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## Post-COVID-19 Employee Satisfaction: An Examination of Flexible Work Arrangements

Joshua Cooper

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Post-COVID-19 Employee Satisfaction:  
An Examination of Flexible Work Arrangements

by

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A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of Honors Requirements

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## **ABSTRACT**

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses had to switch their strategy to stay afloat in such unprecedented times. One way that businesses, as well as entire industries, pivoted was by using flexible work arrangements to alleviate the stress and potential danger of employees gathering at work. The addition of flexible working arrangements into industries has created an entirely different world of work that challenges the traditional form of working in a face-to-face format. Moving forward, after the pandemic, industries have to accommodate for these more present working conditions that impact how employees view their satisfaction with their job. This research studies how employee satisfaction is impacted based on the industry and form of work arrangement being used by the employee. An employee survey was designed and distributed to gather data to answer this question. Through the survey, it was found that utilizing flexible work arrangements leads to a higher average employee satisfaction. In turn, however, merely offering flexible work arrangements does not contribute to a significant increase in employee satisfaction. Along with these findings, the research also found that other factors such as mission attachment also contributes to employee satisfaction. In conclusion, employees that utilize flexible working arrangements in the job have higher satisfaction levels than employees using traditional work arrangements.

***Keywords: employment arrangements, organizational flexibility, remote work, employee satisfaction, technology, COVID-19***

## **DEDICATION**

To my friends and family who unwaveringly believe in me even when I fail to believe in myself. I would not have made it this far in life had it not been for your encouragement, support, and unconditional love through the best and worst of times. My college career has been a rollercoaster, but this work is dedicated to you as a reminder that God is good, He has a plan, and He guides us when we need Him most.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge Professor Russ Willis for his contributions of time and his help in finding an idea that interested me. Along with this, Mr. Willis deserves the credit for finding my main advisor, Dr. Joel Bolton. I would like to acknowledge my thesis advisor Dr. Joel Bolton who poured countless hours into me during the writing process of this research. His commitment to guiding me into producing a piece of research that I can be proud of is immensely appreciated. He has become a great mentor and a wonderful person to know.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

FWA Flexible Work Arrangement

IRB Institutional Review Board

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In late 2019, people contracted cases of an unknown disease in the Wuhan province of China. Soon after the disease began, scientists determined that the disease was a virus known as SARS-CoV-2 or, colloquially, COVID-19. Although the exact origins of the disease are a mystery and widely debated, the disease soon spread to the rest of the world by March of 2020, beginning the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 is a respiratory disease, so close contact with humans that are infected increases the chances of transmission and spread of the disease. It is safe to say that the pandemic has created a lasting impact on the world in almost every way imaginable: supply chains slowed, business strategy changed, and political divides deepened.

An article in *Forbes* magazine released March 3, 2020, lays out the early ideas for businesses to prepare and be prepared for a pandemic. The article examines short term solutions such as encouraging employees to wash their hands often and routinely disinfect surfaces (Martinez, 2020). Additionally, the article discusses long-term solutions such as preparing for remote work, expecting absenteeism among employees, and expecting problems related to supply chain delays (Martinez, 2020). It is obvious that the latter was more of the reality than the prior, but how did businesses adjust to this reality?

On March 13, 2020, *The Guardian* posted an article speculating that COVID-19 could permanently shift businesses towards a system which leverages a labor force working from home (Hern, 2020). Amid the pandemic, many businesses chose to work from home. This change in work arrangements allowed many employees to realize an entirely different world of work that does not constrain them to an workplace daily but

rather grants employees much more time to do things they enjoy by increasing daily efficiency (Hern, 2020). This efficiency is created through the elimination of commuting, searching for parking, and unscheduled office interactions that hinder employees' abilities to leave the office on time.

Now that COVID-19 has become endemic to the population resulting in adjustments to healthcare and awareness of ways to navigate the disease, many employees are struggling to return to eight hour work days where they must be present at an office. They enjoyed the freedom that different work arrangements offered during the pandemic, so it is difficult to concede that freedom back to an employer. This research attempts to explain the future of these abnormal working conditions in the world of business.

## **CHAPTER II: CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Flexible Work Arrangements**

Even though the world is moving out of pandemic lifestyles back to pre-pandemic modes of operating, much of society has been forever changed by the pandemic. Perhaps the largest change that is still in development is the change that has occurred to working arrangements. Although the majority of employers will not continue employee mandates for masks or social distancing in the workplace, the way in which employees attend work might continue to reflect pandemic habits. This is accomplished using flexible work arrangements (FWAs).

