EXAMINING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENT IN ASIAN-OWNED COMPANY IN LAGOS STATE

Princess Josephine Anya, Covenant University
Anthonia Adenike Adeniji, Covenant University
Odunayo Paul Salau, Covenant University
Olaide Mary Balogun, Covenant University
Samuel Oluwaseunfunmi Aribisala, Covenant University
Judith Ogechukwu Ikeagbo, Covenant University

ABSTRACT

Flexible work arrangement has become an important concern for organizations both in the private and public sector. The global pandemic has called for a need for flexibility at work in other to reduce the spread of the virus. The purpose of this research is to explore the impact of flexible work arrangement on employee engagement at work. The need for flexibility in the context of this study was a result of the COVID-19 crisis. A contribution of this study is that it brings together the spillover theory that has its root in flexibility which promotes work-life balance. 19 top level managers of KRS investment limited owned by an Asian company in Nigeria participated in this qualitative research study. The research made use of focus group discussion for data collection and was analysed using inter-rater reliability and content analysis. The main finding is that flexibility develops from job shift, adjusting, growth and development motivation and observation. This study provides a number of practical recommendations for flexible work arrangement and employee engagement.

Keywords: Flexible Work Arrangement, Employee Engagement, Covid-19, Qualitative Research, Asian-Owned firms in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Flexible work arrangement has become a necessity among employees in the organization. In past years, before introducing a flexible work arrangement by a German aerospace company in 1967, the workforce was made up of the male gender (Kim, 2020). Recently, there is a transition from male to female participation in the workforce. This is due to the need for women seeking to be independent, take care of themselves, strive to break the glass ceiling, and support the family due to the current economic situation. Therefore, these changes have demanded not only for work-family balance but as well as work-life balance.

The world is experiencing a pandemic, and most organizations are forced to shut down or work from home; this will disrupt a lot of businesses if organizations do not take active measures to ensure that they still meet up to the market demands alongside maintaining the guidelines issued to curtail the spread of the covid-19 virus. One of the significant ways to ensure that these rules are being adhered to is instituting a flexible work arrangement. Flexible work arrangements can be categorized into different forms: Flextime, job sharing, telecommuting, compressed workweek, part-time schedule, etc. (Daniel, 2017). Although this

flexible work arrangement's success highly varies across other countries and organizations, the level of control an employee enjoys the industry's culture, and the flexibility of the work itself (Peretz et al., 2017).

Developing countries are also embracing flexibility at work. This involves teaching formal and informal practices to have a unique work-life balance and avoid work-family conflict, especially in Nigeria (Ogueyungbo et al., 2019). The rapid speed of economic growth worldwide in the 21st century has generated new initiatives for organizations. Flexible work arrangements deal more with workplace flexibility, hours of work scheduled and spent at work, employees having the opportunity to choose where and when to perform a task (Daniel, 2017). Although it is common for some government and private-owned companies to adopt flextime, mostly remote working due to the covid 19 pandemic, there is a poor implementation in Nigeria (Olowe et al., 2013). Limited studies have only considered flexible work scheduling as a significant forerunner of work-life balance. Therefore, this research examines the impact of flexible work arrangements on work-life balance. Flexible work arrangements lead to increased productivity, ease of stress on the employees, and valuable staff retention. Studies have examined the benefits of flexible work arrangements in the manufacturing and telecommunication industry (Olowe et al., 2013; Ogueyungbo et al., 2019), while limited studies on the benefits of flexible work arrangement for both employers and employees have been made in Asian owned firms in Nigeria. This study examines the challenges in implementing flexible work arrangement that has been insufficiently addressed in past research. This research's objectives are: to determine the influence of flexi-time on the employees' engagement in Asian-Owned firms in Nigeria; to assess the impact of telecommuting on employees' engagement in the Asian-Owned firms in Nigeria and to ascertain the influence of job shift on employees' engagement in the Asian-Owned firms in Nigeria. To achieve this, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. To what extent does flexi-time influence employee engagement?
2. What is the impact of telecommuting on employees' engagement
3. In what ways does job shift influence employee engagement?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work Flexibility

