IJIS: Vol.2, Issue 1, January 2026 Page: 101-116

ISSN 3049-3277

International Journal of Integrative Studies (IJIS)

Journal homepage:www.ijis.co.in

The Younger Generation the Relation between workplace flexibility and employee engagement.

Conference Article

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Abstract

The workplace flexibility has become an issue in the sphere of human resource management as the post-pandemic environment significantly boosted the pace of its introduction. Directed at the young working adults, the current research will aim to define the effects of the 4 dimensions of flexibility in place of work on employee engagement. The targeted respondents who took part in the online survey were of age below 30 and provided the empirical data that was further applied to partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The analysis shows that work system flexibility and operational flexibility turn out as valuable positive predictors of engagement. The implications of these findings on the managerial practise are direct and straight forward to the scholars of human resource management who are interested in unravelling the dynamic nature of work.

Keywords: Workplace flexibility, Employee engagement, Workspace flexibility, Operational flexibility, Young working Adult

Impact Statement

The after-pandemic period has highlighted a generational disruption in the work values where the younger generation values workplace flexibility and work-life balance to a greater degree than ever. This demand that is employee based is concurrent with the organisational urgency to engage employees, which is a key determinant of organisational performance and it includes dedication, commitment and job satisfaction. In this regard this paper explores the intersection between the malleability conditions of the new workforce with the involvement aspirations of the modern organisations. Empirical evidence indicates that specific aspects of flexibility i.e. workspace and operational flexibility are important positive predictors of engagement. It is therefore put forward that a well calculated flexibility of the workplace has the potential of breeding a synergistic relationship which will eventually help both the corporate world and society as a whole.

Introduction

The values and conditions of work are not homogenous; the ones differ greatly in between generations. It is important to understand what Mr. and Mrs. Young adult prefer in the workplace and especially in terms of flexibility in order to create effective communication and positive organizational environment. According to the latest research, Generation Z values workplace flexibility, but they relate it to the idea of work-life balance rather intensively (Kompa, 2019; Stankiewicz-Mroz, 2020). This favour is in line with the fact that flexible management practices contributed to the resiliency of small and medium enterprises in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (Asad and Kashif, 2021). In that regard, human capital plays a central role in adaptive changes, which is enabled by the greater training and technological integration, which helps to secure the quality of work (Fadhel et al., 2022; Kashif et al., 2020). But there is no direct correlation between positive outcomes and flexibility. Although the young workers are very demanding when it comes to flexible work arrangement, there is a dualistic challenge when it comes to its implementation. According to a report

by Ernst and Young (Smits, 2022), the pandemic-related widespread virtual work resulted in high employee burnout and disengagement, which in turn poses a threat of decreased productivity and attrition.

This paradox highlights a research gap that is of critical importance: the necessity to explore the ways of successful utilization of workplace flexibility and use it to achieve employee engagement, instead of its destruction. The current literature tends to serve intergenerational disparities in workplace needs (Gabrielova and Buchko, 2021; Tjiptono et al., 2020) or considers the effect of flexibility on certain more abstract ideas such as job satisfaction in all age groups (Davidescu et al., 2020; Govender et al., 2018). The literature on the specific impact of the various types of workplace flexibility on the engagement of young working adults is limited. Such attention is critical, and this group of people is the future labor force in the world. It is important to meet their needs by ensuring a good working environment in order to increase organizational efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). In this perilous labor market, where the engagement of employees is one of the key productivity drivers (Pintão et al., 2020), the accurate levers of the engagement are the keys to successful people management.

This paper fills this gap by discussing how four types of flexibility at the workplace, including working time, workspace, functional and operational flexibility affect the engagement levels of young employees. Its results will give organizations practical ideas. In case a positive correlation is drawn, then it will mean that there is a need to reconsider and increase the flexibility services. To employers, it is important to know these dynamics and enhance the performance of the organization (Bal and de Lange, 2015; Bran and Udrea, 2016). By providing employees with more control over their work schedules, through personalized flexible working schedules, organizations will be able to open up to improved performance levels and lower turnover. In the final analysis, the study makes a contribution to human resource management and sustainable HRM sphere (Manzoor et al., 2019; Stankevičiute and Savanevičiene, 2018). The effects go further than the short-term performance, presenting the workplace conditions with the anticipations of the emerging workforce, organizations can secure their existence and sustainability. Otherwise, they may lose young talent to entrepreneurship or other opportunities, which is why this research is not only an academic exercise, but a strategic necessity of the future of work.

