A STUDY ON THE PERCEPTION OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS TOWARDS FLEXIBLE WORKPLACES AT NARESUAN UNIVERSITY IN PHITSANULOK

[1]EUGENIA A. BOA-CHANTENGCO, [2]PONGSIRA KONGTHAEWTONG, [3]PITCHAYA KRAIKIJRAT

[1]Naresuan University International College, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand
E-mail: eugeniab@nu.ac.th, [2]pongsirak@nu.ac.th, [3]Piepit.ya@hotmail.com

Abstract - "In many instances, issues in the workplace are caused by a lack of flexibility in regulations, strategies, programs, and conditions. As a consequence, the capacities of an organization are minimized. For example, the abilities to attract and retain talented or experienced staff, participation within the workforce, work-life balance, job satisfaction, opportunities for success, productivity, health, safety and wellbeing of staff, absenteeism, customer service, and innovation capacity. Nowadays, the concepts of flexible workplace are better known. However, many people are still unaware of the benefits of workplace's flexibility. The objectives of the research are therefore to explore whether undergraduate students understand the concept of flexible workplace and to determine their understanding if flexible workplace affects their career in the future. For the data collection, questionnaire was used to survey 100 undergraduate students at Naresuan University. And the findings are 1) most of the respondents knew about flexible workplace and agreed that it is beneficial, 2) they understood the concept of flexible workplace quite well and knew that it has a lot of benefits for both themselves and their organizations, 3) they preferred to work in a flexible firm in future, 4) most of them viewed the concept of flexible workplace as a benefit even if some of them did not think that flexible workplace affect their promotion and commitment to the company, and 5) they thought that flexible workplace contributes to their performance, motivation, positive feelings, happiness, timetable arrangement, and a balance of their work and life."

Keywords - Undergraduate students, employee, organization, performance, impact of flexible workplace.

I. INTRODUCTION

Many companies in the world have used flexible workplace framework in the company. It refers to when an employee and an employer making changes to when, where and how a person will work to better meet individual and business needs. Flexibility enables both individual and business needs to be met through making changes to the time (when), location (where) and manner (how) in which an employee works. Flexibility should be mutually beneficial to both the employer and employee and result in superior outcomes.

Many companies provide an opportunity for employees to work from their home. Moreover, flexible workplace has the potential health benefits associated with current trends towards more flexible working in the UK and Europe [1]. The problems of workplace flexibility in Thailand is a lot of people and companies in Thailand do not use a flexible program because they do not know how to apply it effectively. Moreover, its advantages and effectiveness are not understood well enough. For example, flexible program can help employees to work happily and under pressure and so on.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1) To explore whether undergraduate students understand the concept of flexible workplaces.

2) To determine undergraduate students understanding if flexible workplaces affect student's career in the future.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definition of Workplace Flexibility

Workplace flexibility is where an employer and an employee can agree upon changes to how, when and where an employee can perform their duties to meet the business demands. Flexibility on the job includes the willingness and ability to readily respond to changing circumstances and expectations. Being flexible when it comes to work is worth a lot. Employees who approach their job with a flexible mindset are typically more highly valued by employers [2]. Having employees willing to step outside their job description means employers can get more accomplished. Flexible workers who are able to take on more responsibilities, do different tasks, and do more at work have more to offer their employer than employees who can only do one or two tasks. Having flexible employees means do not have to find others to take on more work because flexible employees are willing to do whatever is necessary to get the task accomplished or the job done.

B. Definition of Flextime

Flexi time is a flexible way of working which allows employees to fit their working hours around their individual needs, and accommodates for other commitments outside of work. The employees do this by communicating with their employer to create an adaptable work schedule that is different to the set timings of the standard working day (e.g. '9-to-5'). This may involve work from home, or adjusting starting and finishing times around the core hours. It would then be up to the employee to choose when

they work (with their employers permission), provide that the total hours add up to the amount required by their contract [3]. In addition, there are many advantages of using flexi time, and it has the potential to benefit both the employee and the employer. Employees may choose to work on a flexi time basis to avoid a long or busy commute, to allow time to work around childcare, or even to maintain a steady work/life balance by giving themselves time for their own hobbies or sports. Employers often offer flexi time work to increase staff retention, and broaden their recruitment opportunities. As it can also result in happier employees, companies who utilize flexible working hours can earn benefits from a boosted morale and higher level of productivity within the business.

