

A Study on necessity of flexible working for managing the knowledge based workforce

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ABSTRACT

The way to do work is changing across all sectors. It is not only in IT or IT enabled sector but also in manufacturing, banking, health services, financial services etc. Work in the 21st century is more about what you do not from where you do. It is more result oriented. According to (Lake, 2013), Flexible working can be termed as smart working, new way of working, agile working which delivers more efficiency and effectiveness. Similarly with the advent of knowledge based economy the definition of ideal employee has changed. According to (Bunud & Tumolo, 2004) there is a paradigm shift in the definition of ideal employee for the present workforce. The new ideal employee is the multidimensional individual who is effective in dual – focus mode (managing work and personal life simultaneously) can deliver results collaboratively, can innovate and challenge, works well in diverse employment arrangements, and possesses meta-competencies that leverage technical skills: a whole person who can bring heart, mind, and hands to work. So this paper attempts to find out the potential of flexible working / smart working to manage the new workforce. The aim of this article is to study about flexible working, its significance, and its benefits. The focus on this article are the drivers of flexible working like technology, sustainability, business, demographic change, work life balance and policies. The study is totally based on secondary data collected from different sources. Results discusses about the present state of flexible working and the untapped potential of flexible working. Paper is concluded with the hope that more and more organisation will understand the smart flexible way of working.

Keywords : Flexible working, new ideal employee, sustainability, demographic change, work-life balance.

I. Introduction:

In April 2003 employees in the UK were first given the right to request flexible working. In the modern work environment, the introduction of these new rights served to illustrate that traditional working patterns could no longer be sustained by employers and that there was a need to address the work/life balance. Organisations – already facing skills shortages – would find recruitment and indeed retention made harder if a more flexible approach to working patterns was not adopted. In this world of continuous change say either political, economic or natural surviving with a business is very difficult. One thing we can be sure of is that turbulence and uncertainty will continue to be dominant themes in the industrial and competitive arenas. This will necessarily have far reaching consequences for the organization of work, and the management of people. (Kamoche, 2001, p. 11) So the question is how performance can be sustained in the face of massive and even unpredictable changes. Downsizing, restructuring, cost cutting are some of the measures adopted by the companies to overcome the challenges. So we need to understand that this is the time to change the way the work is done. So we must rethink our approach to wealth creation, in particular, moving from an exploitative to a regenerative mode, reducing resource use, recycling products and eliminating waste. In addition, we must undo much of the damage that has been done. (Dunphy & Benveniste, 2000, p. 8). The paper discusses about a sustainable business practice called Flexible working arrangement. It is the new way of doing work. The world of work is changing across all sectors. Flexible working or agile working or smart working is the new way of working which is proving effective in managing the knowledge based workforce. Knowledge workers are the employees who have a deep background in education and experience and are considered people who "think for a living." Sometimes they are also called as "Gold collars" because of their high salaries as well as because of their relative independence in controlling the process of their own work. Managing Knowledge workers can be a difficult task. Literature review proves that they are most valuable asset of the 21st century. Flexible working is one of the strategy which is being proving instrumental in managing knowledge workers. Flexible working is catching momentum due to the following reasons:

1. Reengineering, lean organisation and outsourcing
2. More women in the workplace
3. Demographic change
4. Individualism and personal autonomy
5. Blurring boundaries between home and office

6. Globalisation
7. Beyond Industrialisation
8. Advancement in Information and Communication technologies
9. Global warming and Environmental awareness.

Objective of the study

1. To study about the meaning and benefit of flexible working
2. To study about the various reasons that are instrumental for organisations to practice flexible working.
3. To understand the significance of flexible working for managing the knowledge based workforce

Research Method

To study the above objectives a systematic review of literature was performed. Literature review study is based on the secondary data collected from various sources like surveys, company websites, articles from journals, articles from respected newspapers and magazines, reports from university research centres and non-profit agencies.

II. Literature Review :

Meaning of Flexible working

According to Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, Flexible working is about an employee and employer making changes to when, where and how a person will work to better meet individual and business needs. Flexible working enables both individual and business needs to be met through making changes to time (when), location (where) and manner (how) in which an employee works. Flexible working should be mutually beneficial to both the employer and employee and result in superior outcomes.

According to (Houston & Waumsley, 2003) while interviewing for their book, explained flexible working patterns cover a wide range of options which are designed to help people combine paid work with family life or personal interests.

