

## Flexible Work Schedules and Employee Well-Being

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### Abstract

This paper aims to improve understanding of the relationship between the use of flexible work schedules and employee well-being. Using a sample of 336 employees operating on two flexible work schedules (flexitime and telecommuting), clear evidence was found of the positive relationships between flexible work practices, job satisfaction and work/life balance. The results of the study also indicate that flexitime schedules can reduce the impact of role overload and job-induced stress. However, the findings suggest that telecommuting does not always enhance role overload and work/life balance. In addition, employees operating under flexitime work schedules displayed significantly higher levels of work/life balance than their counterparts utilising telecommuting arrangements. The study findings are discussed in relation to theories of employee flexibility and the implications for employees and organisations are addressed.

**Keywords:** Flexible work arrangements; work schedules; well-being; job satisfaction; work/life balance.

### Introduction

There have been many changes to global business, international work forces and in employees' lives that have led to increased concern for the boundary between work and non-work. For example, the challenges created by the present financial crisis have led to more international organisations focusing on flexibility as an alternative to redundancy (Andrews, 2009). A further example of the ambiguity of the pursuit of balancing work and non-work is demonstrated by the increasing incidence of dual career couples, dual income families, and single parent families with either child or elder care responsibilities (Baird, 2006). Indeed, the number of working individuals with children or elder dependents for which they need to care seems to be increasing (Pocock, 2004). Furthermore, a greater number of employees telecommute (work from home), or bring work home, thus blurring the boundaries between work and non work (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris and Weitzman, 2001). Together, these factors have resulted in employees spending more time attempting to balance multiple responsibilities, and ultimately, increasing the concern for the boundary between work and personal life. To adapt to these changes, many organisations have implemented flexible work arrangements to help employees balance their work and non work lives.

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The impact of flexible work arrangements on employee and organisational outcomes has been well documented. For instance, research (Rubin, 1979; Ronen and Pimps, 1981; Stains and Pleck, 1986; Barber, Dunham and Formisano, 1992; Pierce and Dunham, 1992; Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright and Neuman, 1999; Saltzstein, Ting and Hall Saltzstein, 2001; Kossek, Lautsch and Eaton, 2006; Baker, Avery, and Crawford, 2007) examining the impact of flexible work arrangements has generally shown that these initiatives have a positive influence on the work and non-work attitudes of employees. However, these results are not supported by other studies. For example, empirical investigations (e.g., Hicks and Klimoski, 1981; Dunham, Pierce and Castaneda, 1987; Hill, Miller, Weiner and Colihan, 1998) exploring the work related benefits of flexible work arrangements have concluded that in some cases these initiatives can have little influence on employee attitudes.

The primary objective of the research was to assess the relationships between flexible work schedules and employee well-being of office based employees. To accomplish this objective a survey questionnaire was administered to office based employees in an Australian organisation. Evaluating the relationship between flexible work arrangements and employee well-being is appropriate as Australia is still generally considered to be underrepresented in the work-life literature (Baird, 2006). Four dimensions of employee well-being are assessed for the purpose of this research: work/life balance, role overload, job- induced stress and job satisfaction.

## **Theory Development and Hypotheses**

Evidence presented in the literature suggests that greater autonomy provided to employees with the use of flexible work schedules can provide employees with positive outcomes (Ronen and Pimps, 1981; Pierce, Newstorm, Dunham and Barber, 1989; Baird and Litwin, 2005; Baker et al., 2007). In addition, it is also been suggested that greater work schedule flexibility will lead to enhanced work/life balance perceptions for professional employees (Tausig and Fenwick, 2001). Flexible work programmes offer employees more flexibility and work schedule control than traditional working hours (Ronen, 1981). Therefore, it is logical to assume that organisational programmes that offer employees greater flexibility (e.g., flexitime and flexiplace) should provide employees with a better ability to balance work and non work responsibilities compared to their counterparts working on traditional fixed hour schedules.

