



The Relationship between Flexible Working Arrangements and Quality of Work Life among Academicians in a Selected Public Institution of Higher Learning in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the relationship between working arrangements and quality of work life (QWL) among academicians in a selected public institution of higher learning in Kuching, Sarawak. A survey methodology was used in this study. This research involves the utilization of questionnaire which was administered among one-hundred and fifty (151) academicians currently working in a selected public institution in Kuching, Sarawak. The relationship between flexible working arrangements and quality of work life was analyzed using the Pearson's Correlation analysis test. The results of this study revealed that there is a significant relationship between long working arrangement and flexible working arrangements with QWL. Hence, if organizations are concerned about developing their human resources and gaining a competitive advantage in the marketplace, it is necessary that they attend to one of their most precious assets, namely, their human resources by practicing flexible working arrangements.

Keywords: working arrangements; quality of work life (QWL); flexible working arrangement (FWA)

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the phrase “*Quality of life*” has been used with increasing frequency to describe certain environmental and humanistic values neglected by industrial productivity and economic growth. Many current organizational experiments seek to improve both productivity for the organization and the quality of working life for its members.

Quality of Work Life (QWL) is the existence of a certain set of organizational conditions or practices. This definition frequently argues that a high quality of work life exists when democratic man-

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agement practices are used, employee's jobs are enriched, employees are treated with dignity and safe working conditions exist. QWL refers to the level of satisfaction, motivation, involvement and commitment individuals experience with respect to their lives at work (Geet, Deshpande & Asmita, 2009).

Public institutions of Higher Learning in Malaysia play an important role in economic and social development of Malaysia. In order to fulfill this role successfully, they need to attract and retain high quality staff. They also need to provide a supportive working environment to enable their staff to conduct high quality teaching and research (Siti Aisyah, Azizah, Roziana, Ishak, Hamidah & Siti Khadijah, 2012). Nowadays, flexible working arrangement has become a significant issue for workers in order to have a good steadiness between both work and non-work events (Kattenbach, Demerouti, & Nachreiner, 2010). The concept of flexible working hours refers to the provision towards workers in controlling their hours of working instead of their working schedule (Atkinson & Hall, 2013). Prior study has found that male workers took the opportunity through having a flexible working arrangement by developing the engagement skills towards the organization that they work in, while on the other hand female workers used the chance to improve the balance between work and home life (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). Also, flexible working hours promote and facilitate work-life balance. Reduced stress and increased employee wellbeing are outcomes of the work-life balance. In Malaysia, the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, Dato' Sri Rohani Abdul Karim has promoted the implementation of Flexible Working Arrangement (FWA) in the Ministry of Women, Family & Community for the purpose of producing 85% of high successful employees (Bong, 2015).

Previous research on QWL were prioritized more towards the specific

measures, such as, enticing skills, occupation safety, as well as rewards along with welfare; which then, the priority progressively changes to the contentment of an occupation together with involvement (Gayathiri & Ramakrishnan, 2013). However, researchers these days believed that there are still other varieties of measures that are significant and beyond than what have been mentioned that literally influence the grasp towards QWL (Kaighobadi, Esteghlal & Serajoddin, 2014).

Besides that, prior studies have shown that academicians are being pressured due increasing workload but at the same time being discouraged by lack of encouragement in doing research (Siti Aishah et al., 2012). Flexible working practices are beneficial for both employee and employer. Flexibility definitely contributes to improvement in allocation of work and life responsibilities. Thus, employee might end up easily fulfilling his/her working tasks as well non-working roles (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014).

Hence, this study focuses on determining the relationship between working arrangement (flexible working hours) and QWL of academicians in a selected Public institutions of Higher Learning in Kuching, Sarawak.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Working arrangement gives a huge effect towards the QWL of workers. As what Lu (2011) had claimed in his studies, it has already being identified that working arrangements influences a person along with his family life presentations. This finding is similar with that of a study by Ahmad, Idris & Hashim (2013) indicating that the implementation of suitable working hours schedule could increase and balance one's responsibilities in work and family. On the other hand, working arrangement influences the occupation in terms of health (Uchida, Kaneko, & Kawa, 2014). In this study, two types of working arrangement,

long working hours and flexible working hours were investigated.