C. Definition of Flexplace

Using the flexibility to work in a home office or telework center when it is effective to do so is clearly the wave of the future, and for many of us the future is already here [4]. Flexplace has multiple benefits, for both the company and the employee. For organizations, it offers the chance of reducing its carbon footprint, through reduced energy consumption, reduced travel costs and parking spaces. For individuals, flexplace schemes have improved performance and productivity as well as an improved supervisor/worker relationship, morale and job attitude. Employees working-at-home a day or two each week are often more productive because the quiet environment without constant interruptions allows for maximum concentration and creativity. Also, participation in flexplace has allowed employees with health problems to continue providing valuable work contributions with less leave usage and little interruption to the office. Other reported benefits for employees include reducing stress levels, increasing efficiency, and reducing commuting time.

D. Definition of Flexible benefit plans

Benefit program offers several choices and combinations in its contribution requirements, benefits, and timeframe to suit individual employee needs. Flexible benefit plans allow the employees to select the plans or benefits they need from a bucket of plans or benefits provided by the employer. Flexible benefit plans allow employees to choose their package of benefits out of health insurance, retirement benefits, and reimbursements for out-of-pocket health expenses of self or dependents. Flexible benefit plans were beneficial to both the employer and the employee as the employer could save payroll taxes while the employee can save Federal and State income taxes. This is because the employees contribute to these benefits in a similar manner as co-pay. For example, the contribution was deducted from their pre-tax income. The employer's contribution is reduced and the employee's taxable income is also reduced. Along with the benefits received in return of this contribution, because of the lower taxable income, the employee's take-home salary also increases which is an added benefit. Because of the rising cost of healthcare, employees expected to receive health insurance benefits as a result of employment. Flexible benefit plan reduced the benefit-pay burden on employers while giving the employees a choice of selecting their own benefit plans. Cafeteria planed and flexible spending account were some of the types of flexible benefit plans. Flexible benefit plans became increasingly popular with employers. Health and child-care costs have risen tremendously over the past several decades. This has had a major effect on a business' ability to offer benefits, yet most employees still expect to receive benefits as a result of employment. Small firms in particular were often unable to take advantage of the economies of scale that larger companies could use to their advantage in securing benefits programs. These companies, as well as larger ones, have subsequently sought palatable means by which their employees can contribute to the cost of benefits.

E. Definition of Flexible Working Hours

A flexible schedule allows an employee to work hours that differ from the normal company start and stop time. Particularly in an environment for exempt employees, those hours are generally 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. or 9 a.m. - 6 p.m. and tallied, they total a 40-hour work week. (Any regularly scheduled work hours allow an extra hour for lunch whether the employee takes the time or not.). In the past, flexibility has meant that an employee might work 7 a.m. - 4 p.m. every day as an option that gave the employee an extra hour in the morning in exchange for losing an hour in the late afternoon. But, today's employees demand more from their employers and especially the millennial employees. A flexible schedule is also dependent on employee availability to cover all aspects of the job and all hours of the day during which a business makes products or serves customers [5]. When the employer's focus is on the work being done, the employees can focus on meeting deadlines and producing good work – do not on watching the clock tick the seconds until it is time to go home. The luxury of the nontraditional schedule reduces stress - and when stress do not get in the way, your startup is benefit. Allowing employees to work flexible hours does not mean they are allowed to stop showing up. Consider these ideas for restructuring the way you work your startup. The bottom line is that tangible results are the goal. Many employees find it helps tremendously when they can complete tasks efficiently, but in their own way [6].

F. Advantages of Being Flexible in the Workplace

Embracing change can expand your opportunities. Today's work environment is fluid. This means those employees who are able to adapt to shifting priorities are considered a valuable asset above and beyond their

skills and experience. Being able to adjust to shifts in organizational dynamics is necessary today. Moreover, being flexible can help you to strike work life balance. Telecommuting, the connected workplace and other technologies mean that the lines between work time and personal time has blurred. Rather than resist this change, embrace it. While you need to be flexible and respond to emails during your evening hours, you can also use this flexibility to your advantage. Personal needs once relegated to weekends alone can be addressed more easily since we are always connected, in and outside of the office. Next, being flexible is make you more responsive to change. The shifting dynamics of the workplace means that you need to adapt and respond to change, quickly. Resisting this can lead to undue stress. Recognizing and embracing flexibility help you to adapt to difficult situations more easily [7]. In addition, flexibility in the workplace allows employers and employees to make arrangements about working conditions that suite them. This helps employees to maintain a healthy work life balance and helps employers improve the productivity and efficiency of their business. If your business enforces a rigid and unyielding workspace you are decreasing your chances of hiring top talent. However, telecommuting can be a challenge for managers. They do not just approach someone in person to discuss an issue. Balancing schedules and workloads can also be complicated if you are managing telecommuters, although the results are worthwhile. Workplace flexibility is a great leadership's tool, make sure you use it to its full potential [8].