To determine the future of these working conditions in this new business atmosphere, defining FWAs and how they tend to work within the confines of performing a job is imperative. According to the University of Missouri System, FWAs are “any arrangements that provide an employee alternative to working regularly scheduled hours in the office or typical work location” (University of Missouri System, 2021). FWAs normally include flextime, compressed work weeks, telecommuting, and voluntary part-time work like job-sharing (Kelly and Kalev, 2006). Flextime refers to employers allowing employees more flexibility in their working schedules. This includes alternate timing for when workdays start and end. Compressed work weeks involve fitting 40 hours of work into less than five days a week (e.g. rather than eight work hours on each of five days, an employee might have ten work hours on each of four days). Telecommuting is a “work from home” solution that allows employees to do all their work remotely via the use of the internet and video conference calls. And finally,

voluntary part-time work such as job-sharing is when two employees might split the workload of one full-time position by each employee working part time.

The forms of FWAs might show up in places that are completely unexpected. FWAs are easily assumed to be attractive to job seekers needing to relieve the stress created by a typical 9-5 job (Rau & Hyland, 2002). Most often, however, FWAs are utilized by employees that care for young children or older, disabled people that need the flexibility to manage their work-life balance (van Wanrooy et al., 2013; Wheatley, 2017). Regardless of motive to obtain the FWA, these options of work span every industry.

### **The Intersection of FWAs and Different Industries**

The realization that work arrangements are uncertain and easily changed is evidenced by the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic altered the way industries operated. COVID-19 altered how business was conducted in such a stark way that people were placed into FWAs without any other option of work (Waples & Baskin, 2021). All businesses in the United States had to abide by the social distancing policies of the federal government to minimize the risk of contamination and disease spread. Because of this, the use of FWAs was the safest option in the face of this challenge. Of course, flexible work looks different for different industries due to the diversity of the work being performed. Zhong et al. (2021) broke down the industry shifts that happened during the pandemic into many categories, but the two categories that matter most in the context of this research are flexibility and remote work. According to Zhong et al. (2021), industries that utilized more flexibility when scheduling work during the pandemic rather than utilizing remote work consisted of food services, education, healthcare, arts, entertainment, recreation, and agriculture. On the other hand, the public administration

and education industries survived without needing an in-person factor and could perform solely remote work during COVID-19 (Zhong et al., 2021). Due to this research, we can see where the clearest divergences are found. Industries that are vital to the sustainability of a healthy population such as food services, healthcare, and agriculture cannot function effectively in a fully remote setting. Rather, the option of using a work arrangement focused on schedule flexibility such as flextime could be considered. On the other hand, industries that are not essential to the immediate survival of a population such as public administration and education can afford to perform all their work remotely. The in-person aspect of these industries can be forfeited in the short-term to promote long-term health and wellbeing of a population.

Because many of the aforementioned industries have been established for a long time, shifting to a new way of operating has brought up many questions about the best way for these industries to operate. COVID-19 has forced companies to try approaches that are unfamiliar and uncomfortable, but through the pain, these approaches may stick around (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Even certain industry settings that are known for being standardized and for having strict rules utilize certain forms of FWAs (Hornung et al., 2008). Because of the many different forms of FWAs that are available in the business world, employees in all industries could initiate conversations about forms of FWA that would best benefit them without leaving a company solely due to the work schedule or conflicting non-occupational motives.

The key to the management and distribution of the FWA lifestyle that many companies have chosen to undertake is the knowledge that FWAs are not one size fits all (Hornung et al., 2008). They can be and are very different in each situation (Hornung et

al., 2008). Industries that require high levels of physical contact with the work being performed would not use large amounts of telecommuting because the work can't be performed over a computer, but these industries could potentially implement flextime. In contrast, the jobs of financial advisor or IT specialist might be able to employ telecommuting since a lot of their job can be performed online using virtual forms of communication and computer programs to fulfill the job. These jobs heavily utilize computers when using traditional work arrangements, so the transition to remote work should not alter the job in a stark way. Even though methods of FWAs might be different depending on the industry, consistency is found in the fact that supervising managers determine access to FWAs, and, consequently, supervisor support for FWAs is boosted strongly through explicit action on a supervisor's part (Kelly and Kalev, 2006; Williams et al., 2021). Without the consent and explicit leadership of the supervisor, FWAs are not possible in any industry or job setting.

