast talent pool and hence filling hard-to-fill positions and flexible working arrangement can also help organizations save cost with this type of arrangement.

Objectives of Study

Flexible working arrangement is one of the new trends which is emerging in the organizations these days. The objectives of this research are as follows:

To understand the various factors affecting the preference of FWA

- To study the comparative preference of FWA w.r.t. IT and education sectors.
- To analyse the preference of FWA by different gender.

Review of Literature

Organizations these days are moving towards work family programs such as, flexibleworking arrangements as a result of some changes in the social environment (Golden, 2006). According to Lambert, Marler and Guetal, FWAs are "employer provided benefits that permit employees some level of control over when and where they work outside of the standard workday" (Lambert, Marler & Gueutal, 2008). FWA includes part time work, flexitime, compressed work week and telecommuting. Importance of FWAs has increased currently because of women, dual-earners couples, and single parent families (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky & Prottas, 2002). Hence due to family responsibilities and role conflicts people are demanding flexibility in their workplace. Studies have revealed that FWAs relate to employee and company benefits such as higher job satisfaction (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999), lower turnover intentions (Allen, 2001), and lower work-family conflict (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). It is found that the rate of implementation of this FWA practice is different in different countries. FWA differs across countries in Europe (European Commission, 2000). Specifically, Northern European countries adopt these practices more frequently than do Southern European (European Commission, 2000; Gareis, 2002). According to Masuda, Poelmans, Allen, Spector, Lapierre, Cooper and Luin 2012, FWA can limit daily and physical contact with the employees hence, hampering the coordination and quality of work of the employees. According to Gajendran and Harrison's meta-analysis showed that frequent telecommuting leads to deteriorating the relationship of coworkers, moreover the more the telecommuting exists more the ties between worker becomes weak.

In 2003, in UK parents of disabled and young children gained legal right to appeal for flexible working arrangement (CIPD 2005). According to de Menezes, L. M. and Kelliher, C. (2011) flexible working arrangement contributes directly or indirectly to an individual's as well as organization's overall development. Moreover, changes in lifestyle and concerns for health and well being of employees flexible working arrangements would be helpful (Department for Work and Pensions 2005; Baptiste, 2008; O'Reilly, 2008; Verbakel & DiPrete, 2008). Flexible working arrangements are being offered on a large scale currently (Kersley, Alpin, Forth, Bryson, Bewley, Dix & Oxenbridge, 2006; Hooker, Neathey & Casebourne, 2007; Nadeem & Metcalf, 2007). According to Ortega's (2009) analysis concluded that European firms rather than giving importance or emphasis on family concerns they give power to employees over their working arrangement to improve performance of employees (Paoli & Merllie, 2001).

Studies have revealed that FWAs have distinct effects on the profit of the company. Flexible working arrangements are positively associated with the profits of the company (Meyer et al., 2001). Telecommuting is positively related to return on assets and equities where atleast 10% of employees use this facility of flexible working arrangements (Sands & Harper, 2007). A company well known for its flexible working arrangements, British telecom reported that flexible working arrangements led to increase in productivity of employees by 20% (Mahajan & Foggin, 2006). According to Martinez-Sanchez, Perez-Perez, Luis-Carnicer, P. and Vela-Jimenez

(2007a, 2007b) use of telecommuting and flexitime is directly related to firm performance.

According to de Menezes, L. M. and Kelliher, C. (2011) flexible working arrangements help and organization in effective recruitment and creating a talent pool. Literature have shown that FWA help organizations in retaining employees with them (Schmidt & Duenas, 2002; Glass & Finley, 2002).

According to Baltes, et al, 1999 compressed workweek is a workweek with less than 5 days, here working hours per day gets increased. The most known form of compressed workweek in the United States is the 4-day, 40-hr workweek (4/40), in which employees work for, 10-hr days (Latack & Foster, 1985; Pierce, Newstrom, Dunham, & Barber, 1989). Commonly, employees will have either Friday or Monday off, extending their weekend to three days. In the recent years, 3/36, 3/38, and 3/40 schedules have been adopted by some organizations. Research shows that compressed work week increases fatigue hence, decreasing the performance of employees (Ronen, 1984). Telecommuting is an arrangement where an individual unlike traditional office work has freedom to work from any place i.e. home or any out of office place. According to Gajendran and Harrison, 2007 telecommuting has positive impact on job satisfaction of employees.