Underpinning theories and reviews

The paper will use multidimensional model of measuring workplace flexibility based on the Conservative of Resources (COR) Theory as its foundation (Hobfoll, 1989). Based on this theoretical perspective, workers use scarce personal resources (including, energy, time and cognitive attention) in their work. In order to reduce stress, they need systems that will enable them to restore their resources (Kim et al., 2017). In line with this opinion, resource-based approaches contemplate employee engagement as an initiator of favourable affective emotions, such as caring and warmth (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018). The fact that workplace flexible orientation is an organisational practise that helps employees (Beigi et al., 2018) can be construed in such a way that it is a crucial resource that enables such replenishment. As a result, flexibility is seen by the employees as institutional support that cuts the stress and enhances the well-being thus leading to increased engagement levels. The associations between these constructs are studied in the sections below.

Employee engagement

The concept of employee engagement has the broad conception of an employee attitude towards work, which is positive, work-related, vigorous, dedicated, and absorbed (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This construct is a multi-dimensional construct which is regularly studied in terms of its separate dimensions. An example of this is Saks (2006) who identifies two major forms: job engagement, which involves the engagement of an employee to a given position, and organisational engagement which involves the engagement of the employees to the organisation in general. This aligns with Mercer's (2008) definition, which describes engagement as an employee's deep-seated desire for the organization to succeed, motivating them to consistently exceed formal job requirements.

The drivers of this engaged state are diverse. In a strategic perspective, Bin (2015) accentuates that the high-involvement work practices and competent human resource management, such as focused training, selective recruitment, performance-based reward, and open information sharing have a key role to play. Other researchers concentrate on the psychological and relational basis. van Bogaert et al. (2013) refer to engagement as the ability of an employee, coupled with their desire to work, and Allam et al. (2021) to the workplace spirituality. Moreover, Robinson et al. (2004) define engagement as positive attitude of the employees which relates to organizational values, and the real interest in the business and readiness to improve personal and organizational efficiency. In the end, engaged employees are those who are greatly satisfied and fulfilled in their jobs (Ipsos, 2008).

This is not a monolith state which occurs under a variety of personal and situational influences. Gender, age, seniority, level of education and position are some of the demographic and structural factors that have an amazing impact on engagement (Origo and Pagani, 2006; Pook et al., 2003). At the same time, job environment is acute, and research indicates that good rapport with the co-workers, good remuneration and supervision is the driving factor (Khalid et al., 2011). In that way, the general attitude towards their working nature and the resulting attitudes, including positive, engaged ones and negative, disengaged ones, can be considered the definite sign of the engagement level of an employee (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014; Ipsos, 2008; Robbins and Judge, 2013). This highlights the need by the management to

incorporate the needs of the employees to the main organizational strategy in order to achieve a highly motivated workforce (Uduji, 2013).

Workplace flexibility

The modern competitive and technologically developed labor market leaves organizations with no choice, but to find other options other than financial incentives to attract and retain new-generation professionals. In an effort to stay competitive, firms need to redefine work models that provide more valued benefits and workplace flexibility seems to be a key feature. This is applicable, not only in the retention of employees but in employee motivation and productivity which gives a huge strategic edge (Origo and Pagani, 2006). On the other hand, there is the threat of losing the best talent in a job market that is becoming highly mobile due to organizational rigidity. The importance of flexibility is especially strong among the young workers, whose ability to enjoy a sustainable work-life balance is facilitated by it (Kompa, 2019). All these elements contribute to the increased engagement of employees, consequently leading to the overall organizational performance (Govender et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic served as a strong stimulus, increasing the pace at which flexible work arrangements are being adopted because of the need to social-distance (Davidescu et al., 2020). The positive side is well-documented: flexibility is associated with the decrease of turnover and absenteeism and, in its turn, higher performance and profitability of the organization (Asad, 2020; PalkiSetia and Shah, 2015). The central aspect of this is the principle of autonomy, as it is one of the major factors of the quality of work life, which is directly correlated with the flexible practices (Allam & Shaik, 2020). Consequently, flexible workplaces have become one of the primary concerns of human resource management and industrial sociology that are fundamental to the contemporary workplace (Davidescu et al., 2020).

Conceptualizing Workplace Flexibility

Workplace flexibility can be defined as the capability of employees to exert control over where, when, and how they perform their tasks (Rastogi et al., 2018). This empowerment is a significant impetus to the performance of organisations (Asad et al., 2021). Scholars have gone farther with a continuum of typologies in a bid to capture the multidimensionality of it. An example is given by Reilly (2001) who identified five categories, including temporal, numerical, financial, functional and locational. Origo and Pagani (2006) drew the difference between qualitative flexibility which refers to work quality and competence, and quantitative flexibility which refers to working hours and headcount. In turn, our research takes the form of a synthesised model which focuses on four major forms which are used by researchers like Căşuneanu (2013) and others: working-time flexibility, workspace flexibility, functional flexibility, and operational flexibility.