As previously mentioned, many supervisors across industries allowed access to FWAs that otherwise might not be available due to the pandemic. Because it was such an uncomfortable and drastic change for a lot of companies, many employers never would have abandoned the traditional work arrangements to try alternate working arrangements that might prove more effective at motivating employees to perform work. Because COVID-19 pushed so many companies out of their comfort zones, employers are now left with many choices to make about whether FWAs are the right decision for the company or job role. In the post-pandemic world only one thing is certain, the future of work whether in-person or using FWAs is uncertain (Waples & Baskin, 2021).



## **Employee Satisfaction as a Metric to Compare Industries**

To compare the effect that FWAs have on different industries, a quantitative metric consistent across all industries must be utilized. As previously mentioned, because of the shift to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, many people found themselves with more time to perform leisure activities outside of work. This extra time led to a reduction in work-life conflicts, and, because of this, the overall employee satisfaction rate increased due to FWAs (Hornung et al., 2008). This fluctuation in employee satisfaction is a measurable, understandable metric making it ideal for this study.

Research has shown that employers can expect FWA policies to have a reduced absenteeism effect on the workforce (Shifrin and Michel, 2021). According to Sagie (1998), reduced voluntary absenteeism is a direct result of a higher employee satisfaction. The results from Sagie (1998) coupled with the results from Shifrin and Michel (2021) lead to the connection that the utilization of FWAs should lead to a higher employee job satisfaction. Employees that have the option of flexibility within their job are more likely to not miss work due to reasons associated with a traditional job setting. Overall, providing FWAs has proven to be a good business practice for company success and employee satisfaction (Halpern, 2005). Therefore, offering flexibility options for employees should provide a much happier and effective workforce.

Research has already shown that employees view FWAs as benefits to both employee and employer (Williams et al., 2021). Using this knowledge, employers know that employees view these types of work arrangements as advantageous for both parties. In some industries employers take advantage of this knowledge by using FWAs as a

reward mechanism to encourage employee loyalty (Kelly and Kalev, 2006). This bodes well for the company because employees then view FWAs as a benefit that can be earned through time and dedication to their job. Once an employee has reached a certain level of loyalty to gain access to FWAs, i.e. remained in a company for a longer period of time, the employer can expect higher levels of increased employee satisfaction. Allowing employees the ability to take/deal with personal issues during business hours allows employees to feel less stressed and increases loyalty to a company (Halpern, 2005). Reduction of stress in any area of life should lead to more attentive employees with higher levels of employee satisfaction. Research has shown that increased levels of employee satisfaction both internal and external of the company leads to levels of higher productivity (Halkos & Bousinakis, 2010). In turn, the presence of FWAs should lead to higher productivity from increased employee satisfaction. In conclusion, using employee satisfaction as the proxy to measure overall effectiveness of the FWAs, this research looks at the impact that different FWAs have had on employee satisfaction in different industries after the pandemic.

*Research Question: Which industries have the most satisfied remote workers?*

## CHAPTER III: METHODS

To complete this study, a quantitative survey was designed. The survey consisted of eight questions to gain background knowledge on each participant's age and recent work history as well as a 15-question employee satisfaction survey to gauge the level of employee satisfaction within their current job.

Within the first section of survey, the researcher asked questions related to the participant's industry, the participant's age, the number of employees within the participant's workplace, the year the participant's employing organization was established, the length of time the participant has spent within the organization, and the types of work arrangements available to the participant. To fully understand whether FWAs alter employee satisfaction from one industry to the next, information must be gathered regarding the participant's current industry of employment, the size of the organization, and the length of time spent within their current organization. These questions constitute questions 1, 3, and 5 on the distributed survey (see Appendix A).

To find whether there is a correlation between age, work arrangements, and employee satisfaction, participants were asked to associate themselves with certain age ranges. The provided age ranges were "Under 30 years old", "30-60 years old", and "Over 60 years old" (see Appendix A). The choice "Under 30 years old" is to specifically target which individuals are a portion of Generation Z. Because the timeframes for the generational divide vary, this age range also includes a few members of the Millennial generation. These Millennials, however, share many experiences and privileges with Generation Z. Within the "30-60 years old" category, the researcher captures the bulk of the Millennial generation as well as Generation X. The members of these generations

control a higher percentage of the workforce than other generations. Finally, the members of the workforce that fall within the “Over 60 years old” category belong to the Baby Boomer generation. Although many members of the Baby Boomer generation have reached retirement age, the younger portion of this generation has yet to reach the retirement age of 65.

