

A Comprehensive Study of Flexible Working Arrangement practices and its Significance in India

Paramita Roy

VTU Research Scholar

Abstract

Aim of the study: Flexible working arrangement is not a new concept. It started in UK when legislation was made to allow employees the right to ask for flexible working option. Though it is a known practice, the use is minimal due to ignorance and lack of proper policies. Managers and supervisors are not convinced about employees working from remote places other than office. Employees are apprehensive that opting for Flexible working arrangement will affect their appraisal and career growth. Flexible working arrangement can give leverage to an organization if it is used strategically. This paper tries to explore the benefits of Flexible working arrangement if practiced. This paper aims to find out the present use of Flexible working arrangements by the companies in India. The paper is hopeful to enlighten the readers about the long term significance of Flexible working arrangement.

Method: This paper reviews various academic and practitioner articles available in google scholar, Ebscohost and Inflightnet-nlist. Some of the keywords used to search articles are flexible working arrangements and India, benefits of flexible working. Both the empirical study and literature review based papers are identified to study

about various themes related to flexible working arrangement in India.

The stakeholders: 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 women employees. It would help HRD professionals to understand and appreciate organizational culture, settings, and various components which can promote more scope of flexible working arrangements.

Key words: flexibility, flexible work arrangements, work from home, telecommuting

Introduction:

Digital revolution is reshaping the way we live, we work, we interact with customers. It is forcing to change the existing business model. In the new millennium business success needs agility and flexibility which leads to the end of traditional 9to 5 job pattern. Work in the 21st century is what you do not where you do it. With advanced technology and digital revolution there is a paradigm shift in the way work is done. Technologies can be used strategically to enable most of the work to be carried in other locations other than office.

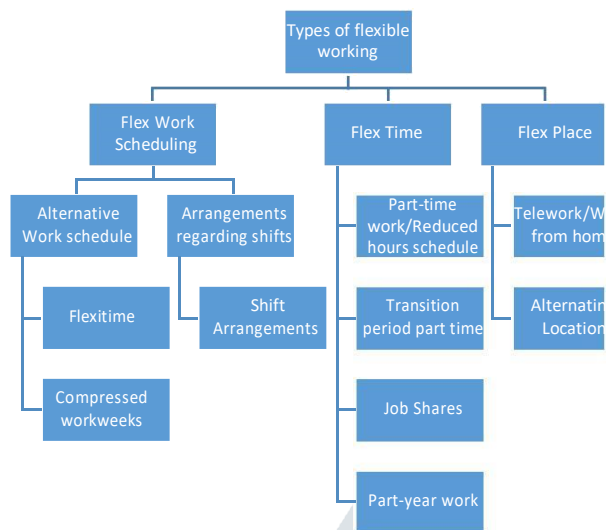
Smartphones, tablets, iPad have

revolutionized the concept of working. This has changed the attitude of professionals from “live to work” to “Working to live”. In April 2003 employees in the UK were first given the right to request flexible working. In the modern work environment, the introduction of these new rights served to illustrate that traditional working patterns could no longer be sustained by employers and that there was a need to address the work/life balance. Organisations – already facing skills shortages – would find recruitment and indeed retention made harder if a more flexible approach to working patterns are not adopted. Present economy is more knowledge based, idea based and globalized.

The current work scenario is marked by the fast pace of change, intense pressure, and constant deadlines and dual earners. Changing demographics, increased use of technology and the co-existing virtual work place. Juxtaposed with this, the increase in average income and rise in living standards have individuals striving for better work atmosphere, improved family and personal life. (Johnson, Shanon, & Richman, 2008)

Definition of Flexible Working

According to (Anderson, 2008) Flexible working often refers to patterns of working which differs from traditional pattern of working times of 9 to 5 of five days in a week. It provides the employees a choice of place and time of working. This concept has recently become interwoven with concepts such as work-life balance, family-friendly practices, workplace equity, work-life policies and alternative work patterns according to (O'Brien & Hayden, 2008:199) *retrieved from* (Grobler & de Bruyn, 2011) According to Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, Flexible working is about an employee and employer making changes to when, where and how a person will work to better meet individual and business needs. Flexible working enables both individual and business needs to be met through making changes to time (when), location (where) and manner (how) in which an employee works. Flexible working should be mutually beneficial to both the employer and employee and result in superior outcomes. Workplace Flexibility 2010 defines a “flexible work arrangement” (FWA) as any one of a spectrum of work structures that alters the time and/or place that work gets done on a regular basis.



Barriers to flexible working :

1. According to (Hagel, 2015), sometimes remote employees feel cut from their colleague and not able to blend with the organisational culture. Collaboration can also suffer when employees donot spend time in the main office.

2. According to (Peterson & Tuers, 2014), organisations can have family friendly policies, but if they are not supported by organisational norms and rules, employees will not use the flexibility because it may be seen as the lack of commitment to the organisation.

3. According to Holly Burket managing change and cultural transformation is another barrier in accepting flexible working. He further finds out that most of us work for companies (83%) with no

change strategy in place and almost companies (66%) do not have designated person to lead change process.