Focus on Working Time Flexibility and Engagement

Working time flexibility refers to arrangements that give employees control over their work schedules (Rastogi et al., 2018). This includes practices such as:

- Flextime: Allowing employees to set their schedules within core business hours.
- Compressed Work Weeks: Enabling longer daily hours in exchange for an extra day off.
- Flexible Shifts: Permitting shift swaps among colleagues.
- Time Banking: Allowing employees to bank overtime for future leave (Kossek et al., 2015).

Research indicates that such flexibility can decrease stress, improve physical health, and generate cost savings (Halpern, 2005). A primary mechanism for this is the reduction of lengthy and stressful commutes, which are correlated with both absenteeism and heightened stress (Chen & Fulmer, 2018; van Ommeren & Gutiérrez-i-Puigarnau, 2011; Zhou et al., 2017). Since both stress and absenteeism are antithetical to engagement (Kurtessis et al., 2017), and given that long working hours themselves can reduce engagement (Gazioglu & Tansel, 2006), it is theorized that working time flexibility enhances engagement by mitigating work-life conflict.

This relationship can be explained by Role Conflict Theory (Frone, 2003; Madsen, 2003), which posits that individuals have limited time and energy for competing roles. The conflicting requirements of work and personal life are incompatible with each other, and the studies prove that people with high role conflict are more attracted to the scheduling flexibility (Rau and Hyland, 2022; Salehati and Rojuaniah, 2022). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that there is a possible paradox: too much flexibility without a sufficient structure will result in the problems with time planning, which will inevitably ruin engagement (Nord et al., 2002). This brings out the importance of a moderate and well justified execution of flexible work policies. Therefore, the Hypothesis 1 (H1) are established in the research.

H1: The working time flexibility is positively correlated with the employee engagement of young working adults.

Workspace flexibility and employee engagement

Workspace flexibility, defined as the level of employee control over their physical work environment, represents a

critical dimension of modern work design. The concept goes beyond geographical positioning to imply the capability of customising workstations, controlling the environmental factors (temperature and light) and using an assortment of bespoke environments (Roskams & Haynes, 2020). Nowadays, with the world of non-assigned flex office, hybrid combi office, co-working space, and full or part home office, the modern workplace situation introduces a continuum of models (Davidescu et al., 2020; de Been and Beijer, 2014). However, the connexion between such flexible arrangements and engagement with employees is still complicated. Although it allows autonomy, remote working creates other problems including procrastination and work-life boundaries (Schmidt and Neubach, 2007; Hill et al., 2003) which implies that the physical environment might not be as powerful as the individual coping with job stress (Pienaar, 2008). It is based on the Ecological Systems Theory that states the dynamic nature of the human interaction with their environments (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994) and is assuming that, in case flexibility puts real control over the workplace, person-environment fit is improved. In its turn, such alignment is theorised to make employees more engaged because they would be given an opportunity to design their workspace in a way that best addresses their productivity and well-being (Alfes et al., 2013).

H 2: Workspace flexibility and engagement between young working adults relate positively.

Functional flexibility and engagement of employees. Functional flexibility is an organisational approach that lays emphasis on implementing multi-skilled workforce that has the capability to adjust to the changing demands, technologies and processes (van den Berg and van der Velde, 2005). It is attained through the diversification of the competencies of the employees where they are no longer limited to occupational boundaries but are able to perform broader scope of duties (Friedrich et al., 1998). In case of organisations, it will increase agility, lower labour expenses, and overall performance, whereas in case of employees it may result in more engagements and diversified work, better job security and improved professional growth (van den 2-10, 2005).

The Job Characteristics Theory can be used to elucidate the positive effect of the functional flexibility on employees (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). As one of its inherent effects, functional flexibility adds skills and diversity to the core job characteristics of skill variety, task identity and task significance because it drives the employee to acquire a number of skills and move between various jobs. This elaboration of the workplace activity is a documentedly proven antecedent to increased levels of internal motivation, job satisfaction, and eventually, more engagement (Stavrou, 2005).

This strategic flexibility is made to work by a number of human resource practises: Currently, job enlargement, which means increasing the responsibilities that the employee performs horizontally to increase the amount and variety of jobs performed by the employee, is prevalent.

- Job Enrichment: Increasing the role responsibilities by introducing the elements of planning, control, and decision-making.
- Job Rotation: This is a systematic shifting of employees among functions or departments with the aim of developing a wide range of competencies.

Those practises rely on continuous training, which is supported by employers and employees individually, which is the key to the development of a flexible workforce (Davidescu et al., 2020). Such dynamic organisational structures seem to be specially welcoming to the modern generation of youth that is characterised by the mastery of multitasking and information synthesis (Iorgulescu, 2016). Besides, empirical studies support the point that developmental intervention in the form of coaching, performance planning, and job enrichment predict an increase in work meaning and engagement (Lockwood, 2007; May et al., 2004; Robinson, 2007). As a result, through the ability of diversifying skills and varying the roles, the functional flexibility is theorised to create the best employee engagement, and as a consequence, it supports Hypothesis 3 (H3) developed in this study.

