# Work Flexibility and Employee Intention to Stay: Examining the Issues

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*Abstract: Companies are continually looking for ways to compete in a dynamic and changing business environment. Staff turnover rate is a concern for many companies, particularly when investing resources (i.e. time, money, training) on staff only to have them leave. In response to these concerns, and increasing demand for work-life balance from employees, companies around the world have been introducing initiatives such as flexible working arrangements. These flexible working arrangements can lead to higher levels of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and intention to stay with the company. Flexible working arrangements can be defined as flexibility in the place of work, hours of work, or schedule of work. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of work flexibility on employee intention to stay. The study basically is conceptual in nature and adopted a literature review method. The findings from the review of extant literature show that in any case, intention to stay, whether it is in the form of lower turnover or increased organisational commitment, is positively associated with family-friendly programs such as flexible working arrangements.*

*Key words: Work Flexibility, Employee Intention to Stay, Job Sharing, Compressed Work Week*

## INTRODUCTION

Flexible working arrangements are actually emerging issues in human resource management field. The world is becoming a global village, hence as an employee in any organization the balance between personal life and work responsibilities should not be ignored, if the employee performance is to be achieved. The discourse on flexible work time schedule as a strategy for improving the capacity of employees to achieve their non-work goals while at the same time achieving the organizational goals is attracting increased attention among scholars. Employees need to balance work and non-work roles and employers require it to increase productivity and reduce cost (Abbott & De Cieri, 2008).

In the current global work environment, there is intense competition for talented employees and for market share based on higher product quality and lower prices in order to realize strategic advantage. Competition requires organizations to take into account diversity of employee's needs, work life values, cultural influences in the areas where the companies operate as well as the diversity of working relationships in order to attract, retain and fully engage the employee. As many organizations come to terms with the challenges of attracting and retaining the best talent and retaining the best talent coupled with the emerging issues of work life conflicts, it is important that managers employ a variety of human resource practices to attain organizational goals (Mclean & Collins, 2011).

In response to these concerns, and increasing demand for work-life balance from employees, companies have been introducing initiatives such as Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA) (McNall & Collins, 2010), where employees can choose their place of work, and within boundaries their of scheduled hours of work. These FWA's can lead to higher levels of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and intention to stay with the company (Warner & Hausdorf, 2009). Flexible work time arrangements are essentially those arrangements of work that allows workers to modify where, when and for how long job-related work is performed (Lewis, 2003).

For many employees today both male and female lives are becoming more consumed with a host of family and other personal responsibilities and interests in addition to demands of the workplace (Grantol-Vallore & Donaldson, 2001).There is therefore a perceived imbalance between the demands of current lives and people's abilities to adequately cope with them and this may lead to an experience of stress (World of Work Report, 2011). In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments, flexible work arrangement has become a predominant issue in the workplace. Three major factors contribute to the interest in and importance of serious consideration of flexible work arrangement: global competition, renewed interest in personal lives, family values and an aging workforce. Concerns have always been raised regarding policy and debates on flexible work arrangement from perspectives of the quality of working life when weighed against the broader family matters. However the challenge has been how employees would adopt good flexible work arrangement practices and the organizations to adopt policies to tackle conflicts that ensue from the interface of family or social pressures and work stress.

This paper therefore seeks to examine the emerging issues in the relationship between work flexibility and employee intention to stay. It shall examine the role of work shift, part time work, temporary contract and flexi time in enhancing employee retention. Flexible working relates, to an organizations working arrangement in terms of working time, working location and pattern of working (chartered institute of personnel and development). Flexible working arrangements like flexible part time, shift work, compressed work hours and job sharing are often used to help employees in balancing their family and work life (Lim & Teno, 2000) during 'core hours' which Shift work is a set of periods of working, often designed to provide 24-hour cover as a three-shift systems or sometimes operating as a two-shift system or a 'twilight shift' which lasts from say, 5 pm to 9 pm. Part-time work is where an employee's contracted hours are less than the standard full-time hours which can involve working only number of hours over any number of days. A temporary contract is employing extra staff on short-term contracts of varying length (weekly, monthly, and 6- monthly) (Cole, 2002). Flexi- time is whereby a full time employee schedules his/her time so that at the end of the day he/she should have covered the number of our required of him to cover.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Concept of Flexible Work Practices