Long Working Arrangement

In the reality of current work life, most of the individuals are actually working overtime for the reason of the increment of amount of work, security of career, job performing stress, as well as for the maintenance of budget to live (Ahmad et al., 2013). Fiksenbaum, Jeng, Koyuncu, & Burke (2010) claimed that working for long hours might lead to bad impacts within the workers themselves, relatives, companies, as well as, the people. Besides that, it is believed that there is a relationship between long working arrangement and the implication towards the healthiness of an employee (Uchida et al., 2014). According to Sabil and Marican (2011), long working arrangement is usually being related to pressure, tiredness, sleeplessness, also serious health conditions, for instance, body aches, coronary heart disease along with the increment of safety issues. However, on the other hand, Fiksenbaum et al. (2010) claimed of a prove that long working arrangement could also be prospering, whereby the respondents of theirs' who consists of top level managers felt very contented towards their occupation due to the incoming benefits, significance as well as the difficulties produce at their state of position. On top of that, Rudolf (2013) found that the Americans are pleased with long working arrangements as they assumed that being a hard-working employee may lead to favourable outcomes.

Flexible Working Arrangement

These days, flexible working arrangement has become a significant issue towards workers in order to have a good steadiness between both work and non-work events (Kattenbach et al., 2010). The concept of flexible working hours refers to the provi-

sion towards workers in controlling their hours of working instead of their working schedule (Atkinson & Hall, 2013).

There has been a prior study stating that male workers took the opportunity through having a flexible working arrangement by developing the engagement skills towards the organization that they work in, while on the other hand female workers used the chance to improve the balance between work and home life (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). Another prior study also claimed that flexible working arrangement is preferred within female employees in order to manage both job as well as family obligations (Lewis & Humbert, 2010). In addition, one of the constructive aspects of flexible working arrangement includes job values producing motivations as intuitive indicators meant for the workers towards evaluating their QWL (Yeo & Li, 2013).

Quality of Work Life (QWL)

According to Nair (2013), it is said that QWL can be understood as the bond value among both workers and the whole environment of working. QWL involves the belief of intermodal relative that is impacted by period setting, along with one's own and community principles which relies on the opinion of such individual along with his life (Behzad, Arezo, & Mohammadi, 2014).

On top of that, the workers along with their managers will mutually receive the advantages of initiating the practice of QWL and to the fact that the workers perceive it as feeling secured, contented, as well as having the competency in growing and developing through the attendance of the practice of QWL (Adhikari & Gautam, 2010). According to Gayathiri and Ramakrishnan (2013), employers as well as scholars similarly had visualize on how to improve the QWL. This is due to the fact that QWL gives a massive impact towards mostly everything for the sake of achiev-

ing the vision, mission as well as goals in an organization. In addition, Gayathiri and Ramakrishnan (2013) claimed that from the viewpoint of a group of scholars, it is the necessity of organizations to attain great performance along with the development in productivity.

Perspectives of Elements in QWL

According to Gayathiri and Ramakrishnan (2013), a group of scholars had made an effort in discovering the types of elements that they conclude came about as a result of several of their viewpoints. The reason is because different scholars have their own different perspectives. Not only that, Nair (2013) said that QWL involves a class of principles which comprise the elements that are based on jobs, for instance contentment in work, wages, together with the bond between co-workers; as well as the elements that widely indicates the state of life and universal emotions towards well-being.

Furthermore, QWL influences workers' actions on the job regarding aspects, such as, company recognition, meaningful job, work engagement, work endeavor, work outcomes, desire in resigning, turnover of company as well as isolation of individual (Sinha, 2012).

