

Is gender moderating the relationship between formal flexible working and life satisfaction: a study on employees of an IT company, Bangalore

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Abstract:

Purpose: With the vaccination in place and the spread of virus being controlled, employees are being called back to office. Organizations are also looking at hybrid model of working which will be mixed way of working either from office or other location. The purpose of this article is to find out the effect of flexible working on the life satisfaction of IT employees. Due to working in various time zone, deadlines, milestone to be achieved, IT employees most of the time work under stress and anxiety. Added to that the pressing demand resulted due to joining of dual earners in the workforce, increase of nuclear family, children studying from home and elderly care. This paper attempts to find out the life satisfaction measure of employees utilizing the flexible working before and during Covid -19 period. The paper further looks at the moderating effect of gender on the relationship. Most of the earlier research on family friendly policies, work life balance policies are based on women employees. The data collected from both the women and male employees to see the moderating effect.

Design/Methodology: A survey was completed by 186 IT employees based out of Bangalore. Questionnaire method was used. The survey includes measures of three types of flexible working, the options are setup based on SHRM article 2015) [1] The survey includes the socio-demographic of the employees and the measures of life satisfaction. Correlation and multiple regression analysis are used to test the hypothesis.

Findings: Correlation analysis is used to find the association between the variables. To prove the direction, magnitude and variation, regression analysis is done. Out of three types of flexible working, classification based on (Sloan, 2010), flexibility in work schedule affect the life satisfaction of the employees. Gender is not significantly moderating the relationship.

Originality/Value: There is less empirical paper where different types of flexible working is being taken as a independent construct. Most of the papers have researched with family friendly policies, work-life balance policies and not type of flexible working as a developed construct. This paper will benefit HRD practitioners, academicians, research scholar. It may provide insights for how to improve the processes or policies in the organization to create opportunity for employees. It would help HRD professionals to understand and appreciate organizational culture, settings, and various components which can promote more scope of flexible working.

Key Words: Flexible working, Life satisfaction, Information Technology, New Normal.

1. INTRODUCTION:

In this world of continuous change say either political, economic or natural surviving with a business is very difficult. One thing we can be sure of is that turbulence and uncertainty will continue to be dominant themes in the industrial and competitive arenas, and that this will necessarily have far reaching consequences for the organization of work, and the management of people. [2] So the question is how performance can be sustained in the face of massive and even unpredictable changes. Downsizing, restructuring, cost cutting is some of the measures adopted by the companies to overcome the challenges. With advanced technology and digital revolution there is a paradigm shift in the way work is done. It is forcing to change the existing business model. In the new millennium business success needs agility and flexibility which may lead to the end of traditional 9 to 5 job pattern. Flexible Working is not a new concept. It started in UK when legislation in the year 2003 was made to allow employees the right to ask for flexible working option. Flexible

The information technology sector is considered the most emerging economy in the country. It has been recognized by the government of India as the major industry of the country. It has been very helpful in fulfilling economic goals like the development of the economy. As per the reports, this sector has employed nearly 4.36 million employees in 2020. As most of the multinationals have their offices in India, the work culture practiced in western or European countries are so motto transferred to the Indian Offices. Although many policies are tailor made according to the organization