There are current existing literatures that revolves around the research term *"flexible working"*. Arge (2005) are professionals in this area of study. Arge (2005) explained work flexibility as a section of a building compliance, which is allowed to meet the changes in taste of owners' needs by changing its structures easily. Steiner's (2005) flexibility definition is similar to Arge (2005) definition. He said that flexibility is the ability to build and reorganize due to changes and office makeovers and reformation of businesses and introducing innovative technology. Steiner (2005) focuses on the physical office layout.

Hassanain (2006) has a general view of the flexibility concept at work. Therefore, flexibility at work explains *"the concept of a good external design and efficient changes of the work environment and the idea of flexibility in the organizational as it relays on how and where employees work irrespective of their contract of employment"* (Hassanain, 2006).

Organization progressively accepted new administration practices that in the meantime required new working environment so as accept new changes.

The development of *"mass office workplaces"* started after World War II (Salama, 2004). In the mid-1950s, the expression paper-factory was used at the workplace as a situation where most of the work is paper-based.

The modification of the current industrial place of work design was made after the air conditioning presentation toward the end of the 1950s in US. It altered the outdated office format to a suitable and open structure - open arrangement conditions. Hassanain (2006) defines an open arrangement condition as an office space separated into moderately small cubicles. No high walls are dividing the offices, oversized doors, and space separating staffs. This sort of workplace assembly can be viewed as elastic. According to Hassanain (2006), the courtyard idea was initially created to utilize office space and empower better communication.

After World War II, European workplaces were *"restricted inside and out and cellular in the plan, with little workplaces, aided off a dominant hall"* (Hassanain, 2006). Salama (2004) depicts the European office structure known during the post-war times - the *"Burolandschaft"* office that started in Germany. Its point was to improve correspondence flow. The correspondence paper-based channels or individual dictated the new office structure among people and gatherings. Because of the new structure, all walls were evacuated, and working conditions were exceptionally open.

Burolandschaft was presented in the US in the mid-1960s yet with specific adjustments. Place Meetings were removed; administrative employees were set in exposed spaces while topmost administration stayed in private fenced workplaces.

By the mid-1960s, Burolandschaft developed into another idea classified as *"Action office"* made by Herman Miller, one of the US's principal office equipment organizations. An Action office's fundamental thought was that the furnishings *"is meant to be a part that reacts to the differed tasks of office work"* (Salama, 2004; John et al., 2016; John, 2017).

In any case, in cooperation with Burolandschaft and Action office, ideas got comprehensive analysis by space planning specialists and experts because of their excessively deterministic norms and how not all associations were communicated and, in this way, not all workplaces should have similar designs. In the mid-1970s, as a reaction to the analysis of past ideas, additional office structure is the *"Archetypal"* office idea presented in North America. As Bal & De Lange (2014) noticed, this could be viewed as the exchange between personal and commercial desires.

In Europe, unceasing advancements in office designs occurred all through the 1980s until the rise of Individual computers. Stone & Luchetti (1985) stressed the significance of this uprising in data innovation when the workplace's existence began to be seen and utilized in various, progressively imaginative ways. New office assemblies were developed to consolidate the progressions and new ideas of the workplace.

During the 1990s, Harris (1998) established that workers turned out to request their working conditions. Good lighting, adequate ventilation, and atmosphere control that particular specialists had. Associations needed to think about it if they wished to hold their staff. This is worth referencing the *"theory Z"* or a Japanese administration theory worldview, as Vidyarthi et al. (2016) discussed that where a worker is set in the center point of association when settling on an office plan; for example, a worker is profoundly associated with a decision making concerning his work environment that, it will positively affect representative's mental and standards of conduct and, hence, increase efficiency.

Worthington & Koya (1988) depict new office design as offering abnormal amounts of individual nooks at the structure edge, empowering joining and assembling in center zones. It tends to be viewed as very close to the structure of prototype office ideas in North America.

