

Perception factors of work place flexibility during COVID pandemic.

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Abstract

Workplace flexibility includes flexible time schedule and choice of work place that is beneficial for both employer & employee especially for women employees who can manage work life balance by deciding where, when & how their works get done and which in turn helps employer to satisfy and retain talented and experienced employees. Workplace flexibility is successful in the present scenario due to development in digital technology because technology enables the employee to join as a team and work from remote locations. The present COVID pandemic situation has thrown in lot of challenges for the different organizations like lockdowns clamped by the different governments, social distancing and the discomfort of wearing personal protective aids over extended hours. However, the work from home flexi schedule has come out as a big boon to companies and a blessing in disguise for employees. The study aims to find out the perceived importance of factors work flexibility as perceived by women employed in IT sector of Bangalore. The study was conducted with women employees of IT sector employees in different concerns and who shifted to flexible mode once pandemic struck the Country. The feeling of working from a safe zone and the efficiency with which one was able to maintain a flexi schedule at home were ranked as most important by the employees. Future studies can be targeted at men and the environmental impact of flexi work schedules.

Key words: Flexible approach, Job satisfaction, Work-life balance, safe zone, Pandemic.

Introduction

Workplace flexibility is a strategy used by organization especially in pandemic situation that enables the employee the choice to select from where to work. The flexibility to work from home enables the employee to work without any fear of pandemic and also enable them to maintain social distance dictated by pandemic. The reduction in employees provide the organization advantages such as maintaining productivity levels due to reduced absenteeism and

requirement of lesser office space due to lower number of employees visiting offices. Workplace flexibility includes flexible time schedule and choice of work place that is beneficial for both employer & employee especially for women employees who can manage work life balance by deciding where, when & how their works get done and which in turn helps employer to satisfy and retain talented and experienced employees. Workplace flexibility is successful in the present scenario due to development in digital technology because technology enables the employee to join as a team and work from remote locations. In the present pandemic situation, most of the employees perceive that workplace flexibility ensures that people do not have the need to come out of their homes and preserve the health of the employee as well their family members. Covid 19 has thrown a huge challenge to humanity and tends to be a threat in work place where stringent social distancing during entire work hours might not always be a possibility. Hence it gives a huge feeling of security when someone gets the option of work at home. Brooks (2020) identified that negative psychological effects complicated the severity of these symptoms based on quarantine duration and extent, a feelings of lonesomeness, the fear of being infected, insufficient information, and stigma. Pierce(1992)found that an increasing number of organizations were shifting to substitute work schedules, such as flextime and compressed workweeks.

To implement successful work place flexibility it is important to make sure everyone follow the same rules and by providing required training will enable employees to work more effectively and eliminate confusion, to make it more successful the significant factor is trust between employee and employer. Clark (2000) stated that that the borders between work and family attained when individuals manage and negotiate the work and family spheres while physical, psychological and emotional boundaries separated roles made by the work and family. Flexible work decisions often enable employees to choose where and when work that needs to be done gets carried and make decisions that enable them to be most productive for their organizations. When employees are better able to manage their career and their personal life, they tend to be more loyal towards their organization. Hill (2008) identified that flexibility was beneficial to organizations in order to face demands created by internal and external forces while from a worker perspective the same was beneficial to improve productivity. Jessica (2020) stated that the COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered the way one worked, communicated, and socialized and has brought out making of significant challenges in a matter of days on an unexpected scale and the Social distancing guidelines brought out by the different governments

and public health officials brought out the need for everyone to cope with unprecedented level of changes. Wright (2020) found that in Wuhan, the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak, people in order to face the lockdown developed many ways to be connected, through efforts such as cloud clubbing, house karaoke station, and online work groups. Titan (2020) stated that the closure of daycare, schools, child care it was difficult for working moms to balance work-life and it also affected men in terms of rescission but these problems are overcome with the help of workplace flexibility options like flexi time, flex place. The present COVID pandemic situation has thrown in lot of challenges for the different organizations like lockdowns clamped by the different governments, social distancing and the discomfort of wearing personal protective aids over extended hours. The challenge for the organization in keeping employees motivated was compounded by employee perceptions such as the fear of being infected by virus. However the work from home flexi schedule has come out as a big boon to companies and a blessing in disguise for employees.

