

# **The Moderating Effect of Supervisor Support on Flexible Working Arrangement and Work-Family Conflict Relationship: A Conceptual Paper**

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## **Abstract**

Workforce competitiveness trends have shown significant changes over the years. Multiple role conflicts have seen an increase in both dual-earner families and single-parents. Regardless of whether it is single parents or working couples, both must manage family and work obligations daily. As such, many companies are adopting flexible working arrangement in their organizations. This study aimed to discover the moderating effect of supervisor support on the flexible working arrangement and work-family conflict relationship. The population for the study consisted of Malaysian organizations that adopted a flexible working arrangement. The flexible working arrangement here includes adoptions of flexible working time, compressed work-week practices and working from home. The companies involved were derived from TalentCorp Malaysia Flexible Working Arrangement report, 2015, in collaboration with Malaysian Federation Employer. The surveys form would be disseminated to the organization selected from the list through their respective Human Resource Department. The findings would explain the moderating effect of supervisor support on the flexible working arrangement and work-family conflict relationship. Findings from this study are deemed to be beneficial for the employers in general and human resource ministry in overcoming the turnover of productive employees due to the inability to balance work and family needs. The findings would also minimize the brain drain suffering by Malaysian organizations. An effective strategy could be developed so that the work-family conflict issues could be overcome.

## **Keywords:**

Flexible working arrangement, supervisor support, work interference with family (WIF), family interference with work (FIW)

## **INTRODUCTION**

Malaysia has encountered significant changes with regards to workforce competitiveness trends over the years (KPMG, 2019). The changes among others include the growth of dual-income earners and single-parent family, declining of fertility rates, ageing population, growth of women involvement in the workforce nearly as equal as men (Kossek & Distelberg, 2009). Because of this, dual-earner families and single-parents particularly, are experiencing an

increase of multiple role conflicts (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Both working couples and single-parents are obligated to handle the job and household accountabilities successfully in their daily life (Tammelin, Malinen, Rönkä, & Verhoef, 2016). Furthermore, when the demographic and roles changed and becoming more diversified (Mee Choo, Desa, & Abu Hassan Asaari, 2016), the workforce demanded working arrangement that fit their needs. Thus, to remain competitive, companies are obligated to restructure their work arrangement to fulfil the global labour market trends (Kossek & Thompson, 2015). One way to achieve this is via the advancement of information technology that enabled employees to work virtually (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). The technological innovation adopted by many organizations around the world has inevitably changed how work is carried out (Lake, 2016). These changes have allowed many industries to adopt new ways of working. According to Subramaniam, Geetha, and Maniam (2015), Malaysians prefer to engage in a flexible working arrangement (FWA) more than regular work hours and stationed workplace because of the flexibility that it brings to them. The flexibility here is the ability of the employees to decide their working hours and location of performing the work (Regus, 2017). Indirectly, this flexibility in choosing when to begin working and where to work from enables them to accomplish home roles demands and expectation (Kossek & Thompson, 2015).

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

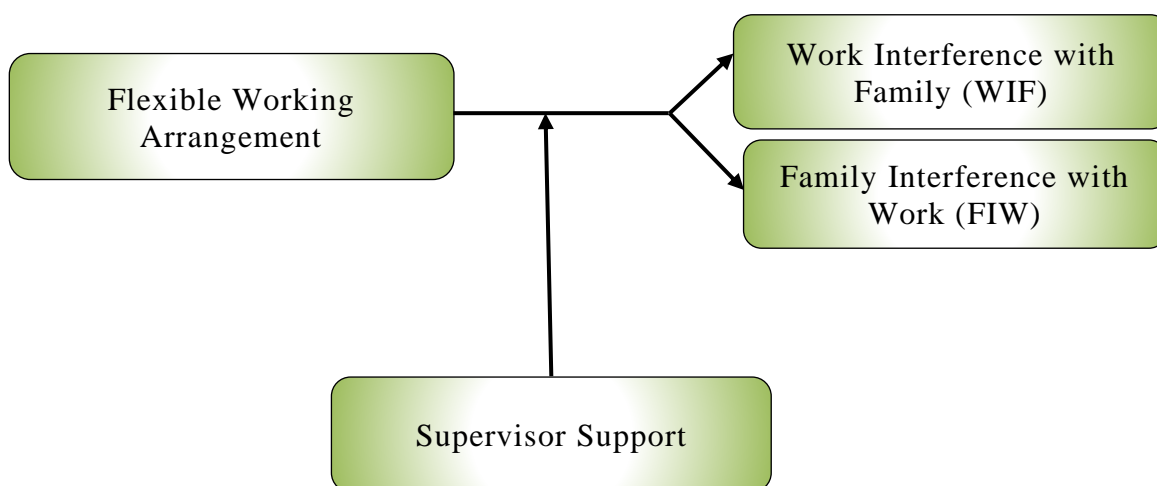
According to Fiksenbaum (2014), the demographic configuration has changed precipitously, where more dual-career families are surfacing. The dual-career families were facing more marital problems (Noor, Mahdzir, Nor, & Abdullah, 2019). The conflicts range from fiscal matters, disagreement, communication, relationship issues, caring, loving, affection and others (Noor et al., 2019). It creates a barrier in the employees' career if it is not resolved (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). Furthermore, Erdamar and Demirel (2014) highlighted it would also affect home matters.

