

# FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS: EXPERIENCE OF A MALAYSIAN MANUFACTURING COMPANY

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The demands and the needs of employees prompted the development of flexible work arrangements in the West. Using role conflict theory, the present study examines the relationship between the level of flexible work arrangements and the amount of work-life balance evident in the Malaysian manufacturing sector.

**Design/Methodology:** The data were collected from employees currently working in the manufacturing sector. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data.

**Findings:** The results indicate a moderately strong positive correlation between flexible work arrangements and the work-life balance dimension.

**Originality:** Previous studies have focused on work life balance from the prespective of workplace characteristics. Other studies have examined flexible work arrangement provided to employees independently. Moreover, these studies have usually been conducted in services and banking industries. However, the present research focuses on how flexible work arrangements influence the work life balance of employees in the manufacturing sector specifically.

**Keywords:** *Flexible work arrangement, flex-time, flex-pace, work-life balance*

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years, the concept of employing workers in flexible work arrangements has become increasingly prevalent in the academic and business domains alike (Bagnes, 2021). Research suggests that traditional work-life patterns need to be rethought in light of the complexity of today's corporate environment, which is characterised by severe rivalry, globalisation, and changes in traditional gender roles (Cervia and Biancheri, 2017). The fact that most families now have two income sources is one factor that contributes to the rise in the percentage of households with two income earners (Smith, 2015). At the same time, globalisation has evolved due to rapid technological improvements, which has resulted in a rise in the significance and value of knowledge management and cross-border collaboration, as well as a change in the traditional work environment of eight to five hours (Galea et al., 2013). Therefore, by modifying weekly working hours and offering flexible working hours, and part-time work, flexible working arrangements can improve the work-life balance.

Employers who offer flexible work allow employees to determine their own working hours (Atkinson and Hall, 2013). Therefore, this would allow ample time and relief for employees to focus on their personal adaptation in this challenging world. According to Bijsterveldt (2015), the expanding relevance of flexible working techniques can be attributed to several causes such as market globalisation, the development of new technologies, rapid changes in the labour market, and increased market competitiveness. Highlighting the benefits of flexible work arrangements, Sharifah and Sharija (2020) observe that working hour flexibility provides employees with enabling working conditions that make it possible for them to work outside of standard work hours and locations.

In recent years, the term "quality of life" has gained traction as a notion to describe environmental and humanistic elements that industrial productivity and economic progress have neglected (Ariffin et al., 2016; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Shabir & Gani, 2020). Therefore, employment flexibility is argued to be one of the variables that can contribute to a positive work environment and atmosphere within an organisation (Ariffin et al., 2016), since it helps both the employees and the company. In addition, flexible working practices encourage work-life balance, which is useful for both men and women as family structures evolve (Pruyne, 2012). Faced with the need to balance their personal and professional lives, employees can better plan their lifestyles when flexible work hours are provided (Lahti, 2017).

Since Covid-19 engendered the need for flexibility in how work was carried out, the workplace has been in constant flux. Flexible workspaces and flexible work arrangements are intrinsically linked. According to Davidescu et al. (2020), job flexibility must become "business as usual" and not merely an emergency measure. Even if the incidence of remote work increases, especially during the peak of Covid-

19, employees will still choose to commute to the office rather than work from home (Feleen and David, 2021). As flexible work arrangements grow increasingly prevalent in the workplace, Covid-19 will continue to alter the office's appearance and ambience (Chua et al., 2022). The current workplace must become more adaptable and flexible to accommodate the hybrid workforce and the dynamic of remote work during and after COVID-19.

Establishing a flexible work environment is one of the most effective ways to meet the work-life balance requirements of most employees, regardless of generation. According to Shagvaliyeva and Yazdanifard (2014), a flexible work environment reduces stress, boosts job satisfaction, and encourages healthy habits among employees. Companies and organisations should offer flexible working hours, the option to work from home, and unrestricted paid time off in order to create a more flexible work environment that attracts younger generations of workers.