Because the study originated from the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the workforce, the researcher used three questions to determine whether the work arrangements that participants identified were directly correlated to the pandemic. Question 4 asks the participant “Was your company established before the year 2020?” (see Appendix A). Knowing whether the company was established before 2020 will allow the researcher to know if the organization had certain practices in place before the pandemic altered the normal workplace arrangements. To strengthen this question, the researcher used question 5 to determine the approximate length of time in which the participant has worked at the organization in which they are currently employed. The categories for the length of time involved at this organization are “less than 2 years”, “2-5 years”, and “more than 5 years.” If a participant has only worked at an organization for less than 2 years, the participant will only have known their workplace work arrangements either from direct pandemic impact or the lingering impact of the pandemic. These participants can only provide limited information regarding the long-term changes in work arrangements throughout the company. If a participant has been employed by their company for 2-5 years, they will be comfortable in the company in which they work. These participants will have a good knowledge of company options both before the pandemic as well as after the pandemic. The final group of participants

that will have stayed at the company more than 5 years is a loyal group of employees. They are not looking to change employers nor are they seeking to find a new occupation. These people will be very valuable to the research to know if the effects of the pandemic have drastically changed the way in which the company they work for addresses work arrangements. Finally, the researcher use question 8 to explicitly determine the length of time in which the participant's employer has offered its work arrangements.

To establish whether a participant's workplace offers FWAs, the researcher asks questions 6 and 7. Question 6 is as follows: "Which of the following work arrangements are offered by your employer? Please select all that apply." (see Appendix A). This question specifically seeks to determine what work arrangements are offered by an employer overall. This question regarding work arrangements is to look directly at the employer instead of the participant. Question 7 seeks to find information regarding the research participant's use of different work arrangements. Question 7 states, "Select all of the work arrangements that you have used in the past 6 months" (see Appendix A). This question, as previously stated, aims at looking more closely into whether the participant directly participates in different forms of work arrangements. A distinction needs to be made between both questions. Although many participants may answer both questions with identical responses, not all participants may actively use every work arrangement offered by their employer. Question 7 seeks to better understand the participant's frequent usage of the work arrangements outlined from the response to Question 6.

The forms of work arrangements offered by many employers vary, especially in the wake of the pandemic, but for the purposes of this research, the survey will pose work arrangement options of "Office-based work with set times (Employee comes into an

office space but must work at specific times during the day),” “Office-based work with Flextime (Employee comes into an office space but can work whenever it fits their schedule),” “Office-based work with compressed work weeks (Employee comes to an office space and works longer days to work fewer than 5 days a week),” “Remote work with Flextime (Employee does not come into an office space and can work whenever it fits their schedule),” “Remote work with set times (Employee does not come into an office space but must work at specific times during the day),” and “Remote work with compressed work weeks (Employee does not come into an office space and works longer days to work fewer than 5 days a week)” (see Appendix A). This arrangement of options allows for participants to respond with the most common combinations of placement and timing. In the context of this research, the word “placement” refers to virtual work versus the traditional office-based occupation. The word “timing” accounts for the fluctuations among specific working hours, flextime, and compressed work weeks. Using the six combinations of these placements and timings, the researcher is able to account for the most prevalent work arrangements in the post-pandemic job market.

Following these eight questions, the researcher used a 15 questions employee satisfaction survey adapted from a larger 36 question employee satisfaction survey developed by researcher Paul Specter (1985) and copyrighted in 1994 (see Appendix A). When using Paul Specter’s survey in this research, the researcher sought to only ask questions aimed at a particular response one time. In turn, redundant questions that aimed at establishing consistency in normal survey responses were removed. Along with these redundant questions, the researcher also removed any negatively worded questions from the original survey that might confuse participants. The remaining 15 questions were

inserted into the survey using a Likert scale labeled as 1: disagree very much, 2: disagree moderately, 3: disagree slightly, 4: agree slightly, 5: agree moderately, and 6: agree very much as is consistent with Paul Specter's original survey (see Appendix A). Using the responses from participants, the researcher will be able to score the participants' responses to gauge overall employee satisfaction.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Over the 30-day period that the survey was distributed and available for responses, a total of 211 responses were gathered. Once the survey closed, the responses were analyzed to ensure completion and consent. After culling the nonconsenting respondents and the incomplete responses, the survey yielded 160 usable responses. Table 1 provides the breakdown and sample size of respondents from each industry along with the percentage of the sample size from each industry that used a form of FWA.

