

The effect of flexible working on employee performance in the post epidemic era: the mediating effect of work-related well-being

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ABSTRACT

The growth of many businesses have been severely hampered by Covid-19, which raced through the world in 2020 and affected many spheres of life. Many businesses have adopted the online office as a way of responding rapidly in order to deal with the challenges caused by Covid-19. In the meantime, many businesses have started implementing flexible work schedules due to society's rapid advancement and the Internet industry's explosive growth in the past few years. This paper uses a questionnaire survey method to study the relationship between flexible working mode, work-related well-being, and employee performance. It has been discovered that flexible working significantly enhances employee performance, and work-related well-being plays a positive moderating role in flexible working.

KEYWORDS

Flexible working; Employee performance; Work-related well-being

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Work flexibility can offer some benefits for employees and change into a new type of worker model as the pace of modern Internet technology has increasingly intensified, particularly in the Chinese environment. Both for organizations and individuals, how to introduce work flexibility, enhance employee performance, and promote long-term business development is of great importance to managerial practice.

At the beginning of 2020, the public safety and health crisis triggered by Covid-19 caught many companies by surprise, and in order to minimize the impact of the epidemic on business production and operation, many companies turned to the implementation of "home office" and "flexible work"^[1]. China's academic community has paid increasing attention in recent years to the outcomes of flexible work patterns. Flexible working arrangements promote growth and help to lower stress levels. However, the impact of flexible working on employees' organizational citizenship behavior is not purely facilitative and can have diametrically opposed effects at different levels. Flexible working may not be conducive to employee communication, which could be detrimental to work processes and outcomes. The conventional way of working has not been able to adjust to the changes in the environment of the new age due to the advancement of times and changes in the staff structure^[2]. Flexible working is gradually prevalent in China's enterprises. Therefore, there is a need and value in focusing on flexible working and the consequent impact on employee performance.

1.2 Opinion statement

- (1)Flexible working has a significant positive effect on employee performance.
- (2)Work-related well-being plays a positive moderating role in flexible working

2 Literature review

2.1 Flexible working

Research in recent years has found that the impact of flexible working on employees' well-being is two-sided. On the one hand, flexible work realizes the positive impact on employees' well-being by strengthening work-life balance, enhancing employees' autonomy, and improving communication efficiency; as this institutional arrangement will bring about the disturbance of time and space, and in turn, it may also have a negative impact on employees' well-being, making the individual's work pressure and intensity greater, causing the depletion of the individual's resources, such as time and energy, and then lowering the sense of well-being.^[3]

2.2 Work-related well-being

Relevant scholars point out that job happiness can stimulate employees' passion for work, which reduces the tendency to leave the job and employees' absenteeism. In addition to this, a series of studies have shown that job happiness can bring about a driving force at work, which enables individuals to better utilize their potential and perform positively at work, which in turn can increase productivity and work efficiency, and thus enhance job performance.^[4]

2.3 Work performance

Studies by related scholars have shown that flexible work is found to be a human resource management practice for work-family balance, which can help individuals solve work-family problems, experience work-family balance, enhance job satisfaction, and strengthen organizational identity to a certain extent.^[5] In addition, past research has shown that flexible work allows employees to personalize their work activities, which can make the labor force more efficiently used, and thus increase productivity.^[6] Flexible working provided by organizations to individuals can help to increase individual work engagement and help to generate proactive behaviors in the work process.^[7]

2.4 Result

The literature reviewed in this paper suggests that flexible work has both positive and negative effects on employee performance. Adjusting the time location and form of work through the flexibility of flexible work patterns facilitates employees to complete their work tasks more efficiently; Flexible work may not be conducive to communication between employees, which may be detrimental to the process and outcome of work.

Previous literature does not reflect well the performance of flexible work in this new period of the post epidemic era. Although scholars have conducted many research on the above variables in previous studies, there is a lack of research on the mechanism of the impact of flexible work on employee performance using Work-related well-being as a mediating variable. With the arrival of the post epidemic era, this paper intends to fully consider the social reality of the new stage, and explore the role that flexible work will play in the field of practice in a quantitative way. In addition,

this paper introduces work-related well-being into the study of flexible work on employee performance, examining whether work-related well-being plays a mediating role between flexible work and employee performance in the post epidemic era, so as to enrich the relevant theoretical results.

3 Method

3.1 Research hypothesis

3.1.1 The relationship between flexible working and employee performance

When the organization provides employees with scarce work resources such as flexible working, individuals can allocate the resources according to their own needs, and these favorable conditions can give employees more motivation to complete their work, which helps to improve their work performance. Based on the above analysis, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H1: Flexible working has a significant positive effect on employee performance.

3.1.2 The relationship between flexible working and work-related well-being

Flexible working mode, because of its strong flexibility, makes employees have more freedom in their work and such a work mode can reduce work pressure and effectively enhance the sense of well-being of employees. Based on the above analysis, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H2: Flexible working has a significant positive effect on work-related well-being.