Edefiaje (2011) gives another order of different sorts of office structures in the existing business condition. It is similar to the open arrangement of Salama. In this manner, he arranges workstation into four kinds: hive, when work depends predominantly on

individual procedures; cell – is fit best when the high focus is required and when self-governance expands; cave – bunch work when communication builds; club – value-based learning when independence and connection increment. He at that point talks about that typically in a genuine workplace there is a blend of every one of the four kinds of workspace relying upon worker's job, industry, size of the organization, corporate culture, area etc.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is the result achieved in reaching the firm's internal and external goals (Leslie et al., 2012). The performance of employees has several outcomes which include growth, existence, competitiveness and success. The simplicity of providing flexible work arrangements would decrease turnover for all staff, not just those in practices (Abid & Barech, 2017). Organizations that have a variety of flexible work arrangements experience greater profitability. This helps to strengthen the employee's relationships with close friends and family members.

Researchers concentrated on the individual level and similarly the organizational level effects of flexible work arrangements. While there is evidence of higher organizational success at a higher level, the secret dimensions have not been brought to light at the person level. Studies have shown that the context and frames of mind of coworkers, supervisors and line managers is significant.

Gajendran et al. (2015) illustrated a positive relationship between flexible and homeworking and employee engagement, arguing that the social environment of flexible working is a crucial factor. In addition, there is evidence that co-workers' flexible working has an impact on flexible work choices between co-workers (Rockmann & Pratt, 2015; Stefanie et al., 2020). The study found that employee satisfaction and organizational accountability are negatively linked. It is beneficial that flexible job is his/her unique to his/her. This was established in the research of Gajendran et al. (2015) which demonstrated how flexible work hours were negatively associated with task and analytical efficiency. Moreover, McAlpine (2015) found that the ripple effect exists whereby detrimental impacts are reached out regardless of whether those workers are versatile or not. Flexible working can impact strong groups of people who work in similar occupations. The more people you deal with, the more likely you are to have flexible work arrangements. Their findings led administrators to conclude that flexible working could affect group productivity; in the end goal that flexible working would contribute to group efficiency.

This study adopts flexible work arrangement to achieve a work-life balance of employees from the spillover perspective. Ceteris Paribus propounded this theory (Kossek & Thompson, 2016) Spillover theory defines the conditions relating to work and family balance. Work flexibility helps to view various factors of time and space involving work and family balance and is instrumental in achieving healthy working and family balance. It shows the effect of work on the home and other work-related emotions from the employees to others around them, especially their partners at home. These feelings or emotions can be negative or positive. An employee is experiencing a hard time at work and personal life due to work overload results in overworking as a leisure time. An employee experiencing an unpleasant day at work and stressed would worry even at home, probably concerning an unfinished task.

