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The Effect of Flexible Work Arrangement on Employee Perception and Behavior

By

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The Effect of Flexible Work Arrangement on Employee Perception and Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this research paper is to study the impact of flexible work arrangements (FWA) on employee's work-life balance, wellbeing and behavior. This is the new alternative of the regular 9 to 5 job that everyone is seeking to change. This study will give a clearer review of the advantages of flexible work such as enhanced efficiency, improved time- management, healthier lifestyle and mental health and increased employee's engagement.

Design/methodology approach: A data sample of 133 participants who have worked flexibly was collected for the purpose of this study. The confirmatory factor analysis model was used to evaluate the model fit indices and validity of data.

Findings: It was found that flexible work arrangements do not lead to an unavailability of work-life balance. Moreover, there is a positive relationship between flexible work and employee wellbeing. In addition, the results also showed a positive relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement. Hence it is concluded that flexible work arrangements indirectly lead to better wellbeing and engagement

Practical implications: This study will provide implications that will help future employers to take further consideration regarding flexible work schedules and implement them. As well at the end of this study, the reader might find clearer answers of whether to stick to his 9 to 5 job or start looking for a flexible job to achieve a better work-life balance in case he was ever considering that change.

Originality/value: The research is based on the social exchange theory, and it provides an insight on the importance of flexible work arrangement (FWA) and how it might affect employees. This study is being completed because there is no previous literature that discuss the direct relationship between all discussed variables being flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, employee wellbeing and employee work-engagement.

Keywords: Flexible Work Arrangements, Work-life Balance, Employee Wellbeing, Employee Engagement, Social Exchange Theory.

Paper type: Research Paper

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Chapter 1

Overview

In this chapter, an overview to the study will be provided and the purpose is stated. In addition, the research questions are given.

1.1. Introduction

The outbreak of Covid-19 has drastically changed our lives. Every person on this planet has witnessed the effect of the covid 19 pandemic on everyday tasks from online banking to online shopping and remote working. The pandemic has been a game changer for corporates as well as workers. Studies and hard work of medical experts have made it possible to fight the pandemic rapidly with covid vaccines without compromising the safety of the vaccine, which made many people expect everything do go back to normalcy meaning by that returning to office places for work and attending universities for courses. However, we are now halfway through 2022 and new covid virus variants are still emerging which might cause workforce to momentarily go remote again. Given the situation, the rapid internet and the technological advancement, flexible work was one of the approaches used as a response to the changing circumstances and expectations. The prevalence of flexible work arrangements has increased sharply over the last decade and has seen a huge spike following the covid pandemic (Shifrin, 2022). To facilitate the accessibility of remote working for all, many organizations were already offering a variety of FWA (Flexible work arrangement), yet the outburst of the disease obliged all organization to immediately implement FWA. While the pandemic is

temporary the change in work life is permanent. Major corporations such as Google, Facebook, Pay Pal and other renown companies have already proclaimed that they will be offering FWA indefinitely (Eyal, 2014). A new work era has developed, and the flexible work trend is here to stay especially that the largest working generation in the workforce today represented by 35% is majorly made up of millennials and generation Xers who grew up in a very flexible and tech savvy environment (Fry,2018). According to a survey conducted by PWC in 2020, 69% of the US financial services expect that almost two-thirds of their workers to be working from home once a week in the near future. An article published in 2022 by Harvard business review alleged that more than 90% of employers are planning to adopt a hybrid work model. Another study conducted by communications consultancy the Grossman Group also showed that 48% which is nearly half of the US employees working from home desire to continue teleworking or using flexible work arrangements post the covid virus (2020). Companies have been reducing their offices spaces and promoting FWA. For example, Japanese tech firm Fujitsu is halving their office space and providing its 80,000 workers unprecedented flexibility (2020). Moreover, Microsoft's Work Trend Index (2021) showed that 66% of employers around the world are reshaping workplaces to accommodate hybrid work arrangements. Knowing that FWA has been evolving and is soon enough going to be the new normal, it is imperative to understand how it affects employee's behaviors. Throughout this paper I will focus on the role of FWA affecting an

individual's daily work-life balance. In term, we will assess how this might affect employees' wellbeing and engagement.

This study is being completed because there is no previous literature that connect all variables in a single model. Although the relationship among the variables can be found in previous studies, the importance of the thesis is to present a holistic model connecting the variables and examining the underlying mechanism that explains the influence of flexible work arrangement on employee engagement. Most papers discussed connections related to work life balance, job satisfaction, wellbeing, turnover intentions, and engagement but no prior study connected the four chosen variables in a holistic model depicting the direct and indirect relationship between them. Moreover, the studies completed during the outbreak of Covid-19 only highlighted the effect of remote work/work from home on employees' work life balance and not FWA. Remote work is just one of the many types of flexible work and hence proves why I am proceeding with this study.

1.2. Research questions

The research Questions of this study can be stated as follows

Research question 1

Is Flexible Working a reasonable Alternative to the regular 9 to 5 jobs?

Research question 2

What benefits would flexible work arrangements achieve?

Organization of the remaining of the thesis is as follows: In Chapter 2 of the thesis a concise literature review will be informing you about previous research where

one should be able to gain a deeper understanding of the variables. Chapter 3 a conceptual model is provided showing off the relationship between all diverse variables and hypotheses are developed. In following section “Chapter 4” of the theses, the research methodology, statistical analysis followed by the discussion of the mentioned results are presented. Last but not least chapter 5, includes the conclusion, limitations as well as recommendation for future studies.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter provides a general overview about flexible work arrangements in all their various forms, work-life balance, employee wellbeing and engagement in the workplace.

2.1. Flexible work arrangements

In 2020, workers were faced with one of history's largest social confinements, where extended lockdowns have accelerated the uptake of flexible work arrangements. In times where social gatherings were prohibited and offices were closed-off, flexible work arrangements became the new normal for millions of employees across the globe. Many companies adopted flexible work arrangements as a way to avoid business disruption, a strategy that has proven effective, with some companies even sustaining such arrangements in a post-pandemic future.