4. According to Ian Ziskin another barrier to Flexible working is that to expect the employees and potential employees to be satisfied with same one -size-fits-all HR practices and other element of employment proposition.

5. According to Lynda HR teams are not fully aware about the longevity and the effects of changing demographics. Still they are basing their people practices on the traditional three-stage path of education, work and retirement.

6. There is huge challenge in managing teams working in remote. Managers or supervisors have to be more patient, trusting and well trained. A manager needs to demonstrate a flexible mind set and an attitude to adapt to different situations.

7. According to (Anell & Hartmann, 2007) in a report about status of flexible working arrangement in Asia states that the mind-set that one needs to be in office seems more customary in Asia.

8. According to an article by Deccan Herald dated 14th June 2016, 59% of firms in India say they believe that flexible working costs less than fixed office working. However, the same survey reports that 57% of Indian

business firms offers this facility to senior staff only due to trust issue.

9. Another factor also responsible for the less prevalence of Flexible working arrangement in India is due to the absence of a proper legislation guiding the flexible work arrangement.

Flexible Working arrangement practised in Indian Companies:

CA (India) technologies introduced the workplace flexibility in the year 2011. As they felt that “war for talent” is becoming a determining factor for competitiveness. Work place flexibility will enable them to recruit, retain and engage the top talents in the industry. The attrition rate has come down from 23% in 2011 to 10% in 2013. Not only are that 98% of present employees happy working with the organisation.

Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL) has introduced flexible working environment for the employees. The ASMs are allowed to work from home and they are allowed to work in the field for 5 days a week for two weeks in a month.

JP Morgan Chase found that 95% of employees working in an environment where the manager is sensitive to work and personal life—including informal flexibility—feel motivated to exceed expectations, compared to 80% of

employees in environments where the manager is not sensitive to needs for informal flexibility

In an effort to retain, attract and to increase productivity Infosys made changes in its flexible working schemes: the company now allows the employees to work from home for 9 days in a month. Earlier it was 4 days in a month.

Accenture Consulting is a global firm that puts a heavy emphasis on telecommuting and flexible work arrangements.

In Bookmytrainings.com, India's #1 Training Discovery Platform, employees work from home in various location all over India.

Significance of Flexible Working Arrangement:

1. According to (Howington, 2015), some of the benefits Flexible working arrangements are less stressed employees, decreased absenteeism, trust building.
2. Ability to attract a **higher level of skill** because the business is able to attract and retain a skilled and more diverse workforce. Also, recruitment costs are reduced.
3. Improved **competitiveness**, such as being able to react to changing market conditions more effectively.

4. Reducing operating cost: according to (Peers,Richards, Vodafone Global Enterprise, 2013), a recent survey [YouGov poll, March 2013] showed that flexible working can save British businesses £34 billion a year; however, in this same survey more than a third of leaders commented that they had not considered flexible working as a way of saving money. This represents a huge opportunity for businesses to save costs.

5 .Further (Peers,Richards, Vodafone Global Enterprise, 2013) says that Flexible working can also have significant environmental benefits. Home working means businesses need fewer desks, and physical real estate. This can save money on property and energy costs, and with fewer staff commuting, can reduce travel costs and carbon emissions.

6. Satisfied employees are less likely to look for greener, more flexible pastures, reducing the need for companies to fill vacated positions and keeping brain drain to a minimum.

7. Individuals who have jobs tailored to meet their individual needs may be more motivated.

8. Flexible working can replace the old fashioned concept of what is often referred to as Face Management (ie, the boss

needing to see the employee to believe work is being performed).

9. According to (Flexible Working - Advantages for Management, 2016) Employees arriving at work at different times cuts down a lot of the general chit-chat about last night's TV or the latest news headlines.

10. According to (Flexible Working - Advantages for Management, 2016) While often it is difficult to measure improved productivity, especially in white collar environments, but many companies claim that productivity has improved.

11. Workloads are clearer to identify by the amount of hours worked by individuals. This enables alterations to be made, or even promotions to be considered.

12. According to (Lake, 2015), the greater autonomy will increase the opportunity to lead more balanced and healthy lives.

13. Proper implementation and execution of Flexible working in corporates can help to achieve "Triple Bottom Line" benefits which is an accounting framework with three parts social, environmental and financial.

Conclusion :

Inspite of several benefits Flexibe working offers, it is not widely accepted and

practised in India. It is important to create legislation for the proper implementation of the Flexible Working in India. Many new startups are providing flexible working facility but there is no standard guidelines. It is at the discretion of the supervisor to allow flexible working to the employees. There is lots of scope for research both empirical and theoretical in the area of Flexible working. Areas like role of flexible working in recruitment, employee engagement, retention, branding etc can be explored and researched. Research is also needed to show that work-life balance is not a gender based but a facility to both the genders. Flexible working arrangements which are practiced in west are pushed down by the organization and hence to a certain extent are devalued. Programs are not customized according to need of the employees. The initiatives are required to be integrated into an employees work schedule /rhythm.

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