RESEARCH MODEL

The research model was developed by the researcher based on secondary data and prior to data collection to generate evidence whether to prove or disprove the key concept (Figure 1).
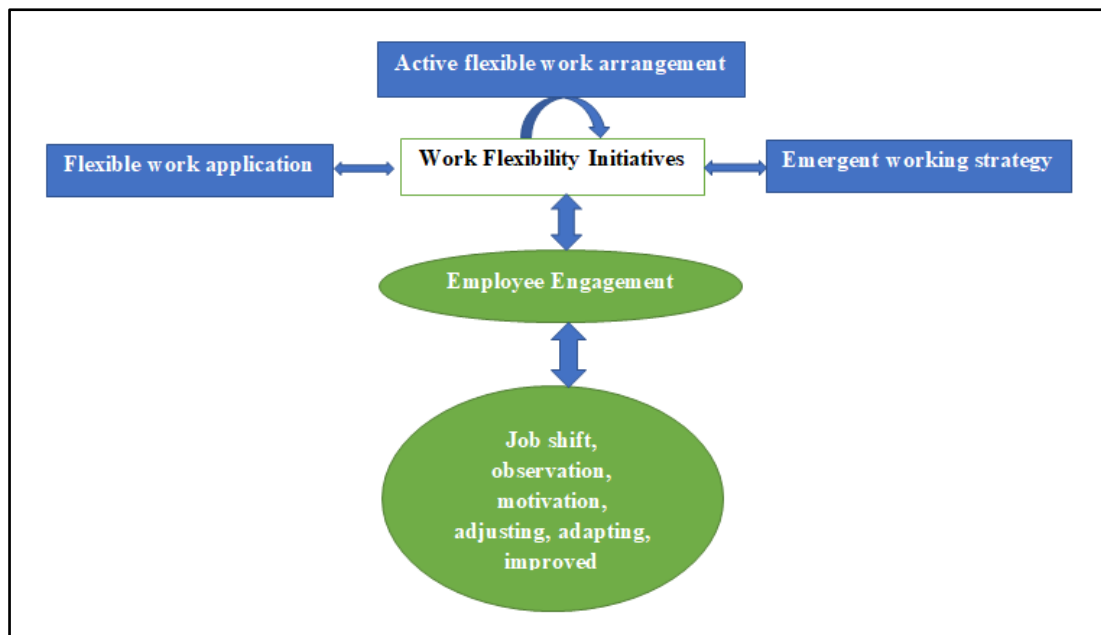
Source: Authors' compilation

FIGURE 1
RESEARCH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conventional Office *vs.* Flexible Office

Researchers like Skyrme (1994) are significant specialists of flexible working. Their works were generally referred to in scholastic publication, separating flexible and customary office conditions by working environment, time, connections, innovation, security, and board style and skills. Thus, fundamental qualities of flexible workplace when contrasted with traditional office include:

1. Working environment: workers do not have a fixed work station. Shared assets; storage arrangements courses of action for individual effects are presented.
2. Time: flexible long stretches of working, compelling utilization of computer frameworks, requirement for time the executives and successful work coordination.
3. Exchange of information: powerful data sharing despite the work spot; requires progressively advanced message taking care of frameworks. Strategies inside workgroups should be all around created and comprehended.
4. Relationship: because of the quick data flow and correspondence requirements associations are moving towards progressively lean structure, the nature of shared and worker to-administrator connections change. Physical gatherings regularly are substituted by video chats or telephone confreres.
5. Innovation: flexible working, particularly teleworking needs consistent changes as per technology advances.

Recent Research

In the analysis of Bianca et al. (2018), it was seen that career versatility and demands for resources have risen significantly. When daily life is getting ever more difficult, employees expect more expertise and better and effective resources from their companies. Since staff needs convenient arrangements to enjoy a day off, yearly break, and night out, they are willing to offer outstanding benefits to the employers, so the employers can have and retain successful employees.

These results also align with Groen et al. (2018), who claimed that an understanding of the type of flexible employment one provides the employer allows for an awareness of

how the employees perceive the made services. According to Groen et al. (2018), in every job versatility, the employee's efficiency is vital to an individual's capacity to make sure they are well contented beyond average circumstances. Find this to be a grant of both what is intended and even in respect to the less evident wishes of workers (Groen et al., 2018; Clarke & Holdsworth, 2017; Felstead & Henseke, 2017). The respondents answered that they are happy to have a versatile day plan that incorporates their own desires at work/family and personal life. Respondents also stated that their work take a single stream of productivity and not several streams of productivity and does activities that yield the greatest return on investment within a tight time frame. The research further shows a strong association between the actions placed forward in a person's everyday work life and the desire to sustain a stable work schedule at periods when this is most important.

The study offers evidence for the association between flexible working privileges and organizational success in the sense that organizations with flexible working opportunities (work from home, reduced working hours) are able to allow their workers more versatility thereby have more accommodating working duties as opposed to that of the organizations with fixed working regime and working hours.

According to the qualitative data from the report, employees bargained for further thoughts on flexible work conditions and early arrivals at work would guarantee that they do not exit from the company which eludes the reality the implementing such flexible work hours would contribute to a rise in efficiency.

