ABSTRACT
Work-life balance is the buzz phrase of the 21st century. By taking a flexible approach to work, one can spend more time with family. That elusive 'my-time' or simply work at a time that suits one, rather than 9 to 5 timings imposed by many organizations are changing eventually. Employees search employers that offer flexible solutions as to lead a happy life. Organizations move into the dynamic changing environment by introducing flexible working solutions. Hill defines flexible working solutions as the degree to which workers are able to make choices to arrange core aspects of their professional lives, particularly regarding where, when, and for how long work is to be performed. This conceptual study gives a detailed structure of flexible working, its need for the employers and employees, types, barriers in implementing a flexible solution and ends with the impact of flexible working to complete a balance day.

Keywords: Flexible Working; Impact; Work-Life Balance

INTRODUCTION
Flexible Working- An Overview
From a theoretical outlook, flexibility is a highly “amorphous” term (Pollert, 1991; 3), and does not have a straightforward definition yet. It has been utilized as an umbrella-term including a broad range of practices, work arrangements and workforce organization systems (Kelliher and Anderson, 2008; 420) Flexible work solutions include any work pattern that alters the hours, days, schedule or location of work on either a permanent or ad-hoc basis. There lies a strong belief that it is beneficial to both the organization and the employees (Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2009). Flexible policies are most welcomed by both employees and employers for the following reasons Reducing overall hours worked, Changing work schedule, Changing place of work, Stopping work for an extended period and the most important is Ad-hoc flexibility. It satisfies the employer by providing reduced absenteeism and high productivity and satisfies the employee for balancing work-life.

OBJECTIVES
1. To identify the need for flexible-working.
2. To examine benefits of flexible working.
3. To enumerate the impact of flexible working on Work-life balance
LITERATURE REVIEW

A recent survey states that employers have begun to provide more of flexible working conditions and this will increase markedly in the y+ears to come. This trend has been fuelled by growing concern over work-life balance (Bailyn et al, 2001), the desire to be seen as an ‘employer of choice’ (Rau and Hyland, 2002). It could be argued that the introduction of flexible working practices is likely to contribute to job quality, since they offer employees some degree of choice over where and when they do their work, normally designed to assist them achieve a better work-life balance. In a meta-analysis carried out by Baltes et al (1999), flexi-time and compressed working were found overall to have a positive effect on job satisfaction. The lack of social interaction has been found in some studies to lead to feelings of isolation and to impact negatively on job satisfaction (Igbaria and Guimaraes, 1999), whereas in others, job satisfaction has been found to be higher for remote workers (Baruch,2000).

If flexible working offers choices to employees which help them achieve a more satisfactory work-life balance, one might expect it to have the effect of reducing stress levels. Cooper and Kurland (2002) found that remote workers had concerns over the lack of development opportunities offered to them, including informal learning and mentoring from colleagues. But it should be noted that employees having the ability to handle work alone increases their self-confidence. In terms of progression, Frank and Lowe (2003) found that flexible workers were perceived to have lower long-term career potential, although in contrast, McCloskey and Igbaria (2003) found no direct or indirect effect on career prospects.

While for decades the flexibility debate was dominated by employer concerns, rather than by workforce needs (Blyton, 1992), growing recent research has been looking at these practices from the perspective of the employee (Russell et al., 2009; Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa, 2008; Grzywacz et al., 2008). In this sense flexibility is conceptualized as “the degree to which workers are able to make choices to arrange core aspects of their professional lives, particularly regarding where, when, and for how long work is performed” (Hill et al., 2008a; 151). Fleetwood (2007; 387) states that “some flexible working practices are employee friendly and sought by employees whereas other practices are employer friendly sought by employers, primarily to pursue profit”.

Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999) determined that flexi-time was associated with employee productivity, job satisfaction, satisfaction with work schedule, and employee absenteeism, with the largest effect found for absenteeism. The authors also found that compressed work-week schedules related positively to job satisfaction and satisfaction with work schedule. DeNisi & Griffin, 2001 cites that Flextime programs enable employees to exercise a decision regarding the time of day they will arrive at and leave from the workplace.