Managers have long been working on ways to increase and optimize employees positive outcomes for instance organizational citizenship, innovative work behavior, corporate social responsibility, engagement, wellbeing etc...(Singh et al,2020; Singh et al,2019; El-Kassar et al 2017,). Similarly, human resources management teams have been consistently working on ways to improve employees' outcomes such as innovative capabilities, satisfaction, creativity, task performance etc. (El-Kassar et al 2022, Sreih and El-Kassar 2018; Kassar et al 2015). One way used to improve those positive outcomes especially during Covid is the use of FWA.

Flexible work arrangement (FWA) can be defined as a work situation in which employees have the ability to control the time or location of their work (Weeden,2005). According to Masuda et al, (2012) there are several kinds of flexible work arrangements including: flextime, telecommuting, remote working (also known as flexplace), part-time work and compressed workweek. However, most studies focus on the two most sought-after arrangements, which are flextime and flexplace (Mcnall et al,2010). Flextime (flexible schedules) refers to an agreement between the employer and the employee that gives freedom to the employee to decide his/her working hours throughout the day. The extent of this time flexibility can be limited by the employer in several ways, for example the employer might require the presence of the employee at the office during certain times of the day. For example, the employee is obliged to spend 8 to 9 hours per day effectively working as he or she would work in the office, but it is the employee's choice to choose how to divide those working hours during the day. Employees' flexible schedules can also be restricted by other factors such as workers' policies, government regulations, or interdependent colleagues' schedules (Laine,2017). Flexplace which is what the majority of workers experienced during the covid 19 pandemic is the employee's ability to choose where he or she wants to work such as working from home, from a coffee shop or any other suitable place outside the employee's office (Laine,2017).

Previous studies have shown that FWA plays a significant role on an organizational and personal level. Weidman (2018) found out that FWA have a positive impact on employee's wellbeing which promotes employee engagement to his duties and responsibilities. It is believed that when employees are granted more flexibility,

they tend to feel less stressed and are much more relaxed than employees who follow a strict work schedule. Similarly, Wahab and Tatoglu (2019) also found out that employee wellbeing and firm performance would be enhanced if FWA was adopted.

In addition, FWA can be quite advantageous. It is a preferable work model especially for young parents who are still figuring out parenthood and for people who need to look out for family members (ex: elderly, toddlers, ill members etc.). FWA is the most important work-life facilitators particularly for mothers (Fuller and Hirsh,2019). It provides workers with autonomy and control over when and where the job is done. Temporal and spatial flexibility will permit employees to be more productive by reducing fatigue and distraction. It reduces work family conflict for the reason that employees are able to integrate paid work with caregiving (Fuller and Hirsh,2019). FWA also cuts commute costs (Fuller and Hirsh,2019). Instead of going to the office every day, employee could go to the office once or twice a week or work remotely. Not only is it saving money, but it also saves time and allow employees to spend more time with loved ones

Subsequently, studies have found that FWA have a positive effect on employees' engagement and retention. Mcnall's findings (2010) showed that FWA increases employee satisfaction, promotes work-life balance (WLB) and in turn increase employee retention. Azara et al's findings (2018) had similar conclusions where FWA increases employee satisfaction, promotes work-life balance and thus decreases turnover intentions. To conclude, FWA is said to improve employee morale as well as increase job satisfaction, commitment, and the capability to handle stress (Jaber,2016).

2.2. Work life balance

The work life balance is the state of equilibrium where people are equally satisfied with their personal and professional life, limiting interference and overlap of both (Lockwood, 2003). The ultimate understanding of this term means that there is correlation between work life and personal life. The challenge is to be able to balance the time between oneself, family, friends, and relatives on one hand and colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors on the other. Each employee is an active family member as well as an active earning member because he/she is employed thus he/she should find a fit between the different roles in his/her life (2003). But in order to be able to show the correlation between work and life and try to define their boundaries one should at least be able to define the two terms. What exactly is “work life” and “personal life”? In an article in 2011, work life is defined as the amount of time spent on job related activities whereas personal life or “non work” life is defined as the time invested on family and self-care, away from “formal work places” (Delecta P,2011). Work life balance can be interpreted in several terms and cannot be limited to one single definition, however, in this context work life balance is described as the dilemma employees face to manage their time between family and work responsibilities as they are working flexibly.

Work life balance is an important variable as it affects employees’ health and by that organizational outcome. Poor work life balance might lead to health problems including frequent headaches, insomnia, depression, weakened immune system, increased smoking/alcohol consumption etc. (Dhas,2015) In order to achieve a better work life balance, it is recommended to manage time effectively. Make sure to prioritize important task and limit distractions. Improvement in flexibility especially time and

place flexibility contribute to increased work-life balance(Dhas, 2015). Employee retention/turnover, dedication and satisfaction, absenteeism, productivity, and accident rates have all been shown to be influenced by work-life balance (Dhas,2015).

2.3. Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a vital component for a happy life (Kluczyk, 2013). Wellbeing implies the feeling of happiness, satisfaction, liveliness, fulfillment, passion, and self-actualization (Seligman, 2002). It indicates positive attitudes and emotions such as contentment, optimal functioning and absence of depression or anxiety (swift et al 2014). According to WHO wellbeing is a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being” an implication that mental health is as important as physical health, and that wellbeing is not just the absence of diseases or disorders. Mental health is fundamental and important, it is the state in which humans realize their capabilities and their ability to cope with normal stressors, work efficiently and contribute to society. Mental health awareness has been one of the priorities in the WHO in the recent years to help raise awareness on the effective treatments and preventing suicide at young ages thus improving the quality of life. Other studies go much deeper in the definition of wellbeing and divide wellbeing into three categories subjective wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, and health.(Yigerem,2017) Wellbeing can be evaluated by one’s subjective judgment and what he or she thinks about his or her life satisfactions (subjective wellbeing), psychological wellbeing (like their perceived amount of stress) and one’s measure of physical wellbeing (like blood pressure and diabetes) (Yigerem,2017; Broadwell and Light, (1999). In this paper, wellbeing was discussed considering all three of its categories and was not narrowed down to one type.