In Malaysia, Choo et al. (2016) and Ariffin et al. (2016) have established that flexible work arrangements are advantageous for both employers and employees. According to the Talent Corp Malaysia Report, the majority of flexible work arrangement adopters are multinational corporations (MNCs) with good flexible work arrangements policies, such as Digi and IBM, but local organisations such as Maybank and CIMB Bank have begun looking into such arrangements. Malaysia's Talent Corp (an agency under the Ministry of Human Resources) has also promoted flexible working arrangements, particularly in government agencies and manufacturing industries (Wong et al., 2017).

Therefore, the present paper aimed:

1. To identify the level of flexible work arrangements among employees at a manufacturing company.
2. To identify the level of work-life balance among employees at a manufacturing company.
3. To examine the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance among employees at a manufacturing company.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Flexible Work Arrangements*

According to Stroup and Yoon (2016), flexible work arrangements are a low-cost programme assisting employees in balancing work and family responsibilities as workforce demographics and the nature of work evolve. Flexible work arrangements are a work-life balance strategy that enables employees to mix their professional and personal lives (Chou and Cheung, 2013). As a result of the introduction of flexible work, employees will have a degree of control over where and how they work, but this must be based on an agreement with the employer (Lahti, 2017). Flexible work arrangements can assist employees in exercising greater control over their workload.

In addition, those that utilise a variety of arrangements report greater job satisfaction and a better work-life balance (Wheatley, 2012).

In addition, there are three basic types of flexible work arrangements: flexibility in scheduling hours, flexibility in the location of work, and flexibility in the number of work hours (Chen, 2015). In addition, the flexibility of scheduling hours is subdivided into several options, such as flex time, reduced workweeks, and varying breaks and overtime. Moreover, flexible work arrangements have been demonstrated to increase productivity, even non-parents have profited substantially. Some employees with lengthy commutes may wish to explore altering their schedules or working from home in order to spend less time in traffic. According to Maurer (2021), two-thirds of workers reported being more productive when working outside of a traditional office, experiencing less stress due to not commuting daily, and having fewer distractions and interruptions. Companies with flexible work arrangements benefit from a larger candidate pool that is tempted to join their organisations, which also helps the employer (Terri, 2019).

### *Role Conflict Theory*

According to the role conflict theory, work and family role pressures are incompatible in some respects, resulting in inter-role conflict (Palomino and Frezatti, 2016). In addition, this theory developed the basic concept that the family-work relationship is best portrayed as a zero-sum game because human time and energy are limited or important resources (Schuler et al., 1977). Therefore, employees with more family obligations will be able to devote less time and focus to work, resulting in surprisingly poorer job outcomes. In addition, the term "role" implies that a person may have multiple roles and responsibilities concurrently, such as career, family, and community, which can lead to conflicts when the requirements of one function are incompatible with those of another. According to Kossek and Thompson (2016), by providing organisational flexibility, organisations can increase the time and location ranges to address work and nonwork demands, thereby reducing the tension that might result from competing job expectations.

### *Work-Life Balance*

Career-family compatibility has always been a subject of discussion for everyone concerned with their life and job quality (Lahti, 2017). Constant availability and the need to establish a work-life balance have significantly increased employee stress levels. In recent years, the importance of combining work and family life has increased for various reasons, including competitiveness, demographic change, the increasing participation of women in the labour market, continually evolving technologies, and the increase in dual-income households (Feleen and David, 2021). Holistically, work-life balance is a notion that embraces all elements of life and is unique to everyone (Kossek & Thompson, 2016).

### *Border Theory and Boundary Theory*

According to Leung and Zhang (2017), the work/family border theory, also known as boundary theory, focuses on how people manage the boundaries that separate the work and family worlds in order to achieve a good balance. Employees can achieve a better work-life balance by having flexible, integrated work-family arrangements that allow them to spend more time with their loved ones (Kluczyk, 2013). The flexibility and constraints of altering the borders between work and family life will impact the degree of integration and the simplicity of transitions between the two spheres, and the degree of friction between any of these domains is strongly related. Another theoretical paradigm of boundary theory seeks to examine and clarify how people strike a balance between work and life while reducing work-family conflict (Ashforth et al., 2000). According to boundary theory, humans develop, maintain, and change role boundaries (Sun et al., 2020). Given the importance of work-life balance today, it is becoming increasingly important to understand how border management influences all aspects of life. Border management's impact on working-family conflict has been examined in a number of studies (Kossek & Thompson, 2016; Li et al., 2017). Although there are significant differences, border theory and boundary theory are very similar.