**Table 1**

<b>Industry</b>	<b>Sample Size (n)</b>	<b>% of Sample that Used FWA</b>
Agriculture	1	0%
Construction	5	60%
Education	44	59.09%
Finance/Insurance	18	55.56%
Government	11	72.73%
Healthcare	18	66.67%
Hospitality	5	40%
Manufacturing	10	60%
Retail	10	40%
Telecommunication/ IT/Technology	10	90%
Logistics/Distribution	3	100%
Law	6	66.67%
Supporting Industries	19	78.9%



To easily compare the differences a work arrangement's effect and an industry's effect have on employee satisfaction, a total employee satisfaction score was calculated from the answers to the Paul Specter (1985) adapted employee satisfaction survey. Because the survey used in this study was modified from Paul Specter's original survey, the individual scores for each question rated 1-6 were added for a total employee satisfaction score. These scores ranged from being extremely satisfied with the job at a potential maximum score of 90 or extremely dissatisfied with the job at a potential minimum score of 15. Averages of employee satisfaction are calculated using this total employee satisfaction score.

It is important to note that these are averages of employee satisfaction. Within each industry there were participants that responded with incredibly high employee satisfaction and incredibly low employee satisfaction. Because 45 is the middle score between a potential minimum employee satisfaction score and a potential maximum employee satisfaction score, all industries regardless of FWAs utilized were, on average, satisfied with their job as seen in Table 2 below.

To easily understand and interpret the data gathered through the study, Table 2 was created to appropriately communicate the average employee satisfaction of each industry and work arrangement combination that was offered by each participants employer. It should be noted that some boxes are labeled with an "x" to denote that no respondents fell into that category. The totals on the right-hand side of the chart represent the overall employee satisfaction in each of the different industries represented on the left-hand side. Conversely, the totals along the bottom of the chart represent the average

employee satisfaction of the participants that identified participating in each option of work arrangement within the past six months.

**Table 2: Average Satisfaction of Work Arrangements offered by Employer**

Industry	Offered Work Arrangement						Total
	Office Work	Remote Work	Set Times	Flextime	Full Work Week	Compressed Work Week	
Agriculture	65	65	65	x	65	x	65
Construction	74.8	75	74.8	80	74.8	x	74.8
Education	71.5	74.17	71.29	70.93	72.2	68.25	71.84
Finance/Insurance	75.56	76.8	74.69	79.4	75	84	76
Government	73.44	77.5	73.22	84.75	72.125	83.67	75.27
Healthcare	69.08	72.64	67.86	75.50	70.41	83	71.11
Hospitality	73	71.5	71.2	79	71.2	x	71.2
Manufacturing	69.88	81	75.38	66.67	73	x	73
Retail	74.63	79.25	73.38	84.25	74.33	88	75.7
Other: Telecom/IT/Technology	80	80.67	79.56	82	80.5	x	80.5
Logistics/Distribution	84.5	80	83.5	82	81	87	83
Other: Law Industries	77.5	84	77.5	84	77.5	x	77.5
Industries	80.54	82.67	78.5	84.3	79.27	85	80.47
<b>Total</b>	<b>74.23</b>	<b>77.10</b>	<b>74.03</b>	<b>78.02</b>	<b>74.46</b>	<b>78.54</b>	<b>74.79</b>

It is important to make the distinction that the offering of a work arrangement does not constitute its use. To compare the average employee satisfaction of participants that were offered work arrangements, Table 3 was created to analyze and compare the satisfaction of participants that used each of the work arrangements provided. Note that the totals in the chart did not change because the overall participant satisfaction for each category remained constant.

**Table 3: Average Satisfaction of Work Arrangements used by Employee**

<b>Industry</b>	<b>Utilized Work Arrangement</b>						<b>Total</b>
	Office Work	Remote Work	Set Times	Flextime	Full Work Week	Compressed Work Week	
Agriculture	65	x	65	x	65	x	65
Construction	74.8	78.33	69.67	78.33	74.8	x	74.8
Education	71.80	71.94	71.41	72.2	71.64	73.4	71.84
Finance/Insurance	75.67	78.5	75.2	81	75.53	84	76
Government	72.5	79	75.27	86.75	74.7	81	75.27
Healthcare	70.09	72.64	68.33	79.14	71.11	x	71.11
Hospitality	73	71.5	71.2	79	73	64	71.2
Manufacturing	71.5	75.17	73.11	70.67	73	x	73
Retail	74.63	82.67	72.5	84.25	75.7	x	75.7
Other: Telecom/ IT/Technology	83.25	80.67	81.22	81.5	80.5	x	80.5
Logistics/Distribution	83	80	87	81	81	87	83
Other: Law	77.5	80.33	77.5	78	78	75	77.5
Industries	80.36	82.08	80	82.4	79.13	87.67	80.47
<b>Total</b>	74.23	77.10	74.03	78.02	74.46	78.54	74.79

