

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE : A REVIEW OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

“Flexible work arrangements” is a strategic part of the ecosystem of progressive organizations. There has been exponential increase in organizations that offer flexible work arrangements to their employees. Flexible work arrangements encompass various components which individually and collectively help in improving the overall wellbeing of the employees. The relaxations provided under flexible work arrangements improve the work-life balance of the employees significantly.

Keywords: *Flexible Work arrangements, Benefits, Work-Life Balance, Stress, Wellbeing*

Introduction

Many organizations are offering their employees “flexible work arrangements” [1]. Scholars claim that flexible work practices facilitate work-life balance for the employees [2, 3, and 4]. In this paper, “flexible work arrangements” will be dissected into its various components and an effort will be made to establish their impact on employees’ work-life balance. In the conclusion, an inference will be drawn how “flexible work arrangements” holistically impact “work-life balance” of the employees.

Flexible Work Arrangements

“Flexible work arrangements” mean an employee’s ability to change the schedule and place of his work shift. It also entails flexi-time working, compressed working hours, job sharing, sabbaticals, telecommuting and childcare provisions [5 and 6]. Each of the arrangement could be used individually; or they can be combined to complement each other [7].

Flexible Work Arrangement Components

1. Flexi-time working empowers employees to decide their check-in and check-out time of their work shifts.

2. Part-time working is one of the most common types of methods in which employees are agreeing to work less number of hours than the full-time.
3. Compressed working hours allows employees to work his hours over four days in a week instead of five.
4. Job-sharing is a mechanism under which two employees having the same job share the job and split the hours so that each one has a part-time position. They also split the remuneration, holidays and fringe benefits.
5. Sabbaticals allow employees to take career breaks for various purposes.
6. Telecommuting allows employees to do their job by using information and communication technology without being physically present at the workplace.
7. Childcare options are a means to help employees' with adequate care of their children when both the parents are at the workplace away from home. This may include crèche facility and day nursery for the children.

Benefits For The Organizations

Organizations introduce “flexible work arrangements” as part of their work-life balance policy. Flexible working helps organizations in attracting, recruiting, and retaining highly qualified employees [8]. Flexible working leads to increased productivity, increased profitability, reduced employee turnover and absenteeism rate [9].

Benefits For The Employees

The various components of “flexible work arrangements” benefit employees in different ways. Flexi-time helps an employee to look after his personal activities without having to take time-off from work. Compressed working hours lead to additional free time for the employee during the working week. Job-sharing allows employees sufficient time to attend to their personal chores. Sabbaticals give employees career breaks and help them achieve work-life balance. Telecommuting allows employees to work from their home by using information and communication technology. This helps employees to look after their family and other personal chores. Childcare measures extended by employers help their employees achieve work-life balance, particularly in the backdrop of dual earning families. Therefore, all the benefits flowing from different components of the “flexible work arrangements” help employees in achieving work-life balance [10].

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance can be defined as “satisfaction and good functioning both at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict”. Work-life balance is a wide ranging concept

involving proper prioritization work and personal life. It is essentially balancing between responsibilities at workplace, family responsibilities and leisure. It is, however, challenging to achieve work-life balance in this unpredictable and rapidly changing world today [11, 12 and 13].

Components of Work life balance

Work-life balance refers to the equilibrium between an individual's professional and personal life. Its components typically include:

1. **Work commitments:** These encompass the responsibilities and tasks associated with one's job or career.
2. **Personal commitments:** These encompass activities, relationships, and responsibilities outside of work, such as family, friends, hobbies, and personal well-being.
3. **Time management:** Efficiently allocating time to work and personal activities is crucial. This involves setting priorities, managing schedules, and establishing boundaries to ensure a balanced distribution of time and energy.
4. **Flexibility:** Having the ability to adapt work hours, location, or workload can contribute to work-life balance. Flexible arrangements, such as remote work or flexible working hours, allow individuals to meet personal obligations while fulfilling work responsibilities.
5. **Boundaries:** Establishing clear boundaries between work and personal life is essential. This includes setting limits on working hours, avoiding excessive overtime, and avoiding the intrusion of work-related matters during personal time.
6. **Well-being and self-care:** Prioritizing physical and mental well-being is crucial for maintaining work-life balance. Engaging in activities that promote relaxation, self-care, and stress management, such as exercise, hobbies, and downtime, helps prevent burnout and fosters overall well-being.
7. **Support systems:** Having a strong support system, both at work and in personal life, plays a significant role in work-life balance. Supportive colleagues, understanding supervisors, and a network of friends and family can provide assistance, understanding, and encouragement during challenging times.