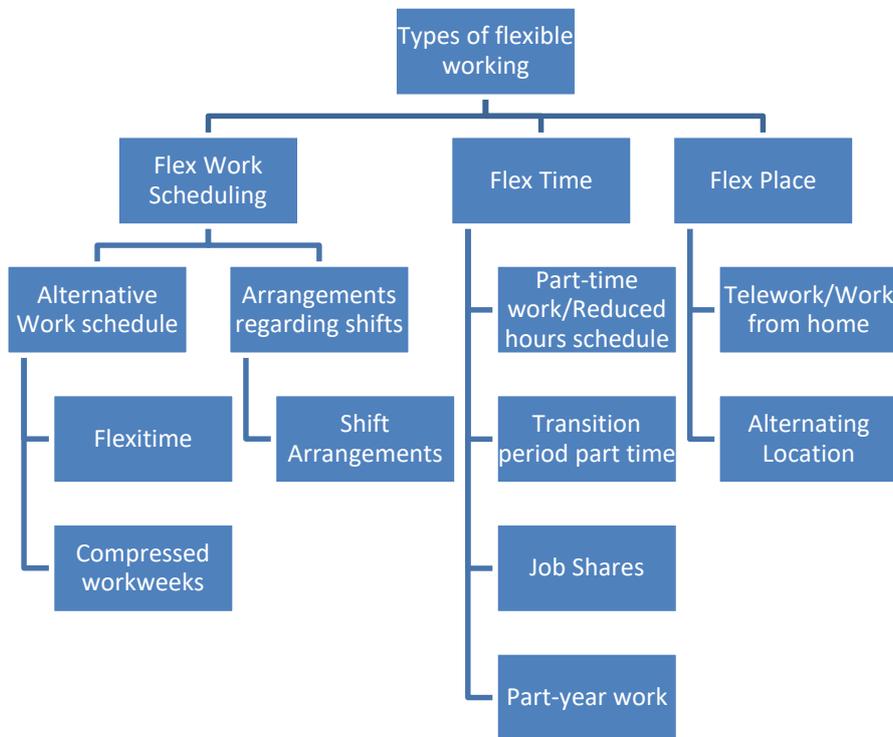
prerogative not as a formal policy laid down by labor legislature. Same is the scenario with the work policy of availing flexible working. The current study is conducted in Bangalore city because it is the IT hub of India. Hence often considered as the Silicon Valley of India. This city employs the maximum IT sector-based employees in India, therefore it has become the perfect place to get required respondents for the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Flexible working

The definition of flexible work can be as the schedule of the employment practices that are structured to provide better work-life balance to the employees over where, when, and how much or the continuity of the work is conducted (3). In other words, the balance between work and private life can be understood as the flexible work practice of the employees. The flexible working is an arrangement between employee and employer depending on how when and where the work will be done. The idea of flexibility in work has been in demand among the employees in the last few decades as the couples have been looking for double earners, single parent or women families, and those who have responsibilities of a child. Under flexible working conditions, employees are assisted in their control of how they can work to mitigate the effects of work stress over their work. The practices of flexible work arrangement in the organization have its positives like it improves the trust and loyalty among the employees towards the organization, it helps in increasing the engagement of employees towards work and increases the rate of retention of the employees. Further, the brand name of the firm helps make a good reputation which will attract better employees in the future. Research has been able to prove that flexible working is advantageous for making the work-life balance better, decreasing stress and anxiety. The improvement in the quality of sleep, betterment of the sugar level in the blood are the few benefits of the flexible work arrangements as per the studies [4]. The level of motivation of employees and their production increases sharply as it provides positive reinforcement. There are various definitions related to flexible working arrangement like it is termed as new way of working, Agile working, virtual working etc. This paper is based on the definition and classification of Work Flexibility 2010.

Figure: 1



Flexible working is classified into three types:

Flexibility in work scheduling: apart from the usual schedule of 8 hrs., it includes working in shift, alternative schedule etc. Flexibility in amount of hours worked: like who work less than 45 hrs. say part time, job sharing. Flexibility in the place of work: employees work from different place other than the office.

Life Satisfaction

Among the researchers, there is a lack of consistency when it comes to the definition of life satisfaction. Many researchers while defining this concept have said that it means to focus on the total assessment of the employee regarding their life in a positive sense.[5] The researchers have also said that it is the feelings and the attitudes of the life of an employee during a particular period in the time ranging from negative to positive. However, Lucas-Carrasco and Salvador in their article [6] have said that life satisfaction is attributable to self-efficacy while other researchers have associated it with the expectations and the environmental support and the abilities of the intellectual of the individual. Life satisfaction can also be related to specific parts of an individual's life like physical health, mental health, social relationships, and the sense of accomplishment in general [7].

A study was conducted by Mafini, C. [8] to find if there is any relationship between the satisfaction of the employee and the satisfaction in life among South African university academics. [9] The study revealed that the correlation between life satisfaction and workplace flexibility, skills utilization, and autonomy was very strong. Further, the study also did the regression analysis on flexibility in the workplace, utilization of skills, and autonomy showed good significance. In another study by Upadyaya, K., & Salmela-Aro, K. [10] the dynamics of the development showed that life satisfaction of the young adults predicted their work engagement during their change to work. The young adult's engagement to work had a positive impact on life satisfaction.