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

From the results of the survey, it is clear that the majority of the time, utilizing FWAs leads to higher employee satisfaction as consistent with the research from Wadhawan and Mahendru (2018); however, the type of industry does modify the level of employee satisfaction as well. Of the work arrangements provided, the FWAs, on average, outperformed the traditional work arrangements by at least three satisfaction points in each traditional work arrangement versus FWA category. Remote work had an employee satisfaction score of 77.1, and office work had an employee satisfaction score of 74.23. Working during set times throughout the day had an employee satisfaction score of 74 while utilizing flextime had an employee satisfaction score of 78.02. And finally, utilizing a full workweek had an employee satisfaction score of 74.46, and utilizing a compressed workweek had an employee satisfaction score of 78.54. These averages are taken from participants across all industries.

As an employer, the data gathered seems to be straightforward regarding the best way to increase overall employee satisfaction within individuals in any industry. Simply increasing the availability of flexible working options is a simple solution to maintaining employees with a higher employee satisfaction; however, this simple conclusion is not backed by the data. From the results, there is a difference between the employee satisfaction of employees that utilized FWAs offered by their employers and employees that did not utilize FWAs offered by their employers. Table 3 shows a distinct difference in overall employee satisfaction within almost every industry between the employees that utilized the flexibility options versus the employees that were offered the flexibility options. These results mean that employers cannot make such sweeping

recommendations about how to best increase satisfaction levels. As with anything, incentivization to utilize the flexibility options could increase their likelihood of the flexible options being used along with the likelihood of overall employee satisfaction increasing.

When looking at Table 2 and Table 3, averages are taken from industry specific responses on the horizontal axis. The three industries that had employee satisfaction scores above 80 included participants working in the telecommunication, IT, and technology industries, participants working in the logistics and distribution industries, and participants working in supporting industries. The lowest satisfaction scores came from the participant working in the agriculture industry with an employee satisfaction score of 65. Being that there was only one participant in the agriculture industry, the employee satisfaction score is likely not representative of the entire agricultural industry without more data.

This discrepancy between employee satisfaction scores could be representative of the difference between physically intensive jobs and non-physically intensive jobs. People that work in physically intensive roles do not have as high an employee satisfaction score as those that are able to work behind a computer and in a controlled environment every day. This is consistent with the information provided by Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2014) where they found that there is a positive correlation between good working environments and increased employee satisfaction. Physically intensive jobs tend to come with poorer working environments such as working in the weather, so the notion that working environment being correlated to employee satisfaction is reaffirmed with these findings.

Instead of looking at industries with a heavy emphasis on physical labor to gauge the effectiveness of FWAs, industries that require extensive formal education might instead be a better indicator of higher employee satisfaction when using FWAs. However, industries that require extensive education to join, such as the education industry and the legal industry, seem to have no correlation between dedication required to obtaining the job and overall employee satisfaction once the job position is held. This difference in employee satisfaction, consequently, could come from the opportunity of FWAs being offered.

Participants working in the legal industry had much more flexibility driving a higher employee satisfaction of 77.5 than their counterparts in the education industry who account for a score of 71.84. Working in a law office might entail a lot of work, but the employee could manage to adjust their work around a schedule that suits them. An article in the Lawyer Monthly online newsletter posted in February of 2021 discusses the flexibility that lawyers possess in the face of a workforce that is moving towards more flexible opportunities. In the article, the author suggests that many law firms see flexible work only as a phase that will go away in the near future as it does not work for a career in law (Heagren, 2021). However, contrary to that belief 40% of lawyers, according to the article, view the option of flexible working to be one of the largest benefits when choosing a new place of work (Heagren, 2021). This article makes it apparent that FWAs in the legal field is a growing phenomenon moving away from the traditional work week to utilizing more flexible option.

On the other hand, the results show that working in the education industry does not provide the degree of scheduling maneuverability that the legal industry might. By in

large, education in both higher education and in primary and secondary education revolve around traditional weeks where students and teachers alike need to be present to effectively communicate. In turn, the differences in employee satisfaction in the education industry between traditional office working arrangements and flexible remote working arrangements were very small with less than one satisfaction point separating them: 71.80 and 71.94 respectively. Along the same lines as the traditional versus remote work setting in education, the same logic is true when it comes to utilizing specific daily working times and flextime. The data shows that there is less than one satisfaction point between traditional set working times and flextime: 71.41 and 72.2 respectively. According to this, employee satisfaction in the education industry is not correlated to the availability of FWAs. Instead, the satisfaction involved with employees working in the education industry, a nonprofit human service, might be more strongly tied to the idea of mission attachment where the mission of educating the younger generation brings higher satisfaction than the lack of flexibility within their working arrangements. This is consistent with research conducted by Kim and Lee (2007).