3.1.3 The relationship between work-related well-being and employee performance

One of the effective ways to improve individual performance is to make employees feel higher happiness at work. In view of the analysis of previous work, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H3: Work-related well-being positively affects employee performance.

3.1.4 The mediating role of work-related well-being

After analyzing the previous research and applying logic, it is possible that employee happiness would act as a mediator between flexible working and employee performance. This hypothesis is theoretically supported, and this study needs to reinforce the association by using this mediating variable.

H4: Work-related well-being mediates the relationship between flexible working and employee performance.

3.2 Scale design

The scales in this paper are all based on a 5-point Likert scale from "1" to "5" representing, respectively, the five situations of, "1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Rather Disagree, 3=Fairly, 4=Rather Agree, 5=Strongly Agree".

3.2.1 Flexible working measurement

Flexible working draws on the scale developed by Breaugh. The original scale was created in 1985 and does not accurately reflect flexible working habits in the post-epidemic era. As a result, the items were augmented in terms of flexible workplace and degree of flexibility, leading to a 5-item

flexible workload scale.

3.2.2 Work-related well-being measurement

In this study, the employee work happiness scale draws on the "Work Happiness Scale" compiled by Huang Liang in 2014, which has four dimensions, the four dimensions are occupational, cognitive, emotional and social well-being, and this paper selects the items containing the characteristics of the post epidemic era of the scale's original 29 items, ultimately form the 15-item Employee Happiness^[8].

3.2.3 Employee performance measurement

The work performance scale used in this paper was developed by Zhao Fuqiang and colleagues in 2018 based on a back-translation of Van Scotter 's scale into Chinese, and it primarily has three dimensions: work dedication, interpersonal facilitation, and task performance. In this research, the original 19 scale components that captured the post-epidemic era's features were chosen and mentioned, resulting in a 12-item employee work performance scale.

3.3 Reliability test

The investigation period for this paper is April 2023 to May 2023. During this time, the vast majority of employees have already adopted flexible working methods due to covid-19. Internet-based questionnaires were used to capture pertinent data from eligible research participants. The research subjects consisted primarily of employees in the IT industry, the service industry, and the education industry, who had adopted flexible working in a variety of industries across the country. A total of 137 questionnaires were distributed, 13 invalid questionnaires were discarded based on the reverse questions, and 124 valid questionnaires were collected.

3.3.1 Trustworthiness

(1) Scale of variables related to flexible working

The Cronbach's coefficients and standardized alpha coefficients of the variables related to flexible working are shown in Table 1, and the coefficient of the standardized alpha is 0.914, which has a good level of reliability.

Table 1 Reliability analysis of the Flexible Working Scale

Cronbach Alpha	Normalized term-based clone Bach Alpha	Item count (of a consignment etc)
0.919	0.937	5

(2) Scale of variables related to work-related well-being

The Cronbach's coefficients and standardized alpha coefficients of the variables related to work-related well-being are shown in Table 2, and the coefficient of the standardized alpha is 0.957, which has a good level of reliability.

(3) Scale of variables related to employee performance

Table 2 Reliability statistics of Work-related Well-being Scale

Cronbach Alpha	Normalized term-based clone Bach Alpha	Item count (of a consignment etc)
0.955	0.957	15

The Cronbach's coefficients and standardized alpha coefficients of the variables related to employee performance are shown in Table 3, and the coefficient of the standardized alpha is 0.915, which has a good level of reliability.

Table 3 Reliability statistics of Employee Performances Scale

Cronbach Alpha	Normalized term-based clone Bach Alpha	Item count (of a consignment etc)
0.914	0.915	12

3.3.2 Validity

The KMO value and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to analyze the suitability of the scale for factor analysis. As shown in Table 4, the KMO value of the overall scale is 0.877 and the probability of significance in the Bartlett's test of sphericity is 0.000 (<0.001), indicating that the overall scale is suitable for factor analysis.

Table 4 KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO Quantity of Sample Suitability	.877
Approximate chi-square (math.)	3034.625
Bartlett's test of sphericity (number of) Degrees of freedom (physics)	528
Significance	.000

3.3.3 Correlation analysis

As can be seen in Table 5, flexible working is significantly correlated with job well-being and employee performance at the 0.05 level, and job well-being and employee performance at the 0.01 level, with correlation coefficients of 0.181, 0.132, and 0.237, which is basically in line with the expectations of this study.

Table 5 Relevance analysis

Variant	Average value	(Statistics) Standard deviation	Work perfor- mance	Happiness at work	Degree of work flex- ibility
Employee performance	34.0403	7.07	Pearson Correlation	1	
Work-related well-being	54.26	13.21	Pearson Correlation	.237**	1
Work flexibility	15.36	3.862	Pearson Correlation	.181*	.132* 1

3.3.4 Regression analysis

In order to further precise the functional relationship between the variables, combined with the results of correlation analysis, linear regression analysis was conducted on flexible working, work-related well-being, and employee performance respectively, to determine the direction and degree of influence between the variables through regression coefficients, and to determine the significance by comparing the P-value.

