



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW,
GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNICATION
(IJLGC)
www.ijlgc.com



A STUDY ON FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS AT KELANTAN STATE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 18.04.2024

Revised date: 13.05.2024

Accepted date: 15.06.2024

Published date: 30.06.2024

To cite this document:

Shafei, N. A., Salleh, N. J., & Abidin, N. Z. Z. (2024). A Study on Flexible Work Arrangements at Kelantan State Administrative Office. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication*, 9 (36), 72-82.

DOI: 10.35631/IJLGC.936006

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Abstract:

The modern workplace increasingly values flexible working arrangements (FWA) as a vital component, particularly in response to global events like pandemics, increasing workloads and evolving organizational dynamics. Moreover, technological advancements and a re-orientation of traditional management frameworks toward adaptability further propel this paradigm shift. Additionally, numerous international bodies and agencies have lauded this transition. While the evolving work culture acknowledges the benefits of flexibility for certain employee groups, its impact on productivity remains varied. While governments worldwide recognize the importance of FWA, its full integration into public sectors remains a gradual process and is subject to governmental decisions. A complete and comprehensive implementation of FWA has yet to be realized. This paper investigates the relationship between FWA and various factors influencing its adoption within public sector organizations. By applying SPSS methods in this study, findings have revealed a positive correlation between FWA and organizational dynamics, highlighting the need for public sector entities to prioritize offering diverse FWA options to their employees. This emphasizes the importance of accommodating changing work patterns and promoting employee well-being in today's dynamic work environments.

Keywords:

Flexible Work Arrangement, Public Organization, Work Dynamics

Introduction

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Flexible working arrangements (FWA) have emerged as a new trend in response to the increasing participation of women and caregivers in the workforce, with accessibility now extended to all employees (Lewis et al., 2007). This sentiment is supported by Costa et al. (2006), who attribute the introduction of FWA to the recognition of the detrimental impacts of rising workloads on employees' health and familial responsibilities. The imperative to balance heightened work intensity with familial and social obligations has prompted the adoption of FWA to mitigate the adverse effects of work on employee health, well-being, and social lives (Lewis et al., 2007).

Furthermore, global entities such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the European Union (EU), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have endorsed flexible working arrangements (FWA) as a means to achieve a successful work-life balance among the workforce (Zeytinoglu et al., 2009). Additionally, Croucher and Rizov (2015) have observed that FWA not only support the workplace but also enhances economic and social outcomes for communities. However, from the employers' perspective, flexible working arrangements can be categorized into two groups: internal and external arrangements. The utilization of external FWA is driven by the need to manage high and low periods of demand, ensuring cost efficiencies and job security (Anagnostopoulos & Siebert, 2015). Kleinknecht et al. (2006) highlighted the importance of external FWA in filling temporary vacancies until permanent or regular employees are hired, covering for full-time employees on leave, or for short-term projects. On the other hand, internal FWA enables employers to address employees' needs to balance work, health, and family responsibilities. Consequently, internal FWA is more accessible to larger organizations seeking quality human capital. However, small organizations may have limited capacity to offer FWA to employees initially but may eventually do so to enhance their competitive positions.

A global survey conducted in 2011, encompassing over 7,700 businesses across 39 countries, revealed that Finland had the highest percentage of companies offering flexible working arrangements (FWA) at 92%. Following closely were Sweden (86%), Australia and Thailand (85%), New Zealand (84%), and The Netherlands (82%). Conversely, Japan ranked the lowest with only 18% of companies offering FWA, followed by Greece (26%), Armenia (35%), and Malaysia (39%). In contrast, a report by the World Bank in 2021 indicated that 136 countries had implemented home-based work for public sector employees in response to the immediate challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