Jayakumar and Kalaiselvi (2012) claimed that the term QWL is known for concepts such as, job dedication, work inspiration as well as outputs from work. QWL consists of eight main theoretical components which are receiving rational reimbursement, achieving secured job environment, obtaining instant chances of ongoing progress along with safety, chances in utilizing together with growing people's skills, accomplishing employees' relations within company, having constitutionality within company, attaining work-life balance, and being pertinence to colleagues. Each scholar described QWL differently that leads to several counterparts, for instance job standard, work description

purposes, workers' welfare, workers relations' quality, job condition, as well as the poise concerning work necessity as well as having the capability of making choices (Kaighobadi et al., 2014). Susan and Jayan (2013) conceptualized QWL's elements as work safety, improved compensation structure, increment of salary and wages, chances in developing, involvement of employees together with the increment of profitability.

Other than that, Gayathiri and Ramakrishnan (2013) recognized several QWL measurements which are: wage and salary, work pressure, company well-being programs, flexible working arrangement, involvement in job management and controls, receiving gratitude, relation of employer-employee, injustice practices, capitals sufficiency, superiority along with advancement merit and perpetual employment. The factors of QWL can be categorized into several parts which are: (a) the increment of employees' engagement, contribution as well as authority, (b) the increment of focus towards workers ability growth, (c) the increment of self-independence within employees in taking actions along with creating choices also (d) the decrement of position discriminations within the organization (Battu & Chakravarthy, 2014).

In addition, Tabassum, Rahman and Kursia (2011) said that QWL covers reimbursement method, job surroundings, job arrangement, safety and health matter, monetary as well as non-monetary welfare including the organization comportment so as to approach the workers.

In this study, four domains of QWL which consist of work life, work design, work context, and work world are investigated. Almalki, Fitzgerald and Clark (2012) claimed that the domain of *work life/home life* can be understood in terms of the border concerning the life of both at workplace and at home. In other words, it can be seen as a domain that touches towards the aspect of work life balance.

On the other hand, another domain known as *work design* can be understood as the arrangement of job along with the realistic description about the job (Almalki et al., 2012). This domain generally views about matters, such as, workloads, time adequacy to conduct such tasks as well as quality. Besides that, Almalki et al. (2012) also stated another domain identified as *work context* that involves situation of job conducting whereby one works while exploring the job surroundings' influence towards such structures of several parties. Elements such as the achievements in getting recognitions, feedbacks, communication skills, relationship with colleagues and job opportunities are being emphasized within this domain.

The forth domain is *work world* that can be comprehended by the means of the impacts within the influences of wide communal together with the alterations of job practices (Almalki et al., 2012).

The Organizational Commitment Theory

The organizational commitment theory comprises of three components which are identified as Affective Commitment (AC), Normative Commitment (NC), and Continuance Commitment (CC). However, this research only focuses on the AC components. According to Afsar (2014), AC is understood as "*an emotional attachment, identification, and involvement that an employee has with its organization where he is happy to be a member of that organization*" (p. 128). Indeed, studies show that individuals who have a high level of affective organizational commitment are less likely to quit their jobs, have a lower rate of absenteeism, have a stronger desire to achieve the organization's goals, adopt organizational citizenship behaviors, uphold the organization's values, and ultimately perform better (Brunelle, 2013, p.57). Thus, this theory can also be related towards one's QWL in terms of the relation-

ship between working arrangements and QWL.

Relationship between Working Arrangements Dimensions and QWL

A study by Lu (2011) found a significant relationship between working hours and occupational stress which is also part of the QWL contexts since it focuses towards long working arrangement. Consequently, Rudolf (2013) conducted a research on the effect of working arrangements towards an individual and family quality of work and domestic life. The study found that reduction in working hours had no significant impact on overall job and life satisfaction.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Prior studies show that limited study that has been done that focused on working arrangements. Previous researchers of QWL focused more on the specific measures, such as, enticing skills, occupation safety, as well as rewards along with welfare; which then the priority progressively changes to the contentment of an occupation together with involvement (Gayathiri & Ramakrishnan, 2013). However, researchers these days believed that there are still other varieties of measures that are significant and beyond than what have been mentioned that literally influence the grasp towards QWL. "Given the diversity in perspectives, two questions remain: what constitutes a high quality of work life? How its impact be measured?" (Kaighobadi et al., 2014, p.220). Besides that, prior studies have stated that academicians work pressure is increasing due to increasing workload, but at the same time decreasing of encouragement especially during handling tasks that are linked with research (Panatik et al., 2012). There have been a dearth of prior studies regarding flexible working arrangement influencing work-life balance and what more QWL (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). In