### *Relationship between Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Life Balance*

Numerous research studies have examined the relationship between flexible work arrangements and employee work-life balance (Bagnes, 2021; Subramaniam et al., 2015; and Atkinson & Hall, 2013). According to a study conducted by Chung and Van der Lippe (2020), flexible working can facilitate a better work-life balance and family functioning. While the study by Subramaniam et al. (2015) concludes that better-educated and higher-earning Malaysian women prefer flexible work arrangements, the MANOVA analysis indicates that flexible work arrangements can attain work-life balance. In contrast, Dilmaghani (2020) found that employees with both flextime and flexplace have much higher job and work-life balance satisfaction than those with only flextime.

Consequently, a research framework has been developed to accommodate the objectives of this study (Figure 1). Work-life balance is the dependent variable, while flexible work arrangements are the independent variable. The following research hypothesis has been created based on the findings of the literature as mentioned earlier:

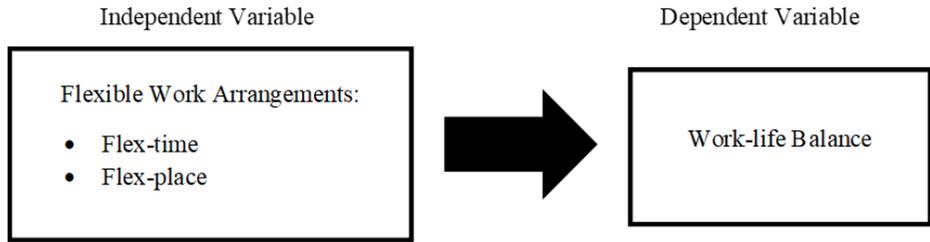


Figure 1: Research Framework

## METHODS

### *Pilot Study*

Accuracy and precision are the defining characteristics of a reliable measuring technique (Srinivasan & Lohith, 2017). In the context of this study, the instrument's reliability is determined by using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. According to Arof et al., (2018), an instrument with a reliability range and Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 or higher is considered reliable, consistent, and acceptable. Therefore, the results of the pilot study for this study are acceptable as shown in Table 1. In order to evaluate the validity of two variables in this study, 15 Johor-based employees of ABC Company were selected as respondents.

Table 1: Reliability Test

Dimension	N	Cronbach's Alpha
Flexible Work Arrangements	15	0.765
Work-Life Balance	15	0.850

### *Sample and Procedure*

While conducting research for this research, the researcher employed the population sampling approach. According to Daniel (2011), using the census for study is strongly recommended if the population is small and the researcher has enough resources. Consequently, it may be necessary to incorporate into this study the foundations of doing a total count or examining the entire population. Moreover, Daniel (2011) also claimed that readers of research findings would be much more inclined to attest to the validity of a study whose conclusions were based on a census rather than a sampling. As a result, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to all 97 Malaysia-based manufacturing company employees. As a result, 65 respondents supplied responses, with an overall response rate of 67%.

Data for this research were collected utilising quantitative methodology. To achieve the study's objective, which was to determine the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance among manufacturing company employees, the researcher also relied on the questionnaire as the primary data collection method, which was distributed via an online platform (google form and email).

### *Measures*

In this study, a questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was adapted from questionnaires developed by prior researchers (Bijsterveldt (2015) - flexible work arrangements, and Lahti (2017) - work-life balance). The instrument contains both positively and negatively worded items. This study's questionnaires consist of three sections: section A, section B, and section C (refer Table 2). Each item of flexible work arrangements and work-life balance is evaluated using a five-point Likert Scale with five alternatives ranging from 1 to 5 in sections B and C (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

*Table 2: Segment of Questionnaire Items*

Section	Variables	No. of Questions	Source
A	Demographic	10	
B	Flexible Work Arrangements	11	(Bijsterveldt, 2015)
C	Work-Life Balance	10	(Lahti, 2017)
	Total	31	

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

Two types of statistics were utilised to analyse the collected data: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to examine demographic information, the level of flexible work arrangements, and the level of work-life balance, whereas inferential statistics were used to examine the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance among manufacturing company employees.

