Perceptions of organizational attractiveness

The differential relationships of various work schedule flexibility programs

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Abstract

Purpose – Past research on flextime programs often treat work schedule flexibility as a homogeneous construct. The purpose of this paper is to empirically demonstrate the relationship between different flexible work schedules and employee perceptions of organizational attractiveness.

Design/methodology/approach – Participants (n = 655) reviewed a scenario with work schedule flexibility manipulated into one of eight consecutively more flexible schedules. Participants then rated the job offer within the scenario on organizational attractiveness.

Findings – The study found significant differences in organizational attractiveness based on the eight types of work schedule flexibility. The study’s results supported categorizing flextime programs as heterogeneous constructs.

Research limitations/implications – The study utilized scenarios reducing generalization to work situations. Participants were college students with a limited work experience and may have viewed organizational attractiveness based on expectations, not on experiences. Future studies should examine workforce populations and also examine different work schedule flexibility programs’ effects on absenteeism and productivity.

Practical implications – The study suggested that work schedule flexibility affects future employees’ perceptions of organizational attractiveness. Attracting high-quality employees is in the best interests of organizations and the effects of a flexible work schedule may begin before employees are hired.

Originality/value – The paper illustrates that different work schedule flexibility schedules, often labeled “flextime,” are perceived differently regarding organizational attractiveness. The paper further supports the notion that work schedule flexibility is a complex construct that cannot be examined using one broad term.

Keywords Flexible working hours, Corporate image, Employee behaviour, Gender, Working patterns

Paper type Research paper

Work schedule flexibility has become important for both employers and employees in job negotiations for the increasingly diverse USA workforce, including women and single parents. Further, work schedule flexibility may directly affect perceptions of an organization’s attractiveness. Work schedule flexibility refers to non-traditional variability in work schedules, allowing for less rigid attendance requirements (Avery and Zabel, 2001). This flexibility should allow for individuals with home or family obligations to participate in their job without additional stress from juggling home and work life. Job flexibility enhances the retention of employees who are in need of more flexible job arrangements, as well as decreases stress in workers who have access to flexible arrangements (Avery and Zabel, 2001; Rama Devi, 2009; Shapiro et al., 2007).

To date, empirical field research has been inconsistent concerning the effectiveness of work schedule flexibility plans on organizational outcomes (Avery and Zabel, 2001; Baltes et al., 1999; Scandura and Lankau, 1997). One explanation for these inconsistent findings is due to variation in types of work schedule flexibility programs, coupled with tendencies to examine work schedule flexibility as a universal homogenous
construct. Flexible work arrangements can include flexibility in scheduling of hours (flextime), amount of hours (part-time or job sharing), and location of work (telecommuting) (Galinsky et al., 2004). For the purposes of this study, we focused specifically on the scheduling of hours or work schedule flexibility. Within the scheduling of flexible hours, there are many different functional programs varying in structure and implementation.

Flextime programs are a scheduling feature added to full-time positions where certain hours are expected to be worked on a set schedule while others are flexible hours. Traditionally, organizations with these programs set limited core hours where attendance is required, with remaining hours of attendance being more flexible. Management usually sets core hours, while flexible hours or "flexi-time" is adjustable by employees (Avery and Zabel, 2001). Sloane and Gasteen (1989) found multiple definitions of work schedule flexibility were grouped as a homogenous construct and used to define organizations as flexible or not.

Nadler and Cundiff (2007) suggested the theoretical need for heterogeneous work schedule flexibility categories, which are often labeled within the homogenous term "flextime." Nadler and Cundiff suggested seven types of flextime programs adapted from Rubin's (1979) examination of work schedule flexibility. Seven distinct categories of flextime are based on the most commonly offered variations of work schedule flexibility within the US government and private industry (Avery and Zabel, 2001; Nadler and Cundiff, 2007; Needham and Donaldson, 1989; Rubin, 1979). Different flextime programs need to be empirical tested in order to determine whether potential employees perceive them as separate constructs. This study aimed to test for differences in employee perceptions of these seven categories of work schedule flexibility.