G. Importance of Adaptability & Flexibility at Workplace

Adaptability is the nature of changing or create modifications in oneself to suit to the new environment. Workplace culture means that a person must be opened to new ideas or changes, must be able to work independently or in teams, or carry out tasks that do not intend for one person only. Employers are increasingly shifting from single roles to rotation of roles and flexible job descriptions. It is a sought after skill as it indicates the employee can adapt to changing customer needs, technology trends. It is also tied to career growth as the person becomes more equipped [9]. An adaptable person is someone who can carry out multiple tasks, manage multiple assignments by setting priorities and making changes to attitude to merge with the new culture. To function or perform in the world in any situation or circumstances, it requires an individual to possess the basic skill of adaptability. Hence, the importance of adaptability get stronger when there are more given opportunities. Of all the skills that employers look out is a person having adaptability, a core emotional intelligence quality. It is ranked the top among other important skills like communication, interpersonal skills, work ethics and principles.

H. Impact of Flexible Working Hours on Work-Life Balance

Flexible working practices are beneficial for both employee and employer. Hence, in the first place flexibility is introduced to the workplace in order to help employees with kids or employees who care after siblings to manage their time between work and life. As flexibility gives employee the ability to control when, where, and how much time do they work, flexibility definitely contributes to improvement in allocation of work and life responsibilities. Thus, employee may end up fulfilling his or her working as well as well non-working roles easily. Finally, successful achievement of inside the work and outside the work responsibilities leads to finding work life balance, which increase overall life satisfaction. To summarize, it might be said that use of flexible working practices positively influence on work life balance and overall life satisfaction of the employee [10]. Flexible working hours have been highly requested and used by women due to their family roles. However, flexible working hours are offered to men as well. Nowadays, both women and men due to the new family patterns used flexible working practices, where both parents have equal family roles and dual family income. Thus, it is important for both of them to successfully fulfill work and life responsibilities and achieve work-life balance [11].

III. METHODOLOGY

The respondents were undergraduate students from Naresuan University in Phitsanulok, Thailand. The population of undergraduate students at Naresuan University is 19,030 people. The researcher used Taro Yamane Formula in (1) for determining the sample size which is given by n= sample size required, N=number of people in the population, and e= allowable error (%) which is 10%. The researcher sampled size was 100 respondents. To make inferences about characteristics of a population, researcher used a random sample [12]

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} \qquad (1)$$

The Criteria for Choosing the Sample. First, the respondents must be above 20 years old. Second, the respondents must be undergraduate students. Lastly, the respondents must be students at Naresuan University. For data analysis, the researcher collected the data from undergraduate students at Naresuan University respondents for classification to answer the problem of research and calculate statistics to conclude research result. The researcher used Likert scale and all the questionnaires gave to relevant respondent to get their responses. The following scale assigned to each of five responses, See TABLE I. Data analysis methods in the absence of primary data

collection could involve discussing common patterns, as well as, controversies within secondary data directly related to the research area [13].

TABLE I. Likert Scale and statement Table Type Styles

Scale	4.50-5.00	3.50-4.49	2.50-3.49	1.50-2.49	1.00-1.49
Statement	Excellent	Very good	Moderate	Fair	Poor

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Personal Information

There were 78% of female respondents and 22% of male respondents. 83% of the total respondents knew about flexible workplace before. Moreover, 89% of the total respondents agreed that this research would benefit the respondents while 2.8% disagreed.