In addition to the lack of flexibility, the pandemic has caused the gap between higher education and both primary and secondary education to widen. Over the course of the pandemic, the differences in the overall concept of a traditional classroom setting have shifted to also including online classroom settings. The presence of completely online classes that never meet and completely online classes that meet via a video call now populate the world of higher education. During the pandemic, these forms of classroom arrangements in primary and secondary education were also present, but now they have reverted to a more traditional format where students and teachers alike show up

to school daily. In higher education, however, the phenomenon of flexible classrooms has the potential to continue long after the pandemic.

Due to changes from the pandemic, the flexibility of educators has changed dramatically (Walker et al., 2022). Primary and secondary educators have returned to work in the classroom daily, but higher education educators have adopted some forms of blended and hybrid online learning classrooms permanently (Walker et al., 2022). Because of this difference, the education industry must now be divided between higher education and primary and secondary education for this study to best analyze the results regarding the impact that FWAs have on employee satisfaction in the education industry. The average satisfaction score of 71.84 for the education industry does not represent neither higher education nor primary and secondary education well due to these discrepancies. Instead, future research should be conducted to navigate these differences in flexibility between higher and lower education to provide more sustainable results of the impact that FWAs have on these polar ends of the education spectrum.

It could be that more highly educated people are more satisfied because their education results in greater job flexibility. Most people working in the legal, healthcare, and education industry are required to be highly educated, so using this logic, their satisfaction levels should positively correlate to the percentage of the respondents in each of these industries that are utilizing FWAs. Table 1 shows the percentage of participants in each industry that are using FWAs. The legal, healthcare, and education industries have percentages 66.67%, 66.67%, and 59.09% respectively. On the other hand, industries that do not require extensive education to enter into such as the logistics and distribution industry along with many of the supporting industries have similar average



employee satisfactions as the participants who are highly educated. The logistics and distribution industry and the supporting industries have 100% and 78.9% of the employees utilizing flexible working options, respectively. The percentage of respondents engaged in utilizing FWAs, in turn, does not have any serious implications on the overall employee satisfaction of the respondents in that industry.

## **CHAPTER VI: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although the data gathered from the study is useful in pinpointing industries and analyzing the different work arrangement options offered in each, it may not be the best way to gather information regarding employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction is the proxy used in this study to attempt to quantify the relationship between FWAs and different industry types; however, employee satisfaction is not an isolated variable in the overall picture of whether someone is satisfied with their job. Although not studied with this research, the presence of a positive work-life balance can strongly influence the perception of employee satisfaction. In conclusion, employee satisfaction as a metric has its limitations due to uncontrollable and immeasurable forces that also impact it.

By the same token, the breakdown of job responsibilities within each industry can sway the outcome of the employee satisfaction score. Accountants that work in the manufacturing industry might have the same job satisfaction if they worked in the telecommunication industry being that the role of an accountant is, by and large, very similar regardless of location and industry. Alternatively, the employee in the manufacturing industry that is assembling a final product might not be doing the same job if they were to switch industries altogether. In this case, FWAs might indeed lead to a change in the employee satisfaction. The world of work has become so interconnected that many job roles overlap between industries. Because of this fact, the ability to accurately poll and distinguish between industry and job role becomes a much taller task.

Within the “Supporting Industry” category of the results, respondents classified themselves as being part of the ‘marketing’ and ‘human resources’ industry. These are valid industry assignments because there are third party marketing and human resources

agencies that consult and perform those job roles for companies. This is a part of the gray area of overlap between the industry and the job role. Most companies have a marketing and human resources department in-house eliminating the need to out-source these positions to third party companies. So, when polling for an item as fluid as employee satisfaction, the responses between industry and job role might be skewed. These specialized fields would categorize themselves differently leading to overlap. The third-party marketing firm might have a satisfaction of 80, and Company A might have a satisfaction of 75. However, the marketing department in Company A might have a satisfaction of 80 congruent with the third-party firm. This congruence between overall job satisfaction is shadowed and hidden when a marketing professional classifies in a specific industry.