The seven flextime variations are defined by the amount of flexibility in ending and starting schedule times, core hours present, as well as the flexibility of day-to-day changes. The seven proposed categories of flextime are: flexitour, modified flexitour, gliding schedule, modified gliding schedule, variable day, variable week, and crediting schedule (Nadler and Cundiff, 2007; Rubin, 1979). Flexitour is defined by a flexible, but predetermined, starting time followed by a corresponding ending time fixed to the starting time. Modified flexitour adds the ability to change starting time with prior notification as need arises. Gliding schedule allows daily flexibility in starting time without prior notice and a corresponding ending time. Modified gliding schedule is similar but features a set of core hours determined by peak customer interaction, where employees are expected to work core hours with flexibility on start and corresponding end times. This modified gliding schedule closely fits the common definition of flextime (Avery and Zabel, 2001). Variable day programs incorporate core hours; however, start and end times are flexible and independent of each other as long as a weekly quota of hours is met. Variable week plans are the same as variable day programs, distinguished by a quota of weekly goals rather than weekly hours. Finally, crediting schedule features complete flexibility in start and ending times with no required core hours, in which hours can be credited from one week to the next (added or subtracted from vacation time).

**Work schedule flexibility issues and benefits for organizations**

Benefits to organizations for using flexible work scheduling include a greater range of available customer service hours, higher employee satisfaction (Galinksy et al., 2004), and stronger organizational attractiveness to potential employees (Rose, 1998). Additionally, a reduction of unplanned absences (CCH Incorporated, 2005), an increase in loyalty, and reduction in turnover (Meyer et al., 2001) have been associated with
Work schedule flexibility

flextime programs. However, these findings are not consistent across the literature (Baltes et al., 1999).

The positive effect of flexibility on various outcomes has been empirically supported; however, the implementation of a flexible plan needs to be consistent and communicated clearly to employees. Organizations need to focus on maximizing the benefits of work schedule flexibility in order to attract and retain a more representational and diverse workforce. Additionally, work schedule flexibility is often available informally instead of being an officially established organizational strategy. Increasing the clarity of the program for employees will also increase the likelihood that the program will be utilized. Unclear procedures have been listed as a main reason employees fail to make use of flextime when offered (US Department of Labor, 2005).

Galinsky et al. (2004) reported that 80 percent of employees want more flexibility in work hours, but these same employees are also concerned with negative consequences associated with the use of flexible schedules. Employees’ often fear consequences for using work schedule flexibility (Bond et al., 2002; Avery and Zabel, 2001). Reported negative consequences include slower promotions, smaller bonuses, and less career-advancing opportunities. Reluctance at the managerial level to promote flextime programs is due in part to unsupported concerns over loss of productivity (Roberts et al., 2004). These issues are enhanced by difficulties employees’ face getting reliable and consistent information about existing work schedule flexibility programs (Bond et al., 2002).

Gaps also exist in the types of employees gaining access to formal flextime programs. Primarily, employees in white collar managerial jobs have more access to flextime programs (Golden, 2005). As a byproduct of this, well-educated white men are significantly more likely to have access to flextime programs (Sharpe et al., 2002). While women are leading the call for work schedule flexibility they are less likely to have access to such programs compared to men (Avery and Zabel, 2001).

Work-family conflict and gender differences in work schedule flexibility

In 1951, 76 percent of mothers stayed at home. Fifty years later, that percentage had decreased to 28 percent (DeBell, 2001). Indeed, women are seen as the leaders of the paradigm shift for flexible work arrangements (Lotus, 2007). A study conducted by the Families and Work Institute found that 43 percent of employees have access to some form of flexible working arrangements, and 63 percent of the male respondents indicated that they used these arrangements whereas 79 percent of females indicated use of flexible work arrangements when made available to them (Bond et al., 2005). In another study, 90 percent of women surveyed responded that they had used or were utilizing flexible work arrangements when their employers made them available (Shapiro et al., 2007).

The attractiveness of flextime may be due to a desire to alleviate conflict between work and non-work roles. The conflicting division between work and non-work is most often referred to as work-life or work-family conflict. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985, p. 77) defined work-family conflict as “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role.” Lambert (1990) suggested that many of these theories interact simultaneously in explaining work-family conflict. The ideal state is to achieve balance between potentially conflicting roles (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000).

Although both work and family conflicts can be detrimental, studies have shown that work is much more injurious on family than family is on work (Frone, 2003). As the amount of hours worked per week increase, studies have shown that the level of
work-family conflict rises (Frone et al., 1997). Bond et al. (2005) found in a national workforce study that flexible workplaces are associated with a reduction in work-family conflict.