addition to that, it can be said that there are limited studies that have been done within this area, especially amongst academic staff in Public Institution in Malaysia as well as in other Asian countries (Farid, Izadi, Ismail & Alipour, 2014). Hence, this study focuses on QWL among academicians in a selected Public Institution of Higher Learning in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.

OBJECTIVES

Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- i. to determine the relationship between long working arrangement and QWL among academicians in a selected public university.
- ii. to determine the relationship between flexible working arrangement and QWL among academicians in a selected public university.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed the survey methodology to collect data on the dependent variable, that is, QWL and on the independent variables that is, working arrangement (long working arrangement & flexible working arrangement).

Population and Sample

This study was conducted in a selected Public Institution of Higher Learning in

Kuching, Sarawak. The population of this study consisted of all the 350 academicians. A formula devised by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) was used to determine the minimum required sample size for the survey to guide in the sampling process. Based on the calculation using this formula, the minimum required sample size for the survey should be 120 persons, or approximately 40.0 percent of the total population. A slightly bigger sample of 151 respondents were identified and selected to take into account the problem of non-returned questionnaires and missing responses during data collection.

Research Instrument

The long working arrangement questionnaire was adapted from Robbins (1999) which was actually known as a Work Addiction Risk Test (WART), consisting of 12 items (Aziz, Uhrich, Wuensch, & Swords, 2013). On the other hand, the flexible working arrangement was adapted from Churchill (1979) that involved 7 items (Ahmad et al., 2013). Meanwhile, QWL questionnaire was adapted from Brooks (2004) and also includes four domains known as Work Life, Work Design, Work Context and Work World. In this study, the questionnaire employed the five-point Likert-type scale, as follows: 1 =Strongly Disagree, 2 = Moderately Disagree, 3 = Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Moderately Agree and 6=Strongly Agree. A pilot test was conducted to determine the reliability of the instrument and the results are shown in Table 1.

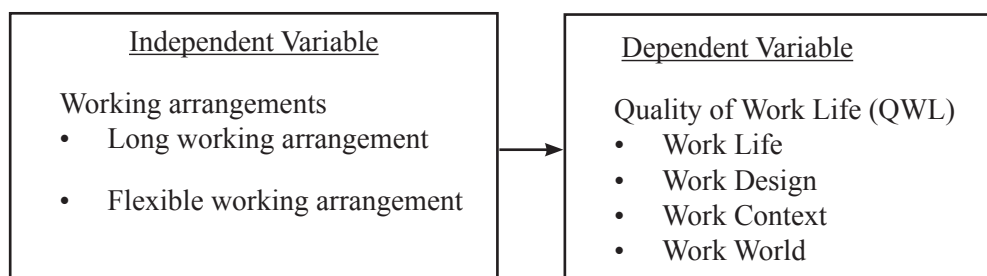


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Table 1: Reliability statistics

Instruments	Pilot Test	Actual Test
Long Working Arrangement	.806	.910
Flexible Working Arrangement	.741	.922
Quality of Work Life	.824	.930

Table 2: Bivariate correlations between long working arrangement, flexible working arrangement, and quality of work life

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) Quality of Work Life	1		
(2) Long Working Arrangement	.708**	1	
(3) Flexible Working Arrangement	.523**	.421**	1

Data Analysis

Data gathered were analyzed using IBM SPSS package, version 22. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data. Descriptive statistic was used to describe selected demographic characteristics. Meanwhile, Pearson Correlational analysis was used to test relationships between the independent (long working arrangement and flexible working arrangement) and the dependent variable (QWL).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data were collected from 68 male and 83 female respondents (with a total of 151 respondents), aged between 23 to 57 years old. A majority of them were Malays, having Master, and have permanent job and 50.7% of them having worked for more than 10 years.