Curtis (2009) divulged that the SARS disaster in China and also in the aftershock of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans learning on the web became a necessity when virtually there was no other option to learn. This can be considered a forerunner to actions amid a pandemic. Justus(2008) in their case study on the chikungunya pandemic in Kanyakumari district that wreaked havoc with rubber plantation workers, the different estate managements identifies labor as a vital plantation asset and found the investment on their health and welfare as of paramount importance

Review of literature:

Amabil (2013) concluded that workplace flexibility helped employees balance their routine responsibilities and office work. Richardson (2017) stated that workplace flexibility is aided by development in modern technology like web-conferencing, voicemail which makes the work of the employee easier. Susan (2003) found that workplace flexibility helps employee to be flexible in their work and increase productivity. Byron (2012) found that flextime strategy helped increase profitability when used to satisfy and protect employee and failed when its purpose was to reduce cost.

Galinsky (2011) through his work identified that, employees are not finding enough time to manage their work and family with multiple responsibilities. Crossbire (2004) found that employees who work most of the time outside the home find it difficult to manage work and home so for such type of employee flexible workplace will be beneficial. Shareenu (2020) found that work from home is strictly enforced in most of the sectors due to pandemic situation and the manuscript revealed that work from home depended on the home environment and facility provided by organization. Hayman, (2009) found that employees working under flexible timings and workplace have higher level of work life balance. Butler (2009) found Workplace flexibility to reduce stress level and maintain physical health. Becker, (2002) suggested that organization cost can be reduced by providing flexibility and also increase organizational effectiveness. Susan. (2003) found that workplace flexibility helps employee to increase productivity. Byron (2012) stated that flexi time strategy helps to increase profitability when it is used to satisfy and protect employee and it fails if it is implemented only to reduce cost. Idris (2014) concluded that in most developed countries flexible work policies help to retain employees in the organization.

Objective

To find out the perceived important factors of work flexibility as perceived by women employed in IT sector of Bangalore

Research Methodology

The employee perception of flexible work culture at Bangalore scale was a Likert scale with 1 anchored as certainly untrue and rising up to 5 on the other end anchored as definitely true. The alpha value of 0.85 for the flexi work culture perception scale was considered sufficient. The study involved 200 respondents and was conducted over a forty five day period in June – July 2020. The study was conducted with women employees of IT sector employees in different concerns and who shifted to flexible mode once pandemic struck the Country.

Lewis (2015) found that flexible working practices are more suited to women than men and can likely be employed by women because of the ideology beliefs of motherhood.

Discussion

Table: 1. Mean, Standard deviation level of factors of importance perceived by employee towards workplace flexibility

SL.NO	Work place flexibility statements	Mean	Std deviation	Mean Rank	Friedman Chi square	Friedman multiple comparison
1.	I am in Safe zone	3.49	1.38	6.43	476.11	1
2.	I can maintain a flexible schedule at home	3.56	1.18	6.94		1
3.	I feel like I am enjoying my work more	3.25	1.27	7.95		2
4.	I able to meet even higher work load than usual	3.28	1.25	7.64		2
5.	I look after my family	3.17	1.33	7.65		2
6.	I don't feel Economic in stability as I work as I work previously	3.14	1.31	9.02		3
7.	I Can clear my doubts instantly as my boss responds Immediately	3.26	1.24	8.97		3
8.	I feel relax that I don't need to use mask and other protective measure	3.02	1.30	8.80		3
9.	I don't have the Pressure of commute	2.88	1.35	9.00		3
10.	I feel more Creative in the concise of home environment.	2.86	1.34	9.25		3
11.	I can be a Responsible citizen in this pandemic situation by following the slogan "stay home , stay safe"	2.94	1.30	10.07		4
12.	My Family is happy that I work from home.	2.86	1.36	9.56		4
13.	I feel I am able to Complete the work well.	2.53	1.38	9.73		4
14.	I don't feel the stress of work.	2.55	1.41	10.18		4
15.	I feel my Management is understanding towards employee need	2.66	1.45	9.96		4
16.	I don't have any technical issue as I am thorough with work.	2.39	1.36	11.23		5
17.	Technology as enabled us to join as a team and work.	2.25	1.31	10.64		5

Source: Primary data Computed

The Friedman's multiple comparison value 476.11; P value 0.000 indicates that perceived factors of flexibility in working from home during pandemic situation is not similar. This test is carried out to find out women employees perception towards workplace flexibility.

From the above table house being a safer work place compared to office in pandemic times, maintenance of flexible schedule at home are major important factors perceived by women employees, they feel safe and can save time by avoiding commute during pandemic situation. Mark(2020) identified that flextime and compressed work schedule gave employee more control over the time they worked and in turn had larger blocks of free time that increased their overall job satisfaction. Hegewish (2009) the study found that in most of the countries women employee prefer flexible working because of carrying responsibilities when compared to men. Courtney (2020) recognized that pandemic would change the way of working and provide opportunities to think in a different manner and that workplace flexibility would reduce commute time, pollution and helps people to have work-life balance.