The several factors that could affect an employee's wellbeing include job satisfaction, quality of life, organizational support, stress and many others (Soh, 2016). According to Pfeffer, one major variable that affect employees' physical and psychological health is workplace stress (2018). Employees who faced chronic stress at work have higher risk at developing metabolic syndrome, heart diseases or type 2 diabetes. Another variable that is said to play a main role on employees' health is job control (Pfeffer,2018). Low levels of job control may lead to ill effects imposing a burden on employees' physical and mental health. Organizations can avoid these dangers by providing their workers with more flexibility and fluidity. It was derived that higher ranked employee were less likely to experience depression and anxiety because they had more job control and flexibility. Moreover, another key factor that affect employee wellbeing is the quality of life/ work-life balance (2018). Poor work-life balance can cause stress and emotional exhaustion. Working for too long or blurring the lines between work life and normal life will impact one's health especially when work cuts into leisure activities or family time. Flexible work arrangements or working from home are one way to deal with this problem. Another important aspect that affects wellbeing is social support (Pfeffer,2018). Being socially integrated and surrounded by friends and family is said to decrease stress levels. It is important for companies to maintain a healthy supportive work environment in order to keep employees high spirited and content. Employees with a better health state are more likely to be productive and efficient at work. According to Johari et al, 41.8 percent of job performance was determined by employee wellbeingb (2018).

2.4. Engagement

The notion of engagement date back to 1990 when Kahn coined the term. He believed that a person is considered to be engaged when he/she works hard, puts in the effort and stays involved. He/she should show up to work, remain focused and strive to push his/her work ahead. Kahn proposed that engaged workers are willing to put in time and effort to successfully complete a task (Schneider,2017). Similarly, to Kahn, Schaufeli and Bakker defined work engagement as a psychological and emotional state. A positive, satisfying, work related state that can be characterized by vigor, high levels of dedication and absorption on work (2010). Vigor is defined as high levels of energy and increased willingness to devote effort and passion into work. Dedication is when an individual is highly involved in his work and experience a sense of significance, eagerness, motivation, pride, and challenge (Manzoor et al,2021) . Absorption is when an individual is fully focused and immersed in his work and sometimes feels like time passes by and has difficulties to disconnect from work. In brief, engaged workers have high levels of energy; are passionate and strongly engrossed in their work (2010).

There are several benefits related to engagement. An increase in employee engagement leads to a more optimistic and supportive work environment and increases customer satisfaction. Organizations must enhance engagement in order to increase employee's involvement and dedication and by that attain favorable business outcomes. A study conducted by Schneider employee engagement plays a role on organizational performance. Based on a sample of 102 companies, engagement significantly predicts organizational financials such as ROA,net margin etc(2017).Work engagement also

increases employees' commitment to the organization decreases absenteeism and lowers turnover intentions (Plooy et al,2010; Bothma and Roodt,2012) . In general, engaged employees are less stressed, more content in their lives, more productive and are less likely to be absent during workdays or quit the company (Gallup organization,2006). Ali et al also found that engagement was positively related to job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior (2020). According to Rich some of the factors that serve as antecedents to engagement are psychological and organizational team factors as well as self-perception of confidence (2010)). Rich's data collected from the 245 firefighters and their supervisors proved that individuals who stated to be more engaged are the ones who reported higher levels of value congruence, perceived organizational support and core self-evaluation (2010). People who said to be more engaged are more likely to have a better job performance (2010).

Chapter 3

Hypothesis and conceptual model

In this chapter, hypotheses to be tested suggest relationship between flexible work-arrangements, work-life balance, employee wellbeing and engagement, driven mainly by the social exchange theory, where good employee treatment by organizations and corporations is paid back by the employee through higher performance and engagement. These relations are represented by a conceptual model.

3.1. Social exchange theory

The relationship between the chosen variables will be explained by using the social exchange theory. The chosen variables include flexible work arrangement (FWA), work-life balance (WLB), employee well-being (EWB), and employee work engagement (EWE). The social exchange theory is based on the concept of making a decision based on the idea of “exchange of goods”. The object of this theory is to maximize rewards by measuring the cost and benefits of a certain relationship or action. This theory explains that when companies care for their employees and provide them with good opportunities; employees will tend to show different and positive behaviors and attitudes towards their company. More exactly, when workers receive favorable treatments from their company, they are more likely to reciprocate this positive action by changing their behaviors. Workers will feel obliged to reciprocate the amenity given by the company by providing a better attitude and increasing their productivity at work.

Accordingly, if the company provides workers with a more flexible schedule, which is equivalent to a better work life balance, employees will feel more cared for and less stressed therefore willingly increase their engagement and work harder (Jaharuddin& Zainol ,2019). Employees will be more dedicated and enthusiastic once they feel that their company is supporting and appreciating them.

3.2. Hypotheses development

This section will present eight hypotheses to be addressed. Those hypotheses were derived based on literature review and previous studies.