These components, when integrated effectively, contribute to a healthier and more fulfilling work-life balance, promoting overall satisfaction and improved quality of life.

What organisations are doing about worklife balance ?

Many organizations are recognizing the importance of work-life balance and taking steps to support their employees in achieving it. Here are a few examples of what organizations are

doing, supported by evidence:

1. Flexible work arrangements: Many companies are implementing flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options or flexible working hours. A study by the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health found that employees with flexible work arrangements experienced better work-life balance, reduced stress levels, and increased job satisfaction.
2. Wellness programs: Organizations are implementing wellness programs to support employee well-being. These programs may include activities such as yoga classes, mindfulness sessions, and access to fitness facilities. A study published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine found that wellness programs positively impacted work-life balance and improved employee health outcomes.
3. Paid time off policies: Offering generous vacation and paid time off policies helps employees recharge and attend to personal obligations. A survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management revealed that organizations with flexible paid time off policies had higher employee satisfaction levels and reported better work-life balance.
4. Parental leave and family-friendly policies: Companies are implementing parental leave policies that provide adequate time off for new parents. Additionally, family-friendly policies, such as on-site childcare facilities or subsidies, help employees manage their work and family responsibilities. A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that access to paid family leave positively impacted work-life balance for parents.
5. Employee assistance programs (EAPs): EAPs offer counseling and support services to employees facing personal challenges or work-related stress. Research published in the Journal of Occupational Health Psychology showed that employees who utilized EAP services reported improved work-life balance and reduced levels of stress and depression.
6. Training and education: Some organizations provide training and education programs to help employees develop time management skills, resilience, and work-life balance strategies. These programs equip employees with the tools and knowledge to better manage their work and personal responsibilities. A study published in the Journal of Applied Psychology found that training interventions positively influenced work-life balance and reduced work-family conflict.

These examples demonstrate that organizations are taking proactive measures to support work-life balance, recognizing the positive impact it has on employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall organizational performance.

Outcomes of work-life balance

Organizations that actively support work-life balance can experience several positive outcomes. Here are some key outcomes associated with organizations that prioritize and implement measures to support work-life balance:

1. **Increased employee satisfaction and morale:** When employees are able to achieve a better balance between their work and personal lives, their overall job satisfaction and morale tend to improve. They feel valued and supported by their organization, leading to higher levels of engagement and commitment.
2. **Improved employee retention:** Organizations that prioritize work-life balance often experience higher employee retention rates. Employees are more likely to stay with a company that understands and supports their personal needs, reducing turnover and the costs associated with recruiting and training new employees.
3. **Enhanced productivity and performance:** Supporting work-life balance can lead to improved productivity and performance. When employees have the opportunity to rest, recharge, and address personal obligations, they return to work with increased focus and energy, leading to higher levels of performance and efficiency.
4. **Reduced absenteeism and presenteeism:** Work-life balance initiatives can help reduce absenteeism (employees being absent from work) and presenteeism (employees being physically present but not fully engaged or productive). By addressing employees' personal needs and promoting well-being, organizations can create a healthier work environment, resulting in fewer sick days and improved overall attendance.
5. **Attraction of top talent:** Organizations that prioritize work-life balance are often more attractive to top talent in the job market. Prospective employees value employers who understand the importance of work-life integration and offer supportive policies and programs. This can give organizations a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining skilled individuals.
6. **Positive employer brand and reputation:** Companies that demonstrate a commitment to work-life balance can build a positive employer brand and reputation. This can attract not only employees but also customers, partners, and other stakeholders who appreciate and support organizations with a strong focus on employee well-being.
7. **Decreased stress and burnout:** Supporting work-life balance can help reduce stress levels and prevent burnout among employees. By providing resources, flexibility, and a supportive culture, organizations create an environment that promotes employee well-being and reduces the risk of excessive work-related stress.

Overall, organizations that prioritize and support work-life balance tend to experience a range of positive outcomes, including increased employee satisfaction, improved retention, enhanced productivity, and a positive employer brand. These outcomes contribute to a healthier and more productive work environment and can positively impact the organization's overall success.