Literature on Flexible work arrangement has evolved to a noticeable height of understanding prevailing concepts. Rau and Hyland (2002) define flexible work arrangement as an alternative to the standard working day. It usually comprehends to organizational initiatives which enhance employees' flexibility on the time and place where work has to be accomplished, and also various policies exerting influence on the number of hours worked. Economic, technological, social and family changes have encouraged the introduction of flexible working arrangements. The flexibility arrangements includes; flex-time, absence autonomy, compressed work weeks, reduced schedule, tele-work, extra vacation days, limited schedule of meetings (meetings cannot be scheduled too late at the end of the day), flexible holidays and keeping with the schedule (employees work the mandatory8 hours /day and do not extend their schedules longer).

Flexible work practices as stated by Hill, Märtinson, Ferris and Baker (2001) allow employees the freedom to work outside the standard work schedules. According Rau (2003) flexible work practices are different forms of working schedule that enables employees to work outside the normal work day. Some of various forms of flexible work practices include – telecommuting, compressed hours, shift, flexi-time and annualized hours (Kelly & Kalev, 2006). However, this study was interested in only four types of flexible work practices namely: telecommuting, compressed work week, job sharing and flexi-time.

According Tang and Dermid (2008) a survey carried out found that 87% of workforce preferred flexible work and this would take priority when looking for new employment. Organizations are more alert and seek to engage employees who are more creative. They therefore look for ways and means of attracting employees. According to Perrin (2001) flexible work schedules are important element of Organization strategies which should be geared towards retaining a motivated workforce. Flexible work practices have been practiced in both developing and developed countries and both employers and employees have benefitted from them.

### Dimensions of Flexible work practices

### Telecommuting

Noted dimensions of FWA are telecommuting (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002) in which the employee works at home or at a central place convenient to one's customers The employees make use of their telephones, email and fax to get in touch with their managers and other co-workers. Previous studies have found that organizations practicing telecommuting have the advantage of employees' retention (Grippaldi, 2002). According to Kurland and Bailey (1999) there are variety types of telecommuting. The commonly used are: home-based, satellite offices, neighborhood work centers, and mobile workers.

Home-base telecommuting is a method of telecommuting in which employees particularly work from their homes. Employees may opt to work for several days in a week. In order for this arrangement to succeed, employers provide employees with various office equipment and machines for instance, computers and fax machines (Wahab, 2007). On the other hand, Satellite offices are other ways of telecommuting whereby employees are stationed at locality convenient to them or to their customers. The offices are properly furnished and have various office equipment (Blair-Loy &Wharton, 2002). The other form of telecommuting is Neighbourhood work centre. It is more or less like satellite office. The disparity arises in that neighbourhood work centre accommodates employees from more than one company. The

organizations or companies may share the lease on buildings but maintain separate offices within the same building. Offices may be furnished by owner of the building or the renting firm (Pyoria, 2009). Mobile working is different from telecommuters because they work from one fixed location. Mobile workers are mostly commuting on the road. They may work from various locations for instance, hotel, planes or vehicle. This arrangement is common for salespersons, reporters or investment bankers (Sahay, Nicholson & Krishna, 2003).

According to Kossek and Lee (2008) organizations makes saving because of reduced absenteeism. Reduced absenteeism displays employee's loyalty to the organization which in turn has positive effects on organization performance. Workers operating from home have the advantage of combing work and family or personal responsibilities. This benefits the organization in that absenteeism reduces. In their study Karnowski and White (2002) established that office running costs reduces as a result of better utilization of resources management. Employees reduce their commute time as well (Major, Verive & Joice, 2008).

However, there are challenges associated with telecommuting. Madsen (2011) states that workers telecommuting may feel cut off from the organization set up. Employees are not able to interact with each other thereby losing the sense of belonging. Teamwork and employees' relations are also affected. There is the problem of inadequate resources and lack of technical support. Career development is affected as well (Khaifa & Davidson, 2000). The employer is not able to closely monitor the performance of those employees chosen to telecommute. This may have repercussion for those jobs which are measureable. According to Bailey and Kurland (2002) extensive studies have been carried out on telecommuting and its influence on performance however very little research has been done on examine decisions and design processes to give support to these programs. Other research indicated that managers/supervisors have problems in monitoring their employees (Kurland & Egan, 1999).