### ***Flexitime and Well-being***

Flexitime work schedules (also referred to as flex-time or flexible hours) have been linked to numerous work and non-work benefits for employees. The review of the work/life literature revealed that flexitime schedules that offer the most benefits for employees are those with short core hours, the accumulation of hours, and the ability to change schedules daily or weekly (Olmstead and Smith, 1994). While there may be some limitations when utilising flexitime work schedules (Bailyn, 1993; Pocock, 2004), working flexible hours is generally considered to have a positive influence on employee attitudes such as job satisfaction (Ronen 1981; McGuire and Liro, 1986). Furthermore, flexitime can enhance work and personal life balance (Hayman, 2009). Indeed, flexible work schedule research (Owen, 1977; Pierce and Newstrom, 1980; Tausig and Fenwick, 2001; Saltzstei et al., 2001) has established a positive relationship between flexitime

operating schedules and work and non-work integration. Better integration of work and personal life leads to less work/life conflict which can have a positive impact on job related stress (Baird and Litwin, 2005). Consequently, it is predicted.

***Hypothesis 1: The utilisation of flexitime work schedules will be positively related to employee well-being.***

### ***Flexiplace and Well-being***

The impact of flexible work schedules, such as flexitime on employee attitudes, has received a great deal of attention (Hicks and Klimoski, 1981; Ronen, 1981; Hill, et al. 1998; Pierce, et al. 1989; Eaton, 2003). In spite of the abundance of literature exploring flexible work hours, the impact of working at home, or telecommuting has not received the same attention (Rasmussen and Corbett, 2008). One study by Hill et al, (1998), which is, generally, considered to be the first in the world to compare virtual office workers with their office-based counterparts, found telecommuting had moderate effects on employee productivity, flexibility and work/life balance. Other more obvious employee benefits of flexiplace initiatives include reduced commuting time, reduced stress, role overload and more time for personal and family activities (Kossek et al., 2006). Moreover, research (Grzywarc and Marks, 2000) has found in certain situations telecommuting can help manage role overload. Flexiplace schedules also help support diverse work and life patterns of employees and improve job satisfaction and well-being (Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea, and Walters, 2002; Baker et al., 2007). Most research examining the impact of flexiplace initiatives suggests that the effect on work and non-work attitudes of employees is similar to flexible work schedules, such as flexitime (Rodgers, 1992). Therefore, it is conceivable that flexiplace or telecommuting work arrangements will also positively impact employee well-being. Consequently, the subsequent relationship between flexiplace work schedules and well-being is expected.

***Hypothesis 2: The utilisation of flexiplace (telecommuting) work schedules will be positively related to employee well-being.***

## **Methods**

### **Research Setting and Participants**

An Australian university was selected as an appropriate setting to conduct the study. The organisation is a large employer of office-based administrative staff with comprehensive access to flexible work schedules. Indeed, the participating university has utilised a variety of flexible work arrangements and work/life programmes and these are entrenched in the organisational culture. Furthermore, employees have had access to flexible work schedules including, flexible hours and working from home, since 1990. Consequently, this setting provides a unique opportunity to assess how flexible work practices influence the well-being of office based employees.

Respondents in the study were 336 administrative employees. 211 of the survey respondents used flexitime work schedules, with 125 respondents operating on flexiplace work schedules. A prominent feature of the sample characteristics was the majority of respondents were female (64 and 60 percent of respondents respectively), reflecting the nature of the administrative staff employed within the universities (*Healthy Life Style Office, 2002*). The second feature of the study sample related to job function; specifically, office-based administrative employees make up a large percentage of the non-academic university workforce, and indeed, a further feature of job function was that 93 percent of the incumbents were in the category of administrative and professional staff. Another feature of the sample was that all age groups were relatively well represented. A final feature of the sample was that over 50 percent of respondents in both organisations had children living at home and nearly 12 percent of the survey staff had eldercare responsibilities. Overall, the characteristics of the sample generally represented the demographics of the universities office based employees.

## Measures

### *Work/Life Balance*

Employee work/life balance was measured with a 15 item scale adapted from an instrument reported by Fisher-McAuley, Stanton, Jolton and Gavin (2003). The original scale consisted of 19 items designed to assess three dimensions of work/life balance: work interference with personal life (WIPL), personal life interference with work (PLIW), work/personal life enhancement (WPLE). Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of feeling a particular way *during the past three months* using a seven point time related scale (e.g., 1=Not at all, 4=Sometimes, and 7=All the time). The factor analysis of the items confirmed the three dimensions of the work/life balance scale. Cronbach alpha values for the three factors were .90 for WIPL, .86 for PLIW, and .77 for WPLE. Higher arithmetic means indicate that respondents report having experienced that situation more frequently. For the WIPL and PLIW, sub scales higher means are purported to indicate lower levels of work/life balance. The WPLE sub scale is worded positively and higher means indicate higher levels of perceived work/life balance.