The accuracy of the distribution is determined by using the minimum score or the average mean as the centre of the distribution (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). To examine respondent background, the adoption of flexible work arrangements, and the work-life balance of manufacturing company employees, the data were descriptively analysed using mean score, frequency distribution, and percentage.

According to Kuhar, inferential statistics are often employed for comparing differences between treatment groups (2010). Therefore, Pearson correlation analysis is the most suitable technique to employ in this study to analyse the third research objective. Pearson's Correlation returns a value between [-1, 1], with 1 signifying full

positive correlation and -1 full negative correlation. The inclusion of mean and standard deviation in the computation of Pearson's Correlation indicates that it is a parametric method.

### *Demographic Analysis*

Table 3 shows the findings of the descriptive analysis for this study. First, just 21 of the respondents were female, or 32.30 percent. In addition, the majority of the workforce was composed of Malay (98.50%), followed by Chinese (1.50%). In addition, a remarkable 43.1% of the responses consisted primarily of 28 workers aged 24 or younger. In addition, based on the numbers presented previously, the marital status of the respondents revealed that 24 of them (36.90%) were married. Moreover, data from these previously married couples revealed that virtually all their partners were unemployed (64.60%). In addition, 38 of the 41 respondents (58.50%) claimed being single and no longer living with their parents no longer resided with their parents. In addition, the distribution of respondents according to the number of children revealed that the majority, 41 out of 65 respondents (63.10%), did not have children.

In addition, the data revealed that, in terms of academic background, the majority of respondents had attained SPM or equivalent credentials by age 30 (46.20%). The number of respondents holding diplomas and degrees were just 17 (26.20%) and 15 (23.10%), respectively. Prior to the statement, statistics on respondents' career histories since graduation revealed that, on average, sixty percent (60%) of respondents had worked for 0 to nine years. In addition, 11.0% of the total respondents (11 out of 65) had between 10 and 19 years of job experience. 12.30% of the total was comprised of 8 responders with 20 to 29 years of experience. Surprisingly, 48 respondents, or 73.80% of the total of 65 respondents, consistently exceed their daily allotted work hours.

### *Research Objective 1 : Level of Flexible Work Arrangements Among Employees at Manufacturing Company*

The study's first objective is to determine the level of flexible work arrangements among manufacturing company employees. To extract and collect significant values from the data collected from 65 respondents for analysis purposes, a descriptive analysis utilising the mean and standard deviation was utilised. The number of respondents with flexible work arrangements was determined using a total of 11 items, which were separated into flex time and flex place dimensions. In conclusion, as stated in Table 4 discovered that flexible work arrangements among manufacturing company employees are at a moderate level, with a mean score of 3.49 out of a possible 5 points.

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents

Demography	Description/ Option	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	44	67.7%
	Female	21	32.3%
Race	Malay	64	98.5%
	Indian	0	0%
	Chinese	1	1.5%
	Others	0	0%
	< 24	28	43.1%
Age	25 – 34	14	21.5%
	35 – 44	11	16.9%
	45 – 54	9	13.8%
	55 >	3	4.6%
Marital Status	Single	41	63.1%
	Married	24	36.9%
If (single), do you livewith your parents?	Divorce	0	0%
	Yes	27	41.5%
If (married), is your partner employed?	No	38	58.5%
	Yes	23	35.40%
How many children do you have?	No	42	64.60%
	0	41	63.10%
	1 – 4	17	26.20%
	5 – 9	7	10.80%
Level of education	SPM or equivalent	30	46.20%
	Diploma	17	26.20%
	Bachelor's degree	15	23.10%
	Master	3	4.60%
	PhD	0	0%
Job experience sincegraduation (years)	0 – 9	39	60.00%
	10 – 19	11	16.90%
	20 – 29	8	12.30%
	30 >	7	10.80%
Do you regularly work longer than standard hour?	Yes	48	73.80%
	No	17	26.20%