**Compressed Work Week**

Compressed work week is an agreement in which employees' works for more hours by prolonging the length of work days in a week (Sundo & Fujii, 2005). Employees may opt to work for four days in a week to get a day off. Poor (2010) ascertains that the commonly type of compressed hours is made up of ten hours per day making forty hours for 4 days. The employee could therefore be in a position to take a day off either Monday or Friday. According to Avery and Zabel (2001) North America workforce practices compressed work hours more than any other country. According to Bird (2010) compressed work hours increases production and job satisfaction improves as well as reducing absenteeism. In a study carried out in Texas 85% indicated it was easier to devote time to their families while 76% indicated that more time was devoted to family responsibilities (Travis, 2010).

Compressed work week has limitations. Work may be disrupted if most employees are absent due to emergencies since it would be difficult to provide for employees to alternate; Employees health may be affected as a result of working for long hours; Meetings and training of employees may also be affected due to different work schedules; Managers may also fail to provide supervision when employees work for extended hours.

**Job Sharing**

Bliss and Thornton (2010) sees job sharing enabling two employees to carry out the tasks of full-time job by alternating. Job sharing came into existence in mid 1960s. This was meant to provide solutions for those jobs which could not be divided into two part time jobs. Job sharing enables organization to maintain jobs in their full-time capacity and still get the benefit of employees'

expertise (Gliss, 2000). According to Branine (2003) job sharing option allows two employees to alternate work responsibilities. Each employee works on half time basis, for instance, one employee reporting in the morning and the other in the afternoon. However, the employees need to have complementary skills (Kossek & Lee, 2005).

Organizations practicing this form of flexibility have the advantage of sourcing employees' skills and experience in one job; enables tapping of employees' talents; learning from each other; reliefs employees while away; Job sharers are able to maintain their jobs on full time basis (Miller, 2007). The greatest problem arises in getting a suitable partner. If the job sharers are not compatible the arrangement may not work. The issue of overhead costs also arises due to trainings, employee compensations, office machines and equipment. Managers may be uncomfortable with this arrangement since it increases their supervisory roles. Job sharing is not very common in some sectors. According to Miller (2007) in a survey of counselor education forum only 11.1% and 15.8 % had ever participated in job sharing. Some of reasons for its unpopularity is associated with cost; managers difficult in supervision; difficult in recruiting and maintaining accountability.

## Concept of Employee Intention to Stay

Intention to stay is defined as employees' intention to stay in the present employment relationship with their current employer on long term basis (Johanim, Muhammad & Umar, 2012). On the other hand, turnover intention refers to as when individual thinks, plan and wish to leave the job (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand & Meglino (1979). However, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) in Ghazali (2010) described the definition of intention in detail where they refer to an intention approach as "a theory of reasoned action". According to this theory, a person's intention is a function of two basic determinants: one personal in nature and the other reflecting social influence (Ghazali, 2010). In terms of personal factor, it is the individual's positive and negative evaluation of performing the behaviour which can be termed as attitude towards the behavior and it also refers to the person's action to exhibit good or bad behavior (Ghazali, 2010). The second determinant of the intention is a personal perception of the social pressure to perform or not perform the behaviour in question (Ghazali, 2010).

Intention to stay mirrors the employee's level of commitment to his organization and the willingness to remain employed (Hewitt, 2004) in (Noraani, Aminah, Jegak & Khairuddin, 2010). It refers to as the propensity to leave, intent to quit, intent to stay, behavioral commitment and attachment (Halaby, 1986; Mueller, Iverson & Price, 1999). According to Noraani *et al.,* (2010) several studies have revealed that this concept whether it was called intent to stay or propensity to leave, it was clearly the most important determinant of turnover (Tett & Meyer, 1993). According to Steel and Ovalle (1984), Carsten and Spector (1987) and Iverson (1996) intention to stay had a strong negative relationship with turnover respectively. Dalessio, Silverman and Shuck (1986) have emphasized that more concern should be given on intention to stay rather than turnover, as whenever an employee exit, an organization has to incur the cost of recruiting and maintaining another employee.