3.2.1 Relationship between flexible work and work-life balance

Most researchers studied that there is a positive effect between flexible work and work-life delimitation, and hence work-life balance (Ferdous et al, 2021; Azar et al, 2021; Jaber, 2016, Mcnall, 2010). A study done by Rawashdeh et al on 95 employees of a private airline found out that FWA did help employees better draw boundaries between their professional and personal lives, limiting interferences and as a result significantly impacting work-life balance positively (2016). FWA can provide employees with more freedom and autonomy to manage their work and non-work life, avoiding overlap between professional and non-professional duties and ensuring improved overall efficiency (2016). When working flexibly, managers may plan out the work in a way that employees have more authority over how and what task to prioritize and complete. Allowing the employees to take control over their working hours, makes them more conscious about the value of time and thus encourages them to spend it more

effectively. This work plan builds in employees a feeling of increased autonomy giving them the feeling of being in charge of their lives with more energy and time to advance in their work tasks while still having more “thinking time” for themselves. Gaining the freedom to choose when and where to work leads to self-independence in organizing certain tasks and higher control over the desire of accomplishing them. In addition, having more control over time means that employees are less likely to get behind in their work and hence experience less time pressure (White, 2003). Being in control of one’s own tasks, priorities and time allocation throughout the day, helps employees limit interferences between work and play and avoid mix-ups by properly setting the boundaries for the various activities. Moreover, working from home reduces the time spent commuting and thus one focuses on spending this time on completing other tasks. Not to forget that we live in a digitalized era which makes it possible to make all work documents easily accessible without the need to go to the office. Commuting for some people is considered as an added stress since it is not practically time spent on work but also not leisure time (Clark, 2020). Accordingly, the chance to decrease the time to travel for work or avoiding business travel and replacing them with zoom calls frees up time to spend on non-work activities such as family and leisure. Therefore, it is safe to say that the very use of FWA encourages a more effective coping strategy.

H1: FWA has a negative impact on personal and professional interferences and lack of Work life balance.

3.2.2 Relationship between work-life balance and employee wellbeing

The relationship between Work life balance (Wlb) and employee wellbeing has been thoroughly studied in existing literature. The main claim is that if employees had a

better Wlb, then they're less likely to be mentally or physically ill and thus work more effectively. Mostly, negative health outcomes such as depression and fatigue are the result of the employee's lack of control over demanding work and imbalance between working hours and family time. Wlb is positively related to employee's wellbeing as proved by Zheng et al (2015). Given the notion that a good Wlb means a better control of time, this means that employees have additional time to meet their demands and reduce daily stress. Therefore, it is estimated that Wlb is related to better physical health (HAAR et al, 2013). Moreover, balanced individuals might be mentally healthier because they experience a feeling of harmony in life and satisfactory psychophysiological situations which allow them to meet the long-term work and non-work-related demands (Greenhaus et al., 2003). People who sense balance between their work and life responsibilities have better life satisfaction. Individuals who stated to feel more satisfied in their life reported to be in better mental and physical health. (Brough et al., 2014; Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska, 2009; Greenhaus et al., 2003; Ferguson, Carlson, Zivnuska, & Whitten, 2012; Haar, 2013; Lunau, Bambra, Eikemo, van der Wel, & Dragano, 2014). Several research proved that Wlb has a negative direct influence on employee turnover, thus increasing job satisfaction and leading to increased employee engagement. Workers with higher job satisfaction feel mentally and physically healthier over time which is one of the best preventions of health deterioration (Fischer et,2009). Furthermore, many studies found out that poor Wlb led to health problems such as higher stress levels, depression, and anxiety. Stress from work and life imbalance are manifested by elevated blood pressure, high cortisol levels as well as higher heart rates. Those responses increase the chances of strokes, cardiac

diseases and other health problems (Lunau et al,2014). Kluczyk concluded that work life imbalance causes dissatisfaction and discontent, affecting wellbeing negatively (2013). As most studies proved that the imbalance in life can exhaust physical and mental resources, accordingly, we hypothesize that good Wlb does not lead to increased stress or deteriorated wellbeing.

H2: Wlb has negative correlation to work-induced physical and mental illnesses, leading to improved employee wellbeing.

In addition, H1 and H2 suggest the following:

H3: WLB mediates the relationship between FWA and EWB.

3.2.3 Relationship between flexible-work arrangements and employee wellbeing

According Weiler who is a flex job senior career specialist, FWA reduce work related stress (2021). Her study showed that remote work, being one type of flexible work, reduces distractions during the work day. The worker will be able to better focus on the job instead of getting interrupted by co-workers or getting involved in office politics. 60% of employees claimed that remote work permit for a quieter work environment. Around 50% of the employees agree that remote work provide them with a more comfortable and personalized work environment. In Addition, Weiler claimed that offering flexible working options allowed the employees to devote more time on their health and wellness. According to Weiler's survey 77% of the respondents claimed that FWA would help them lead a healthier life(2021). They would be able to decide when to focus on work, when to exercise, when to eat etc.... Some employees might end up skipping meals because they are not hungry during their lunch break. Others might

choose to eat fast food because they feel that their work schedule is compressed, and they have no time for a decent meal. Flexible arrangements will allow employees to take better care of themselves instead of neglecting their health. Furthermore, another study completed by Ray and Cryan in 2021 also showed a positive relationship between flexible work arrangements and employee Wellbeing. The study took into consideration different types of flexible work such as time and location flexibility. Several indicators of wellbeing were considered such as job stress and employee satisfaction. The result of their study was that there is a significant association between those 2 variables (Ray & Cryan,2021).

Therefore it is hypothesized:

H4: FWA has a positive impact on employee Wellbeing.

