



The Strategic
**JOURNAL of Business & Change
MANAGEMENT**

ISSN 2312-9492 (Online), ISSN 2414-8970 (Print)



www.strategicjournals.com

Volume 10, Issue 1, Article 010

**EFFECT OF WORK SPACE FLEXIBILITY ON PERFORMANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF IN PUBLIC
UNIVERSITIES IN WESTERN KENYA**

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EFFECT OF WORK SPACE FLEXIBILITY ON PERFORMANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN WESTERN KENYA

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Accepted: December 31, 2022

ABSTRACT

Public Universities in Kenya are striving to maximize human capital as one of the factors of production in order to achieve its goal. In relation to this, the International labor organizations global report on flexible work arrangement of 2010 rates Kenya among those with the highest prevalence of long working hours per week. Public Universities in Kenya faces challenges with implementation of flexible work arrangements programs. Universities are limiting flexible work arrangement and this has affected performance of administrative staffs in supporting the teaching staffs and students. The Public Universities in Western Kenya have had their administrative staff participate in industrial action citing being over-worked after some staff exited services either because of retirement, resignation, death or being laid off, reducing the size of human capital. The purpose of the study was to determine the influence of work space flexibility on performance. This was achieved by the study's objective: To establish the effect of work space flexibility on performance of administrative staff in Public Universities in western Kenya. The research hypothesis was: H_{01} : Work space flexibility does not have a significant effect on performance of administrative staff in Public Universities in western Kenya. The study was guided by socio-technical systems theory. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. A population of 140 respondents from across the Public Universities participated using census sampling. Reliability achieved at Cronbach alpha value above 0.7. Content validity of the instrument was achieved through literature review. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in data analysis. The findings revealed that flexible working was less practiced and hence a negative and significant effect on performance. It was concluded that flexible work has a negative effect on performance. It was recommended that universities adopt better flexible working arrangements that can enhance performance. It is expected that the findings will aid the decisions of Management of Universities, the Government and future researchers by shaping the decisions regarding work design.

Key Words: Work Space, Flexibility, Performance, Working Hours, Administrative, Staff

CITATION: Nyaoro, B. O., & Anyango, C. B. (2023). Effect of work space flexibility on performance of administrative staff in public universities in western Kenya. *The Strategic Journal of Business & Change Management*, 10 (1), 179 – 189.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, work was referred in terms of a regular or full-time employment. According to Kalleberg, Reskin and Hudson, (2000) related employment as work where job is performed on a fixed schedule, at the firm's place of business under the firm's control and with mutual expectation of continued employment: Institutions however, have experienced a lot of changes in the business environment which has reduced the world into a simple round ball. Thus there is ever increase in need for an organization to study and understand the psychological needs of its workforce within and outside the organization for better performance (Barley & Kunda, 2001).

Even though many companies in Kenya are still focused on the regular or full-time employment modes, the economic distress brought by the detection of Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya and subsequent announcements by the government on containment of Covid-19, the institutions were left with no option but to comply with the guidelines, restructure their operations to accommodate flexible work arrangements in order to continue in operations.

Flexible work arrangement is defined as an alternative to the standard working day or hours (Rau & Hyland, 2002). Simply put, flexible work arrangements are alternate arrangements or schedules from the traditional working day and week. Employees may choose a different work schedule to meet personal or family needs. Alternatively, employers may initiate various schedules to meet their customer needs. Such flexible work arrangements help reduce stress, prevent burnout in the workplace and promote mental health leading to work life balance thereby resulting to peace of mind at work place. This will in turn affect the performance of an organization.

A few studies have been carried on flexible working arrangements, for instance Rupiatta and Beckmann (2018) found a positive relationship between