Work Life Interface:

With the availability of flexible working formally, there exist a work life interface. Work life interface may lead to work life conflict or work life enrichment. The researchers have been very actively trying to understand the boundaries that surround the personal life and the work-life of individuals and have been able to test the proposition laid by the theory. The theory of boundary suggests that the employees should be able to manage their work-life and personal boundaries through the process of either differentiating or making both the domains the same. Researchers have been able to suggest that individuals usually build a boundary for each domain that differs according to its power. This was noticed in the study conducted by Ashforth et al[11]. that individuals usually choose the strength they assign to each of its boundaries. According to the researchers, the strong boundaries by the individuals are created to separate the work-life and the family life domains, in contrast, the weak boundaries are built to facilitate ease of communication between the domains. This can be assumed that the way individual chooses to give importance to a particular boundary varies between male and female. In Indian culture women are entrusted with managing family and child raising responsibilities and men are entrusted with earning livelihood. The study focusses on moderating effect of Gender on the use of flexible working and its impact on life satisfaction

3. MATERIALS:

Study Hypothesis : Organizations are looking at holistic wellbeing of an employee. They have started seeing that holistic well being can be achieved with life satisfaction both with respect to work and non – work roles and then only they can be more productive and efficient.[12]. This can be achieved by reducing work life conflict and enabling work life balance. Conflict between work and family is reduced by having higher work flexibility or work schedule control [13]. IT employees affected by stress and anxiety due to work pressure, prolonged working hours. Therefore, flexible working can enhance the life satisfaction.

H1o : There is no relationship between Life satisfaction and a) Flexibility in work scheduling, b) Flexibility in amount of hours, c) Flexibility in the place of work

H1α : There is relationship between Life satisfaction and a) Flexibility in work scheduling, b) Flexibility in amount of hours, c) Flexibility in the place of work

In Indian context, Work Family conflict is perceived to be more experienced by women. Culturally Women are for managing the household and children whereas Men are the livelihood earner. However, with the globalization, participation of women in workforce, increase in dual earners, it can be said that the work life conflict is not only faced by female employees it is an ongoing issue for all the employees. However, most of the research and theories related to work family conflict is women oriented and gender based. Therefore, the relationship between flexible working and life satisfaction is either strong for women than men or vice versa.

H2o: The relationship between flexible working and life satisfaction is not moderated by Gender.

H2α: The relationship between flexible working and life satisfaction is not moderated by Gender.

Participants

Participants included 186 IT employees working in Bangalore, India. Male participants are 69%. Average age group is between 27-35 years. Source of income for 58% of employees are Single Income and Dual Income participants are 32% . The Frequency and percentage table is below

Table: 1

Participants Characteristics	No of Respondents	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	129	69
Female	58	31
Age		
18-26	50	27
27-35	80	43
36-45	49	26
Above 45	8	4
Marital Status		
Married	97	52
Unmarried	90	48
Source of Family Income		
Single Income	109	58
Dual Income	60	32
Salary plus other income	18	10
Highest Education		
Diploma	2	1
Engineering	64	34
Graduation	23	12
MBA	45	24
MCA	48	26
Mtech	5	3

4. METHOD:

Survey was conducted among IT employees through questionnaire method. The survey included a cover letter. Google form is used to administer the questionnaire. Participants were requested to fill up the survey as a part of study on the flexible working and its relationship with life satisfaction. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed that their response will remain anonymous and confidential.

Measures: Flexible Working construct is generated from the website [17]. It is categorized into three categories: Flexibility in work schedule, Flexibility in amount of hours worked, Flexibility in place of work. Types of flexible workings are selected for each category based on glossary of Flexible working retrieved from website [16] and those are common in Indian context. Five-point Likert Scale is used of 1 being rarely and 5 being always (a=0.75) To measure the Life satisfaction three items were selected from established construct (Diener, Emmons & Larsen, 1985) The five-point Likert scale of 1 being strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree is used (a=0.60).

5. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION:

Pearson Correlation is performed to find if association exists between the types of flexible working and life satisfaction. Type of flexible working – Flexibility in work scheduling (abbreviated as FlexSched) is significant.