Need For Flexible Working

Organizations Perspective of Accepting Flexible Working

In this context, flexibility is a practice or a set of practices that allow organizations to adapt to changes in their environment, with only minor regard to workers (Dastmalchian and Blyton, 2001, 1). Flexibility is one of the keys to success and survival in a changing, competitive and technologically challenging environment. Most of the organizations are aware of the benefits of flexible working conditions. The top reasons why employers accept flexi-time is:

- Ageing workforce
- Skills shortage
- Female participation
- Generational divide
- Competition for talent.
Mardi Deller-Pugh of Ericsson cites that “We believe flexible working is an employee privilege. As long as employee makes a valuable and productive contribution, then we as an organization will support them. It’s a partnership built on trust and shared responsibilities.” Also Christine Shewry of IAG says that flexible work arrangements have been effectively implemented in our business and there is a high employee engagement score.

**Individual Perspective of Accepting Flexible Working**

Employees who are in the need of leading a balance life, they urge for creative or flexible arrangements from the employer. The entry of flexi-time serves to be an apt solution for the employees to balance their work-life. The reasons why employees accept flexi-time is:

- Combining work & study
- Taking care of elderly parents.
- Being an active parent and fulfilling family requirements.
- Participating in community activities and volunteer work.
- General pursuit of happiness.

A survey completed in UK in 2005 by Charter institute Of Personnel & Development (CIPD) interviewed over 550 human resource professionals to understand the motive for introducing flexible work practices. It resulted that 47% agrees that flexible working was introduced to retain staff and 43% agrees to meet employee needs.

**Benefits of Flexible Working**

Employers and employees can equally benefit from flexibility and see it as an organizational must to increase performance and innovation (Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2009). Judith Pettit of Vic Roads says that the benefits of flexible work solutions include retention, improved productivity, full engagement, demonstrating employer of choice values and creating a contemporary workforce and environment. Again to look from both perspectives the benefits vary but still both employer and employees are benefited.

**Employer Benefits**

- Access to great skills and expertise
- Ability to manage 24/7 workforce
- Increased employee retention and reduction
- Increased performance and productivity
- Ability to manage peak workload
- Increased motivation
- Improved competitiveness
- Reduced sickness and absenteeism

**Employee Benefits**

- Increased sense of recognition and value
- Increased workplace cooperation, motivation and commitment.
- Reduced travel costs
- Ability to maintain career progression.
Categories of Flexible Work Solutions

Flexible working arrangements have been identified as one of the effective tools in balancing work and life (Evans 2001; Glass and Estes, 1997; Dex and Smith, 2002). Flexible working solutions vary according to organization values and culture. One can classify flexible working into 5 categories.

Flexible Hours: An employee is expected to work 40 hours per week. With the help of flexible hours one can complete this 40 hours according to employee wish. Also one has to keep in mind to finish the roles and work within the deadline. Flexi-time is the most viable solution used by most of the organizations today. It is also heart welcomed by the employees as they can balance their work and life effectively. Another option which is widely used in most organizations is rostered days off where the employee works additional hours. Summer time hours or compressed work week are the most preferred option in Western countries as they can work long hours from Monday to Friday morning and the rest half of the day is taken as weekend off.

Flexible Days: An employee works either 5 or 6 days in a week. Job-sharing is the most preferred solution as 2 persons can plan their roles and responsibilities among them in order to complete the task. This option saves more time and also enhances team work and productivity. Next option would be permanent part-time working as it is fixed job timing for few hours and the rest of the day can be spent fruitfully. Other options would be term-time working and annualized hours which only few organizations support.

Flexible Leave: Leaves are the major concern today to maintain the equilibrium of work and life. Maternity is one leave which prevails for quite a long time and is being accepted by organizations too. But only few organizations accept parental leave where a mother or a father is allowed to take leaves for the concern of their children may be for a school function or to take the child to a doctor. The next one would be the career leaves which is prevalent among western countries as they perceive career breaks would enhance the skill of employees that the growth is seen within organization too. Other options include purchased leaves, leave on half pay, community service leaves etc.