Flexible working arrangements satisfy all employees' n different manner and proportion. However, FWA is more important to woman as this will aid them in maintaining balance between life and work (Rahman, 2019). According to Byron (2005), women are likely to benefit the most from FWA; as a result, this phenomenon merits closer attention within this literature. According to a research by families and work institute around 45% women face work related stress and hence unable to perform (Meenakshi, Subrahmanyam and Ravichandran, 2013).

FWA and turnover intentions are negatively related (Allen, 2001; Batt & Valcour, 2003; McNall et al., 2010). According to Allen 2011, FWA is directly proportional to job satisfaction, but it is negatively related to turnover intentions. Batt and Valcour (2003) depicts that flextime availability was negatively related to turnover intentions, and McNall et al. (2010) revealed that flextime and compressed work week availability were indirectly i.e. negatively related to lower turnover intentions.

FWA are gaining immense importance and these have great impact on Job Satisfaction of employees. Job Satisfaction is one of the important factors for employee motivation and better performance (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). Many organizations these days are seen to practice FWA as these arrangements are seen to boost the employee satisfaction level. According to McNall, Masuda and Nicklin (2009), the presence of FWA: flexitime and compressed workweek at organizations make employees feel much enriched, which in turn, results in higher job satisfaction. FWA can benefit both the employers and the employees and the benefits include higher commitment, lower turnover, reduced work-family conflict, higher autonomy and higher job satisfaction (Omondi & K'Obonyo, 2018).

Flexible Working Arrangement is more important to females as they have home responsibilities as well and hence, they need flexibility in their working arrangements. FWA and job satisfaction are positively related (Allen, 2001; McNall, Masuda & Nicklin, 2010). FWA differs in context of individualism-collectivism, hence, majority of the studies conducted which show positive relation between job satisfaction and FWA are among individualists. According to Hofstede, 2011, managers in collectivist economy need more of people interaction they prefer to work in an environment where people meet on daily basis. Hence, managers under collectivist economy find it very difficult to manage relations with their subordinates as because of telecommuting and flexitime arrangement they don't get to meet their subordinates hence, limiting their working abilities.

Compressed work week might sound an appropriate option in terms of no. of working days but the working hours increase and hence that may prove to be more stressful to workers as the work load which earlier used to be divided in 5-6 days that gets divided in just 4 days. Hence, working for 10 hours a day might be stressful to an employee hence, might reduce job satisfaction and productivity as well. Hence, flexible working arrangement has its advantages and disadvantages to some extent as well.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The methodology used in this study is descriptive in nature as the study tried to capture the state of affairs as it exists. In this VUCA world where the attrition rate is on peak, flexible working arrangement can help organizations in widening their talent pool hence filling the crucial position with an ease. This study evaluates the factors affecting respondents' preference towards flexi work arrangements. Using Cochran's sample size formula, the sample size taken in this study is 200. The data collection is quantitative and primary in nature following stratified sampling where the basis of stratification is the sector. A well-structured questionnaire was prepared and an online survey is conducted over respondents from two different sectors of IT and education. Equal responses were registered from both the categories of respondents. The questionnaire had questions on the following categories:

- Demographic details: to gain an idea about the sample 24 through age group, gender, work department and the sector.
- Preference of Flexi work arrangements based on factors: factors affecting the preference of flexi work arrangements like Commuting time, convenient place, effective time management, family responsibility, better productivity, child care and stress management.

To understand the preference of types of flexi working arrangement, respondents were asked about their choice they would like to see at their workplace.

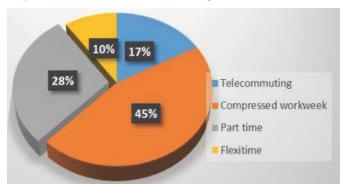


Figure 1a: Preference of FWA Arrangement

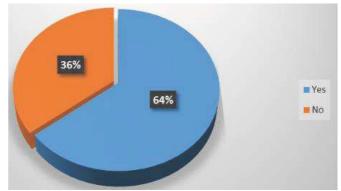


Figure 1b: Acceptance of a new offer based on FWA

Figure 1a shows that out of total 200 respondents, majority of 45% respondents would prefer to be given a compressed work week arrangement, followed by a preference of part time and telecommuting arrangement. Around 10% respondents would prefer a flexi time arrangement which is found to be the lowest preference out of all possible arrangements. To know the degree of preference, respondents were asked whether FWA would be a factor affecting their acceptance of a new job offer. In response to this, from Figure 1b, it is evident that a dominant percentage i.e. 64% respondents agreed that they would see the availability of FWA while accepting a new job offer and this factor would play a major role in the acceptance of job offer.