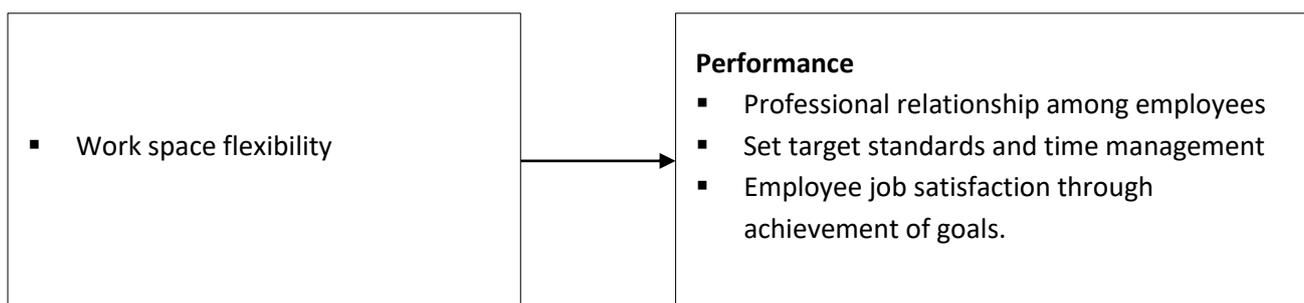
working from home and work effort while Oakman et.al., (2020) found it to have a negative impact on personal health. Palumbo (2020) studies established that home-based telecommuting negatively affected the work-life balance of Public servants but were more of Eurocentric. Moreover, Fukumura (2021) found it important to performance but used qualitative methods such as thematic analysis. Mustajab et.al (2020) also found both positive and negative influence on the effect of working from home on employee productivity and also used qualitative approach. These and other studies such as Van Der Lippe and Lippényi (2020) focused more on self-productivity and were done on already developed countries and in different sectors. The current study therefore seeks to establish the effect of working from home on performance aspects entailing customer, goals and even employee satisfaction.

Statement of the Problem

Employee welfare and conditions of work environment has been a concern for the government. Nonetheless, Public Universities face challenges with implementation of flexible work arrangement programs. The Universities are limiting flexible work arrangement and this has affected performance of administrative staff. They face high staff turnover, lack of commitment among employees and poor support services to both teaching staff and students. Universities are actively losing administrative staff to organizations with work arrangement flexible practices like County governments and Non-Governmental Organizations. Most Universities observe stricter in-office requirement but only guarantee staff leave days. These Public Universities use decentralized approval processes from human resource to managers and heads of units but decision rest with centralized human resource. Universities have had their administrative staff participate in industrial action citing being poor pay and overload due to some staff exiting the organization either on termination, resignation, death or retirement resulting to reduced size of human capital.

Reviewed literature links flexible working arrangements and performance. Some revealed positive relationship while others showed negative relationships. It is evident from reviewed literatures that flexible work arrangements affect employee performance. However, the studies reviewed have not fully addressed the effect of flexible work arrangement in public Universities in Western Kenya. Majority of the studies in Kenya were carried out among health staff while majority of those done in other countries concentrated in hotels and health sectors using either qualitative or quantitative approach. Additionally, none of the studies reviewed used work space flexibility and performance. These studies presented conceptual, contextual, methodological and geographical inconsistencies with the current study.

Conceptual Framework



Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on workspace flexibility on performance (Adopted from Agnes et al, 2016)

The study conceptualizes a relationship between work space flexibility, as independent variable while dependent variables being performance measurable through professional relationship among employees, set target standards and time management as well as employee job satisfaction. A relationship between workspace flexibility and performance of the staff in the Public institutions was therefore expected.

& Slocum (1999) and Dugguh (2008) propose a framework to study how particular job characteristics affect job outcomes and job satisfaction. The framework states that there are a number of core job characteristics that impact on job outcomes. These are: Skill Variety (the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work and involves the use of different skills and talents of the individual), Task Identity (the degree to which the job requires completion of a 'whole' and identifiable piece of work – that is, one that involves doing a job from beginning to end with a visible outcome), Task Significance (the degree to which the job has

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Characteristics Theory

Job characteristic theory (Hackman & Oldham 1976), Schermerhorn, Jr (1984), Hellriegel, Jackson

substantial impact on the lives or work of people in other departments in the organization or in the external environment), Job Autonomy (the degree to which the job gives the employee substantial freedom, independence, and discretion in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out) and Job Feedback (the degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information on the results of his performance). The theory is therefore relevant to the present study in the sense that part time working or working in shift could reduce the hours that employees spend on that particular organization thus reducing performance or creating them more motivation and energy to be self-decision maker or reach set goals with energy.

That notwithstanding, the theory was developed in the 1980s when job design was well aligned with fixed roles within organizations. However, the workplace has changed and there is now an emphasis on core competencies that are applicable across a wide range of settings and jobs.

Empirical Review

Oakman et al. (2020) did a rapid review on the impact of working from home (WFH) on individual workers' mental and physical health, and determine any gender difference, to develop recommendations for employers and employees to optimize workers' health. A search was undertaken in three databases, Psych Info, ProQuest, and Web of Science, from 2007 to May 2020. Selection criteria included studies which involved employees who regularly worked at home, and specifically reported on physical or mental health-related outcomes. Two review authors independently screened studies for inclusion; one author extracted data and conducted risk of bias assessments with review by a second author. Twenty-three papers meet the selection criteria for this review. Ten health outcomes were reported: pain, self-reported health, safety, well-being, stress, depression, fatigue, quality of life, strain and happiness. The

impact on health outcomes was strongly influenced by the degree of organizational support available to employees, colleague support, social connectedness (outside of work), and levels of work to family conflict. Overall, women were less likely to experience improved health outcomes.