Definition of flexibility is more wide ranged says (Rees & Smith, 2014) in their book: Strategic Human Resource Management: An International Perspective. It covers different working hours (numerical), at different times (temporal), on different tasks, in different ways

(functional) and in different places (geographical). Flexible working can be broadly classified into three types of arrangement that is when, where and how.

Now each way of working can further be classified more specifically like:

A. When (Flexibility in work scheduling)

- a. Alternative work schedules like flexitime or compressed workweeks.
- b. Arrangements regarding shifts and breaks like shift arrangements or break arrangements

B. Where (Flexibility in the Place of Work)

- a. Telework/Home Work
- b. Telework/Satellite Location
- c. Alternating Location

C. How (Flexibility in the Amount of Hours Worked) Part Time Work/Reduced Hours Schedule

- a. Transition Period Part Time
- b. Job Shares
- c. Part-year Work

Definition of Knowledge based workforce

The term “Knowledge work” was first coined by the management guru Peter Drucker in 1969 in his book “The Age of Discontinuity”. He predicted with the time people will not do the work with their hand. He termed the new work as knowledge work and the people as knowledge workers. After 46 years it is now evident that the term knowledge worker and manual worker are no longer mutually exclusive. Every worker is now a knowledge worker. This is an age of collaborative organization, where all workers' knowledge counts, regardless of their roles. Every team member contributes, shares knowledge, and participates in making decisions, regardless of their job description. And most important, information flows in multiple directions rather than cascading from senior leadership down through multiple levels of management to front-line people.

According (Burd & Tumolo, 2004) there is a paradigm shift in the definition of worker for the present workforce.

Former worker: The person for whom other priorities do not interfere with work an individual achiever who always does what is asked and is always available as needed, keeping personal life out of work



The Knowledge worker: The multidimensional individual who is effective in dual – focus mode (managing work and personal life simultaneously) can deliver results collaboratively, can innovate and challenge, works well in diverse employment arrangements, and possesses meta-competencies that leverage technical skills: a whole person who can bring heart, mind, and hands to work

According to (Bertheau, 2015) Knowledge workers need three things to perform well and feel satisfied:

1. Autonomy: is the ability to have control over their work, being self-directed.
2. Mastery: is the ability to improve and get better at what they do.
3. Purpose: is the ability to be part of something greater than themselves.

Knowledge workers are employees who have a deep background in education and experience and are considered people who "think for a living."

Knowledge workers are the most engaged employees in the organization. According to (Sheridan, 2012), fully engaged employee increases the productivity and customer satisfaction for an organization. The key determinants of knowledge worker productivity are management and organization practices, information technologies and workplace design. So to manage the knowledge workers the organization should embrace employee autonomy, build true learning organization and provide a much stronger sense of purpose. Flexible working is the most suitable option which will allow the employees to have greater autonomy and learning opportunities. Flexible working is a new smart way of working. For example GE Energy India says flexible working initiatives helps to retain talent and to gain a competitive advantage in a time when

finding qualified job candidates can be a difficult challenge. Flexible working will allow employees to gain more knowledge and keep themselves updated with the new developments in the field of work. These type of employees proves as asset and good candidates for succession planning. Colgate-Palmolive offers some great benefits, such as flexible working, telecommute options and nearby back up childcare centers which is a good perk for work-at

home parent .Company like Google is known for promoting flexible working where employees learn to manage their lives, multitask and collaborate. Salary is not the only factor for job seekers. The knowledge workers goes through company reviews, organization culture, employee surveys to find out the amount of flexibility, autonomy an organization can provide while selecting a company. The 21st century employee wants to manage both work life and personal life simultaneously. Social changes and market changes are forcing companies to change the way of working. It is crucial for a company to adapt to the new way of working for survival. Implementing change will bring challenge but it will also create better opportunities to manage the employees.

Drivers of Flexible working

Demographic Change in work place

The age structure of society in UK and USA are changing. They are moving from a three generation society to a four generation society. People live longer. So the dependency ration increases. This means there will be more pensioners and dependents than the working class and tax payers. Flexible working options can help to overcome the situation. As people live longer, they may need or want to work for longer. Flexible working and self-employment are the natural ways for older people to work in the ways that suits them. These older group pf workforce with strong expertise and knowledge can prove a huge potential for companies in difficult times. Part-timers, home based workers or temporary workers can prove effective to survive with less layoffs, cost-cutting and downsizing. Contrast to these It is expected that, in 2020, the average age of an Indian will be 29 years, compared to 37 for China and 48 for Japan; and, by 2030, India's dependency ratio should be just over 0.4. For example The average age of employees at India's top software services exporter — **Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)**, one of the country's largest private sector employers — is 28. A young population means a young workforce with lots of energy and awareness which will bring more innovative and entrepreneur mindset to the workplace. According to (Rajendram, 2013) the key to transforming the demographic dividend into economic growth lies not just in having more people, but having greater numbers of better trained, healthier and more productive people. If we look from the cultural angle the family structure has evolved from traditional joint family structure to nuclear family structure. Both the parents are working. Parents are financially more stable. These means they have a freedom to experiment with their career. They may find a job, or start their own. The most prevailing characteristic of the