Intention to stay has its base on social exchange theory. Social exchange theory was developed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959). The theory explained the reasons why individuals had personal relationships with others. The theory also specified the appropriate time when the relationships started and ended. It also emphasized on personal relationships, its costs and benefits (Noraani *et al.,* 2010). Blau, (1964) contend that; social exchange theory posited that good deeds should be reciprocated. Mossholder, Settoon and Henagan (2005) had pointed to

Social exchange theory which proposed that individuals who felt that they had received benefits from others would later feel an obligation and then compensate through effort and loyalty. Effort and loyalty usually could be seen from a shear commitment to their job and strong intention to remain with the present employer (Noraani *et al.,* 2010). Employee's loyalty clearly fit within the framework of social exchange theory since it focused on citizenship behaviour whereby employees stop looking for a new job elsewhere since they felt obligated to stay and repay the organization for support they had received (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Social exchange theory provides an avenue of transaction between sense of obligation that had led to the sense of feeling responsibility in compensating what had been given by another party which in turn would motivate positive psychological responses as suggested by several researchers (e.g. Bunderson, 2001; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler,2000) as cited in (Noraani *et al.*, (2010). Through this positive psychological responses employees would tend to be more committed and loyal to the organization and stop looking for a job elsewhere (Bunderson, 2001; Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000) in (Noraani *et al,* (2010).

Ans, Annelies and Dirk (2006) found employee's staying in decision has found some positive effects on the job content, social atmosphere, work-life balance, career development. Janet (2004) in her PhD thesis for retention of core employee in SMEs in Australia, argued that core employees retention higher if they get high human commitment: with human resource practice and organization factors such as selection (organization fit), remuneration and rewards. Training and career development, challenging work and opportunities and organization commitment such as leadership, team work, organizational culture and policies, work environment; Prateek, Babita, Garwal, Kshama, and Kshama (2011) said organization commitment (ownership, loyalty, attachment), career advancement (career needs, career path, career planning and management), quality of work life (fair compensation, working condition, job Involvement) has some direct and independent effects organizational commitment and intention to stay of core employee. Bhavna and Swati (2012) researched on the quality of working relationships, workplace leadership, having a say, clear values, being safe, the built environment, recruitment, pay and conditions, getting feedback, autonomy and uniqueness, a sense of ownership and identity, learning, passion, having fun, community connections, that can influence organizational commitment and intention to stay of core employee in the organization.

**Work Place Flexibility and Employee Intention to Stay**

Intention to stay can be defined as the intention of an employee to remain in their current employment relationship on a long term basis (Johanim, 2012). Reducing turnover is a challenge for many organisations. When employees leave the company, they also take away with them "knowledge capital, relationships and investments" (Ghosh *et al.,* 2013). Understanding turnover is not an exact science. Some employees who are not happy or dissatisfied may stay in their job, while others who are satisfied may leave (Price, 1977, cited in Chawla, 2005). However, since employee intention to leave is a very "strong predictor" of actual departure from the company (Vandenberg & Nelson, 1999, cited 13 in Van der Vaart et al., 2015), knowing the factors that influence an employee's intent to stay/leave can assist in reducing turnover.

In any case, intention to stay, whether it is in the form of lower turnover or increased organisational commitment, is positively associated with family-friendly programs such as FWA's (Ghosh, Satyawadi, Joshi & Shadman, 2013). Some other factors influence employee intent to stay. Sanjeevkumar and Wang (2012) examined HR practices and their influence on intent to stay, and discovered in addition to compensation, that organisational commitment,

work-life balance, supervisor support and career opportunities also had a positive effect. Perceived organisational support is the employee's belief that the company is genuinely concerned about their welfare, and is also positively related to intention to stay (Supangco, 2015). If organisations implement these programs that encourage work-family balance, employees may go beyond mere intention to stay, instead becoming corporate citizens that display "work-related behaviour that goes above and beyond that dictated by organisational policy and one's job description (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

## CONCLUSION

Flexible work schedules are important element of Organization strategies which should be geared towards retaining a motivated workforce. Flexible work practices have been practiced in both developing and developed countries and both employers and employees have benefitted from them (Perrin (2001). Flexible work arrangements are connected to a number of positive outcomes for employees who access them including better mental health and reductions in stress, burnout, turnover and absenteeism and increases in retention, loyalty, job satisfaction, innovation, creativity and productivity (Galinsky, Bond, Sakai, Kim & Giuntoli, 2008).

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