### *Work Role Overload*

Role overload was measured using a six item scale reported by Arynee, Srinivas and Tan (2005). Work role overload is defined as a sense of feeling that there is too much work to do in the time available. Responses were obtained on a seven point response scale (anchored from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). Example items include: 'It often seems like I have too much work for one person to do' and 'there is too much work to do everything well'. An arithmetic mean of the six role overload items was obtained (coefficient alpha = .87).

### *Job-induced Stress*

A measure of job-induced stress was used based on an instrument previously reported by House and Rizzo (1972). The seven item instrument was adapted from a six point scale to a seven point likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree) for consistency with the other measures in this study. Previous research (Macky and Boxall, 2009) using the measure of job-induced stress found acceptable reliability statistics for the instrument. Higher scores represent greater felt stress and the coefficient alpha obtained was .90.

*Job Satisfaction*

The overall level of job satisfaction was assessed using a section of the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). Using samples of white collar professional employees in a series of studies with office workers, the five item scale reported an overall internal reliability coefficient of 0.77 (Oldham, Hackman and Stepina, 1978). These results provide some confidence for using this instrument, which is a popular method for measuring global job satisfaction. An overall, rather than a facet measure, was chosen for the use in this study because the researcher is interested in how work/life balance relates to job satisfaction as a whole, rather than how work/life balance relates to specific aspects of the job. The instrument developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) consists of five items referring to satisfaction with work, the job and how often they (the employees) feel like quitting their job. Two items are reversed scored. Responses were made on a seven point Likert scale (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). An arithmetic mean of the five job satisfaction items was acquired with a coefficient alpha of .85.

*Flexible Work Schedule*

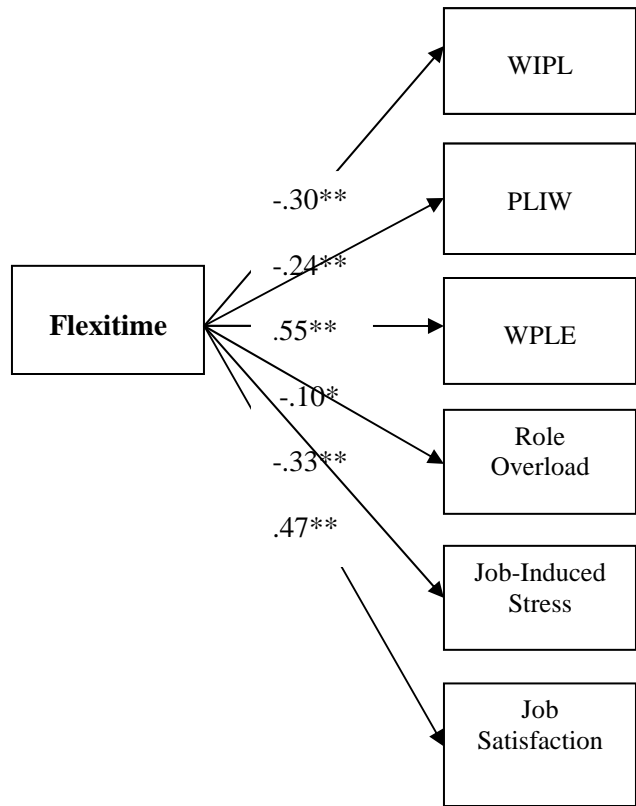
The analyses are based on 336 respondents who reported having used either flexitime or flexiplace (telecommuting) work schedules for a minimum period of one year. Of these, 211 employees utilised flexitime arrangements and 125 employees worked on flexiplace schedules, generally from a home office. Employees were asked how many days per week they worked from home. All employees worked from a home office for a minimum of two days per week. The instrument used to measure the use of flexible work schedules was adapted from an instrument reported by Hayman (2009). The three items relating the utilisation of individual work schedules were measured on a seven point scale (coefficient alpha = .91).

**Analyses and Results**

To test the research hypotheses and the overall fit of the model, structural equation modelling or a path analysis approach was used. AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) was employed to estimate path coefficients among the variables while simultaneously removing the effects of method factor bias. Modelling the two groups simultaneously provides more efficient parameter estimates than two single-group models (Bollen and Long, 1993), while also providing a test for the significance of differences between the two groups. Following the recommendations of Bollen and Long (1993) to report multiple fit indices, four goodness-of-fit measures were employed simultaneously in the assessment of model fit. First, the normed chi-square (chi-square ÷ degrees of freedom), in which a ratio of between 1.0 and 3.0 indicates an acceptable fit (Carmines and McIver, 1981) was employed. Furthermore, the Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) were also employed in the analysis. For the AGFI and CFI a value above .90 indicates an acceptable model fit (Bentler and Bonett, 1980). Lastly, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), where a value of 0.06 or less represents a close fit, and the RMSEA should not exceed 0.10 (Bentler, 1990).