Flexi Office: As the name states office-the work environment itself is flexible. The universal 2 options would be Telecommuting and home working. Telecommuting involves the use of personal computers, networks, and other communications to do work in any place rather than the traditional workplace (Hartley, 2002). Home working is a form of telecommuting but mostly telecommuting places would be public places like library, hotels, airport etc. Work from home is the best option for many employees as they can do their work in a relaxed manner.
Ad-hoc Flexibility: This is what is needed in today’s busy schedule to balance work-life. It is like taking a couple of hours to go to the dentist, attend an exam or take your parents to the doctor etc.

Barriers to Flexible Working

Though there are ample benefits for flexible working still it has few barriers too. Some of them are listed below:

**Cultural Barriers**

- Flexible workers are less committed to the organization than full time workers.
- Flexible working is an employee perk.
- Working flexibility will affect career advancement opportunities.
- Managers will lose control.

**Historical Barriers**

- Flexible working will not suit the business and way of working
- Customers don’t want the organizations to change the way of work
- Flexi work arrangements have not worked in the past so organizations regret to try
- Creating a flexible environment is too hard and is not worth it.
- The company has all polices in place but nothing happens in practice.
- Flexi solutions are only available for non-managerial admin positions.

**Myths**

- Implementation cost is high.
- Requires increased supervision.
- Productivity of a flexi worker is not as good as traditional worker.
- Flexi working is only solutions for working mothers.
- Once implemented everyone will want to work flexibly.
- Flexible Working is not possible while working in client facing roles.

**Impact of Flexible Working on WLB**

For the growing literature on the relationship between work and personal life, flexibility is contemplated as a ladder towards balance and employee autonomy (Hill et al., 2008a). Work life balance seems to be a concern with employees having dependent children and elderly and sick parents. Flexi-time or ad-hoc flexibility will really help these employees to effectively maintain a fair ratio on both sides. Employees who work flexibly often have a greater sense of responsibility, ownership and control of their working life. The next concern would be on career progression. If a manager helps an employee to balance their work and home life this can be rewarded by increased loyalty and commitment. An employee may focus on their work and to develop their career. Another concern is the employee can work in a relaxed manner which will certainly reduce conflicts at both work and at home. This will intensely reduce the stress level of the employees. With varied options available in flexible-working one can plan and schedule each task right from morning till night keeping in mind to accommodate and finish all tasks within the day. For instance, apart from going to office one has to leave child at school, going to bank, taking a parent to the doctor, school meetings, family functions etc can be properly handled with the aid of flexible working. Taking Job sharing into consideration, the relationship among peers increases day by day. This enhances responsibility of the employees at
home in meeting the adequate requirements and at work in doing the task effectively. As studies conclude flexible working has a positive impact on work-life equilibrium.

CONCLUSION

Flexi working is a partnership between managers and employees. Both needs to be equally committed and responsible for making such arrangements a success. Other factors that organizations and employees need to understand that affect their ability to create a flexible work environment and culture would be

- Nature Of Business
- External Forces
- Culture and Management Ethos
- Business Priorities

One should keep “3 things: in mind in-order to identify a flexible work solution, say whether it’s evitable for the employer or the employee.

1. Identify flexible working category.
2. Identify flexible work solution that suits the organization.
3. Identify the impact on role of the employee.

Though there are many barriers for organizations to accept a flexible solution, it’s all just an eye-wash. Most employees are expecting their employers to introduce flexible solutions. Not anyone can opt for a flexible solution. One should not keenly whether the option is useful for them to enhance productivity or to spend some time for personal life. Employees need to understand the real benefit of using flexible solution. Most of the employees have a perception that peers are using the benefit so let us also use it. One should not generally use the solution instead the real benefit should be utilized. This lies only in the hands of the employee who knows what to do and when to do, in short the one who plans his work-life will best utilize it. This study is concluded with the research finding of Tausig and Fenwick who in the year 2001 stated that it is not the flexible schedule itself that helps employees to unbind their time, but rather it is the perceived control over their own work schedule that enhances a sense of balance.

REFERENCE