Women and men report similar levels of work-family conflict (Frone et al., 1992), but without flexible work arrangements, women are more likely to feel obligated to leave an organization because of work-family conflict. Flexible work arrangements, such as flextime, are associated with a reduction in the intention to quit (Shapiro et al., 2007). Additionally, work schedule flexibility is valued more by women as a method of reducing work family conflict (Cao, 2005).

**Scenario research**

Flextime as discussed in the current literature is a variable construct capturing many dissimilar work schedules. One of the possible reasons flextime programs are often lumped together in field research samples is the difficulty of finding large working samples all using the same program. Therefore, a scenario-based methodology was used to identify differences in perceptions of organizational attractiveness as related to work schedule flexibility.

Scenario research has been used to assess potential employees’ reactions to a variety of organizational variables and have been found to be useful when comparing different work environments and leadership styles on constructs such as organizational attractiveness and intentions to apply (Cropanzano et al., 2005; Ensari and Murphy, 2003; Jago and Vroom, 1978; Malloy and Janowski, 1992; Peters et al., 2004). Scenario research has also been shown to have strong mundane realism and causal conclusion validity when assessing participants’ attitudes similar to limited information situations, such as when applying for a new job (De Cremer and van Knippenberg, 2004). DeCremer and van Knippenberg’s (2004) suggestions for scenario research, such as using manipulation checks, specific scenarios for each variable, and a questionnaire administered immediately following scenario review, were adhered to in this study.

**Flextime taxonomy and research questions**

This study examined the effect of different “flextime” programs on a job-offer’s organizational attractiveness ratings. Work schedule flexibility programs in this study range from least flexible, a traditional 40 h, 9-5 workweek (control) to most flexible, a crediting schedule program with near complete flexibility (see Table I). The primary research question that guided this study was the differences in work schedule flexibility on perceptions of a job-offer’s organizational attractiveness as assessed by potential applicants. Additionally, the study was interested in testing for gender differences in ratings of organizational attractiveness based on type of flexibility schedule offered. Finally, whether flexible schedules were viewed as distinct from one another was considered and whether these distinct levels have different ratings of organizational attractiveness.

If differences are found in perceptions of and attitudes toward work schedule flexibility programs then this would illustrate how these programs are theoretically different constructs and are seen as different entities by potential employees. Research has emphasized that studying flextime as different entities under a single construct is imprecise (Avery and Zabel, 2001). Therefore, a movement towards heterogeneous taxonomies of definitions seems logical. Understanding how variations in work schedule flexibility are perceived will allow further refinement in research focusing on flextime. Additionally, this information is expected to provide practical guidance to organizations wishing to increase their employment attractiveness.
Based on previous empirical and theoretical research the following hypotheses were considered in this study, examining the relationship between different work schedule flexibility programs and perceptions of organizational attractiveness:

\[ H1. \text{ Greater flexibility will result in higher ratings of organizational attractiveness.} \]

\[ H2. \text{ Women will have a stronger preference for more flexibility in work schedules and will rate flexible organizations more attractive than men.} \]
There will be significant differences in organizational attractiveness ratings between the different flextime categories.

Method

Participants
Participants were undergraduate students at a mid-sized Midwestern state university. Participants ($n = 665$) were drawn from several upper level organizational psychology and business school courses. The mean age of the sample was 21.8 years, ranging from 18 to 53. Of the participants, 48 percent were male and 52 percent were female. The ethnicity for this sample consisted of 72 percent European Americans, 21 percent African Americans, and the remaining 7 percent of participants responded as being Mexican/Mexican American, Asian/Asian American, biracial/multiracial, or other. The mean number of jobs held by participants was 4.3, with an average tenure at a job of 2.2 years, and 90 percent of the sample had worked at least two or more jobs.

Measures
A survey was designed for the purposes of this study, which consisted of demographic questions, a job-offer description (scenario), and five questions assessing organizational attractiveness. Additionally, an initial item, “The company’s job offer includes a flextime plan,” was asked as a manipulation check, assessing the different work schedule flexibility plans on identification with the term “flextime.” Demographic questions pertained to past and future jobs of the participants, along with basic demographics such as age, sex, and ethnicity.

The organizational attractiveness measure used was adapted from Cropanzano et al. (2005). An example question is, “I would find this company to be an attractive place to work.” This scale had a high level of internal consistency, Cronbach’s alpha = 0.86 (Peterson, 1994). Participants rated all items on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strongly disagree, and 5 being strongly agree.