H3: The relationship between the functional flexibility and the employee engagement among young working adults is positive.

Flexibility in operations and employment of employees.

One of the critical areas of adaptability in the work place is operational flexibility which is defined as the liberty of employees to decide how their work shall be executed without any unnecessary supervision (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). This type of flexibility has great advantages both to individual and organisations. It is also found to correlate with lower turnover intentions, less work/family conflict, and increased psychological well-being (Ahuja et al., 2007; Clark, 2001; Haeusser et al., 2010). It embodies its ideas with such models as the Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE), where employee remuneration and appraisals are based on performance, not manhours or physical attendance, thus ensuring the ability of the employee to control his or her work schedule extensively (Govender et al., 2018).

Operational flexibility works hard based on self-management. This leads to the greater ownership and job involvement when employees are provided with the opportunity to control their working behaviours and processes (Breevaart et al., 2014; Zeijen et al., 2018). The given dynamics can be viewed through the prism of such a theory as Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 2017) that asserts that an organisation, which invests trust in its staff by providing them with autonomy, builds a mutually dependent relationship, where employees become increasingly engaged and committed. This is also

further supported by the employer putting in mind the long-term welfare of staff, thus enhancing the person job fit (Bal and de Lange, 2015).

While prior research has established a connection between operational flexibility and outcomes like quality of work life (Rastogi et al., 2018), a definitive link to employee engagement remains underexplored. This gap is particularly relevant given the potential for leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, to further enhance the positive impact of such flexible practices on organizational sustainability (Ullah et al., 2021). Therefore, to directly investigate the relationship between autonomy in work processes and employee engagement, Hypothesis 4 (H4) is proposed in this study.

H4: There is a positive relationship between operational flexibility and employee engagement among young working adults.

This study aims to better understand the relationship between each form of workplace flexibility and employee engagement as shown in Figure 1 which is the conceptual framework.

Methodology

Sampling frame, sample size and sampling procedure

This study employed a snowball sampling technique to gather data from 185 young working adults under the age of 30 in Hyderabad, India, a major technology hub. Data collection took place from April 1 to April 30, 2024. The sampling method was selected due to the challenges in accessing the target demographic through conventional means. Snowball sampling relies on initial participants to refer other qualified individuals, creating a chain-referral effect that expands the sample size over time; however, this approach means that not every member of the population has an equal probability of being selected.

Participation was open to individuals of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, provided they met the core criterion of being young working professionals. Eligible respondents were directed to an online questionnaire via a unique link distributed through email, social media, and other digital communication platforms.

Research instrument and operationalization of variables

In this study, a survey consisting of forty five items have been used that was carried out through the application of Google Forms in compliance with ethical research principles. Operationalization has been based on the already existing scales reported in the extant literature, though, responses were collected on the basis of the five-point Likert scale. There were four items concerning the working-time flexibility (Rastogi et al., 2018), six regarding workspace flexibility (Roskams and Haynes, 2020), five related to functional flexibility (van den Berg and van der Velde, 2005), and five were concerned with operational flexibility (Rastogi et al., 2018). The level of employee engagement was measured on the basis of the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Gerards et al., 2018). Reliability tests also established that all constructs had Cronbachs alpha coefficients of greater than 0.70 and thus showed that the constructs had satisfactory internal consistency (Taber, 2018).

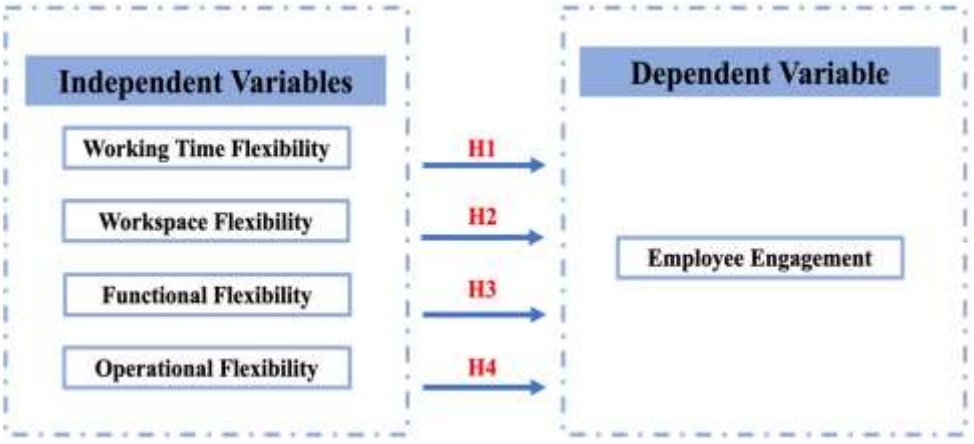

Figure 1. Framework of the study.