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all the study variables were assessed using seven point scales, with means score ranging from 4.89 to 3.60. Higher means indicate higher levels of the particular variable. All of the examined variables are significantly inter correlated, but not above the recommended level of .65. Flexible work schedules are significantly correlated to WIPL ( $r = .46, p < .001$ ), PLIW ( $r = .28, p < .001$ ), and WPLE ( $r = .44, p < .001$ ), role overload ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ), job-induced stress ( $r = .36, p < .001$ ) and job satisfaction ( $r = .54, p < .001$ ).

**Figure 1: Path Model (n=211)**



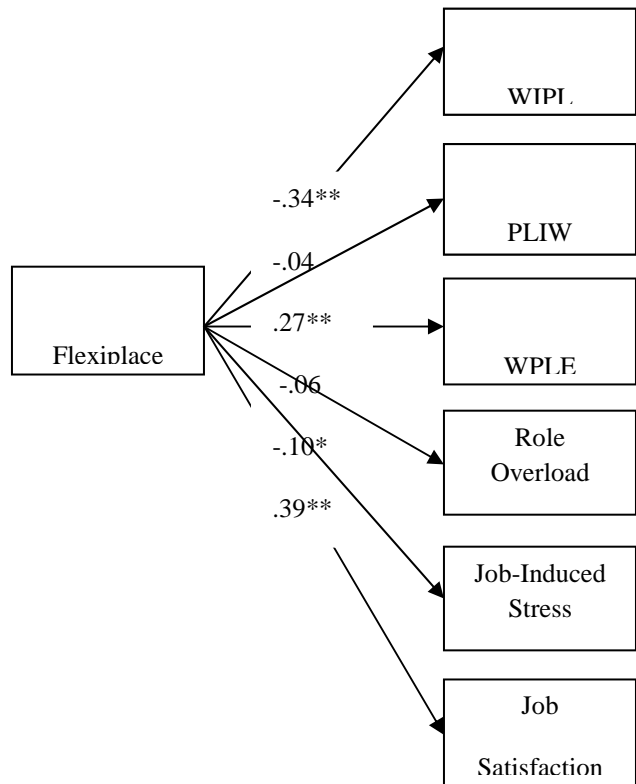
- Notes: a. Standardised estimates of the path coefficients are shown. Non significant path is in bold.  
 b.  $\chi^2 / df = 1.144$ , AGFI = 0.929, CFI = 0.977, RMSEA = 0.041  
 c. WIPL = Work interference with personal life, PLIW = Personal life interference with work, and WPLE = Work and personal life enhancement. d. \*  $p < .01$ , and \*\*  $p < .001$ .

The results presented in Figure 1 indicate that the conceptual model, and the data generally fit well (normed  $\chi^2 = 1.144$ , AGFI = 0.929, CFI = 0.977, RMSEA = 0.041). Furthermore, the standardised path estimates reported in Figure 1 show significant coefficients at the  $p < .01$  level. The results of the path analysis suggest flexitime work schedules were significantly related to the three work/life balance dimensions of WIPL, PLIW and WPLE. Indeed, flexitime was significantly related to role overload, job-induced stress and job satisfaction. These findings indicate flexitime work schedules generally enhance employee well-being. Consequently,

Hypothesis 1 was fully supported; suggesting flexitime work schedules are positively related to employee well-being.

The results presented in Figure 2 indicate that the data generally fit well (normed  $\chi^2 = 1.240$ , AGFI = 0.910, CFI = 0.937, RMSEA = 0.061). Moreover, the majority of the standardised path estimates reported in Figure 2 show significant coefficients at the  $p < .01$  level. The path analysis results suggest that flexiplace work schedules were significantly related to two of the work/life balance dimensions of WIPL and WPLE. However, flexiplace schedules were non-significantly related to PLIW. These results imply that flexiplace schedules do not reduce the impact of personal life interference with work. Indeed, flexiplace arrangements were non-significantly linked to role overload and only marginally significant to job-induced stress. Hence, the findings suggest telecommuting did not positively impact role overload. Furthermore, there was a positive relationship found between flexiplace work schedules and job satisfaction. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 was marginally supported, which indicates flexiplace work schedules are only moderately related to employee well-being.