This research, inspired by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the adoption of flexible working arrangements (FWA) in various Asian countries such as Japan, Thailand, Taiwan, India, and Singapore, despite not having as high a prevalence of FWA as in developed countries, aims to investigate the practice of FWA based on employee's perspective. The implementation of flexible working hour schedules, also known as Staggered Working Hours (SWH), began in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on May 1st, 1998. This initiative aligns with the administrative framework aimed at serving the public more efficiently. The Malaysian government subsequently extended this flexibility to all federal government agencies, aiming to enhance administration and extend benefits to the public (Ramakrishnan & Arokiasamy, 2019). This study contributes to the implementation of FWA within the government, focusing specifically on the Kelantan State Administrative Office. Our objective is to explore the emerging practice of flexible working arrangements within the public sector, specifically the state government. To support this exploration, we draw upon the findings of

Atkinson and Hall (2011), who investigated a segment of the hospital unit (NHS Acute Trust) and emphasized the importance of considering employee attitudes and acceptance when implementing flexible working arrangements. Thus, our study examines employees' attitudes towards flexible working arrangements.

The research investigates six main objectives. These are mentioned below.

RO1: To know the extent of flexible working arrangements among employees in SUK Kelantan

RO2: To identify the relationship between motivation and FWA among employees in SUK Kelantan

RO3: To examine the relationship between morale and FWA among employees in SUK Kelantan

RO4: To investigate the relationship between stress level and FWA among employees in SUK Kelantan

RO5: To examine the relationship between work-life balance and FWA among employees in SUK Kelantan

RO6: To analyse the most influential factors of FWA among employees in SUK Kelantan

Literature Review

This section offers a concise literature review concerning flexible working arrangements (FWA). Additionally, it outlines the advantages of FWA as identified in the literature and underscores the theoretical underpinnings supporting FWA.

Concept of Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA)

Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA) encompass a variety of non-standard working arrangements that provide employees with options and flexibility in how they work. While there is no single definition of FWA, they can generally be categorized into three main categories:

- **Scheduling of hours worked:** This includes alternative work schedules such as flextime (where employees have flexibility in choosing their start and end times within a defined range) and compressed workweeks (where employees work longer hours on fewer days), as well as arrangements regarding shift and break schedules.
- **Flexibility in the number of hours worked:** This involves options such as part-time work (where employees work fewer hours than full-time employees) and job-sharing (where two or more employees share the responsibilities of a single full-time position).
- **Flexibility in the place of work:** This category encompasses options such as working from home, teleworking (working remotely using technology), or working at a satellite location away from the main office.

In essence, flexible working arrangements deviate from the standard work arrangements of a "9 to 5" workday, the traditional workweek, or the conventional workplace setup. They provide employees with the flexibility to adapt their work schedules and locations to better suit their individual needs and circumstances.

Flextime has been described by human resource managers as one of the earliest and essential introductions for employees. The concept was first introduced in 1967 for 3000 white-collar workers in administration and Research and Development at the main headquarters near Munich, Germany, in line with the reduction of working hours among employees. According to Abis and Barech (2017), employees were leaving early to avoid traffic jams, which

negatively impacted their morale and productivity. The practice of flexible working hours increased to two thousand by 1971. European countries also witnessed the exercise of Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA) by 1975, with more than 30 per cent of workers in Switzerland working under the new work system (Subramaniam et. al., 2010). Additionally, the United States of America established flexible working hours by 1972, starting with Hewlett Packard (Bernard, 1979 as cited by Subramaniam et. al, 2010).

Part-time employment emerged as another form of Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA) that gained popularity in Europe and America during the mid-1970s. Olmsted and Smith (1994) identified three reasons for the rise of part-time employment. Firstly, changes in workforce demographics, including more women entering the workforce. Secondly, the transition from a production-based economy to a services-based economy. And thirdly, the growing desire among workers for more personal time. Meanwhile, telecommuting, or working from home or alternate workspace options, experienced significant growth from 1992 to 1994, fueled by technological advancements and the increased affordability of such technology. Additionally, job-sharing involves two or sometimes three individuals splitting or sharing one job. Moreover, compressed workweeks are prevalent in some companies, often referred to as "summer hours" (Crosby et. al., 2008).