Data analysis and results

The characteristics of the sample respondents in terms of demographic make-up are summarised in Table 1. The gender was largely dominant (59.5 0) and focused on the age range of 2630 (81.1 0). The majority of the respondents were holders of at least the bachelor's degree or similar professional qualification (82.1%), and single people (92.4%). The employment was mostly in the privates (91.4%). Regarding tenure, 43.2% indicated the number of experience in the profession to range between three and five years.

The next analytical method is Bivariate Correlational Analysis. The correlation panel included in Table 2 eliminates the doubts of multicollinearity; the values of all the inter-variable correlation were held well below the 0.9 threshold. It is

worth noting that, employee engagement was found to have significant positive relationships with three different dimensions of workplace flexibility namely; workspace flexibility (r = 0.402, p=0.001), functional flexibility (r= 0.518, p=0.001) and operational flexibility (r= 0.390, p=0.001). On the other hand, working-time flexibility did not have any significant correlation with engagement (r -0.059).

In Common Method Bias (CMB) assessment, the problem arises from both the assessment method and the research approach (Williams, 2007).<|human|>Common Method Bias (CMB) Assessment. Since the study was a cross-sectional and self-reported study, the risk of Common Method Bias (CMB) should have been given special attention. To offset it, procedural and statistical precautions were taken, as it was in line with the prescriptions of Guide and Ketokivi (2015). Procedurally, anonymity of the respondents was promised as well as the cover letter clearly spelled out the academic purpose of the research. The single-factor test proposed by Harman was statistically used; the first one had only 31.26 per cent of the overall variance which is well below the 50 per cent critic threshold by Podsakoff et al. (2003). In this respect, therefore, CMB is not a substantive issue in the dataset at hand.

Table 1. Demographic profiles.

Demographic Details	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	110	59.5
Female	75	40.5
Age		
Below 21	2	1.1
21 to 25	33	17.8
26 to 30	150	81.1
Highest education qualification		
Foundation/Pre-U and below	9	4.9
Diploma	7	3.8
Degree/Professional paper	152	82.1
Masters	17	9.2
Marital status		
Married	14	7.6
Not Married	171	92.4
Organization type		
Private sector	169	91.4
Public sector	16	8.6
Years of working experience		
Less than 1 year	26	14.1
1 to 3 years	64	34.6
More than 3 years but less than 5 years	80	43.2
5 years and more	15	8.1

Table 2. Bivariate correlations between variables

Employee Engagement		Operational Flexibility	Functional Flexibility	Workspace Flexibility	Working Time Flexibility
Employee Engagement	1				
Operational Flexibility	.390**	1			
Functional Flexibility	.518**	.521**	1		
Workspace Flexibility	.402**	.502**	.439**	1	
Working Time Flexibility	−.059	.032	.046	−.103	1

