

Flexi-work: a new paradigm and the future of work in India

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ABSTRACT

The current paper delineates the evolving of flexible work as a new paradigm and the future of work in India. Studies have shown that, flexi-work arrangements, as a new concept, have actually enhanced productivity, efficiency, creativity, engagement and retention. And with the onset of novel coronavirus pandemic worldwide the phenomenon is gaining even more attention. Despite this, employers have traditionally exhibited reluctance to promote and accommodate flexibility at work places. Moreover, employers' concerns mainly deal with perceived negative effects on productivity, culture and morale caused by flexi-work. Many firmly believe that the new concept of flexi-work such as working from home would create a situation wherein employees might get dissociated from workplace and take advantage of the freedom. Ultimately, these considerations might induce fear and a lack of trust. However, due to COVID-19 pandemic, work from home has become a new normal for the employees, and honestly speaking there is hardly any other alternative to this in the given situation. In fact, flexible work is no longer 'new normal', rather the 'new essential'. Taking this into account, the paper also attempts to set out a discourse on the significance and relevance of flexi-work in Indian context.

Keywords: Flexi-work, new paradigm, future, COVID-19, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, flexible working has witnessed a sharp increase across most industrially developed nations. Furthermore, there stands a growing demand for higher flexibility in the workplace particularly from the younger generation. The surfacing of digital revolution has brought about a drastic change in the world of business. However, the transformation presents both pressing challenges and novel opportunities for today's working individuals. The diffusion of these novel technologies is occurring fast, and also new industries are changing and developing at a faster pace (Aydalot & Keeble, 2018). Their adopting and proper utilization are anticipated to pick up more speed in the coming years. Although the digital technology developments has had effects on few contexts and it is hard to be neglected by individuals (Andriole, 2017), it pushes the germination and spread of several new methods of doing business (Oukil, 2011).

A study conducted by Ernst & Young found that nearly one-third of working professionals worldwide opine that work-life balance is becoming difficult to manage. Too much overtime and no flexibility are forcing the people to relinquish their jobs. However, the employment directives are going through a change and new rules are scripted fast. In this context, flexi working has started to become the new normal and is considered to be one of the most impact making developments and family-friendly policy in working practices globally. Organizations today are trying to imbibe a sense of trust among employees by offering flexibility to them. Moreover, the millennial generation is even ready to go past an attractive compensation package and promotions for limited-period contracts with organizations to enable them to experiment.

While focusing on India, the country is rapidly matching other developing countries in supporting a remote work culture. So, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, the current paper attempts to explore the new opportunities that are being offered by this digital transformation to entrepreneurs in India. The current paper attempts to put forth a deliberation on the relevance and significance of flexi-work in the Indian context.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The term flexible working refers to worker's control over when or where they work (Glass & Estes, 1997; Kelly et al., 2011). Work flexibility simply does not indicate time and place variation of the job, but also job sharing, breaks in career, part-time and term-time working (Jones & Jones, 2011; Chung & Tijdens, 2012). Other studies on work flexibility narrowed down on three broad categories of the phenomenon namely flexibility in scheduling (flexi-time), flexibility in location (telehomeworking), and flexibility in length of the work (part-time) (Possenried & Plantenga, 2011). Undoubtedly, work flexibility facilitates simplicity in planning, and no reduction in working time. So, in short, flexibility in work may be summarized as the capacity of workers to maneuver their working hours as well as work location (remotely from office) i.e. control over the timing of one's work (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020).

In recent reports, it was found that the majority of millenials would like the opportunity to work from home and have work flexibility (Finn & Donovan, 2013; Deloitte, 2018). In the opinion of some researchers, flexible working style contributes to work-life balance and with changing family patterns such policies and practices are an attractive deal for both men and women (Thomson, 2008; Hofacker & Konig, 2013). Talking about employers, they have incorporated flexible working options with the intent of alluring, recruiting and retaining staff with greater credentials to their organizations (Croucher & Kelliher, 2005; Anderson & Kelliher, 2009). With the power of scheduling their own work, employees feel that employers really think about their wellbeing and after office life (Casper & Harris, 2008). This often channelize to enhanced satisfaction with the assigned job and recruiter, resulting in greater job dedication (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). On the other hand, few studies have also indicated employers' concerns, which mainly deal with perceived negative effects on productivity, culture and morale caused by flexi-work. Many firmly believe that the new concept of flexi-work such as working from home would create a situation wherein employees might get dissociated from workplace and take advantage of the freedom. Ultimately, these considerations might induce fear and a lack of trust. Moreover, there is little evidence of the organizations with flexi-work schedule having less under pressure employees (Eldridge & Nissar, 2011). Although, previous studies have claimed that work flexibility leads to employee commitment and involvement,

higher organizational loyalty, and increased job satisfaction. Furthermore, enhanced productivity, less employee turnover and absenteeism has been recognized as pros of allowing flexibility in working to the employees (Anon, 2008).

According to Tipping et al. (2012), researchers claim that employees firmly believe in flexibility at workplaces to boost their morale, which might have positive impact on work-life stability, additionally employees are also of the view that employers are in a position to support them balance their professional and personal obligations via flexible working practices. Flexibility in working is regarded as one of the effective methods to enhance employee health, as it proves to be quite handy for the employees to address responsibilities outside the work (Pruyne et al., 2012). Singley & Hynes (2005) assert that flexible working can be employed as a constructive capability lasting asset beneficial to workers particularly women, as it will enable them to adapt their job demands to family demands.

The aforesaid literature conveys that there exists a host of academic pursuance on the positive impact of flexitime on employees' performance. In light of this, the current study has attempted to predict the likelihood of flexi-work as the future of work in India through the prism of evidences drawn from previous studies on the subject.