According to Davidescu et al. (2020), flexible working arrangements offer employees a balanced life between their professional and personal responsibilities, leading to increased job satisfaction, higher performance, and overall organizational improvement. The flexibility provided by these arrangements allows employees to work from anywhere with an internet connection, leveraging digital advancements and improved technology. This enables employees to better balance their lives and enhance their performance within the organization. The unprecedented disruption caused by the pandemic resulted in a significant number of employees being compelled to work remotely, making remote work the new norm (Buheji & Buheji, 2020). In response, organizations worldwide introduced flexible work arrangements such as teleworking, distance learning, reducing and avoiding congestion, and closing non-essential facilities and services (WHO, 2020). Consequently, organizations have granted their employees the flexibility to work remotely from home.

The demand for a more flexible working environment emerged even before the onset of the pandemic, driven by employees seeking a renewed focus on their lives. Mullen O'Keefe (2020) argued that flexibility has brought about significant changes in management practices across workplaces. However, the impact of Covid-19 on the labor market varies considerably from country to country. For example, employees in Germany benefit from a well-established short-term work schedule (Davidescu et al., 2020). The global trend of increasing women's participation in the workforce has also been observed in Malaysia. As more women enter the workforce, they face the challenge of balancing their roles as wives, family managers, and career women. Balancing work and family life is particularly challenging for women. In this context, Ballantine et al. (2022) found that senior managers in the public sector perceived female employees as less committed to the organization, leading to a sense of exclusion from the team.

The question arises: Can flexible working arrangements (FWA) enhance work performance and safeguard employee well-being? While FWA offers benefits such as improved work-life balance, it can also raise concerns regarding career progression, relationships with colleagues,

and work performance (Subramaniam et. al., 2010). In Malaysia and other Asian countries, there is a trend for married women to exit the workforce upon marriage or childbirth (Kaur, 2004). As a result, female employees are particularly interested in FWA. While FWA can facilitate a better work-life balance for female employees, they still face the challenge of managing multiple roles. Therefore, while FWA can contribute to work-life balance, organizations must consider its potential impact on career progression, relationships within the workplace, and overall work performance, particularly for female employees balancing work and family responsibilities.

The Implementation Of Flexi Work Hours In Government Sectors Before And During The Pandemic Of COVID-19

The implementation of flexible working arrangements within the framework of the Canada Labour Code exemplifies a proactive approach to safeguarding the rights and well-being of employees within federally regulated workplaces. By delineating rights and protections, such as enhanced leave entitlements and the ability to substitute general holidays, the Code underscores the nation's commitment to fostering a conducive work environment that prioritizes work-life balance. These provisions serve as instrumental mechanisms in empowering employees to effectively manage their personal and professional commitments, thereby promoting both individual welfare and organizational productivity.

The United Kingdom's government mandates that employees possess a legal entitlement to request flexible working arrangements, colloquially termed as, 'making a statutory application.' However, eligibility hinges upon a prerequisite of at least 26 weeks of continuous employment with the same employer. This requirement underscores the government's aim to ensure a certain level of commitment before extending flexible work privileges. Within the UK public sectors, diverse flexible working options are available to accommodate varying needs and preferences. These encompass job sharing, remote work, part-time employment, compressed hours, flexitime arrangements, annualised hours, staggered work schedules, and phased retirement. This comprehensive range of alternatives reflects the government's commitment to fostering a supportive and adaptable work environment that promotes employee satisfaction and productivity.