Palumbo (2020), the disruptions brought by COVID-19 pandemic compelled a large part of Public sector employees to remotely work from home. Home-based teleworking ensured the continuity of the provision of Public services, reducing disruptions brought by the pandemic. However, there were also implications of telecommuting from home on the ability of remote employees to manage the work-life interplay. This study adopted a retrospective approach, investigating data provided by the sixth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) to shed lights into this timely topic. An empirical, quantitative research design was crafted. On the one hand, the direct effects of telecommuting from home on work-life balance were investigated. On the other hand, work engagement and perceived work-related fatigue were included in the empirical analysis as mediating variables which intervene in the relationship between telecommuting from home and work-life balance. It was established that home-based telecommuting negatively affected the work-life balance of Public servants. Employees who remotely worked from home suffered from increased work-to-life and life-to-work conflicts. Telecommuting from home triggered greater work-related fatigue, which worsened the perceived work-life balance. Work engagement positively mediated the negative effects of working from home on work-life balance.

Fukumura (2021) carried out a study whose objective was to explore the benefits and challenges of WFH during COVID-19 to identify supports and resources necessary. Comments from two free-response questions on a survey regarding experiences of WFH population of 648 out of which a sample of 366 were analyzed using inductive qualitative content analysis. Four themes emerged

which included time use, considerations of working in the home space, intersections between work-life and home-life, and temporality of WFH as situated within a pandemic. Across all themes were concerns related to participation in work and home roles, work performance, and well-being. Findings highlighted the importance of support during times of disruption of occupational patterns, roles, and routines. Despite challenges, many individuals hoped to continue WFH. It was concluded that organizations should consider the complex intersections of work-life and home-life to develop supportive policies and resources.

Rupietta and Beckmann (2018) investigated how working from home affected employees' work effort. To account for the self-selection into working locations, the study used an instrumental variable (IV) estimation strategy. This was from the norm that employees who have the possibility to work from home have a high autonomy in scheduling and organizing their work and are therefore assumed to have a higher intrinsic motivation. Thus, the study hypothesized working from home to positively influence work effort of employees. Theoretical model that analyzed whether intrinsic motivation influenced the impact of working from home on employees' work effort was introduced. The empirical results indicated that working from home had a positive influence on employees' work effort. In addition, the study showed that working from home indeed increases intrinsic motivation and thus employees' work effort. Moreover, it was established that the frequency of working from home also mattered a lot such that the more frequently employees worked from home, the higher the work effort they provide.

Mustajab et.al (2020) study aimed to explore the impacts of working from home on employee productivity with a qualitative approach. A qualitative method with an exploratory approach was used in this study which aimed to explore and explain in full the phenomena that occur. 50

informants consisting of 30 female informants and 20 men were willing to be interviewed in-depth using snowball sampling, but with a COVID-19 outbreak, direct interviews (face to face) were very unlikely to be done so conducted interviews were done via Telephone, facetime, WhatsApp and also Zoom Cloud Meeting (ZCM) so that the selected informants were believed to have represented the need for study with adequate location distribution. The findings indicated that working from home had provided advantages and disadvantages both for employee and organization as well as being responsible for the decline in employee productivity. Furthermore, it was established that working from home cannot be generally accepted since many areas of work cannot be carried out from home, although for many employees, working from home has provided a work-life balance. Yet, this is sometimes interrupted by multiple jobs (multitasking) that must be done at home.

Van Der Lippe and Lippényi (2020) aimed to study the influence of co-workers working from home on individual and team performance. The study used unique data from a large-scale survey involving nine European countries, 259 establishments, 869 teams and 11,011 employees to show that the impact of working from home by co-workers on performance is considerable and has remained hidden in past studies because they did not account for co-worker effects. It was established that while working from home may be useful for some workers, it does bring issues for them as well such that co-workers working from home negatively impact employee performance. Moreover, team performance was worse when more co-workers are working from home.