The symbolic action viewpoint, according to Oyewobi et al. (2019) notes that having work-life balance activities amongst personnel encourages a conscientious and dedicated community amongst the workforce by acting as a sign of distinct consideration and consideration for the affairs of the workplace. In a recent article by Oludayo et al. (2018), he concludes that if a company will promote flexible work hours, it will see a rise in morale due to the workers would be motivated to operate on a daily basis.

Generally, the research evidence recommends a limited support for a good connection between flexible working and job performance encouraged by improved work commitment. Organizational efficiency benefits more from apparent flexibility (i.e., flexible working arrangements) than via flexible workers' increased work engagement. Given the detailed list of benefits obtained from flexible work arrangements, it is logical to hypothesize that employees respond certainly too flexible work arrangements as they identify that their organizations care for them. Most of the studies are focused on larger industries and bigger banks; efforts to study Asian-owned firms in Nigeria are limited. Hence this study seeks to bridge this gap.

In light of the above, to consequently achieve the stated objectives, this section of the research work, focused on making relationships between the works of other authors in other to full grasp the concepts being discussed.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sampling

The proposed population of study would be staff (top level employees) from KRS investment limited owned by Asian manufacturing firm in Lagos State, Nigeria. KRS Investment Ltd is located in Town planning way, Ilupeju, Lagos State. A sample size will be drawn to represent the total population (Table 1).

Table 1 SAMPLE SIZE- TOTAL POPULATION	
Level of Management	KRS Investment Ltd **Workforce Strength**
Top level Management	19

Source: Company's Prospectus

Procedure

This topic uses the focus groups to conduct further research through debriefing meetings/interview session to address the semi-structure nature of the questions and the following steps to be followed on the actual focus group. The following questions re drafted as a guideline to get the required key materials for this research through semi-structured interviews.

a. In what ways do you re-strategies your work environment from experience?
b. How does flexible work arrangement apply to you?
c. In what ways have you moved between telecommuting and work shift in adopting flexible work arrangement?
d. How has working from home affected the performance of the employees?
e. Give an example of how the employees in the organization adapt with workplace flexibility.
f. In what ways has the pandemic affected the work arrangement in your organisation?
g. How has your past working habit affected your new work flexibility?
h. How does your actual work experience result in new knowledge about flexibility?

Moderation while carrying out this focus group was done by a single researcher and also tried to asked further inquired participants responses. When the focus group was approached, they were briefed the purpose of the research model the questions were built on. However, it was only ethical to promise confidentiality to participants and that when collating the data, no reference would be made towards them, their departments or the institution at large.

Strategies to Ensure Credibility and Dependability

While trying to ensure the dependability of the collection of data in this research, three steps were carried out:

- Firstly, a concise and clear description of the interview data was formed- this aided the researcher to finalize on the scientific benefit of the data collected as regards to the study.
- Furthermore, the documentation of the study was recorded during the interview session allowing replication of some key words related to the study in different contexts
- Finally, the reliability of interrater was measured with the help of three-coders in coding the data independently.

The researcher engaged with sampled focus groups and carried out separate processes of immersion in reading, reflecting and interpreting on the data to make sense out of the opinions of the focus groups.

However, in order to create inter-rater reliability a deductive approach was carried out. The theme for flexible work arrangement and employee engagement had codes which were predefined and based on the theoretical framework and the content analysis. To allow for inter-rater reliability, a deductive method was used, in which the codes for the themes of flexible work arrangement and employee engagement were predefined and decided upon prior to the start of the content analysis, and were therefore developed before the start of the content analysis and this was based on the theoretical framework (Table 2).