To understand the high preference of FWA, respondents were asked about the reasons of their choice. Figure 2 depicts that among the various reasons stated, majority of respondents believe that flexibility at workplace help in managing pressure and work effectively. According to them most of their time is wasted in commuting to and fro to the workplace. Longer commuting time is the next major reason along with working from a place of convenience which may help them in meeting the expectations of the employer. Other reasons as surveyed are the effective time management and fulfilment of family responsibility. Two other reasons with lower agreements by respondents are higher productivity and ease of child care that can be effectively done with the benefit of flexi arrangements.

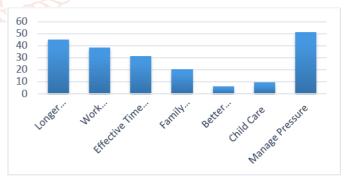


Figure 2: Reasons for Preference of FWA Arrangement

The study is also aimed at finding sector wise preference of FWA arrangements. So, to analyze the specific factors impacting the respondents belonging to the two sectors under study in preference of FWA, mean square analysis is undertaken.

Table: 1: Preference of flexible working arrangements in an organization over sector

Sectors	Longer Commuting Time	Work Convenience	Effective Time Management	Family Responsibility	Better Productivity		Manage Pressure
IT	4.1851	4.3518	4.2037	3.5	3.5	2.444	4.8703
Education	4.616	4.4107	4.116	3.0178	3.2053	2.928	4.3125

As seen from Table 1, managing pressure is the most important factor for IT sectoremployees as it can be seen that it has highest mean i.e., 4.8703 among all factors chosen which leads to the decision of Flexible Working Arrangement. As far as education sector is concerned mean value of longer commuting time is highest hence, education employees' value this factor highest in terms of making decision for requirement of FWA. To analyze the specific factors of FWA and its preference over gender, mean square analysis has been shown in Table 2.

Table: 2: Preference of flexible working arrangements in an organization over gender

Gender	Longer Commuting Time	Work Convenience	Effective Time Management	Family Responsibility	Better Productivity	Child Care	Manage Pressure
Male	4.3888	4.3666	4.2888	3.677	3.333	2.605	4.411
Female	4.5789	4.421	3.973	2.5789	3.2631	2.923	4.5921

From the above analysis it can be seen that top three factors that lead to decision of FWA among males are: managing pressure, longer commuting time and work convenience. Highest mean is for managing pressure i.e. 4.411, hence, it is the most important factor impacting preference of FWA in males. For females also managing pressure is the most important factor, according to the mean given above, i.e. 4.5921. For females top three factors are also same: managing pressure, longer commuting time and work convenience. Here, it can also be derived that family responsibilities as a factor is more important for males than it is for females while for females child care factor is more important than males..

The study categorized the overall expected benefits of flexi arrangements in four broad categories i.e. higher productivity, maintaining work life balance, stress reduction and achieving mental and physical health which employees perceive to gain from flexi arrangements. To find the variance between these benefit factors affecting the preference of FWA arrangements over two sectors, following three hypotheses are formed:

H01: There is no significant variance between factors affecting the preference of FWA. H02: There is no significant variance between sectors in preference of FWA.

H03: There is no significant variance between sectors and factors affecting the preference of FWA.

To test the above hypothesis ANOVA test with replication is applied.

Table: 3 Anova: Two-Factor With Replication: Summary Table

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Anova: Two-Factor With Replication								
SUMMARY	Work with higher productivity	Maintain work- life balance	Reduction in stress	Maintain mental and physical health	Total			
IT		人 沙 199M: Z4	156-64/0	· A				
Count	100	100	100	100	400			
Sum	420	445	428	405	1698			
Average	4.2	4.45	4.28	4.05	4.245			
Variance	0.66666667	0.593434343	0.76929293	0.79545455	0.721779449			
Education			7777					
Count	100	100	100	100	400			
Sum	418	397	413	398	1626			
Average	4.18	3.97	4.13	3.98	4.065			
Variance	0.8359596	0.797070707	0.90212121	0.76727273	0.827844612			
Total								
Count	200	200	200	200				
Sum	838	842	841	803				
Average	4.19	4.21	4.205	4.015				
Variance	0.74763819	0.749648241	0.8371608	0.77866834				

Table 3 shows that highest mean value for IT category is 4.45 while in education category it is

4.18. This depicts that maintaining work life balance is most important for IT employees while education sector people aim at higher productivity which they perceive is possible through flexi work arrangements. The overall highest total is 4.21 which again corresponds to maintenance of work life balance.