3.2.4 Relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement

Previous studies showed a significant connection between Wlb and employee engagement. According to Wood et al, Wlb is an antecedent of work engagement (2020). Following the role enrichment perspective, it is presumed that positive experiences or emotional comebacks to one's role increases engagement. Furthermore, when an individual perceives a good Wlb and that he or she has more autonomy and feel more at ease, he/she is less likely to feel demotivated or have more negative feelings towards his/her work which by extension increases work engagement (Wood et al, 2020). It is believed that having more Wlb provides the individual energy, self-efficacy and a positive attitude which motivates employees and encourages them to be more

involved at work (2020). Dinh's also found out a positive relation between Wlb and employee engagement (2020). She claims that companies should help employees to balance demands with opportunities to be able to reenergize and take a break after stressing periods. She also mentions Richman's et al idea that flexible Wlb has an important and positive impact on employee engagement (2020). Moreover, Wlb gives employees the feeling that the company is helping them balance their work with personal lives. Consequently, when employees feel that they are being supported by the company and taken care of, they will feel obliged to reciprocate to the company by providing a better attitude in the workplace and engross more. When attention by the company is given to the workers, employees will respond positively to it by showing a certain level of increase in engagement (Larasati and Hasanati,2018). In addition, the study conducted by Haar et al proved that Wlb is positively related to vigor, dedication, and absorption (2017). As already discussed previously in the definition of engagement, those 3 components are the major characteristics of the variable. Therefore, if Wlb positively affects those 3 components as proved by Haar et al, then it is safe to say that balance between work and the employee's personal life is positively related to engagement confirming other studies. With that being said a third hypothesis was made up:

H5: Wlb positively affects employee engagement.

3.2.5 Employee wellbeing as a mediator between work-life balance and employee engagement

Engagement have been constantly associated to wellbeing-related outcomes (Teo,2012; Sivapragasam and Raya,2017; Skurak et al,2018). Wellbeing is said to affect

engagement in a way that both can move in tandem or opposition. Organizations see higher level of engagement when both variables are strong (Sivapragasam and Raya,2017). Fewer mental and physical symptoms of Ill health increase job and life satisfaction which in term increases performance and engagement. Moreover, engaged workers have said to report fewer psychomatic complaints than their less engaged workers (Demerouti,2008). Similarly, engagement has been shown to be negatively associated with sickness, stress etc. Healthier and happier employees are more involved and productive. Additionally, as previous summarized research show, it is asserted that work life balance impacts employee wellbeing (check preceding arguments leading to H2). This paper proposes that better work life balance leads to better employee wellbeing and therefore engagement thus it is hypothesized that:

H6: Employee wellbeing has a positive direct influence on employee work engagement

H7: Wellbeing mediates the relationship between work life balance and engagement

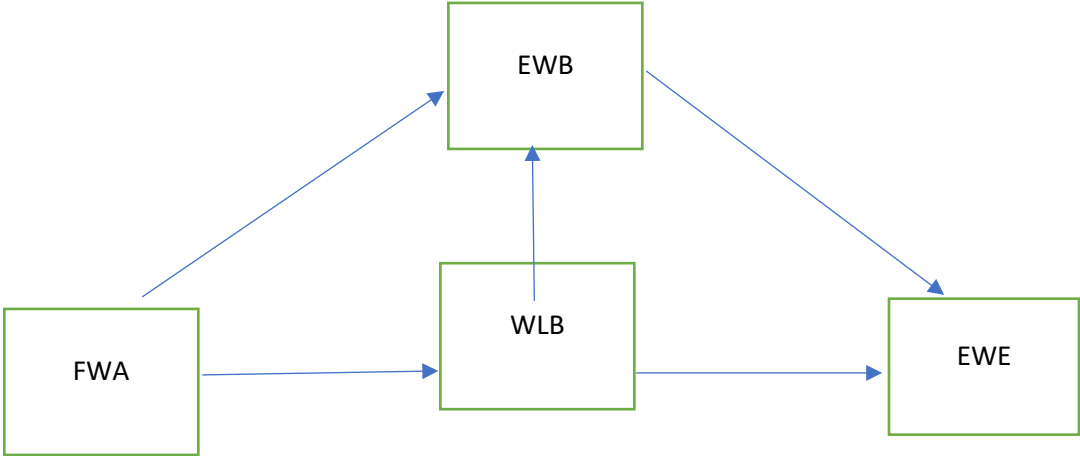
Based on the above hypotheses, our conceptual model also suggest that work life balance and employee wellbeing mediate the relationship between flexible work arrangements and employee work engagement. That is,

H8: FWA has a positive indirect influence on EWE through WLB and EWB; i.e., WLB and EWB sequentially mediate the relationship between FWA and EWE

3.3. Conceptual model

The previously stated relationship can be illustrated by this conceptual model

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



Chapter 4

Research methodology and statistical analysis

This chapter comprises a description of the research population, instrumentation, and the applied procedures to collect and analyze the data. It includes the statistical analysis, findings, and discussion.

4.1. Research methodology

4.1.1. Participants

130 participants filled out the survey. Participants were aged 18 and above and worked or are currently working flexibly.

4.1.2. Measures

The data of this study was collected from a google form survey that was distributed among Lebanese workers who experienced flexible/remote work. A total of 130 respondents were used to conduct this research. The scales adapted are previously validated ones. Except for the control variables like age, sex, education, and work experience etc. all items were measured using a 5 point Likert rating scale ranging from 1 being strongly disagree to 5 being strongly agree.

Flexible work. Flexible work was assessed with a 10 item scale adapted from Baudewijns et al (2015). The scale used was divided into 5 dimensions: anytime anywhere, manage my own work, unlimited access and connectivity and my size fits me, open workplace. However the last construct was not used because it does not contribute much with the study. Some of the items included were “I am able to set my own working hours” and “I am able to determine the way I work”.

Work life balance . Work life balance was assessed using a 9-item scales adapted by Irawanto et al (2021). Original scale is work-life balance assessment scale by Fisher et al (2009) which is made up by 15 items. Items include statements such as “ my personal life suffers because of work” and “I struggle to separate work and non-work”. As indicated by these statements this scale measures the lack of balance between work and personal life.

Employee wellbeing. Employee wellbeing was assessed based on the WHO-5 wellbeing index scale (1998). Items include statements like “I have felt cheerful and in good spirits”.

Employee Engagement. The engagement construct was measured using the employee engagement scale developed by Baudewijns et al (2015). The scale is composed of 9 items. Items included statements such as “at my work I feel bursting with energy” “at my job I feel strong and vigorous”.