The second category identified by employees as of significant importance influencing flexi work schedule include work factors like enjoying the work, tenacity to maintain a higher work load, and the flexibility to better look after the family. In Indian life style family is given a higher importance and hence flexi schedule is a boon to balance the family and work life. Sussanna (2014) identified that workplace flexibility introduced by organization caters to the well being of employees and enabled them to take care of family and work. Lee, (1983) indicated that the constructive benefits of these substitute work schedules towards employees' quality of life outside of work were well documented. Christopher, (2014) found that those employees with more family responsibilities, perceived flexible working not as an extra benefit but as a necessity. It is highly important that workers should be committed to their work and enjoys their work. This enjoyment of work will lead to creativity often identified as the difference between a mediocre and a quality work. Justus (2009) recognized that energized employees will have better capability to succeed while disjointed employees will be a letdown for the company.

The next category of factors that tended to positively influence employees included statements such as economic stability, getting doubts cleared, the need for not unnecessarily using Protective aids, getting rid of the pressure of commute and the probability of being more creative in a conducive environment.

Managerial support to employees is a key to the success of flexi work schedule. The need for workers to get their doubts cleared instantaneously will go a long way in getting work finished on time. Ben (2006) found that restrictions regarding working hours can be resolved through flexibility in timing by enabling employees to work from home. Martínez (2008) identified that capacity for employee to perform innovatively is related to flexibility provided by the organization. Shuo (2020) found that since outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2, the practice of using face masks has become omnipresent in China and many Asian countries

The fourth category of factors perceived as important by employees on flexible work patterns offered during pandemic times included being happy in staying home and there by staying safe, lower work stress, family members being happy, Completing the work on time and management's understanding of the needs of employee. Pamela (2020) identified that work from home helped to maintain social distance and limit the spread of virus but it was challenging for those who are not used to it. Jeffrey (2010) states workplace flexibility will reduce work life conflict, and also reduces stress level of employee. Shagvaliyeva (2014) found that the introduction of flexibility to workplace was to help employees with kids or those who care after siblings to balance their time amid work and life. Jones (2008) found that workplace flexibility helps to fit work-family in a satisfied level. Sharon (2017) Concluded that workplace flexibility helps in team effectiveness, maintain occupation stress and employees feel more committed and motivated towards their job. Kelliher (2010) states that in the competitive business world employee are very important, the performance of employee will ultimately decide the success of business so to satisfy and protect employee workplace flexibility will be a best policy.

The final factors included statements on facing nil technical issues while working from home and experiencing technology enabled team work. Caithin (2020) states that working mothers have to face certain difficulties like taking care of kids, household work, and official work all together in a home environment was a difficult task. Sandy (2001) identified that immediate response between employee and manager was regular in remote work employee than non –remote work. Jessica (2020) found that due to social networking tools employees can stay connected. sridharmitta (2020) found that work from home was a successful option in IT industry to work in a team and to share equitable wealth between employees.

Bobbi (2020) stated that the world of laptops, cell phones, and teleconferences enables the intellectual and analytical responsibilities of knowledge workers to continue from home. In this modern era workers want to be judged by the value they create not by the numbers of hours they worked or where they worked. Customer expectation of 24/7 can be provided by implementing workplace flexibility strategy to employees and the need of virtual team is very much important for productivity, since business nowadays is beyond geographical constraints working across time zones, where experts group easily collaborate and work with each other. During the implementation of workplace strategy right choice of policy to the respective employees should be identified based on their requirements.

Conclusion:

Work place flexibility will provide a win-win outcome for the employee and the employer represented by the managers of the company and tends to be successful when both of them understand their responsibilities and are focused on maximizing productivity. The above paper presents the perceived importance factors of flexibility in working from home during pandemic situation and it was found that working women prefer workplace flexibility to be safe and to protect their family and to have a balance in work –life, but based on the management factors and home environment the success rate depends on individual..The workplace is predicted to continue to evolve beyond recognition with newer technology permitting employees to work from remote locations and collaborate more effectively. Work place flexibility in addition to the benefits perceived by employees brings to focus an added impact on environment like less pollution, less usage of fuel, less congestion less accidents and a host of benefits which can all be considered in future. This study may be further extended to know about workplace flexibility in other sectors and can have a comparative study of workplace flexibility before, during and post pandemic. Work place flexibility from the aspects of male employees may be considered in future studies.

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