Table:2
Correlations

		FlexSched	LifeSatisfactio n
FlexSched	Pearson Correlation	1	.190**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	187	187
LifeSatisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.190**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	187	187

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Other two types of Flexible Working that is Flexibility in amount of hours and Flexibility in Work place are not significant. As it shows that there is a relationship between Flexibility in work scheduling and Life Satisfaction, a simple linear regression is performed to know the direction and how much variation is in dependent variable explained by independent variable.

Table: 2.1

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.190 ^a	.036	.031	.74839	.036	6.891	1	185	.009

a. Predictors: (Constant), FlexSched

b. Dependent Variable: Life Satisfaction

The R Square value is .036 (0.036*100 = 3.6%) is 3.6%. And the adjusted R square value is 3.1%. It is statistically significant and $p < 0.05$, $p = 0.009$. This proves the null hypothesis is rejected.

A hierarchical Multiple regression was run to assess the statistical significance of the interaction term between Flexibility in work schedule and gender. However, the interaction term/ moderation is not statistically significant. This proves the null hypothesis is accepted. P value is .303 and $p < 0.05$.

Table 2.2
Model Summary^c

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.202 ^a	.041	.030	.74857	.041	3.902	2	184	.022
2	.215 ^b	.046	.031	.74843	.006	1.068	1	183	.303

a. Predictors: (Constant), Female, FlexSched

b. Predictors: (Constant), Female, FlexSched, FS_X_Female, c. Dependent Variable: Life Satisfaction

Table 2.3
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.202 ^a	.041	.030	.74857	.041	3.902	2	184	.022
2	.215 ^b	.046	.031	.74843	.006	1.068	1	183	.303

a. Predictors: (Constant), FlexSched, Male

b. Predictors: (Constant), FlexSched, Male, FS_X_Male

5. FINDINGS :

Flexibility in work schedule is the type of flexible working is found to be statistically significant and is related in a positive way with life satisfaction. The flexibility in work schedule involves Part-time, Functional Flexibility, Compressed Workweek, Flexi-time, Career Break. Part-time and Career break give employees the time and scope for upskilling in work front and spending quality time, fulfilling responsibilities in family front. Functional Flexibility allows employees to gain diverse experiences and gives the freedom to choose work related to passion and liking in an organization. Flexi-time allows the employee the autonomy on the start and end time of work. Compressed workweek is much in discussion as it gives the employees to log the extra hours worked and complete the scheduled 45 hrs of work in four days and can enjoy three days’ leisure in a week.

The moderator variable gender does not significantly moderate the relationship and is not a relevant moderator. Most of the respondents were in the age group of 27-35 years which is the age group of Millennial.

6. RESULT:

It is evident that flexible working affects the life satisfaction of the employees. This is in line (SHRM Research:Flexible Work Arrangements, 2015) with the benefits mentioned that flexible working improves wellbeing, lower stress, better health and lower work interference to family which are indicators of life satisfaction. However, it is important to find out what type of flexibility is desired by employees. The organization policies must be drafted keeping the need of employees. It is not necessary what is practiced in western culture can suit the employees working in Indian Organisation. Also, the research shows that one kind fits all is not the right approach to draft the policies.

The Gender is not significantly moderated the relationship may be due to the greater number of participants are GenY/Millennials. Various studies suggest that individuals belonging to different generation will hold different work values and will be characteristically different. This experience separates individuals of each generation from other and is according to the generation theory that work values, career choices, ones thinking pattern is influenced by generational experiences rather than birth age.[14]. Work-life balance and flexibility is also important for Gen Y commitment towards organisation.[15]. and it is same across the genders. This research will add to the dearth of research to bring focus that providing flexible working must not to be limited to female employees or considered as family friendly policies. With the demographic change, economical change juxtaposed with increase dual earners in work force and rise in nuclear family, the flexible working must be looked as working policy available for all the employees without differentiating with the gender.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION:

The sample size is small. And a purposeful sampling is taken from one organisation. The analysis with the socio-demographic profile of age, experience which are not analysed can give direction to formalize flexible working as a formal working policy for all employees and not just for women employees. Organisation may explore various types of flexible working available and evaluate the importance of which type of flexible working is for employees. Each organisation culture is different and so will be the choice of types of flexible working.

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