Table 2 ANALYSIS OF CONTENT CODES		
Theme	**Code number**	**Code name**
Flexible work arrangement	1	Emergent working strategies
	2	Flexible work application
	3	Active flexible work arrangement
	4	Achieved work flexibility
Employee Engagement	5	Adapting
	6	Job shift
	7	Adjusting
	8	Growth and development
	9	Reflection
	10	Improved competence
	11	Assimilation
	12	Employee motivation
	13	Employee productivity
	14	Observation

RESULTS

Inter-Rater Reliability

Consistency of coding in this research was calculated using intra-class correlation of paired scores. Every value that has a correlation of less than 0.5 shows weak reliability, values between 0.5 to 0.75 shows a moderate reliability, and values between 0.75 to 0.9 shows a good reliability, and values greater than 0.90 indicate an excellent reliability. Table 2 indicates the intra-class correlations for each code after the coding of the responses from the respondents were brought together (Table 3) making use of the highest intra-class correlation criteria.

Intra-class correlations range between 0.9 and 0.3. Good reliability of intra-class correlations resulted for the codes job shift and observation. Emergent working strategies, Achieved work flexibility, Adapting, Growth and Development, Productivity, Active flexible work arrangement and motivation are the majority of codes that resulted in moderate reliability of intra-class correlations. A weak reliability of intra-class correlations was recorded for flexible work application and Adjusting. Intra-class correlations were not calculated for reflection, assimilation, improved competence because their coding scores resulted in zero (0).

Descriptive Statistics

The correlation of inter-class in Table 3a & 3b is calculated by pair raters through coding in Table 3, which shows the frequency of codes as well as the mean frequency. The raters were paired based on the criteria of the highest intra-class correlation resulting from their coding. This was done with the aim of selecting coding scores with the best intra-class correlation.

Table 3a ANALYSIS OF CONTENT CODES				
Theme	**Code number**	**Code name**	**Intra-class correlation**	**ANOVA**
Flexible work arrangement	1	Emergent working strategies	0.60	$F_{(15,19)}=4.0, p=0.04$
	2	Flexible work application	0.4	$F_{(15,19)}=2.3, p=0.05$

	3	Active flexible work arrangement	0.6	F (15,19)=3.53, p=0.01
	4	Achieved work flexibility	0.66	F (15,16)=4.91, p=0.001
Employee performance	5	Adapting	0.58	F (15, 16)=3.8, p=0.01
	6	Job shift	0.79	F (15, 16)=8.6, p=0.0001
	7	Adjusting	0.3	F (15, 16)=1.85, p=0.1
	8	Growth and development	0.6	F (15, 16)=4.36, p=0.002
	9	Reflection	N/A	N/A
	10	Adjusting	0.5	F(15, 16)=3.09, p=0.01
	11	Motivation	0.5	F(15, 16)=3.13, p=0.01
	12	Assimilation	N/A	N/A
	13	Improved competence	N/A	N/A
	14	Observation	0.9	F (15, 16)=20.02, p=0.0001

Table 3b
MEAN FREQUENCY AND VARIANCE FREQUENCY OF CODES

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Rater 1	30	4	6	48	23	11	19	32	0	33	8	0	0	32
Rater 2	33	3	7	50	35	15	29	36	0	28	9	0	0	26
Mean	31.5	3.5	6.5	49	29	13	24	34	0	30.5	8.5	0	0	29
variance	4.5	0.5	0.5	2	72	8	50	8	0	12.5	0.5	0	0	18

Achieved work flexibility is the most common code, followed by Growth and Development, Emergent working strategies, and adjusting, which all form part of the constructs for employee engagement described in the theoretical framework of this study. Participants made no reference to reflection, assimilation and improved competence and made least reference to Flexible work application and Active flexible work arrangement.

RESULTS

Emergent Working Strategy, Flexible Work Application and Active Flexible Work Arrangement

Participants had in common a traditional work arrangement that moved from going to the office every day to working from home over a very short period of time due to health and safety directives as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The global crisis changed the way people gather to perform one work activity or the other. Here, participants resulted to working from home and having virtual meeting via zoom and google meet. Other participants had concrete experience in flexible work arrangement practices which they also described as helpful in times of emergent strategies.