The Malaysian government has instituted flexible working hours for federal agencies since 1998, primarily through the introduction of Staggered Working Hours or Waktu Bekerja Berperingkat (WBB). This initiative, as outlined in Service Circular 05/2019 by the Public Service Department (PSD), grants civil servants in select states the opportunity to adopt flexible work schedules. Under this directive, department heads are responsible for ensuring compliance with the flexible working hours program requirements among their respective employees. This entails the completion of forms detailing clock-in times based on gender and rank, as well as any encountered challenges in program implementation. It's important to note that while this flexibility is extended to civil servants in federal agencies, certain entities such as statutory bodies, local councils, government schools, public healthcare facilities, and state government agencies are exempt from the implementation of Flexi Working Hours. This nuanced approach underscores the government's commitment to tailoring policies to suit the specific needs and operational contexts of different sectors within the public service landscape.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in 2020, catalyzed a significant shift in work arrangements across various sectors, giving rise to the concept of hybrid work. The

widespread impact of the pandemic prompted industries and public agencies at both federal and state levels to explore alternative modes of operation for their employees. As COVID-19 cases surged, many industries faced temporary closures, necessitates a rapid adaptation to remote work practices. Malaysia, according to a study by IPSOS Malaysia, experienced a notable increase in remote work compared to the global average, with a substantial portion of the workforce transitioning to work-from-home arrangements. However, this transition was not without challenges, as Malaysians reported the highest levels of anxiety among 28 surveyed countries. In response to these unprecedented circumstances, Malaysia implemented flexible working arrangements, which remained in place until early 2022. The recent transition to the endemic phase has permitted a gradual return to office-based work. Nonetheless, concerns persist regarding the preparedness of employees for this new directive, as highlighted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2020. This dynamic evolution underscores the resilience and adaptability of Malaysia's workforce in navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic. Moving forward, fostering effective communication, providing adequate support, and implementing robust health and safety measures will be paramount in facilitating a smooth transition to hybrid work models and ensuring the well-being of employees in the post-pandemic landscape.

Methodology

This paper investigates the impacts of flexible working arrangements in the State Administrative Office or Pejabat Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Kelantan (SUK). As indicated by Lavrakas (2008), the response rate is a mathematical formula that is calculated by survey researchers, and it is used as a tool to understand the degree of success in obtaining completed interviews from a sample. Of 650 employees in Pejabat Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Kelantan (SUK), 242 were selected. These sample comes from several departments which are; State Economic Planning Unit, Human Resource Department, Information Technology (IT) Management Division, Government Meeting Council Division, Management Services Division, Internal Audit Unit, Local Government Division, Housing Division Coordination and Special Programs Division, Infrastructure Corridor Division and Geospatial Information System. The response rate garnered 70% of the total electronic questionnaire distribution. The research applied SPSS methods in analysing data by investigating univariate, bivariate and multivariate data.

Findings

In order to measure the research objectives, the researchers used three analysis: descriptive analysis, the Pearson correlation coefficient and the multiple regression analysis. Four variables were tested by using SPSS analysis to determine whether there is a relationship between these factors with flexible working arrangements.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1. Frequency Table for FWA

No	Question	Mean
1	My organization provides FWAs to employees	4.68
2	I feel my organization manage to practice flexible working arrangements	4.49
3	My organization follow rules for the flexible working arrangements that provided by the state government	4.58
4	The employees prefer FWAs	4.71
5	I feel that the FWAs give positive impacts to my job performance	4.65
6	My supervisor is really concern towards employees' flexibility	4.53

The results showed that all the mean values for the items have a high degree, and it can be observed that the employees at the SUK prefer flexible working arrangements

Pearson Correlation Coefficient

The next part of the findings was testing the relationship between four independent variables to the FWA. The relationship was tested using Pearson Correlation Coefficient as shown in the table below.

Table 2. Result on the Relationship between Variables

No	The Relationship	Pearson Correlation
1	Motivation → Flexible Working Arrangements	.802**
2	Morale → Flexible Working Arrangement	.507**
3	Stress level → Flexible Working Arrangements	.662**
4	Work-life Balance → Flexible Working Arrangements	.700**

Based on the result of the relationship between the four variables that are; motivation, morale, stress level and work-life balance with flexible working arrangements (FWA), the findings showed that each of the variables has a high correlation with FWA. This proved that FWA is highly recommended and welcomed by the employees in SUK Kelantan. The result also highlighted that motivation achieved the highest score in the relationship with FWA. Other factors also showed that the relationship is above 0.5.