Table 4: Level of Flexible Work Arrangements

Dimension	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Level
Flex-time	3.87	1.12	High
Flex Place	3.10	1.33	Moderate
Total Mean Score	3.49	1.23	Moderate

*Research Objective 2: To Identify the Level of Work-Life Balance Among Employees at Manufacturing Company*

The study's second objective is to determine the level of work-life balance among employees at a manufacturing company. In order to conduct the analysis, significant values were extracted from the data of all 65 respondents using descriptive statistics, specifically the mean score and standard deviation. Ten items spanning three unique dimensions; personal life, organisational life, and social life were used to assess the work-life balance of respondents. The overall mean score for work-life balance among employees at the manufacturing company at a moderate level, with a mean score of 3.59 out of a possible 5 points (refer Table 5).

Table 5: Level of Work-life Balance

Dimension	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Level
Personal Life	3.55	1.16	Moderate
Organisational Life	3.43	1.07	Moderate
Social Life	3.80	1.04	High
Total Mean Score	3.59	1.09	Moderate

*Research Objective 3: To Examine the Relationship between Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Life Balance Among Employees at a Manufacturing Company*

The third objective of this study is to examine the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance among manufacturing company employees. Flexible work arrangements and work-life balance were significant since their p-values were less than 0.01 (refer Table 6). Moreover, the data revealed a significant positive relationship ( $r = 0.619$ ) between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance among manufacturing company employees. The correlation coefficient also indicates a significant positive relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance, which may be explained by the fact that the more respondents' work-life balance is affected by their work arrangements, the more flexible those

arrangements must be. As such, the alternative hypothesis for this study is accepted (refer Table 7).

Table 6: Correlation Analysis Between Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Life Balance

Dimension	Work-Life Balance	
Flexible Work Arrangements	Pearson Correlation	.619**
	Sig. (2 - tailed)	.000
	N	65

Table 7: Hypothesis - Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Life Balance

Hypothesis	Findings
<i>H1: There is a positive relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance.</i>	Accepted

## DISCUSSION

The first dimension (independent variable) of this study, flex-time, indicates a moderate level of flexible work arrangements, while the second dimension, flexi-place, also indicates a moderate level. Another aspect studied was the significance of employees taking time off for a family emergency or an emergency leave. The majority of respondents gave these statements higher agreement scores because they were adamant that they and their family members should receive prompt, attentive care in the event of an unanticipated incident.

The commitment of working parents to the labour force and their subsequent earnings paths can be improved by allowing them to take time off without fear of losing their jobs in the event of an emergency or major life event. The manufacturing company's management is concerned with giving each family member the necessary attention so that employees can continue to function regularly at work without being unduly anxious about their inability to deal with external challenges. Moreover, from a broader perspective, policies that increase employment rates, such as parental leave, "may have long-term positive effects by increasing labour market experience, which could lead to higher future incomes".

According to the statistics, fewer than half of the responders were women. Consequently, a greater level of attention to detail in work practises, notably in the flexibility of arrangements, should be extensively adopted and is currently being implemented throughout the company. Significantly, today's higher standards

indicate that women appreciate schedule flexibility more than men. This may be because women are often more responsible for home duties than men and are also unduly dependent on them (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, and Shockley, 2013).

In addition to context, the majority of female respondents felt they could take paid maternity leave. In practise, Malaysian leave regulations oblige employers to give sufficient maternity leave for female employees and paternity leave for male employees (Wheatley, 2016). Higher father involvement has been associated with greater linguistic and cognitive development in children, which is a consequence of their social development. Paid paternity leave may improve the life outcomes of children in ways beyond the immediate health benefits of paid parental leave. The manufacturing company's management practises, which provided equal possibilities for the welfare of its staff and employees, may encourage other organisations to provide equal chances for the requirements of both genders.

The second objective of this study that has been examined is the level of work-life balance among employees of a manufacturing organisation. The results reveal that manufacturing company employees have a moderate level of work-life balance on average. Although the manufacturing company's management offered flexible working hours, most respondents stated that they frequently put in extra time. Shakir and Siddiqui (2014) discovered that working longer than normal hours was often detrimental to family life practices (Pradhan, Jena & Kumari, 2016). Consequently, it represents the moderate level of mean scores among employees who believe they have sufficient time to manage their job and personal duties.