young workforce will be risk takers, freedom lover. They also know that opportunities will be abundant for them outside their country. So to tap this young workforce companies have to adopt new way of working or smart working. The work needs to be defined in more different and flexible way. Flexibility, autonomy and empowerment are the tools needed to attract, retain the upcoming generation. Another fact that driving the importance of flexible working is the presence of more women in the workforce. If we go back to history it was during the World War II labor shortages led women to work. The campaign by US Government headed by Rosie Riveter lured women into working. A culture shift happened from women working as a taboo to middle class women working as okay. Now increase in cost of living forced women to take up jobs to support their family. But women particularly mothers face more challenges in managing time than men and single women. A logical remedy to employee's sensation of being famished for time is workplace flexibility which enable them to better manage work and personal or family life.

Sustainability

There are many ways to define sustainability. There is no particular universal definition available. This concept first came from a 1987 report of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Report), which defines sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs." Sustainability can be viewed as a holistic system, inclusive of nature and man-made, that needs to be regenerative and balanced in order to last a very long period of time, (University of North Florida, 2015). Corporate sustainability is defined as the commitment of organizations to gain financial competitiveness without neglecting their responsibilities towards environmental safety, contribution to society and health and safety issues of the employees. Sustainability involves undertaking environment-friendly initiatives resulting in greater efficiencies, lower cost and better employee engagement and retention. Flexible working can bring sustainability by offering option of working from work or telecommuting to give relief to stressed employees. Small offices and work hubs can manage businesses without feeling space constraint. Fewer buildings to maintain, less commuting to and from work, and fewer used office supplies to dispose of are just some of the ways flexible work policies help companies lower their carbon footprints. At At&T some 55% of its managers worldwide work from home at least once a week, 82% employees who telework said it has helped them balance family and work life thus improving productivity.

With telework AT&T saved \$3000 per office and about \$550 million by eliminating or consolidating office space people no longer need.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is a concept including proper prioritizing between "work" (career and ambition) and "lifestyle" (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation). The term work-life balance was first coined in 1986 in reaction to the unhealthy choices that many Americans were making in favor of the work place, as they opted to neglect family. Employees today are generally more stressed which reduce performance levels. Absenteeism due to family commitments and stress could be a major reason for low performance levels. Work-Life initiatives like flexible working improves employee performance by reducing absenteeism, lateness, health care and sick-leave and hence their related costs. People who are free of worry about what is going on at home can be more productive at work.

Benefits of flexible working for employer

- a. Productive workforce
- b. Happier, healthy and more satisfied employees
- c. A wider talent pool
- d. Opening up new sources of talents
- e. Lowered environmental impact
- f. Reduced turnover and hiring cost.
- g. Less overhead costs.

Experiences of companies of flexible working

Though many companies are offering flexible working to their employees but still it is not getting accepted by many companies. To get the full benefits of flexible working companies have to make flexible working as company policies. It should not be perceived as a benefit to employee but a way to attract, retain productive talents. A employee survey is must before implementing flexible working. Flexible working can be offered in various ways and it should be adopted according to specific company needs. Each company will have their set flexible working arrangements and it differ from company to company. Another essential part of the process is to work with senior managers to widen their horizon about flexible working, so they can understand better the possibilities for change. Managing a variety of flexible

work arrangements can at times create scheduling challenges. Sometimes visibility with senior leadership can be impacted and may therefore require special attention. Sometimes workers find working from home very lonely and they get easily distracted from their work when their family make demands on them.

III. Results and Conclusion :

The study reveals that the way work is done is changing rapidly due to various drivers like demographic change, sustainability etc. Flexible working is catching momentum day by day. It is the smart agile way of working which is very essential for today's competitive business world. But despite huge benefits it has lacunas which need to be addressed properly. The processes and policies need to be streamlined. To conclude flexible working with lots of benefits is the new way of doing work and a necessity for managing knowledge work force.

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