Multiple Regression Analysis

The last part of the study is to test on the most influential factor that impacted flexible working arrangements (FWA). To realize this objective, multiple regression is used, and the result is as below.

Table 3: Result of the Most Influential Factor

Variable	Standardized Beta	t-value	p-value
Motivation	.617	8.430	.000
Morale	.160	3.213	.002
Stress Level	-.064	-.789	.431
Work-life Balance	.226	2.943	.004

The analysis on the t-value showed that motivation is the most influential factor in flexible working arrangements. On top of that, morale and work-life balance also gain high t-value. However, stress level is not achieved high influence in FWA, nevertheless, its contribution to the FWA is still important.

Discussion

The primary aim of this paper is to investigate the influence of four key variables—motivation, morale, stress level, and work-life balance—on the adoption of flexible working arrangements (FWA) among employees in the State Administrative Office of Kelantan. The evaluation of the findings is conducted in alignment with the research objectives of this study. The results indicate a favorable disposition towards FWA among employees at the State Administrative Office of Kelantan (SUK), with FWA markedly differing from standard work arrangements. Comparatively, in the Korean labor market environment, approximately 8.4% of wage employees utilize flexible working conditions, as reported by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2018). Conversely, countries like the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have extended flexible working arrangements to all employees to mitigate discrimination against specific job groups. However, despite the recognized benefits, SUK Kelantan has not fully implemented FWA due to organizational constraints and adherence to regulations, notably the state service circular number 9 of 2020 governing Kelantan civil servants. This highlights the discrepancy between the potential advantages of FWA and the practical implementation within SUK Kelantan, underscoring the need for further exploration and potential policy adjustments to optimize the adoption and effectiveness of FWA in this context.

The assertions made by Chaudhary and Sharma (2012) regarding the correlation between employee motivation and task satisfaction resonate with the findings of Rahman et al. (2013), who suggest that the implementation of flexible working arrangements (FWA) can indeed elevate staff motivation levels. This relationship is pivotal, as motivated employees typically exhibit enhanced job performance, a factor crucial for improving service delivery, especially within public organizations like SUK (Leeuw, 1996). Furthermore, Vales (2006) underscores the importance of factors that bolster employee morale, positing that such enhancements can lead to heightened productivity. Flexible working arrangements have been identified as a catalyst for improving morale and commitment among employees, as noted by Richman et al. (2011), who also emphasize the positive impact of flexibility on employee health and well-being. The empirical evidence provided by Corporate Voices and WFD, based on a study of businesses that introduced flexibility for their hourly and non-exempt employees, offers compelling support for the notion that employee engagement significantly increases—by as much as 55%—when employees have access to the flexibility they need. This underscores the pivotal role of FWA in fostering a conducive work environment conducive to employee satisfaction, commitment, and ultimately, organizational success.

The assertion that flexible working arrangements (FWA) contribute to a stress-free environment finds support in research conducted by the American University in the Emirates and other universities in Dubai, as highlighted by Solanki (2013). This study suggests that FWA can lead to a reduction in stress levels among employees, consequently fostering higher levels of dedication towards their work. Moreover, scholars such as Kelliher and Anderson (2010) and Wadhawan (2019) have emphasized the positive impact of FWA on employee health and well-being, particularly in terms of mental health. The flexibility afforded by FWA

enables employees to better manage their work-life balance, resulting in reduced stress and improved overall mental well-being. Overall, these findings underscore the significant role that FWA can play in promoting a healthier and more supportive work environment, ultimately leading to enhanced employee satisfaction and performance.