ISSN 3049-3277

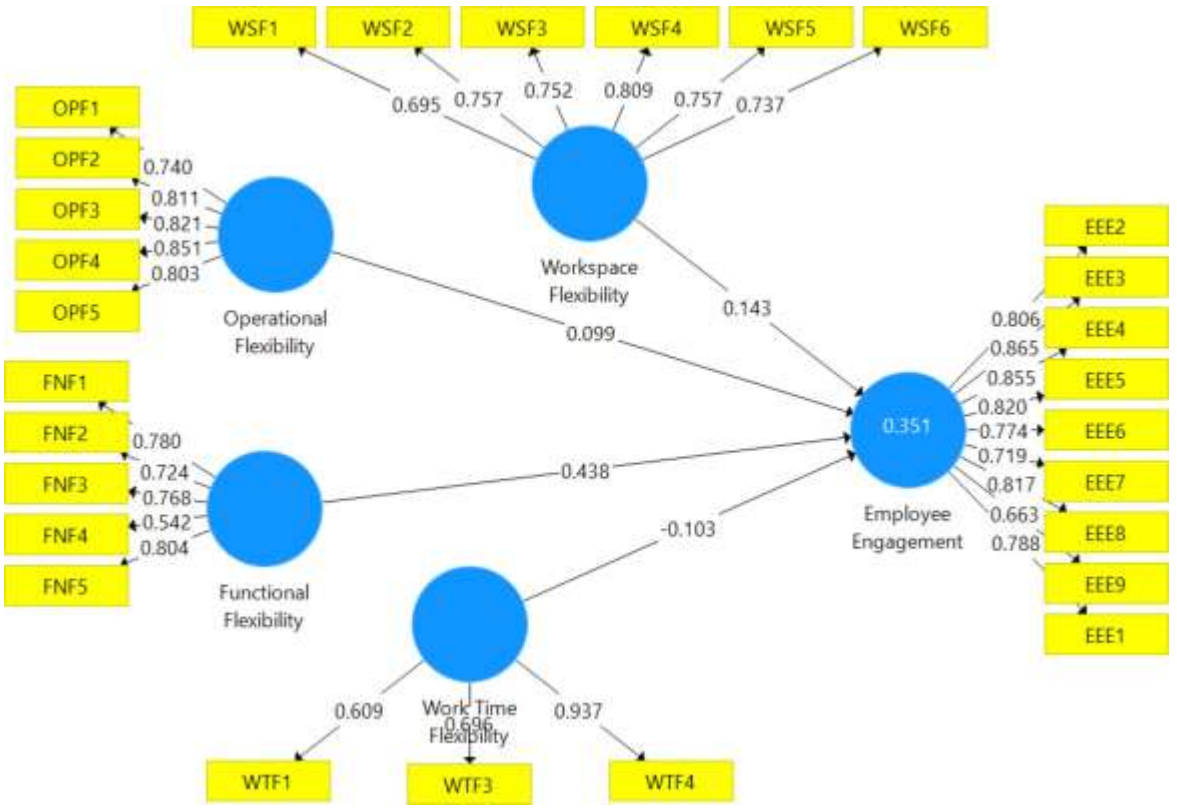

Figure 2. Measurement model.

Measurement Model

The model of the measure was seriously evaluated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equations Modelling (PLS-SEM). Cronbachs alpha (0) and composite reliability were also computed as a measure of reliability. Table 3 indicates that all the metrics exceeded the traditional marker of 0.7 hence supporting the internal consistency of the measurement scales. Averge Variance Extracted (AVE) was used in measuring convergent validity. Once one item had been eliminated in the construct of the working-time flexibility (WT2) due to a factor loading of less than 0.50, the resulting AVE of each construct was larger than the necessary minimum of 0.5, thereby providing convergent validity (Fornell,Larcker, 1981). The Fornell Larcker test was used to cheque discriminant criterion. As Table 4 shows, square root of every construct AVE (shown on the diagonal) was greater than its correlation to all other constructs, which indeed proves the fact that the constructs are actually unique.

Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated by running a bootstrapping routine that was intended to yield statistical significance of the specification of the causal pathways. Table 5 and Figure 3 present the results that follow including path coefficients and the corresponding p-values.

Table 3. Item Statistics of Variables.

Variables / Items	Mean		Standard Deviation	F	actor Loadi	ng
Working Time Flexibility (α = 0.719; CR = 0.799; wt1	*AVE = 0.578)* 3.716		1.227	0.609		
wt2	3.568		1.265	0.696		
wt4	3.532		1.250	0.937		
Workspace Flexibility(α = 0.846; CR = 0.886; AVE = 0.565)						
ws1	3.616		1.076	0.695		
ws2	3.66		1.034	0.757		

	8		
ws3	3.574	1.156	0.752
ws4	3.553	1.157	0.809
ws5	3.711	1.184	0.757
ws6	3.490	1.121	0.737
Functional Flexibility (α = 0.778; CR = 0.849; AVE = 0.533)			
f1	3.011	1.247	0.780
f2	3.326	1.117	0.724
f3	3.563	1.095	0.768
f4	2.853	1.376	0.542
f5	3.168	1.188	0.804
Operational Flexibility (α = 0.865; CR = 0.902; AVE = 0.649)			
o1	3.236	1.024	0.740
o2	3.131	1.181	0.811
o3	3.684	0.968	0.821
o4	3.695	1.009	0.851
o5	3.521	1.068	0.803
Employee Engagement (α = 0.925; CR = 0.938; AVE = 0.627)			
EE1	3.116	0.980	0.788
EE2	3.158	0.946	0.806
EE3	3.468	1.072	0.865
EE4	3.432	1.010	0.855
EE5	2.911	1.185	0.820
EE6	3.168	1.192	0.774
EE7	3.826	0.974	0.719
EE8	3.521	1.032	0.817
EE9	3.416	1.014	0.663

Table 4. Results of discriminant validity.

1		2	3	4		5
1. Employee Engagement	**0.792**					
2. Functional Flexibility	0.552	**0.730**				
3. Operational Flexibility	0.391	0.503	**0.806**			

4. Work Time Flexibility	−0.124		−0.003	−0.005	**0.760**		
5. Workspace Flexibility	0.403		0.448	0.499	−0.137		**0.752**

The path analysis had ambivalent findings in relation to the effect of flexible workplace on engagement. However, with opposing the hypothesis, there was no significant relationship on working time flexibility with the engagement in employees (= -0.103, p>0.1). On the same note, the dependence was not statistically significant between operational flexibility and engagement (0.099, p> Nevertheless, there were also two types of flexibility which found support: workspace flexibility has statistically significant, positive relationship with engagement (0.143, p <.05), whereas functional flexibility has a significantly strong relationship (0.438, p <.001). The explanatory ability of the model was tested through coefficient of determination (R 2). The value of R 2 is 0.377 that implies that the four constructs of flexibility alone explain 37.7% of the employee engagement variance. In accordance to the guidelines of Cohen (1988) in the effect sizes (f 2), functional flexibility found a medium effect (0.205) compared to the small effect of workspace flexibility (0.021). Nevertheless, small effect sizes are still assumed to bring a sense of meaning in the explanatory behavioural research, as Chin et al. (2003) observe.