The studies reviewed showed mixed results between different components of flexible working arrangements and performance. Rupietta and Beckmann (2018) found a positive relationship between working from home and work effort. Similarly, Fukumura (2021) found that flexible work space it important to performance but used

qualitative methods such as thematic analysis. Divergently, Oakman et.al. (2020) found it to have a negative impact on personal health. Consistently, Palumbo (2020) studies established that home-based telecommuting negatively affected the work-life balance of Public servants but were more of Eurocentric. Van Der Lippe and Lippényi (2020) established that while working from home may be useful for some workers, it does bring issues for them as well such that co-workers working from home negatively impact employee performance. However, Mustajab et.al (2020) also found both positive and negative influence on the effect of working from home on employee productivity and also used qualitative approach. Van Der Lippe and Lippényi (2020) secondary data with a population of 11,011 from European countries while Mustajab et.al (2020) incorporated a population of 50 people using qualitative exploratory approach and snowball sampling. Fukumura (2021) used a survey method with a population of 366 employees. However, none of the studies reviewed used mixed method with purposively sampled data to measure the association between the variables specifically flexible working arrangements and performance of administrative staff in Public Universities in Western Kenya as proposed by the current study. Majority of these studies were done in other countries in non-learning institutions and were done on already developed countries and in different sectors. The knowledge gap is presented in different contexts, concept and with methodological inconsistency.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design. This study focused on administrative staff in Public Universities in Western Kenya as per the Commission for University Education (CUE) report (2018). This area covers former Nyanza and Western provinces. It was conducted on the six

Public Universities in Western Kenya. The Universities of focus in Western Kenya were Maseno University, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Kibabii University, Kisii University and Rongo University. The study targeted a population of 140 administrative staff and constituted respondents from six Public Universities in Western Kenya as per the Commission of University Education report, 2018. The administrative staff links academic staff, students and the University top Management. The study questionnaires targeted Registrars and Deputy Registrars, Finance officers, ICT officers, Catering officers, Administrators, and Librarians for the Management representatives and Office Assistants, Secretaries, Clerks, Accountants, Technicians, Cooks and Security personnel. Purposive sampling method was adopted since the intention of the researcher was to engage those staff who were directly involved with functioning units and decisions. Owing to the significance of raw and reliable data, the method was proposed for this study. Content validity of was achieved through literature review while instrument reliability using Cronbachs' Alpha methods revealed reliability coefficients above 0.7 threshold value. Multiple regression analysis was used in analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Statements were provided for respondents to share their views on the extent of practices and overview of flexible working hours in their institution. The aspects of workspace flexibility included work from home. Each statement gave the range of 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The findings are presented as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Workspace Flexibility (Work from home)

Work from home	1	2	3	4	5	M	STD
We schedule our meetings from home virtually	33(28.2)	45(38.5)	5(4.3)	27(23.1)	7(6)	2.4	1.28
I attend to students or clients from home using phone calls or virtual meetings	32(27.4)	30(25.6)	25(21.4)	15(12.8)	15(12.8)	2.6	1.35
I have created a conducive environment at home for my work	30(25.6)	26(22.2)	49(41.9)	9(7.7)	3(2.6)	2.4	1.03
I am not interrupted at home by family while working	20(17.1)	45(38.5)	30(25.6)	14(12)	8(6.8)	2.5	1.12
Working at home balances well with my office work	5(4.3)	48(41)	42(35.9)	19(16.2)	3(2.6)	2.7	0.88
I work faster while at home compared to the office	32(27.4)	35(29.9)	33(28.2)	14(12)	3(2.6)	2.3	1.08
I save more time while working from home	23(19.7)	54(46.2)	23(19.7)	9(7.7)	8(6.8)	2.4	1.09
It is more efficient to work from home	77(65.8)	20(17.1)	5(4.3)	6(5.1)	9(7.7)	1.7	1.24
Overall mean and standard deviation						2.4	0.68

From the findings, majority of the respondents, 45(38.5%) disagreed that they schedule their meetings from home virtually, which received a low rating (M=2.4, SD=1.28). Thirty, 30(25.6%) of the respondents, who were majority, disagreed that they attended to students or clients from home using phone calls or virtual meetings, which was also indicated by a low mean (M=2.6, SD=1.35), although some practiced this as indicated by high standard deviation. The findings shows that 30(25.6%) strongly disagreed on creating a conducive environment at home for my work, which was backed by a low mean (M=2.4, SD=1.03). Clearly, majority of the respondents disagreed that they were not interrupted at home by family, 45(38.5%), which was affirmed by a low mean (M=2.5, SD=1.12) and 48(41.0%) neither found working at home to balance well with their office work (M=2.7, SD=.88). From the findings, majority,

35(29.9%) strongly disagreed that they work faster while at home compared to the office (M=2.3, SD=1.08) while 54(46.2%) disagreed that they save more time while working from home (M=2.4, SD=1.09). Finally, majority of the respondents, 77(65.8%) strongly disagreed that it was more efficient to work from home (M=1.7, SD=1.24). The overall mean and standard deviation were low (M=2.4, SD=.68) implying that these statements compounded an almost nonexistence flexible working, particularly from home. This implies that the work from home among the non-teaching staff in the Universities is practiced to a very low extent.