Procedures
Participants were tested in large groups and were randomly assigned to one of the eight different survey conditions. Participants were asked to fill out the demographic questions first and then asked to carefully read over the job-offer description. A single-paragraph scenario (see Table I) described a “white collar” job in an environmentally sensitive organization with good employee relations. The job-offer’s introduction was the same for all participants with manipulations occurring in the last sentences that described the company’s work schedule flexibility. Flexibility options included no-flextime, flexitour, modified flexitour, gliding schedule, modified gliding schedule, variable day, variable week, and crediting schedule. Each scenario included one of the flexible work schedules described through the scheduling of hours that would be a part of the job offer.

After reading the scenario, the participants were instructed to not refer back to the scenario while completing the assessment. This was done in order to maintain the initial impact of the independent variable without allowing for additional information to confound results. The remaining survey included the organizational attractiveness and manipulation check item. Each group of participants completed the study within 30 min.

Results
The manipulation check indicated that participants were attending to the flexible work schedules presented in the scenarios. This was examined with an analyses of variance (ANOVA) comparing the eight present scenarios on how much each scenario represented a
Work schedule flexibility

There was a large significant difference between the eight presented work schedule flexibility schedules, $F(7, 642) = 41.31, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.31$. Specifically considering the non-flexible work schedule ($M = 2.45, SD = 1.30$), as it was rated significantly lower as representing flextime than all other work schedules presented. The other seven work schedule flexibility programs had no significant differences in their ratings. Among work-flexible schedules, crediting ($M = 4.36, SD = 0.75$) and gliding schedule ($M = 4.40, SD = 0.77$) were identified most with flextime and modified gliding schedule ($M = 4.01, SD = 0.91$) was identified least.

$H1-H3$ were tested simultaneously by conducting $2 \times 8$ (gender by work schedule flexibility) ANOVA. This allows for the examination of participant’s gender and work schedule flexibility on organizational attractiveness. There was a statistically significant and moderate effect of work schedule flexibility on organizational attractiveness, $F(7, 644) = 2.27, p = 0.03$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.03$. Gender did not have a main effect ($F(1, 644) = 1.92, p = 0.17$), nor did it interact ($F(7, 644) = 0.84, p = 0.55$) with work schedule flexibility. Variable day schedules ($M = 3.91, SD = 0.71$) and modified flexitour ($M = 3.80, SD = 0.77$) were rated highest, with no flexibility ($M = 3.51, SD = 0.74$) and modified gliding schedule ($M = 3.58, SD = 0.87$) the lowest (see Figure 1). Fisher’s least significant difference post hoc tests were conducted to find the nature of the differences between scenarios (see Table II).

![Figure 1. Work schedule flexibility scenarios effect on ratings of organizational attractiveness](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Different scenarios</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No flexibility</td>
<td>Modified flexitour</td>
<td>$-0.29$</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variable day</td>
<td>$-0.40$</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Variable week</td>
<td>$-0.24$</td>
<td>0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexitour</td>
<td>Variable day</td>
<td>$-0.28$</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<tr>
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<td>No flexibility</td>
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<td>Modified gliding</td>
<td>0.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gliding</td>
<td>Variable day</td>
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Table II. Significant LSD post-hoc differences between work schedule scenarios
H1 predicted that greater flexibility would result in higher ratings of organizational attractiveness. This hypothesis was partially supported. Work schedule flexible plans had significant differences in ratings of organizational attractiveness. However, there was no consistent increase in organizational attractiveness as flexibility increased. The relationship between work schedule flexibility and organizational attractiveness does not appear to be a linear relationship as expected. H2 predicted that women would have a stronger preference for flexible work schedules compared to men. Women generally rated work schedule flexibility higher on organizational attractiveness; however, these trends were non-significant, and therefore this hypothesis was not supported. H3 predicted that there would be differences in ratings between the various described flexible work schedules. H3 was supported. Significant differences were found between the work schedule flexibility and organizational attractiveness. Additionally, how strongly the programs were identified as being a “flextime” program differed among work schedules.

**Discussion**

This study considered how flextime programs would affect perceptions of organizational attractiveness compared to a non-flextime program. Differences between men and women in the importance of flextime programs were expected. Some research suggests that women may value flextime programs more than men. Within this study, there were no differences found between women and men on organizational attractiveness or identification of flexible work schedules as “flextime.”