Discussion

The result which reported that working-time flexibility is not nearly a major determinant of engagement is supported in other studies (Nord et al., 2002). One of the possible explanations is that the over-autonomy in the matter of scheduling can create some problems with the time management, thus negating the possible advantages.

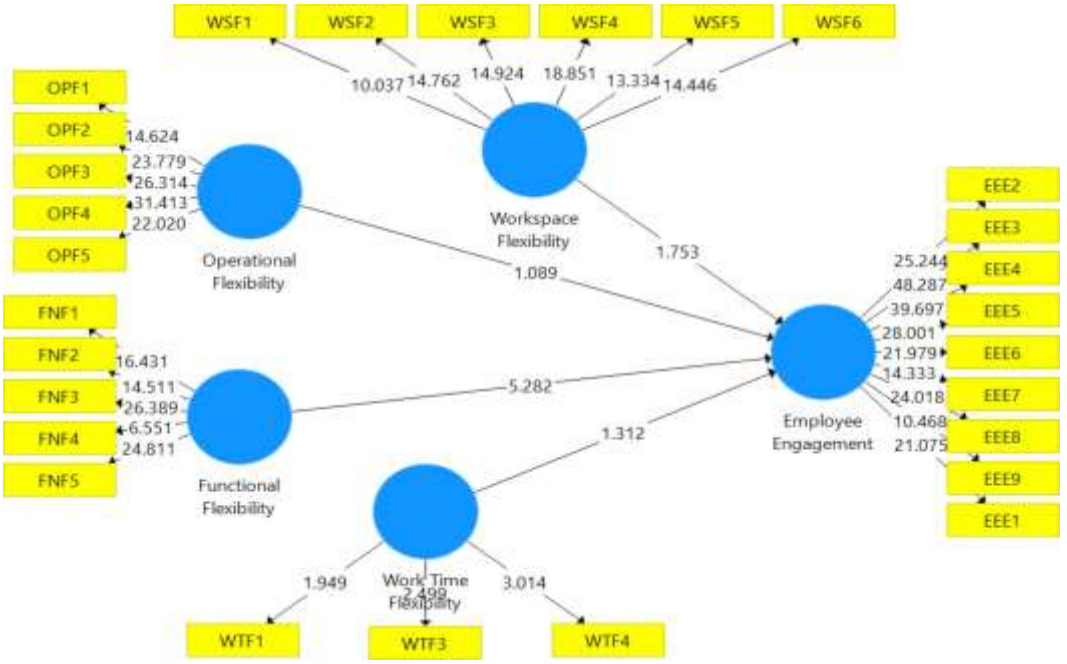

Figure 3. Structural model.

Table 5. Results of Hypotheses Testing.

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	t- Value	f^2	Decision
H1	WTF → EEE	−0.103	1.312	0.016	Not Supported
H2	WSF→ EEE	0.143	1.753*	0.021	Supported
H3	FNF→ EEE	0.438	5.282***	0.205	Supported
H4	OPF → EEE	0.099	1.089	0.010	Not Supported

Note. ***p < 0.001; *p < 0.05; WTF: Working Time Flexibility; WSF: Workspace Flexibility; FNF: Functional Flexibility; OPF: Operational Flexibility; EEE: Employee Engagement.

H1: Flexibility in the work time and involvement. The null hypothesis of a positive correlation between the flexibility of working time and the engagement of the employees was not proven. This finding can be compared with the previous research indicating that too much freedom in schedules may be time-complicated, and they destroy concentration (Nord et al., 2002). Moreover, modern research suggests that flexible work might result in the existence of the work-life boundaries, which further results in the longer working hours, the rise in conflict, and exhaustion, thus, compromising engagement (Palumbo, 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). As much as other models like the Resource Drain Model postulate the positive effects of less commute stress (Zhou et al., 2017), the positive influence of reduced commute stress on

engagement has not been directly established. Therefore, it is evident that more research is required on the situational aspects that can predict the situational direction of whether working-time flexibility is a resource or demand.