Achieved Work Flexibility and Job Shift

Participants indicated that there was a high level of flexibility when asked to either work from home or work based on shifts.

Growth and Development

Participants are of the opinion that flexible work arrangement would aid training and development, as this would give them more time to have personal development in other to

ensure the improvement in the competence and skills. The concept of growth & development cannot be taken away from the organization because it is seen as the bedrock of improved performance.

Adjusting and Observation

The participants indicated that as a result of the pandemic, it was not so easy to adjust to working from home or virtual communication. This is because they have been used to this method of waking up early to prepare for work, coupled with the fact that some of the participants had to learn about the new technology and also observe things themselves.

Employee Engagement

A common response was that every employee contributes to the success (or failure) of the business. The aim is; of course, to constantly enhance the quality and productivity of your employees. However, sustaining success would be difficult without a clear understanding of which factors affect employee efficiency. The way an employee would contribute to fulfilment of tasks varies and is dependent on many factors, and this should be looked into by employers and managers at large.

DISCUSSION

The core objective of this research was to ascertain how flexible work arrangement affects the engagement level of the employees. The main finding is that flexible work arrangement would aid work-life balance among the members of the organization. The research was at the time of Post-COVID-19 which took the world by surprise and all had to adapt to the unknown environment based on the principle that *"work must continue"*. Most employees in the manufacturing industries operated in a remote area while some were laid off because the management was unsure of their usefulness as at the time of COVID-19.

This study, as specified earlier, analyses the perspective of employees' flexibility, especially in the time of COVID-19 where some employees had to move from their physical workplaces to virtual. The data confirms that when confronted with an unknown situation, the management has adapted and adopted techniques to ensure that work is carried out in the most conducive manner. This research is in line with the findings of Sharma (2017) confirming that when faced with unstable environment actions are taken to transform traditional face to face teaching method to more technology driven methods and that this leads to the learner centered strategy which is becoming the new normal. The research illustrates the adaptability and flexibility of work in general and also that faced with challenges, the organization will think outside the box in order to achieve a high level of production.

Another important factor was that the participants made it very clear that flexible work arrangement is highly necessary in this new phase of life (Post COVID-19). The success in implementation of the new strategies depended largely on the support given by the management and also the employee's cooperation in working towards organization's goal.

CONCLUSION

The idea of work-life balance is focused on the development of a positive work atmosphere that encourages and allows workers to retain a balance between their professional and personal lives, thereby improving employee productivity and loyalty. Employers are

required to provide flexible job plans for the younger population joining the workforce. The report concludes that work-life harmony is biased towards work and less towards the personal facets of workers. Employees are thus compromising their time for the completion of office-related tasks which interrupt the work-life balance. It is also anticipated that organisations would have a versatile and open-minded approach to ensuring the correct mix.

This study concludes that a well-balanced work environment is attainable when sufficient work flexibility is established. It has also been established that employees' diverse demands can be met through the incorporation of work-life initiative that cuts across formal and informal policies. In the 21st century, the workplace demands goal-oriented organizations to step-up in the midst of advantageous competition arising as organizations seek to be the most competent in their craft. One of the media of achieving this is by promoting a culture that recognizes employees' non-work domains. In this research, we can conclude that work flexibility initiatives are determinants of employee behavioral outcomes when applied accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations were made. There is a need for consistent work flexibility policies like Over-time, flexi-time, part-time, shift, subcontracting, and moonlighting, which allow employee break from work so that they feel that organization helping them harmonize both work and family lives. Reconsideration of dynamic programs and advancement of current practices on flexible working activities is essential. The management of selected Asian-owned firms should also endeavor to implement the 'Flex works' concept providing more flexible roistering schedules and works to staff as the best practice to work flexibility. Additionally, reasonable work hour's practice, which reduces excessive long working hours, also contributes to work flexibility should be implemented. Improving safety and well-being in the workplace is essential to work flexibility. Providing telephone facilities will ensure all employees can receive and get communication facility with family members at work, enhancing balanced family and work life.

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