For instance, the marketing job with Company A may allow for the marketing department to work compressed work weeks, but every other department in Company A must work full work weeks lowering the company's overall satisfaction score. In this case, FWAs have contributed to the overall increased employee satisfaction within the marketing department, but that is masked when looking at the entire company. In conclusion, further research needs to be conducted to account for these discrepancies between a job role and an industry. It is possible that the job role provides the basis for flexible work rather than the industry itself.

## **CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION**

Based on the research, it is clear that no current form of FWA can accommodate and have a significant impact on the employee satisfaction of employees in every industry. Instead, employee satisfaction could be derived from the working environment at these jobs rather than the opportunity to have a flexible schedule as supported by Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2014) in their research. As mentioned previously regarding the education industry, the mission attachment employees have toward their job can also heavily impact their satisfaction.

As an employer, it is not possible to make all flexible options possible with all job roles in a company. The reality is that the manufacturing worker that has no other option but to be present to assemble parts cannot benefit from the same flexibility option that the IT professional in the same company who can remotely access company computers to fix issues daily no matter the location. Flexibility within the job market is a powerful tool to attract and retain employees, but the fact of the matter is that not all jobs have the same requirements, and in turn, not all offers of flexibility will benefit satisfaction in the same way regardless of industry.

## APPENDIX A: SURVEY DESIGN

1. What industry do you work in?
  - a. Healthcare
  - b. Manufacturing
  - c. Retail
  - d. Education
  - e. Hospitality
  - f. Construction
  - g. Government
  - h. Finance and Insurance
  - i. Agriculture
  - j. Real Estate
  - k. Other
  
2. What is your current age group?
  - a. Under 30 years old
  - b. 30-60 years old
  - c. Over 60 years old
  
3. How many employees work for your organization?
  - a. 1-50
  - b. 51-999
  - c. 1,000+
  
4. Was your company established before the year 2020?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
5. How long have you worked for this organization?
  - a. Less than 2 years
  - b. 2-5 years
  - c. More than 5 years
  
6. Which of the following work arrangements are offered by your employer? Please select all that apply.
  - a. Office-based work with set times (Employee comes into an office space but must work at specific times during the day)
  - b. Office-based work with Flextime (Employee comes into an office space but can work whenever it fits their schedule)

- c. Office-based work with compressed work weeks (Employee comes to an office space and works longer days to work fewer than 5 days a week)
  - d. Remote work with Flextime (Employee does not come into an office space and can work whenever it fits their schedule)
  - e. Remote work with set times (Employee does not come into an office space but must work at specific times during the day)
  - f. Remote work with compressed work weeks (Employee does not come into an office space and works longer days to work fewer than 5 days a week)
7. Select all of the work arrangements that you have used in the past 6 months.
- a. Office-based work with set times (Employee comes into an office space but must work at specific times during the day)
  - b. Office-based work with Flextime (Employee comes into an office space but can work whenever it fits their schedule)
  - c. Office-based work with compressed work weeks (Employee comes to an office space and works longer days to work fewer than 5 days a week)
  - d. Remote work with Flextime (Employee does not come into an office space and can work whenever it fits their schedule)
  - e. Remote work with set times (Employee does not come into an office space but must work at specific times during the day)
  - f. Remote work with compressed work weeks (Employee does not come into an office space and works longer days to work fewer than 5 days a week)
8. From the work arrangements you chose, how long has your employer offered these work arrangements?
- a. Less than 2 years
  - b. 2-5 years
  - c. More than 5 years
9. Please choose the answer that best represents your agreement with each of the following statements.

- I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

- My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

- I am satisfied with the benefits I receive.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

- Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job easier.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

- I like the people I work with.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

- I feel that my job is meaningful.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

- Communications seem good within this organization.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree

very much	moderately	slightly	slightly	moderately	very much
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- Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

10. Please choose the answer that best represents your agreement with each of the following statements.

- My supervisor treats me with fairness.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

- I feel that the work I do is appreciated.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

- I like doing the things I do at work.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

- The goals of my employer are clear to me.

1	2	3	4	5	6
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Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much
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- I feel a sense of pride in doing my job.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

- I feel satisfied with my chances for salary increases.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

- My job is enjoyable.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

# APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of  
Research Integrity



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## NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 22-1508  
PROJECT TITLE: Employee satisfaction as a result of flexible work arrangements  
SCHOOL/PROGRAM: Management  
RESEARCHERS: PI: Joshua Cooper  
Investigators: Cooper, Joshua-Bolton, Joel-  
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved  
CATEGORY: Expedited Category  
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 10-Nov-2022 to 09-Nov-2023

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donald Sacco".

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

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