B. Concept of Flexible Workplace

TABLE II. The respondents' understanding about the concept of flexible workplace

Questions	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	S.D.	Meaning
Do you understand the concept of flexible workplace?	2.32	.84	Fair
Do you think all employees can apply for a flexible workplace arrangement?	3.77	.78	Very good
Flexi place can help you to increase your performance rather than working in the normal office.	3.81	.76	Very good
Flexi time can help you to manage your time better.	4.51	.61	Excellent
Flexi working condition can motivate you to work increasingly.	3.83	.77	Very good
Flexi time can help you to work under pressure.	4.07	.67	Very good
Flexi place supports you to work in the environment that you prefer.	4.46	.86	Very good
Flexi time can help you to have more time for relaxing and do activities with your family and friends.	3.87	.60	Very good
You satisfy to choose your working condition in your company.	4.14	.73	Very good
Flexible workplace helps to balance your working and personal lives.	3.55	.90	Very good
Flexible workplace can help you to plan your life better.	3.92	.86	Very good
All organizations should have flexible time, place and work conditions.	4.56	.59	Excellent
Do you want to work in a flexible company in the future?	4.30	.89	Very good
You prefer to have the flexibility in your organization in order to manage your work and personal interests.	4.18	.80	Very good
You will manage your time better, if you have a flexible workplace.	4.12	.81	Very good
Flexible workplace can reduce your pressure and problems.	3.98	.67	Very good
You prefer to have flexible welfare.	4.27	.82	Very good
You prefer to choose working environment.	4.06	.98	Very good
Flexible workplace contributes to a good physical and mental health.	3.93	.92	Very good
Average	3.98	.78	Very good

According to TABLE II, it is obvious that the respondents fairly savvied what flexible workplace is. Also, they understood the concepts of workplace's flexibility quite well. They realized that flexible workplace can contribute to their better performance, time management, work life balance, health, working environment, motivation, job satisfaction, and planning process. Most of them, therefore, wanted to work in a flexible organization in the future.

C. Impact of Flexible Workplace in Your Career

TABLE III. The opinion of the respondents about the concept of flexible workplace

Questions	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	S.D.	Meaning
Your performance will increase, if you have a flexible workplace.	4.00	.84	Very good
A flexible workplace can motivate you to work better.	3.75	.85	Very good
You will feel good and comfortable, if you can choose your time to work during each working day.	4.20	.83	Very good
You will work happily, if you work within a flexible company.	3.64	.85	Very good
A flexible workplace positively effects on your benefits.	3.94	.79	Very good
You have the same opportunity for promotion as anyone else with your ability and experience.	3.36	.52	Moderate
Flexible work is actively encouraged in your work area.	3.69	.81	Very good
Your responsibilities apart from your work limit the opportunities for promotion.	4.03	.76	Very good
Your commitment to the organization would be questioned if you work flexibly.	2.21	.87	Fair
You think flexible workplace helps to arrange your time schedule effectively.	4.30	.87	Very good
Flexible workplace contributes to work life balance.	4.22	.75	Very good
Average	3.76	.79	Very good

According to TABLE III, the average mean shows that most of respondents viewed the concept of flexible workplace as an advantage for both employer and employee. However, they did not think that flexible workplace affect their chance of being promoted and commitment to the organization. Nevertheless, they still believed that their performance, motivation, positive feelings, happiness, timetable arrangement, and a balance of their work and life could be increased by applying the concept of workplace's flexibility.

CONCLUSION

Lack of flexibility in regulations, strategies, programs, and conditions can minimize the capacities of an organization. For example, the abilities to attract and retain talented or experienced staff, participation within the workforce, work-life balance, job satisfaction, opportunities for success, productivity, health, safety and wellbeing of staff, absenteeism, customer service, and innovation capacity.

In the past, flexible workplace only meant to be able to adapt time, place, benefit plan, and working hours. Nowadays, the concept of flexible workplace is better known, especially its reputation for contribution to more effective management in terms of performance, time, a balance of work and life, health, working environment, motivation, job satisfaction, and planning process. Furthermore, flexible workplace can contribute to positive feelings about the company and happiness in workplace as well. Therefore, many people want to have a flexible conditions within workplace and tend to work in a flexible company rather than the normal one even if there are some people who still think that workplace's flexibility is not beneficial for their promotion opportunity and commitment to their firms. Notably, adaptability is the key of change. To be effectively flexible, a person must be opened to new ideas or changes, must be able to work independently or in teams, or carry out tasks that do not intend for one person only. Both employer and employee should have the basic skill of adaptability in order to create an effective flexible workplace. Finally, the benefits of workplace's flexibility could be turned into a problem if the company does not have an effective strategy to apply flexibility to workplace. Hence, it would be beneficial for all of us if the studies on flexible workplace in other related areas are further reviewed to have a better concept of flexible workplace and use it wisely.

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