The study's findings underscore the pivotal role of flexible working arrangements (FWA) in fostering work-life balance, a notion supported by Wadhawan (2019) and Ramakrishnan and Arokiasamy (2019), who assert that FWA enables employees to achieve equilibrium between their professional and personal lives. This balance is facilitated by the usability of flexible work schedules, which encompass three dimensions: work interference with personal life, personal life interference with work, and the enhancement of work or personal life.

The benefits of flexibility in work extend to both organizations and employees. Abis and Barech (2017) highlight that flexible work arrangements imbue employees with greater enthusiasm and energy to fulfill their responsibilities. Motivation emerges as a key factor influencing the adoption of FWA, with Kalpana (2013) noting a positive association between motivation, work flexibility, and overall satisfaction with the organization, work tasks, and the balance between work and personal life. Ahmad et al. (2014) underscore the complexity of work-family issues in the Malaysian context, emphasizing the need for further research and development in this area. This sentiment aligns with the Self-determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes intrinsic motivation as a driving force behind optimal performance. Mehmood et al. (2022) provide further support for this perspective, revealing a harmonious relationship between work passion and positive work outcomes. Collectively, these insights underscore the multifaceted benefits of FWA in promoting employee well-being, satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness, thereby highlighting the importance of continued exploration and implementation of flexible work policies.

These questions raise important considerations regarding the potential impact of flexible working arrangements (FWA) on job performance and integrity within the public sector. While FWA may be favored by employees, it's essential to assess whether it can serve as a significant driver for enhancing job performance in this context. Additionally, the question of whether FWA can contribute to increasing integrity among public sector employees is crucial for ensuring good governance and moral conduct within organizations. The assertion by Wan Ahmad Fauzi (2020) regarding the symbiotic relationship between good governance and morality highlights the importance of aligning organizational practices with ethical principles. However, the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have added complexity to the pursuit of these ideals, underscoring the need for robust governance frameworks. The concept of human governance, as proposed by Noraina et al. (2020), emphasizes the role of individual values, including religious beliefs, in guiding behavior within organizations. Incorporating such values into administrative practices can potentially mitigate morality issues and enhance integrity among public sector employees. In this context, the implementation of FWA can be viewed as one aspect of a broader strategy to promote human governance and uphold organizational values. By providing employees with flexibility and autonomy, organizations demonstrate their commitment to employee well-being and work-life balance, which can positively influence job satisfaction, performance, and integrity. Ultimately, the efforts to address challenges such as the pandemic and morality crisis should be comprehensive and multifaceted, encompassing not only policy measures like FWA but also initiatives to nurture a culture of integrity and ethical behavior within the public sector. Only through a holistic

approach can organizations effectively navigate these challenges and uphold the principles of good governance and morality.

Conclusion

The paper aims to delve into the factors influencing the adoption of flexible working arrangements (FWA) within public sectors. A survey conducted by a global accounting organization highlighted variations in FWA adoption rates across countries, with Finland leading at 92% and Japan at the lowest scale of 18%, while Malaysia stands at 39% (Walter, 2011). This indicates that FWA practices in Malaysia are still in the developing phase and are not uniformly implemented across the country. Given the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, government employees have had the opportunity to experience FWA, underscoring its relevance in addressing the current global uncertainties. The study suggests that FWA in public sectors is pertinent and warrants examination by the Malaysian government. There is a need for improved flexible working policies that encompass not only flexible work locations but also flexible work hours. Furthermore, there is a gap in research regarding the effectiveness of FWA on job performance in the public sector. While FWA is favored by employees in the State Administrative Office of Kelantan (SUK Kelantan), further studies are needed to explore its impact on job performance conclusively. In light of the positive perception of FWA among employees, the government should give greater attention to FWA implementation. This includes gathering data on FWA preferences and effectively incorporating FWA into public sector policies and practices. By doing so, the government can better meet the needs of its employees and potentially enhance organizational performance.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express gratitude and acknowledgement to all participants/respondents for their time and energy spent on this research.

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