**Figure 2: Path Model (n=125)**



- Notes:
- a. Standardised estimates of the path coefficients are shown. Non significant path is in bold.
  - b.  $\chi^2 / df = 1.240$ , AGFI = 0.910, CFI = 0.937, RMSEA = 0.061
  - c. WIPL = Work interference with personal life, PLIW = Personal life interference with work, and WPLE = Work and personal life enhancement.
  - d. \*  $p < .01$ , and \*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Discussions and Conclusions

The main focus of this paper was to explore the relationships between flexible work arrangements and well-being with a sample of office based employees. The hypotheses presented in this paper predicted that flexitime and flexiplace work schedules would be related to three dimensions of work/life balance: WIPL, PLIW and WPLE. Indeed, the expectation that flexitime would be linked to WIPL, PLIW, and WPLE was substantiated by the statistical results, although flexiplace schedules were not significantly related to PLIW. Overall, the results demonstrate the importance of organisational flexible work policies to reducing the negative impact of work conflicting on personal life and personal life interfering with work. In addition, these results provide empirical confirmation that flexitime and working from home was generally associated to positive enhancement of personal life on work and vice versa. With the exception of a small number of researchers (Eaton and Bailyn, 2000; Daves, 2004; Hayman, 2009), limited attempts have been made to empirically assess the importance of flexible work policies to positive experiences and well-being of office based employees. These findings make a significant contribution to the work/life literature as it is likely that organisational flexibility policies are related to a host of work and non work attitudes of employees (Eaton, 2003; Voydanoff, 2004). Consequently, future researchers may wish to consider the importance of other attitudinal variables when assessing flexible work practices.

The study also has implications for human resource practitioners. The results of this study imply that flexible work schedules make a significant contribution to employee well-being and to the ability of employees to balance their work and personal life. Consequently, an implication for the university managers and human resource practitioners who want to develop comprehensive work/life policies is to how to improve the degree of schedule flexibility provided to professional employees. In addition, university leaders may consider the importance of the type of organisational flexibility policies implemented, and attempt to provide a culture that supports and encourages the use of flexible work arrangements. Hence, there is an opportunity for university administrators to follow the requests of respondents who suggested that training programmes might improve the understanding of supervisory staff on the importance of schedule flexibility and access to flexible work policies for office based employees.

The study results should be interpreted with the following limitations. Firstly, the simultaneous path analyses results should be interpreted with some caution as the better model fit of the flexitime data may be attributed to the different data set numbers. Secondly, the study sample was limited to 336 administrative employees from the university, albeit at four geographically dispersed locations. Therefore, future researchers may wish to test the hypotheses in another university environment, or in other industries that utilise flexible work schedules with office-based professional employees. Thirdly, a cross sectional research design was employed, so as a result, causality among the variables cannot be determined, but inferences can be made from the associations. The fourth aspect of the study is the self-report data collected in the quantitative questionnaire to assess the study variables. Although this method bias, due to the use of a self-report approach, may have possibly inflated the magnitude of the observed correlations, this effect would not alter the statistical significance of the observed linkages between the study variables (Carmines and McIver, 1981; Kent, 2001). Indeed, the constructs included in the



present study were assessed by asking employees to report their own attitudes and perceptions, as work/life balance is in the eye of the beholder (Fisher, 2001). Consequently, the use of self-report questionnaires is an appropriate and convenient method for collecting the study data.

Despite the potential wealth of knowledge presented in this study, the research has arguably only begun to elucidate the complex relationships that might transform management practice and research interest. Indeed, the findings presented in the article are possibly suggestive, but an important consideration is that the results are not definitive. Furthermore, it is possible that alternative conceptual paradigms of work/life balance may be explored in future studies. Future researchers might also consider the model developed for this research across different cultural settings, in particular where flexible work arrangements are utilised by office-based employees, which may provide further understanding and consolidation of the study findings. Moreover, there may be the need for the current investigation to be extended by thorough empirical research that has the potential to refine work/life theory and design, and add knowledge to management practice. Finally, continued research on work/life balance has immense potential for improving organisational efforts to enhance the quality of people's work and personal lives.

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