According to Powell, Greenhaus, Allen, and Johnson (2019), the work-family issues led to critical debates among past researchers. The findings show that work-family issues have a massive influence on work-family conflict (WFC) (Powell et al., 2019). Those employees who are confronted with problems dealing with time and duties in both work and the home sphere would severely restrict them to undertake their role as employee or family productively, which would lead to an increase of WFC (Oshio, Inoue, & Tsutsumi, 2017). Negative consequences surfaced and connected to work-family conflict include employees becoming uncommitted to their work (Clarke & Holdsworth, 2017), individual productivity and performance declining (Fiksenbaum, 2014) and organization experiencing decreasing productivity cycle, an increase of employee turnover and more mental health distress among employee (Erdamar & Demirel, 2014; Kelly, Moen, Oakes, Fan, Okechukwu, Davis & Casper, 2014).

Powell, Greenhaus, Allen, and Johnson (2018), based on their research have found that when an individual focuses on one role domain, (e.g., work), it creates inequalities in performing the role in the other domain (e.g., home). For instance, when a person spends more time at work, it diminishes the time available with the family. Because of this, quality time available to spend with the family is reduced, therefore putting stress on the family and work, steering the employees towards WFC (Erdamar & Demirel, 2014).

Realizing this, many countries around the world are adopting FWA as a way to increase flexibility at the workplace (Klindzic & Marić, 2019; Kottey & Sharma, 2016). Masuda et al. (2012) and Warokka and Febrilia (2015) suggested that a FWA should be applied as a solution to lessen the impact of WFC. In Malaysia, however, employees are hesitant to engage in FWA since they have the discernment and opinion that opting for FWA may harm their career growth (TalentCorp, 2016). As for the employers, they are concerned about the safety of company information and security, when employees can access company data from outside (TalentCorp, 2016).

Furthermore, a study by Kossek (2016b) indicated that since FWA creates a borderless boundaries environment, employees who are working at home, away from the office, would find it difficult to detach themselves between work and family while they are at home, hence threatening the family relationship. These employees may find it hard to switch between work and family roles (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). The present study objectives are to determine the moderation effect of supervisor support between FWA and WFC. Specifically, the objectives of this study investigated the relationship between FWA and family interference with work conflict (FIW), FWA and work interference with family conflict (WIF) and finally examining the moderation effect of supervisor support between FWA and WIF and FIW. Figure 1 indicates the conceptual framework for this study.



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Role theory**

As suggested by Pleck (1977), to explore the concept of work and family, one must understand the different roles that men and women bear. Traditional perception has labelled the responsibilities of work and home-based on gender (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). According to Gornick and Meyers (2008), debates surrounding women's participation in the labour market, tend to reflect negative outcomes. The debates have neglected the fact that gender equality concerns not only women but also men. The effect of gender inequalities has far greater implications, across many dimensions, not only labour -market participation (Aboim 2010). It is broad, affecting both public and private spheres (Grunow et al. 2018). Both genders play

numerous roles in the workplace and at home, which instigate imbalances and stress either at the workplace or home (Kecklund et al, 2017). As an example, an employee who engages in fulfilling the home obligations after an exhausting day at the office may experience challenges when engaging the children's necessities. With the emergence of new technologies, where communication and the ability to be reached at any moment is enhanced, the boundary of work and family domain is becoming much more undistinguishable (Russo, Ollier -Malaterre, Kossek, & Ohana, 2018). With the increasing reliance on technology, i.e. internet and smart devices such as laptops and smart mobile devices, assessing work are limitless, where the control of both work and family boundaries is easier to manage or vice versa, thus affecting WFC (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018).