The majority of respondents indicated that they are comfortable working with their coworkers. This would eventually evolve into an ongoing consensus agreement and coordination among the manufacturing company's employees in order to increase daily output. Most employees believe that positive relationships with coworkers and superiors are among the most important conditions for contributions (Balakrishnan, 2014).

Most workers agreed to spend their entire careers at the manufacturing company, indicating that organisational life among employees is normally moderate. This illustrates the management's efforts to encourage employees to remain with the company for a longer time by providing flexible work hours. According to Coenan and Kok, flexible working hours are one of the organisation's initiatives to improve employee work conditions (2014). This is also acknowledged by employees' organisational commitment to their employer, which shows as a sense of loyalty.

This study's third objective is to examine the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance among manufacturing company employees. According to Pearson correlation analysis, the findings revealed a significant positive relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance among manufacturing company employees. Furthermore, the relationship is really substantial. This aligns with the findings of earlier research by Ariffin et al. (2016), which discovered that flexible working positively impacts workers' work-life balance.

The study by Lahti (2017) also suggests a positive relationship between flexible working hours and work-life balance in the educational sector.

According to Galea et al. (2013), introducing workplace flexibility benefits both companies and employees, which helps to explain the positive correlation between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance. There is little doubt that providing employees with options and autonomy will enable them to establish their own work schedules and quickly finish a variety of jobs. Adding to this, Saragih (2015) argues that such management-led initiatives serve as an important means for empowering employees at work.

## CONCLUSION

Addressing all three research objectives of the study, analysis of data in the present research served to expand our understanding of the importance of flexible work schedules and work-life balance, particularly in the private sector. In addition, the study found that the presence of flexible work arrangements substantially affects employees' perceptions of work-life balance, and that these two characteristics are positively related and fairly significant when compared to each other. In addition, this study revealed that the manufacturing company's employees reported a moderate level of flexible work arrangements and work-life balance.

From a different perspective, the significance of this study could help Malaysian employers in all areas and industries, especially manufacturing. This is because there are still worries regarding the awareness and implementation of appropriate workplace policies among Malaysian enterprises. In view of the new normative practices, work-from-home programmes appear to offer improved protections and rules required by businesses for retaining and improving the well-being of their employees. However, employees today would be receptive to more advantageous policies and options which allow them to carry out their jobs with less monitoring. The capacity to accomplish a task with flexibility and a sense of control is likely to result in greater lifelong job satisfaction and decreased conflict.

Last but not least, the results of this study indicate that the management of the manufacturing company is extremely concerned with adopting the most optimal work arrangements for their employees, in accordance with the requirements of the modern workplace. This surely encourages every employer to be flexible and adaptable when it matters the most. Although there are only a few ongoing discussions about the unintended consequences of implementing work-from-home policies on employee well-being, the positive aspects of work-from-home policies are freedom, flexibility, and control over their own decisions which significantly maximises the employees' potential. The difficulties faced by employees may alter with the times and situations, but efforts would always be valuable in addressing their needs gradually and successfully over time. As it was anticipated that the implementation of flexible work arrangements would continue after Covid-19, these ideas could help the organisation gain more control over the workplace and facilities,

allowing for more successful implementation of flexible work arrangements and laying the groundwork for future transitions (Chua et al., 2022).

It is hoped that the outcomes of the current study may stimulate other researchers, especially those working in comparable fields of study, to pursue new lines of inquiry. However, the study has several limitations that future researchers should carefully address. The future study must be expanded to include more participants from various backgrounds. This is supported by Sekaran and Bougie (2016), who demonstrate that a larger sample size helps to reduce study-related errors. Further, this study focuses exclusively on flexible work arrangements that could impact the work-life balance of manufacturing company employees. However, it does not analyse or quantify other elements influencing work-life balance, such as organisational culture, organisational structure, and technology. Future research may take into account these factors in addition to covering other sectors for more broader insights.

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