3. METHODOLOGY

A quasi systematic literature survey was carried out by searching the impact making work on positive role of work flexibility on employees' duties outside of work. Besides this, data from secondary sources were also drawn to supplement the findings of the literature survey.

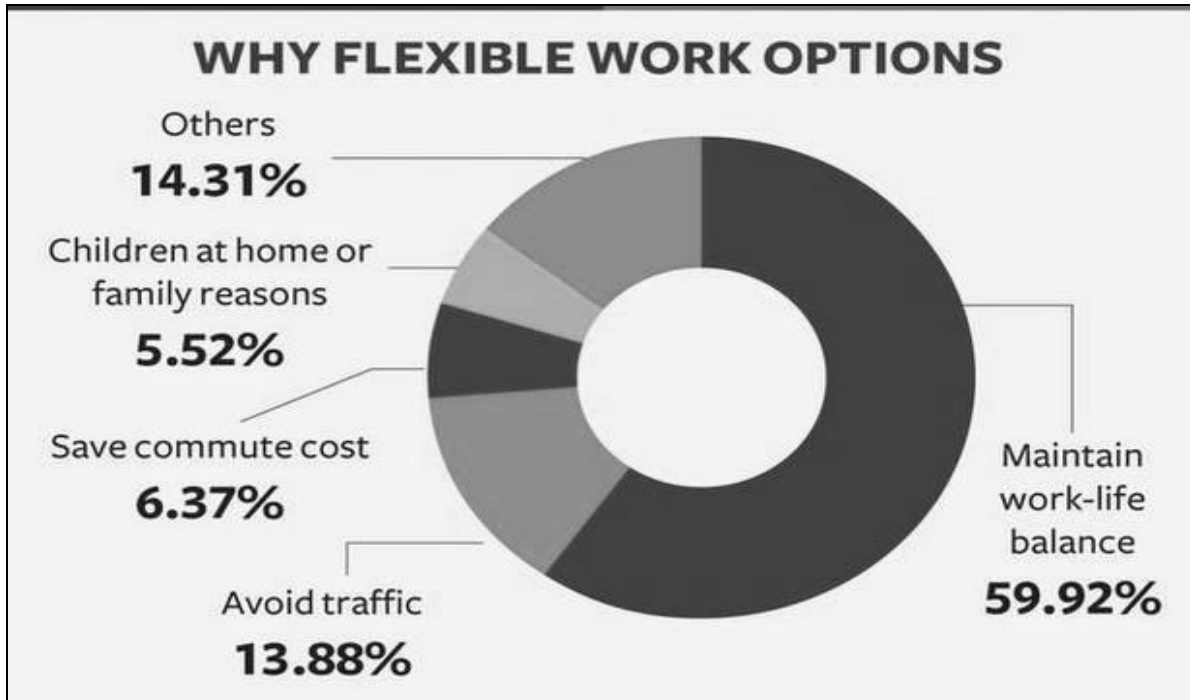
4. DISCUSSION

The extant literature boasts an abundance of studies which attempt to set out a discourse on the significance and relevance of flexi-work. However, at the same time it can't be denied the challenges attached to this relatively new phenomenon of flexi-work. Although several researchers have argued against the implementation of this concept in organizations, the

current study has mainly focused on the likelihood of flexi-work to be potential working style in India, as it carries a substantial role in making individuals achieve work-life balance.

Start-ups were the pioneers in adopting the practices of flexi-work, which was quickly embraced by MNCs and big organizations as well. Nearly 44% of business leaders assert that one of the top socio-economic forces of change in business is the gradual changing nature of working practices and flexible work. According to the estimates of IPSOS, a global research company, about 75% of Indian employees telecommutes quite often and another one-third functions remotely every day. This facilitates abandoning the stress that generally follows ardent travel and working timings. Many affirm that this type of working style give impetus to productivity by guiding people on how to accomplish a greater level of achievement and enjoyment, on as well as off the job.

Workforce under flexi-staffing, or those provided through contractors to various employers, grew at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16.3 per cent to 3.3 million in 2018 as compared with 2.1 million in 2015. Also India emerged as the fifth-largest market worldwide in flexi-staffing in 2018 and the country would have 6.1 million flexi-workforce by 2021 (The Hindu, 2019). In a recent study, it was found that in order to maintain an optimal work-life balance people supported flexible working options, followed by avoiding traffic and saving on the cost of their commute by working from home (Business Line, 2019). Figure 1 exhibits the key reasons for supporting flexible working options.



Source: Business Line (2019)

Fig. 1: Key reasons for supporting flexible working options

A global workplace survey conducted by International Workplace Group (IWG), a serviced-offer company, brings to light many startling facts including the benefits of ‘flexible working’. What’s interesting is 80 per cent of Indian workers believe introducing ‘flexible working’ will reduce commuting hours and stress. With the indication of rapid evolvment of work flexibility culture, it has started to create buzz in the business world. Furthermore, it is slowly but gradually crushing the traditional norm of a stringent 9-to-5 and five–day week policy. The essence of the new concept lies in its ability to offer more freedom to individuals regarding when, where or how to satisfy their specific roles.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of the current paper emit certain evidences toward projecting flexi-work as a useful and effective method in stimulating a tension-free life to workers. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the likely gendered ways in which it is anticipated to be employed.

While emphasizing flexi-work in organizations, the first important aspect that matters the most is organization culture, second that matters is the country contexts, and third is the household patterns. Undoubtedly, this phenomenon is going to attain high significance in the years to come, as its demand is on rise among both new and yester generations of workers for various reasons. Finally, all converges to what extent this innovative working practice will be adopted and used in an appropriate manner. If everything went right then, flexible working practice will become a new paradigm and the future of work in India rather than being used sporadically in some organizations.

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