4.2. Descriptive Analysis

The conceptual model was evaluated by applying the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling technique using the Smart PLS 3.0 software. The procedure found in El-Kassar et al (2022), El-Kassar et al (2021) and Singh et al (2020) will be followed. The 13 respondents were divided into 82 females (61.7%) and 50 males (37.6%), with 45.1% of them aged 18-24 years (60); the rest were distributed as follows: 25-34 (39.1%), 35-44 years (11.3 %), 45-54 years (3%), and 55-64 years (1.5%). The majority of the respondents had completed a bachelor’s degree (54.1%) and the other majority had completed a master’s degree (42.1%) with only 2 of the

respondents who completed a PHD degree, and 3 respondents stopped their studies after high school. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis showed that most respondents worked in non-managerial position making up 62.6% of the total respondents, 19.1% occupied supervisory level positions, 16% work in a managerial level position and only 2.3% of the respondents occupied a top-level management position.

Tables I and II represent respondents' distribution by gender, age, education, and job position.

Table I: Data Sample Gender and Age Characteristics

Gender	Male	50 (37.6%)
	Female	82 (61.7%)
	Prefer not to say	1 (0.8%)
Age	18-24	60 (45.1%)
	25-34	52 (39.1%)
	35-44	15 (11.3%)
	45-54	4 (3%)
	55-64	2 (1.5%)

Table II: Data Sample Education and Job Position Characteristics

Education	High School	3 (2.3%)
	Bachelor	72 (54.1%)
	Master	56 (42.1%)
	PhD	2 (1.5%)
Job Position	Non-managerial Position	82 (61.7%)
	Managerial-level Manager	21 (15.8%)
	Supervisory-level Manager	25 (18.8%)
	Top-level Manager	3 (2.3%)

1. Outer Model Analysis

The 4 latent constructs of Model 1 (Flexible work arrangement, work-life balance, wellbeing, and engagement) were tested for reliability and discriminant validity as per Tables IV and V.

The confirmatory Factor Analysis validated the convergent validity of the constructs. The results in Table III revealed significant loading (greater than 0.5) for almost each set of items used to test FWA (flexible work arrangements) (8 items), WLB (work life balance) (9 items) but except for 1 item which was excluded, EWB (employee wellbeing) (4 items), EWE (employee work engagement) (9 items).

Table III: Significant Loading, Mean, Standard Deiations

Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P- Values					
	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STD EV)	P Values
EWB1 <- EWB	0.911	0.911	0.016	57.865	0.000
EWB2 <- EWB	0.876	0.874	0.026	33.725	0.000
EWB3 <- EWB	0.897	0.896	0.021	42.919	0.000
EWB4 <- EWB	0.815	0.814	0.038	21.221	0.000
EWE1 <- EWE	0.704	0.702	0.074	9.548	0.000
EWE2 <- EWE	0.732	0.732	0.048	15.295	0.000
EWE3 <- EWE	0.847	0.846	0.032	26.172	0.000
EWE4 <- EWE	0.859	0.857	0.027	31.900	0.000
EWE5 <- EWE	0.765	0.766	0.047	16.437	0.000
EWE6 <- EWE	0.741	0.741	0.048	15.291	0.000
EWE7 <- EWE	0.713	0.711	0.069	10.290	0.000
EWE8 <- EWE	0.703	0.700	0.075	9.362	0.000
EWE9 <- EWE	0.594	0.591	0.088	6.748	0.000
FWA1 <- FWA	0.567	0.561	0.095	5.967	0.000
FWA2 <- FWA	0.657	0.646	0.082	8.039	0.000

FWA3 <- FWA	0.703	0.697	0.064	10.923	0.000
FWA4 <- FWA	0.745	0.736	0.063	11.867	0.000
FWA5 <- FWA	0.793	0.786	0.049	16.291	0.000
FWA6 <- FWA	0.724	0.717	0.061	11.946	0.000
FWA7 <- FWA	0.757	0.755	0.052	14.586	0.000
FWA8 <- FWA	0.699	0.696	0.060	11.600	0.000
WLB1 <- WLB	0.872	0.867	0.059	14.860	0.000
WLB2 <- WLB	0.884	0.880	0.053	16.674	0.000
WLB3 <- WLB	0.843	0.827	0.069	12.170	0.000
WLB4 <- WLB	0.670	0.648	0.094	7.089	0.000
WLB5 <- WLB	0.684	0.657	0.113	6.051	0.000
WLB6 <- WLB	0.680	0.655	0.106	6.417	0.000
WLB7 <- WLB	0.453	0.426	0.138	3.286	0.001
WLB9 <- WLB	0.483	0.474	0.110	4.393	0.000

The average variance extracted (AVE) values are above 50%, thus greater than the required 50% (Fornell & Larker, 1981). As shown in Table 4, the achieved values for employee wellbeing, employee work engagement, flexible work arrangement and work life balance are 0.767, 0.553, 0.502 and 0.509 respectively.

Lastly, the high-scale reliability for the four variables is confirmed with Cronbach's alpha and Dillon-Goldsteins' rho values well above the threshold of 0.6 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The cronbach's alpha for all variables appeared to be higher than 0.80.

Table IV: Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
EWB	0.898	0.901	0.929	0.767
EWE	0.897	0.904	0.917	0.553
FWA	0.858	0.871	0.889	0.502
WLB	0.869	0.959	0.887	0.509

As for the scale's validity, it is verified in the discriminant validity matrix (Table V), where the values on the diagonal are larger than the entries in their respective rows or columns.

Table V: Discriminant Validity

	EWB	EWE	FWA	WLB
EWB	0.876			
EWE	0.725	0.744		
FWA	0.435	0.493	0.709	
WLB	-0.413	-0.393	-0.207	0.713

2- Inner model Analysis

In the inner model analysis, $R^2 = 0.043$ for Work Life balance, 0.298 for employee Wellbeing and 0.536 for employee engagement. These results show that the proposed model explains a considerable-part of the variance. Thus, the model validity is considered satisfactory according to Chin (1998).