Performance of Administrative Staff in Public Universities

Performance of Administrative staff was also measured on a five point Likert scale. Analysis was presented using means and standard deviation.

Table 2: Performance of Administrative Staff in Public Universities

Performance Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation
Customer satisfaction	2.4167	.50642
Employee satisfaction through achievement of goals	2.3803	.45200
Target standards and Reporting	3.3590	.83845
Overall mean on performance	2.7187	.40275

The findings shows that the highest performance (M=3.3590, SD=.83845) was indicated by target standards reporting followed by customer satisfaction (M=2.4167, SD=.50642) and finally employee satisfaction through achievement of goals (M=2.3803, SD=.45200). The overall performance was not satisfactory, (M=2.7187, SD=.40275).

Effect of Flexible Working hours on Performance in Universities

The first objective of the study was to establish the effect of work space flexibility on performance of

administrative staff in Public Universities in western Kenya. A simple linear regression model was performed in order to achieve the objective and test the null hypothesis which stated that “H₀₁: Work space flexibility does not have a significant effect on performance of administrative staff in Public Universities in western Kenya”. The findings were also compared with the standard multiple regression model results when other variables are included in the model. The findings on simple linear regression model are presented as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Effect of Flexible working hours on Performance of Administrative Staff

Model Summary ^b									
Model	R	Adjusted R Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate	Change in R Square	F	df1	df2	Sig.	Durbin-Watson
1	.324 ^a	.105	.79655	.105	13.525	1	115	.000	2.097

a. Predictors: (Constant), mean 3 flexible work

b. Dependent Variable: mean performance

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.	Correlations Zero-order	Partial	Part	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.722	.378		12.495	.000					
	mean 3 flexible work	-.4928	1.340	-.324	-3.678	.000	-.324	-.324	-.324	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: mean performance

From the findings in Table 3, it is clear that flexible working hours, that is, work from home explains approximately 10.5% variance in the performance of administrative staff in public Universities, (R²=.105). These findings are significant as indicated by an F value, F(1, 115)=13.525, p<.05. This value implies that the choice of flexible working hours is appropriate and provides sufficient evidence of

capability of predictability of performance and hence not by chance.

Further examination of the findings on model significant shows that flexible working hours have a negative and significant effect on performance of administrative staff in public Universities (β=-.324, t(115)=-3.678, p<.05). This implies that less flexibility in working hours negatively affects

performance of administrative staff in the sense that there is less flexibility as revealed by low mean rating in Table 1, where they indicated that there is very low flexibility. Therefore the low flexibility has a negative effect on their performance, such that Universities have made work from home for administrative staff difficult and hence low performance. Based on these findings, we reject the null hypothesis and adopt an alternative hypothesis which states that flexible work from home has a negative and significant effect on performance of administrative staff in public Universities.

These findings disagree with previous findings such as Palumbo (2020), who established that work from home, through flexible working hours had a positive and significant effect on performance. Fukumura (2021) however highlighted importance of adequate support on working from home while Rupiatta and Beckmann (2018) indicated that working from home had a positive influence on employees' work effort. From these findings, it can be noted that the challenges facing flexible working among administrative staff leads to low rating on its extent thus low performance hence a negative effect on their performance.

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings established that there was a low practice on flexible working among the Universities whereby working from home was not very effective. According to the staff, this was very low among the Universities and not convenient especially for the virtual work. It was therefore established that flexible working (work from home) has a negative correlation with performance and hence a negative effect on performance. From the aforementioned findings, it can be noted that work from home or flexible work arrangement have not picked up for the administrative staff. There is therefore a negative effect of these flexible working on performance and therefore we reject the null hypothesis and concluded that flexible working hours have a negative effect on performance among administrative staff in public Universities. There is low rating on practices concerning flexible working or work from home, with the changing nature of work and employment worldwide, public Universities should readjust and develop mechanisms and structure that helps and encourage their staff to embrace work from home.

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