Relationship between Working arrangements and QWL

Pearson's Correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between long

working arrangement and flexible working arrangement towards QWL among academicians in a selected Public Institution of Higher Learning in Kuching, Sarawak. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 2.

H_a1: There is a significant relationship between long working arrangement and QWL among the academicians from a selected Public Institution of Higher Learning

Table 2 indicated that the relationship between long working arrangement and QWL among the academicians from a selected Public Institution of Higher Learning was significant. Hence, the first alternative hypothesis is accepted. On the other hand, the value of $r = .708$ which indicates there is a strong positive relationship between long working arrangement and QWL among the academicians from a selected public university. This literally shows that long working arrangement provided an impact on the academicians' QWL. Additionally, it supports the research conducted by Fiksenbaum et al. (2010) which prove that long working arrangement could be pros-

pering, whereby the respondents of theirs' which consists of top level managers felt very contented towards their occupation due to the incoming benefits, significance as well as the difficulties produces at their state of position. Besides that, Haines III, Marchand, Genin, & Rousseau (2012) proposed about the possibility of some workers going for long working arrangement is due to the reason that these people attain bliss from it, also due to obtaining the dismiss feeling of pressure from home, gaining extra incomes and benefits along with receiving better job contentment. This positive relationship of this hypothesis is comprehensible with the organizational commitment theory.

H_a2: There is a significant relationship between flexible working arrangement and QWL among the academicians from a selected Public Institution of Higher Learning

Besides that, Table 2 also revealed that the relationship between flexible working arrangement and QWL among the academicians from a selected Public Institution of Higher Learning is significant, $p < .05$ with the value of $r = .523$. Hence, the second alternative hypothesis is accepted and there is a moderate relationship between flexible working arrangement and QWL among the academicians from a selected Public Institution of Higher Learning. This also shows that flexible working arrangement has positive impact on the academicians' QWL. The result advocates a research by Ahmad et al. (2013) whereby they suggested that flexible working arrangement schedule could increase and balance one's responsibilities both in work and family (Ahmad et al., 2013). The finding is also supported by a study done by Kattenbach et al. (2010). They revealed that flexible working arrangement has become a significant factor for worker to have a good steadiness in both work and non-work events.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted to determine the relationship between long working arrangement and flexible working arrangement with QWL among academicians in a selected public university in Kuching. The results reveal there is a significant relationship between flexible working arrangement with QWL of academicians. Salehi, Mohd Rasdi, and Ahmad (2014) mentioned that academicians need to perform multiple major roles and responsibilities, such as, teaching and learning, carried out research, publishing, administering, supervising post graduate, contributing to professional services include providing consultancy for industry and becoming policy makers.

As a result, academics staffs are facing a high level of work-related stress (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). For those who are dual career families, they have to juggle their jobs and family needs. This situation reflects the hardship of academics' work as they also need to adapt to a working environment with a high key performance index (Salehi et al., 2014). Thus, flexible working hours promote and facilitate work-life balance. Reduced stress and increased employee wellbeing are outcomes of the work-life balance (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014).

In addition, this research also provides beneficial information for human resource practitioners. Indirectly, this study provide additional information that can be used to reduce job stress among the academicians in public institution of higher learning. In order to have an improved level of QWL life as well as productivity of the academicians, the human resource practitioners need to develop new initiatives, as well as, alternatives to diminish any issues such as job stress and fatigue that may inhibit the organization's favourable outcomes. Future researchers could extend this research by increasing the sample size through the inclusion of other Ma-

laysian public universities. Besides that, mix methods design (embedded, triangulation, explanatory, and exploratory) need to be considered to explore more in-depth about the concept of QWL and other types of working arrangements. Comparison between FWA and QWL among public and private institutions is also recommended. Furthermore, future researchers are encouraged to confirm the fit of the model by using structural equation modelling.

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