Overall, there were significant differences found between different work schedule flexibility programs on ratings of organizational attractiveness. Regardless of flextime program offered, the hypothetical organization was rated as somewhat attractive. The program rated highest in organizational attractiveness was the variable day program, followed by the modified flexitour program. An argument could be made that these programs are more familiar with the participants; however, there was no significant difference between these and other work schedule flexibility programs on flextime identification. The programs considered least attractive were the gliding schedule and the modified gliding schedule programs. According to this research, potential job positions will be viewed as more attractive if organizations offer flextime programs, such as variable day or modified flexitour. These findings suggest that the flextime programs of gliding or modified gliding schedule should be avoided when attempting to enhance organizational attractiveness. Gliding and modified gliding schedule, though still rated as somewhat attractive, are not the most advantageous programs organizations can offer when it comes to flextime initiatives.

All of the programs were assessed for differences in interpretation. This study established that individuals were able to distinguish correctly between flexible and non-flexible programs. It is important to note that potential applicants may have different interpretations of the available flextime programs. This is important for decision makers to understand when implementing flextime programs in organizations. It is recommended that decision makers assess the best type of flextime that would be seen as most beneficial for the employees and organization alike.

When no flextime was offered the amount of organizational attractiveness was significantly lower than the attractiveness of the modified flexitour, variable day, and variable week programs. A linear trend was not found for attractiveness when it comes to increasing flexibility in a job offer. There is no clear theoretical explanation for the lack of a linear increase in organizational attractiveness as work schedule flexibility
increased. Potential employees may not perceive the addition of greater flexibility as a linear or additive effect when determining organizational attractiveness. Employees may perceive an increase in flexibility as attractive to a certain point, but view complex or “non-standard” work schedules with skepticism.

Additionally, differences were not found between genders on these attributes, and therefore it could be inferred that flexible work schedules are equally important to both genders. Employees can interpret differences between some types of flextime programs, and therefore they should be considered as independent constructs within research. If there are distinct differences between these programs of work schedule flexibility, it should be important in future flextime research to understand the type of work schedule flexibility being considered. Clear construct definition will assist in a more thorough understanding of flextime programs effects on organizational outcomes.

**Limitations**
This study utilized scenarios to manipulate various programs of flextime for a fictitious organization. Scenario research generally lacks realism; therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted with caution (Landy, 2008). In addition, the participants for this study were young college students with a limited amount of work experience. Though the students came from a large range of disciplines and varied interests in the workforce, the results may be less generalizable than if the participants were from the workforce. Individuals lacking work experience may interpret organizational attractiveness based on expectations, not on experiences. Further, this group may not be concerned with the concept of work-family conflict, since younger populations tend to not have to deal with these issues until later in life. Therefore, they may deem such attributes as work schedule flexibility programs as less important when considering a job offer.

**Future research**
Research in the future should attempt to locate organizations that have these various types of flextime programs in order to grasp an understanding of organizational effectiveness in relation to these variables. Also, if such a study were implemented, more objective measures could be utilized in order to assess each type of program on outcome favorability, intention to remain, and likelihood of absenteeism as well as other important but subjective variables such as interactional justice and employee satisfaction.

Other research utilizing a similar scenario methodology could be conducted with samples drawn from the workforce in order to gain a more applied understanding on how flextime programs affect organizational attractiveness and intentions to apply. If such a study were conducted, it would be important to assess the individuals’ current job satisfaction, their type of job, and their industry as these factors may play a role in the outcomes assessed. Future research should also consider examining variability in the implementation of consistency of work schedule flexibility programs in the workplace.

**Summary**
This study offers an empirical illustration that various different work schedule flexibility schedules that are often label under the homogenous term “flextime” are quantitatively assessed differently regarding organizational attractiveness. Additionally, all of the work schedule flexibility programs were rated significantly different from more traditional job schedules. This study further supported the notion that work schedule flexibility is a complex construct that cannot be examined using one broad term such as “flextime.” Previous discrepancies in the effectiveness of flextime programs on various organizational outcomes may be the result of the heterogeneous nature of different flexible work schedules.
This research examined the initial effect of work schedule flexibility. Work schedule flexibility is often associated with positive outcomes in productivity, reduced absenteeism, and higher job satisfaction. This study suggested work schedule flexibility might also affect future employees’ perceptions of organizational attractiveness. Attracting the highest-quality employees is in the best interests of organizations, and the effects of a flexible work schedule may begin before employees are even hired.

References


Further reading


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