Using flexible working as the independent variable and employee performance as the dependent variable, the results are shown in Table 6:

Flexible working has a significant positive effect on employee performance with a regression coefficient of 0.427 and a significance of 0.000 (<0.05). Hypothesis 1 is valid.

Flexible working and work-related well-being Using flexible working as the independent variable and work-related well-being as the dependent variable, the results are shown in Table 7:

Table 6 Regression analysis of flexible working on employee performance

	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.820	.248		3.303	.000
Degree of work flexibility	.254	.112	.427	3.269	.000

Flexible working has a significant positive effect on employee performance with a regression coefficient of 0.328 and a significance of 0.000 (<0.05). Hypothesis 2 is valid.

Table 7 Regression analysis of flexible working on job well-being

	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.532	0.081		6.574	.000
Degree of work flexibility	.215	.036	.328	5.986	.000

Using flexible working as the independent variable and work-related well-being as the dependent variable, the results are shown in Table 8:

Flexible working has a significant positive effect on employee performance with a regression coefficient of 0.653 and a significance of 0.000 (<0.05). Hypothesis 3 is valid.

Table 8 Regression analysis of work-related well-being on employee performance

	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.789	0.092		8.560	.000
Degree of work flexibility	.289	.045	.653	6.436	.000

3.3.5 Mediation effects test

In this study, the mediating effect was analyzed by using flexible working to predict employee performance as model 1, flexible working and work-related well-being together to predict employee performance as model 2, and flexible working to predict work-related well-being as model 3, and the results of the analysis are shown in Table 9:

From Model 1: the total effect of flexible work in work-related well-being on employee performance ($\beta=0.307$, $p<0.05$) and Model 2, Model 3: the direct effect of job flexibility on employee performance ($p=0.457$, $p<0.05$) and the indirect effect of work-related well-being on employee performance ($\beta=0.745$, $p<0.05$), it was concluded that the role of work-related well-being in the flexible working vs. employee performance relationship mediating effect is established and plays a partially mediating role. Hypothesis 4 is valid.

Table 9 Regression analysis of the relationship in the mediator variable model

variant	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Flexible working	0.307	2.546*				
Work-related well-being			0.457	3.215*		
Work performance					0.745	5.320*
R-square	0.419		0.57		0.679	
F	35.629*		48.274*		62.152*	

4 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between flexible working, work-related well-being, and employee performance and to provide a thorough analysis of the ways in which businesses can foster their employees' performance and well-being by allowing for flexible working. The following results were reached after statistically analyzing and interpreting a substantial amount of research data:

The results of the study indicate a significant positive relationship between flexible working and work-related well-being. Organizations that offer flexible working are able to give their employees more autonomy and choice at work, enabling them to have better control over when and how they work. This autonomy and ability to make decisions leads to greater satisfaction and improves their well-being at work. Therefore, organizations should prioritize the development and implementation of flexible working policies to satisfy the unique needs of employees and enhance their sense of well-being on the job. Employee performance is enhanced by flexible working hours. According to research, flexible working can increase employee motivation and initiative, making them reach their full potential and enhance their performance if they have greater freedom in how they divide their time and space. Therefore, organizations should acknowledge that flexible working is not only advantageous for employee well-being but also has a positive effect on the organization's overall performance.

Finally, this study discovered that the association between flexible working and employee performance is mediated by work-related well-being. Employee motivation and satisfaction can be improved through work-related well-being, which in turn fosters employee performance. Therefore, by offering a flexible working environment, firms can indirectly boost employee performance and enhance work related well-being.

Organizations can utilize the following management suggestions to successfully integrate flexible working and improve employee performance: 1. Provide Work Flexibility to Meet Individual Employee Needs: Employers should offer flexible working arrangements that enable employees to allocate their time and space on their own. This will promote a proactive approach to issues and problem solutions by increasing employees' job autonomy and improving job satisfaction and well-being.^[9] 2. Creating channels for communication and feedback between the organization and individuals: When implementing flexible working styles, the organization should create efficient channels for communication, stay in close contact with employees, and promptly gather feedback from them. The organization may comprehend their needs and experiences with flexible working systems and present improvement and optimization plans in line with the evaluation's findings. [10] 3. Implement good human resource practices: Companies can create good human resource practices, such as family support and welfare measures, to increase the perceived value of flexible working to employees and to further pique their motivation and work incentives, thereby enhancing work performance.

There are some limitations in this study, which can be made better if improvements are made: 1. The sample of this study is mainly from employees of organizations in Guangdong and the failure to cover a wider sample of geographic regions and industries may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research could select a wider sample of geographical areas and different industries, which would help to understand the relationship between the three variables more accurately and provide practical guidance for organizations in different regions and industries. 2. This study mainly used an electronic questionnaire for data collection, which may have some subjective bias. Future studies could use a more diverse range of research methods, such as interviews and field studies, to obtain richer and more comprehensive data.

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