The path coefficients in Table VI reveal that FWA has a negative direct influence on work interfering with personal life (path coeff=-0.207, p-value=0.031) p-value showing that it is statistically significant confirming H1. Similarly, Work interfering with personal life has a negative direct influence on Employee Wellbeing (path coeff=-0.338, p-value=0.0000<0.001) confirming H2. FWA has a positive direct influence on employee Wellbeing (path coeff=0.365, p-value=0.000) confirming H3.

The lack of Wlb has a negative direct influence on employee engagement (path coeff= -0.113, p-value=0.069) validating H5. Employee wellbeing has a positive direct influence on employee engagement (path coeff=0.679, p-value=0.000<0.001) validating H7.

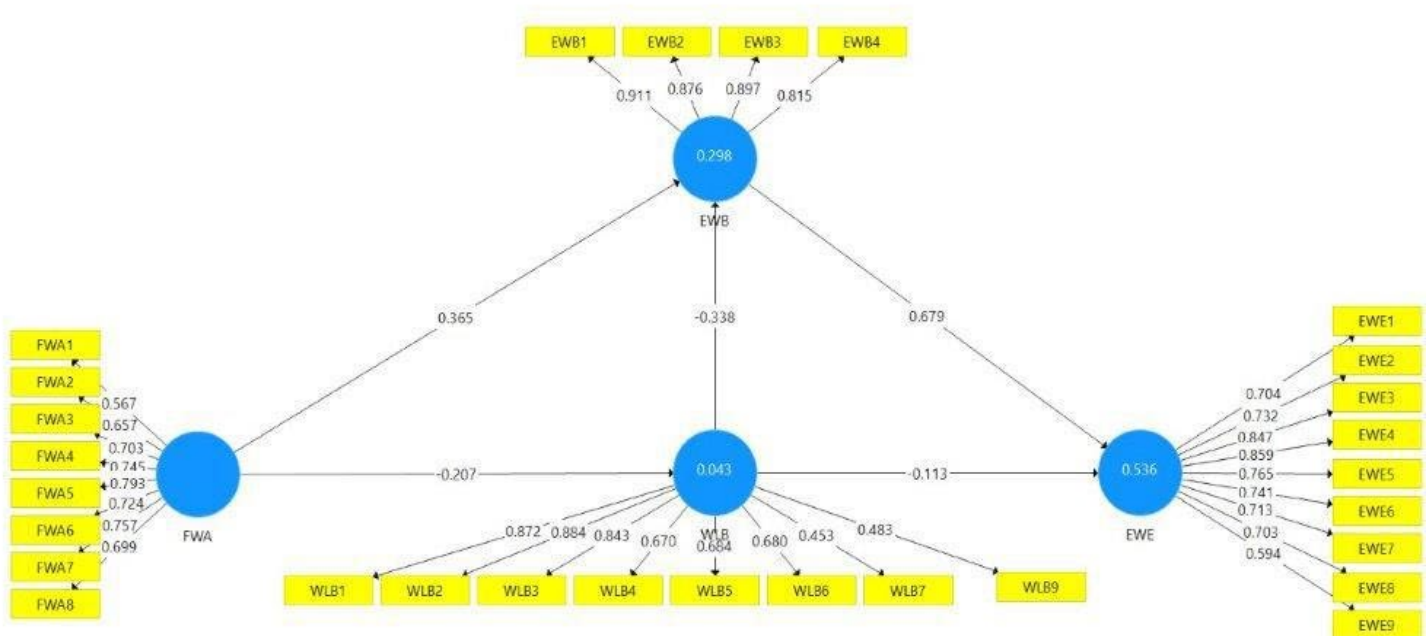
Table VI: Mean, Stdev, T-values, P-values (Direct Effect)

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STD EV)	P Values
EWB -> EWE	0.679	0.670	0.063	10.736	0.000
FWA -> EWB	0.365	0.370	0.061	5.992	0.000
FWA -> WLB	-0.207	-0.242	0.096	2.164	0.031
WLB -> EWB	-0.338	-0.346	0.084	4.044	0.000
WLB -> EWE	-0.113	-0.128	0.062	1.818	0.069

Moreover, Table VII shows that FWA has a positive indirect influence on employee engagement (path coeff=0.07, p-value=0.046) thus confirming H4. It is also shown by the table that the lack of work life balance has a negative indirect influence on employee engagement through employee wellbeing(path coeff=-0.229, p-value=0.00) supporting H6. This outcome infers that employee wellbeing mediates the relationship between the lack of work life balance and employee engagement. Last but not Least, it is shown that FWA has a positive indirect influence on employee engagement through the lack of work life balance and employee wellbeing(path coeff=0.318, p-value=0.000) validating H8. The deduction of the outcome is that the lack of work life balance and wellbeing sequentially mediate the relationship between FWA and Employee engagement.

Table VII: Mean, Stdev, T-values, P-values (Indirect Effect)

	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
FWA -> EWB	0.070	0.035	1.992	0.046
FWA -> EWE	0.318	0.059	5.383	0.000
WLB -> EWE	-0.229	0.056	4.059	0.000



4.3. Discussion

With the advancements in technology and the mass adoption of flexible work and telework, it is important to understand how this new way of work impacts an employee's life and behaviors.

The aim of this study was to take a better look at the relationship between flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, employee wellbeing and their work engagement.