### **Flexible working arrangement (FWA)**

FWA has allowed flexibility at the place, which can improve work-life balance and boost organizational performance (Klindzic & Marić, 2019). It is also can be considered as a tool likely to waned the occurrence of WFC (Kossek & Thompson, 2015). A similar study by Clarke and Holdsworth (2017) also concluded that positive work-life balance was greatly enhanced with the adoption of FWA. According to Adams and Jex (1999), FWA initiatives have been seen as an attempt to help employees manage work and family needs. Yet, in Malaysian environment, it is not common to see FWA being practice in organizations where many companies still using the standard method of employment practices, and reluctant to embrace FWA (Ahmad, Shaw, Bown, Leach, Gardiner, & Omar, 2015). In general, based on Choo, Desa, and Abu Hassan Asaari (2016), organizations were still at the infant stage when the implementation of FWA was surveyed. Based on a survey conducted by Micheal Page Malaysia, a recruitment agency, only approximately 32 per cent of professional employees in Malaysia are considering FWA availability as the top three preferences and reason for accepting job vacancies (Micheal Page Malaysia, 2015). Based on this, FWA is not a popular option among Malaysian employees compared to the United States, where young professionals there are looking forward to work with organizations that opted the use of FWA in its employment packages (Matos & Galinsky, 2011). FWA was found to be associated to flexibility at work, which allows the employee to have control over their job, thus exhilarating the creation of improvement towards accomplishing a work-life balance (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). Concerning the ability to accomplish work-life balance through workplace flexibility, it generates an employee's keenness to continue working with the organization (Byrne & Canato, 2017).

### **Work family conflict (WFC) and flexible working arrangement (FWA)**

Studies focusing on WFC has been conducted since the 1960s, either using one single measurement WFC or separating it into two specific domains that are WIF (Halinski & Duxbury, 2019) and FIW (Hammer et al, 2015). According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), WFC surfaces from the combination of family and work irreconcilable role pressure. Kossek et al. (2015) asserted that generally, a significant number of employees regardless of age, gender or marital status, experience to some degree of WFC. Based on previous studies, the impact on the WIF and FIW depends on many factors such as gender, occupation and marital status (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991; Kim, Lee, Park, & Yun, 2015; Panatik, Badri, Rajab, Abdul, & Shaha, 2011). Each study might have found similar finding, but provided different perspectives of understanding WFC. The multiple perspectives were consistent with the

conclusion made by Kecklund et al. (2017) where they suggested that even if the two conflicts were linked, the consequence is different. Ferri et al. (2018) further emphasized that, because of this reason, more bi-directional studies should be conducted to extend the comprehension of work-family conflict antecedents.

It has been apparent that, in accomplishing role demand, which requires effort and dedicated time, it creates role strain which is the fundamental elements in WIF and FIW (Netemayer, Boles & McMurrin, 1996). Since there are more dual-income earners and single-parent family in the workforce now, the numbers of people experiencing role conflicts also increase (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The role conflict which causes strain comes in the form of role overload, are being experienced in both work or home environment (Liao, Lau, Hui, & Kong, 2019). Many organizations have adopted new ways of working to solve WFC (Warokka & Febrilia, 2015). One of them is the adoption of FWA as a way to increase flexibility at the workplace (Klindzic & Marić, 2019).

Halinski and Duxbury (2019) emphasized that FWA acts as a buffer to the negative effect of WIF. However, Beigi, Shirmohammadi and Stewart (2018) discovered that the findings were inconsistent when the relationship between FWA and WIF or FIW were addressed. Yet, the proof showed that FWA implementation was highly appreciated among dual income earners with children as it can assist the employees in organizing and equalizing work and family demands (Bryan & Sevilla, 2017). FWA indirectly assists them in solving WFC as well as helping the employees gaining work-life balance (Galea, Houkes, & De Rijk, 2014). The finding indicated that WIF and FIW could be reduced drastically, depending on the duration in which the employees were working remotely. The longer the employees working remotely, the greater WIF and FIW can be reduced because they have better control and can manage time more efficiently (Solis, 2016). Nevertheless, the same study discovered that the employees seem to appear more tired because they are enmeshing up multiple roles concurrently.

### **Supervisor support**

Studies on the relationship between supervisor support and WFC, particularly on WIF and FIW issue are abundant (Ferri, Pedrini & Riva, 2018; Kundu, Phogat, Datta, & Gahlawat, 2016). In past studies, it is found that supports that employee received can help them overcome WFC (Abd Razak, Yeop Yunus, Samsudin, Wahid, & Wahid, 2019; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997; Koivisto & Rice, 2016). In the workplace, supports received, particularly from the supervisor is very crucial. Supervisor support is one of the best protuberant support that can assist employees in sustaining the positive impact of employee's wellbeing at the workplace (Hemmig, 2017). Meguella, Abdul Khalil, Ahmad, and Mohd Nor (2017) summarize supervisor support as the willingness of leaders to offer psychological and instrumental assistance to subordinates so that they can cope with work and home obligations. Frone, Russell, and Cooper (1997) identified two forms of support that supervisors can provide to subordinates.

Since then, the research on the supports given by supervisor was given further attention and expounded more comprehensively. Finding from various researches have classified four dimensions or types of support that the supervisor can provide in aiding work and family anxieties faced by the employees. The four dimensions of support consist of emotional support, instrumental support, dual agenda support and role supportive behaviours support (Hammer, Kossek, Zimmerman, & Daniels, 2006; Kossek, Hammer, Kelly, & Moen, 2014).