Relationship Between Flexible Work Arrangements And Work-Life Balance

In the foregoing part of this paper, an attempt has been made to define broad components of “Flexible work arrangements”. However, flexible work arrangements may mean different things to different people. In general, flexibility in one’s work schedule typically depends on the life stage of the person. Employees who ask for flexibility in their work schedules include mothers with young children, people reaching retirement age, but who do not want to quit completely yet, and adults who are caring for their aging parents. People also ask for flexible work schedule who are going through major life change. For example, someone who is dealing with a loss of close family member or someone who is sick and needs accommodations for doctor’s appointments and treatments may need to have a flexible schedule for a short period or indefinitely. The idea of having a flexible work schedule is seen as a positive motivating factor that can lead to increased happiness and overall wellbeing which in turn promotes better work-life balance. It may therefore be fair to infer that implementation of flexible work arrangements have a positive relationship with work-life balance. Opportunity for flexible work arrangement influence productivity, performance, job satisfaction as well as organizational commitment on the part of employees [14].

Flexi time give opportunities to the employees to accommodate their personal needs [15].

Part-time working empowers employees to work continuously while increasing their leisure time [16]

In compressed working, the employee can start work early and finish late so that they can build up additional hours and get a leave for a day from the work. This helps an employee enjoy a longer weekend / more time away from work without a reduction in pay. This promotes their mental and physical well being, which in turn leads to work-life balance [17].

In job-sharing, two employees share a job and split the remuneration as well as other fringe benefits proportionately. In case of personal exigencies, either one has the leeway to remain absent from work [18].

In telecommuting, all or part of the duties, tasks and responsibilities of the employees are carried out by them from their home using information and communication technology.

It helps employees save on travelling cost and time, allow more flexibility in the working hours and consequently leads to increase in the job satisfaction [19].

Wellbeing And Work-Life Balance

Wellbeing refers to an individual's overall state of health, happiness, and fulfillment. When it comes to work-life balance, prioritizing wellbeing is crucial as it directly impacts an individual's ability to effectively manage their professional and personal life. Here's an expansion on how wellbeing and work-life balance are interconnected:

1. **Physiological wellbeing:** Flexible work arrangements, such as remote work or flexible working hours, can positively impact an individual's physiological wellbeing. By having the flexibility to adapt their work schedule to fit their personal needs, employees can prioritize activities that promote physical health, such as exercise, proper nutrition, and sufficient rest. This, in turn, can lead to improved physical wellbeing, including increased energy levels, reduced stress, and better overall health.
2. **Mental wellbeing:** Work-life balance plays a vital role in supporting mental wellbeing. When employees have the opportunity to allocate time and energy to personal activities, relationships, and self-care, they are better equipped to manage stress, maintain emotional resilience, and prevent burnout. Flexible work arrangements provide employees with the autonomy to engage in activities that enhance their mental wellbeing, such as pursuing hobbies, spending quality time with loved ones, or engaging in mindfulness practices.
3. **Work-life integration:** Promoting wellbeing through work-life balance allows individuals to integrate their professional and personal lives in a harmonious way. By providing the flexibility and support needed to fulfill both work and personal responsibilities, organizations enable employees to create a cohesive and fulfilling lifestyle. This integration helps reduce conflicts between work and personal life, leading to increased satisfaction, decreased stress levels, and a greater sense of overall wellbeing.
4. **Positive spillover effect:** When employees experience high levels of wellbeing and work-life balance, it often extends beyond their personal lives. Research suggests that individuals who have positive experiences outside of work, such as engaging in fulfilling personal relationships or pursuing hobbies, tend to bring that positivity back into the workplace. This positive spillover effect can lead to increased job satisfaction, higher levels of motivation, and improved overall performance.

Overall, prioritizing wellbeing is a key factor in promoting work-life balance. By supporting employees' physiological and mental health, organizations create an environment that fosters a healthy work-life integration, reduces stress, and enhances overall wellbeing. This, in turn, contributes to higher job satisfaction, improved performance, and a more positive work

culture. Researchers have suggested that physiological and mental wellbeing significantly help to promote work-life balance [20 and 21].

Discussion

Flexible work arrangements have been introduced in various organizations from time to time to improve the overall wellbeing of its employees so that their productivity increases and consequently the profitability of the organization. Research reveals that workplace flexibility empowers employees to control when, where, and how much time they should spend working so that they get adequate time to satisfy their non-work needs. This kind of arrangement induces a sense of mental peace and propels them to give their best to the organization. Each and every component of flexible work arrangement contributes to satiate those human needs, which leads to improved work-life balance of the employees.

Conclusion

This paper examined the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance. It showed that flexible work arrangements improve physiological and mental wellbeing of the employees. This helps employees to strike an optimum work-life balance which leads to greater output, commitment and loyalty towards the organization. It may therefore be inferred that prevalence of flexible work arrangement creates a positive impact on work and non-work lives of the employees. Looking to the benefits that accrue from a healthy work-life balance, the policy of flexible work arrangement is a win-win situation for the employees as well as for the organization.

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