The findings reveal that FWA has a negative direct influence on personal and professional interferences. This outcome aligns with previous studies that have concluded that FWA has positive implications on work-life balance (Ferdous et al, 2021; Azar et al, 2021; Jaber, 2016, Mcnall, 2010). Based on the recorded responses, employees do not feel that their personal life is suffering when working flexibly or that they are putting their work ahead of their needs. While many might believe that teleworking blurs the lines between work life and personal life, affecting their health and behavior, the negative relationship between those 2 variables proves that FWA does not lead to work life interference and thus validating H1. Furthermore, the study reveals that lack of work life balance has a negative impact on employee wellbeing supporting H2. The acceptance of the hypothesis explains that WLB is a factor that can affect wellbeing, which was similarly documented in previous papers (Zheng et al, 2015). The less interference between work and personal life the better is employees' wellbeing. Employees that have achieved WLB have in fact realized numerous benefits, including lowering their stress levels and increasing personal satisfaction. Employees feel that they can live a healthier lifestyle when they lead a flexible work schedule facilitating their time management, which complies with H3. Greater autonomy and self-management ensued from FWA have been associated with improved employee engagement in the findings of our study, which confirms H4, and complements similar conclusion n our literature review (Ray & Cryan,2021).

Additionally, past research has revealed that WLB plays a role on employee engagement (Wood et al, 2020). This was similarly depicted in one of the outcomes of the study where the lack of WLB proved to have a negative influence on employee engagement, which falls in line with H5. When there are no lines drawn between personal life and work life one might feel pressured and overwhelmed and therefore, becomes disengaged. Having a better WLB provides the employee with a feeling that the company is supporting him/her and thus reciprocate the feeling. When employees receive official social assistance from the company, they feel satisfied and actively obligated to reciprocate the action. This can be explained by the social exchange theory which was explained at the beginning of the literature review. Moreover, when a worker feels less stressed and is in better health, he/she is more likely to be engaged since he/she might feel more energized and motivated, as demonstrated in our study. This finding falls right in line with H6, which has been previously advocated in past studies (Teo,2012; Sivapragasam and Raya,2017; Skurak et al,2018). To summarize the study's key trends, we can note that the less interference between work and personal lives an employee has, the higher the employee wellbeing is, and by extension the higher are the levels of employee engagement, validating H7. Work-life balance and wellbeing both appeared to be mediators between FWA and engagement, finally confirming H8.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and limitations

This chapter concludes the study with a final summary of all findings as well as the limitations and implications of this research with recommendations for the future.

5.1. Conclusion

This study aimed to highlight the benefits Flexible work arrangements have, specifically in improving work life balance and employee wellbeing, while increasing employee engagement. The study revealed that FWA has a direct impact on work life balance and wellbeing and an indirect influence on employee engagement. The outcome of the analysis showed that employees are more likely to be dedicated and engaged to their jobs when working flexibly. As previously mentioned, this study differs from previous ones as it connects all variables together. Although numerous studies have exhausted the analysis of the relationships between the different variables under consideration, this study has focused on providing a holistic model, connecting all variables and examining the underlying mechanism that explains the influence of flexible work arrangements on employee engagement.

First, the study offers great insights to employers who might be evaluating the integration of FWA opportunities to attract new talent or retain top existing one. In the midst of the war for talent, companies have been increasingly promoting FWA for employees in order to lure them, without sometimes truly understanding the effect of

these arrangements and their benefit on the long-term on their employees and their business.

As proved by this paper, employees' work life balance is positively impacted by the adoption of FWA which help employees better cater to their needs without having to sacrifice personal or professional goals. This boost in work life balance is further translated into higher employee engagement and improved work efficiencies that allow businesses to rejoice from better operations, lower turnover rates and potentially better returns.

While many employers are keen on introducing hybrid-work models in the coming years, some employees remain reluctant in moving to such arrangements, especially after unruly experiences at the start of the confinement. However, this paper has proven that there should be no room for doubt – FWA will improve employees' general work-life balance and wellbeing on the long run and workers who have the opportunity to enroll in hybrid-work models should be tempted to do so even if for a couple of days per week or month. The flexibility provided by flexible work enables employees to disrupt the monotony and latency of their 9 to 5 jobs over the work week. This is followed by a sharp gain in independence and control where employees can garner more freedom and autonomy to manage their workload and tasks in between other daily responsibilities, whether fulfilling responsibilities in a second job or duties and leisure activities (e.g. gym/ yoga sessions) on a personal level.

5.2. Limitations and recommendations

Whereas the findings of the study were largely favorable to the stated hypotheses, it is important to note that most of the participants of the survey belonged to a particular group of young and tech-savvy individuals (more than 80% of those who filled the survey were aged between 18 and 35). This might have impacted the results ever so slightly by driving them closer to the general preferences of a mobile-first generation of workers. Nonetheless, the sample surveyed remains small (133 respondents) and constrained from other dimensions, where the workers were mostly from the same nationality (Lebanese), similar background (more than 60% of respondents occupied non-managerial positions) and social class (middle to upper-middle income households). As junior employees have less trouble managing operational activities, managers may find it hard to lead teams, manage client relations or steer strategic directions in hybrid work environment, even harder when these managers lack the skills for it, or the local culture does not favor it.

On another note, all the respondents to the survey experienced FWA during covid, a unique point in time where working conditions were not optimal and did not provide an accurate picture of an FWA. The setup was not ideal, and the business dynamics were very different compared to normal working days, driven by economic disruption on an international level. The overnight transition to a new working scheme without prior training nor equitable access to technology and equipment might have sabotaged the experience for some while advantaged others.

Finally, it is recommended to conclude further research in order to dive-deeper in the analysis and understand which forms of flexible work (be it flexible hours or location or both, even other) have the greatest impact on other employee and business-related variables on the short and long term in post-pandemic world. With companies like Airbnb promising employees' opportunities to work from anywhere at any time, and the rapid unfolding of 4-days workweeks across many fortune 500 companies, the time is ripe to evaluate the impact of these policies on human social behavior and economic and financial performance of large corporations. On another note, it is also recommended to perform this study but from employers' point of view. Given that most respondents to the survey were in non-managerial position, it would be intriguing to perform this same study on highly positioned workers and assess whether FWA will be as favorable to them.

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