In the working environment, instrumental support that the supervisors provided is underpinning FWA practices at the workplace which is crucial to assist employees overcoming conflict at work or home (Baird, 2015; Kossek, 2016b). Koivisto and Rice (2016) found that supervisors could influence employees' attitude and react to the implementation of FWA practices in the workplace. That statement is consistent with findings from past researches linking supervisor role in fostering employee's wellbeing and health while maintaining structural resources and rewards (Hammig, 2017). Supervisors also, at the same time, should give opportunities to co-workers to enhance their job satisfaction and fulfilling their needs at the workplace (Rathi & Lee, 2017). By giving those opportunities, supervisors allow the employee to handle the implication of job loads and complications at the workplace, thus giving a positive outcome on work (Goh, Ilies, & Wilson, 2015). Based on the literature above, supervisor support not only brings favourable impacts on WFC (Abd Razak, Yeop Yunus, Samsudin, Wahid, & Wahid, 2019) but also helps employees in sustaining the positive impact of employee's wellbeing at the workplace (Hemmig, 2017) which is the underpinning FWA practices (Baird, 2015; Kossek, 2016b). Furthermore, work-life literature suggested FWA as a tool for enhancing work-personal life integration and the reduction of WFC (Barnett & Hall, 2001; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper aims to study the moderating effect of supervisor support between FWA and WFC relationship at three companies in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The study population would mainly be concentrated on the companies in Malaysia that currently adopting FWA. The FWA here is defined as companies adopting compressed work-week, practising working from home (WFH) and flexible working time. The companies selected in the study is based on the listing of global organizations practices FWA mentioned in TalentCorp Malaysia Flexible Working Arrangement in collaboration with Malaysian Federation Employer (MEF) report, 2015.

Based on the report, out of the four companies listed, only three are operating in Malaysia. Thus, the three companies would be contacted, and an official letter requesting to conduct the study would be given to them. After receiving their consent, the questionnaires would be distributed to these companies. The survey questionnaire would be accompanied by a letter explaining the reasons for the research, providing background and a bit of information about the study. Non-probability sampling was chosen for this study since the element of the study population does not own any probabilities that devoted as the reason for being selected as a sample subject (Sekaran, 2010). The sampling design is dedicated to the selected companies' employees that possibly able to provide feedback on necessary information.

Self-administered questionnaires would be used to collect the data. Since it is impossible to identify the respondents, the assistance from each organization's Human Resource Department would be contacted to help distribute the questionnaire using Google Form link via the corporate office email.

The questionnaires used would be using items, replicated and adapted from previous research. The questionnaires items consist of four major sections which are Demographic Information, Flexible Working Arrangement, Supervisor Supports and Work-Family Conflict. Questionnaire on FWA which consist of 8 questions would be adapted from Hyland (2000), WFC would be adopted from Netemeyer et al. (1996) which consist of 10 questions and Supervisor Support questions which consist of 6 questions would be adapted from Anderson, Coffey, and Byerly (2002). WFC measurement would be categorized into two sub-sections

since the study was intended to study in both directions. First sub-section is Work Interference with Family (WIF) contains five items, and second sub-section is Family Interference with Work (FIW) contains five items. This study would use a 5-point Likert scale which would include (1) strongly disagrees, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree. The scale was chosen because according to Revilla, Saris, and Krosnick (2014), 5-point and fewer scale would contribute to better result of validity and quality. The dichotomous scale should be considered the middle category to avoid the higher non-response rate, and therefore, the 5-point Likert scale was used for the study. Descriptive analysis, factor analysis, reliability measures, the Chi-Square test, the Mann-Whitney U Test and binary logistic regression analysis would be conducted to analyze the data.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study would give awareness about the importance of supervisor support role in understanding the moderating effect that it has on the FWA and WFC relationship. The study would explain the moderating effect of supervisor support on FWA and WFC relationship. It would also explain the effect of FWA on organization and family relationship that often links that as a cause that was severely affecting employees' career and personal life. Findings from this study were hoped to provide useful insights for the employer and ministry of human resource to overcome turnover, brain drain and burnout among productive employees due to WFC. By appreciating it, effective action and strategy could be planned to overcome the WFC, turnover, brain drain and burnout among productive employees. Organizations should not only accentuate profit but also put employees' interest first, by reducing WFC. It is believed, by offering FWA in the organization, it would help the organization and would have a positive impact on individual employees (Kattenbach et al., 2010; de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). For the nation, FWA can be considered as an incentive to attract Malaysian working abroad to return home and contribute to the skilled labour, which is currently insufficient and lacking.

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