Table: 4: Anova: Two-Factor With Replication

ANOVA				•		
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Sample	6.48	1	6.48	8.46053412	0.003730894	3.853227
Columns	5.27	3	1.75666667	2.29357072	0.076655185	2.616146
Interaction	6.43	3	2.14333333	2.79841741	0.039193754	2.616146
Within	606.6	792	0.76590909			
Total	624.78	799				

Now, the first hypothesis is:

H01: There is no significant variance between sectors in preference of FWA. Ha1: There is significant variance between sectors in preference of FWA.

From Table 4, the p value corresponding to sample is 0.0037which is less than the level of tolerance and so alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is significant variance in factors affecting the respondents of different sectors pertaining to flexi work arrangements. The most crucial factor for IT sector employees is maintaining work life balance followed by reducing stress at workplace and work with higher productivity. The lowest factor rated by IT respondents is maintain mental and physical health. While for education sector employees, the most important factor is aim at higher productivity which can be preserved by deploying flexi arrangements. This factor is followed by reduction in stress and maintaining their health. The least rated factor by education employees is maintaining work life balance. The next is:

H02: There is no significant variance between factors affecting the preference of FWA. Ha2: There is significant variance between factors affecting the preference of FWA.

The p value corresponding to columns is 0.076 which is more than the level of tolerance and so null hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is no significant variance between factors affecting the preference of FWA. Each factor is important in employees' preference of FWA. The last hypothesis is:

H₀3: There is no significant variance between sectors and factors affecting the preference of FWA.

Ha3: There is significant variance between sectors and factors affecting the preference of FWA.

The p value corresponding to interaction is 0.039 which is 2 less than the level of tolerance and so alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is significant variance between sectors and factors affecting the preference of FWA. This deciphers that the sample and the column elements have significant interaction between them as the sample of IT employees rated work life balance as most critical factor while sample of education employees rated maintain higher productivity as most important.

Different respondents belonging to different samples have significant difference in their choice of factors for which they prefer flexi arrangements and want their employer to install these arrangements in the system.

Results and Findings

- The results obtained by analysing the collected data from people of two different sectors are found to be interesting. The findings are related with prominent factors affecting the preference of work arrangements are as follows:
- In the survey conducted from the employees of IT and Education sector, 54% respondents are males and 46% are females where majority of respondents are in the age group of 30-35.
- Majority of respondents believe that flexi options offered at workplace help them in managing pressure and will empower them to work effectively. Longer commuting time and place convenience are the next two major reasons for their preference of these arrangements.

- Telecommuting form of FWA allow employees to work at peace from their comfortable spaces and saves time in commuting to and fro to workplace. Other reasons as surveyed are the effective time management and fulfilment of family responsibility that can be achieved.
- Managing pressure is the most important factor for IT sector employees which lead their decision of flexible working arrangement. Flexi time form of FWA help IT employees in preventing from stress and burnouts. For education sector longer commuting time is the highest chosen factor for which they prefer the arrangements.
- No significant variance was found in the factors affecting the choice of FWA over gender. Top three factors that lead to decision of FWA among males and females were found to be similar and they are: managing pressure, longer commuting time and work convenience.
- Majority of the males chose flexi time and telecommuting while female respondents chose part time and compressed work weeks that they want their employers to offer them so that the work pressures can be managed.
- The sector and the benefits of FWA are found to have significant interaction between them as the sample of IT employees rated work life balance as most critical benefit while sample of education employees rated maintenance of higher productivity as most important.

In this VUCA world where employees are struggling to manage home and work, the rigid handcuffed framework of working hours is impacting their overall work productivity and preventing them to give their best to their job role. The research conducted over the two sectors having strenuous environment brings ahead the need of flexi work arrangements and its demand from the employees. Option of telecommuting can save commuting time and can specifically allow male employees from IT sector to work effectively from their home supporting their working partners in sharing house responsibilities and completing daily tasks without having to waste hours in reaching to workplace, while the option of flexi time can help male employees of education sector to manage pressure at workplace and work with higher efficacy. Females in IT sector prefer compressed work week so that they can equally manage work home responsibilities while part time jobs is another flexi arrangement that females in education sector prefer as it allows them to manage their time and focus more on their work targets along with family responsibilities.

Flexi work arrangements can be one of the strategy that can be used by employers to manage their employees by offering them the benefit of this arrangement which can be a win-win situation for both the employer and the employee.

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