H2: Flexibility and Engagement in a Workplace. The findings affirm the presence of significant positive relationship between flexibility of workspace and employee engagement and hence support Hypothesis 2. Theoretically, this discovery is based on the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and Person-Environment Fit Theory, which proposes that the higher the degree of control over physical work environment, i.e. layout, noise, temperature, the better interaction of the person and the environment interaction, which is more optimal and has positive outcomes, including engagement (Armitage and Amar, 2021). However, one should also note the risks of distance workspaces, including domestic interruptions and the inability to forget about work, which impact the work-life balance towards a negative outcome (Como et al., 2020; Schmidt and Neubach, 2007). In turn, to implement the workspace flexibility with high efficiency, there should be strategies that will help to control the environment as much as minimising risks.

H3: Functional Flexibility and Engagement. Hypothesis 3 that recorded positive relationship between functional flexibility and engagement was highly supported to be true. The reason behind this is good explained by Job Characteristics theory Hackman and Oldham (1976) where job rotation, job enrichment and cross-training are effective and used in adding variety in terms of skill, task importance, and autonomy-key factors of inner motivation and interest (Stavrou, 2005). It is always shown empirically that engagement can be predicted by the opportunities of development, training, and task variety (Albrecht et al., 2021; Bhakuni and Saxena, 2023; Mone and London, 2018). To the young employees, functional flexibility would presumably offer the younger workers variety, challenge and growth opportunities that they would desire, which makes it very effective approach to human resource management.

H4: The Flexibility of Operations and Engagement. In contrast with Hypothesis 4 operational flexibility did not have significant relations with employee engagement. This result is paradoxical, as it does not correlate with the concepts of the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 2017) and the studies on self-management, according to which autonomy in the execution of work should provide mutual engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014; Zeijen et al., 2018). The possible reason is that operational flexibility does not have a universal benefit but can be limited to personal characteristics. Employees with high self-management and achievement of control may flourish within such freedom, but employees with the need to be controlled in a better manner might not have similar good impacts. This observation suggests that operational flexibility can be effective only in the event of the careful correspondence of the policy and personal competencies and preferences of a particular employee.

Implications

Practical Implications for business

The current study confirms that workplace flexibility dimensions, i.e. workspace flexibility and functional flexibility were important in increasing engagement in the workers, thus, acting as strategic tool of organisational competitiveness. Such flexibility would lead to the cost savings of organisations, enhance the satisfaction of the needs of employees, and increase their attractiveness and retention. Moreover, the practises will create a favourable workplace atmosphere that enhances staff welfare, and subsequently, more dedication and hard work as the staff will give back the trust and respect given to them (Allam and Shaik, 2020; Malik and Allam, 2021). Finally, the work-life flexibility makes organisations embrace various working approaches, improve the overall performance, and support the Sustainable Development Goal of Decent Work and Economic Growth.

At the societal level, the pervasive implementation of the flexibility in a workplace would accommodate the enhancement of the work-life balance, the overall work satisfaction and productivity, and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal of Good Health and Well-Being, making the society more successful and happier.

Theoretical Contribution

The study contributes a particular value in the literature since it breaks down flexibility in the workplace into four dimensions and examines each of them separately with employee engagement. It has offered a basis on which the succeeding academicians can explore the delicate interplay of these types of flexibility and some of the factors and consequences of engagement. More so, the research creates new empirical findings regarding the nature of work-life balance, especially in the younger generation in the Malaysian setting, which presents new research opportunities.

Limitations and Future Research.

This research is limited in a number of ways. Validity can be compromised by the fact that the data used is self report based, perceptual and not objective. The sample size, which only included the Malaysian working adults, who are less than 30 years, might have brought about some demographic bias and reduced the generalisation of the results. Possibility of common method bias and affecting of other unmeasured variables to engagement are also limiting. The limitations of the study should be resolved by referring to proposals of longitudinal or mixed-method research in the future. Research may also examine the difference in generation and gender in understanding the value of workplace flexibility, the possible disadvantages or the darker side of flexible work structure, and could also determine other mediating or

modulating variables, which would be used to mediate or moderate the relationship between flexibility and engagement.

Practical Recommendations

Resting on the positive findings which are quite significant, the following evidence-based recommendations are suggested to organisations:

1. Increase Workplace Flexibility: GIVE power to employees by letting them have power over physical environment. It involves letting them customise work environments, providing a range of working environments (e.g. quiet areas, group working areas), as well as being able to adapt to the ambient conditions (e.g. lighting, temperature).
2. Bet on Functional Flexibility: A multi-skilled workforce: systematic job rotation, cross-training and enrichemment. Invest in lifelong skills training and offer opportunities to horizontal promotions or project assignments between various functions and (where possible) geographical regions.
3. Build on Operational Autonomy: Change shift management to outcome evaluation. Grant staff members are given the freedom to decide on the nature in which they complete their work, leaving them to run their own processes and using their time and energy wisely. This empowerment builds up an accountability culture and innovation.

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