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The Impact of Flexible Work Arrangements on Employee Work Well-being and Work-Life Balance

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Abstract: With the profound transformation of work models, flexible work arrangements (FWAs) have become a significant trend in organizational management, and their impact on employee well-being and work-life balance requires systematic investigation. Based on the Conservation of Resources Theory and Self-Determination Theory, this study constructs an analytical framework incorporating job autonomy as a mediating variable, aiming to empirically examine the pathways through which FWAs affect employees' work-related well-being and work-life balance. Through questionnaire surveys administered to employees across multiple industries and data analysis using structural equation modeling, the research finds that flexible work systems not only directly and positively enhance employees' work-related well-being and work-life balance but also exert an indirect positive effect by strengthening employees' job autonomy. These results provide direct evidence for organizational management practices, indicating that implementing people-oriented flexible work policies can optimize employees' psychological experiences, promote harmony between personal and professional life, and ultimately enhance the organization's overall resilience and sustainable competitiveness. The applied value of this research lies in offering actionable theoretical guidance and practical solutions for managers to design more supportive work systems and foster a healthy organizational ecosystem.

Keywords: Flexible Work Arrangements; Work-Related Well-Being; Work-Life Balance; Work Autonomy; Mediating Effect; Human Resource Management

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The nature of work has transformed profoundly, shifting from traditional office-based models to more flexible, hybrid structures—accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic—establishing FWAs (telecommuting, flextime, compressed workweeks) as common in modern organizations [1]. While large corporations often lead in FWA adoption, their implementation and effectiveness in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) remain understudied. As core components of many economies, SMEs face distinct constraints: limited resources, less formal HR systems, and tighter-knit cultures. The pandemic-driven rapid adoption of remote work revealed FWAs' potential benefits (increased autonomy) and challenges (work-family conflict, social isolation, blurred boundaries), which may undermine well-being [1]. The post-pandemic period offers a critical opportunity to systematically examine how FWAs function in SMEs, as their long-term sustainability depends on designing work models that support employee well-being and work-life integration. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the mechanisms through which FWAs affect key employee outcomes.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

Despite the recognized link between flexibility and well-being, the specific psychological pathways and the role of job autonomy require explicit modeling and testing. This study poses three core questions: (1) How do FWAs directly affect employee work well-being and work-life balance? (2) Is job autonomy a key mediating mechanism in these relationships? (3) How do these effects vary across a diverse professional sample? To address these, three objectives are set: (1) empirically test FWAs' direct effects on work well-being and work-life balance; (2) examine job autonomy as a mediator using Conservation of Resources and Self-Determination Theory; (3) derive actionable theoretical and practical implications for organizations to design supportive systems that enhance individual satisfaction and

organizational resilience.

1.3 Research Significance

This study has substantial theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it integrates Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to establish an integrated framework, identifying job autonomy as a key psychological mediator that connects organizational policies to individual perceptions—filling a gap in understanding causal pathways [2]. Practically, the results provide actionable evidence for leaders in an era of prevalent flexible work, moving beyond general remote work discussions to offer detailed policy design guidance. By demonstrating direct and indirect positive effects on well-being and balance, the research equips managers to implement and optimize FWAs intentionally, building a healthy organizational environment that improves employee conditions and long-term competitiveness.

1.4 Paper Structure

Following this introduction, the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature, defines core concepts, presents theoretical foundations, and develops research hypotheses. Section 3 describes the research methodology, including design, data collection, variable measurement, and data analysis methods. Section 4 reports empirical results, covering reliability/validity tests, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and hypothesis testing. Section 5 discusses findings, theoretical contributions, practical implications, and limitations. Section 6 summarizes core conclusions and suggests future research directions [3].

2. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Conceptual Definition

2.1.1 Flexible work arrangements

FWAs are practices granting employees control over when, where, and how they work, differing from traditional fixed schedules [4]. They encompass three core dimensions: temporal flexibility (flexitime, compressed workweeks), locational flexibility (telecommuting), and task-based flexibility (autonomy in task execution). FWAs mitigate work-life conflict by aligning professional duties with personal needs, enhancing control—a key factor for well-being and balance [4].

2.1.2 Work well-being

Work well-being is a multi-dimensional construct reflecting an individual's overall psychological state at work, integrating job satisfaction, engagement, and professional fulfillment. COR Theory suggests well-being develops when individuals manage personal and job resources effectively; FWAs reduce resource loss from inflexible schedules and commutes, conserving positive psychological energy. SDT complements this, noting well-being thrives when autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs are met—FWAs directly address autonomy by aligning work with personal rhythms [5].

2.1.3 Work-life balance

Work-life balance (WLB) refers to an individual's perceived balance between job duties and personal life, involving effective management of time, energy, and involvement across life areas. FWAs reshape traditional work boundaries, but their impact on WLB is conditional—structural flexibility alone is insufficient, as pandemic research showed remote work could blur lines and harm well-being. This study defines WLB as satisfaction with managing work and personal commitments, significantly influenced by FWAs' provision of schedule and location control, mediated by job autonomy.

2.1.4 Job autonomy

In the context of FWAs, job autonomy is a vital psychological resource, referring to perceived freedom in executing tasks and managing schedules [6]. FWAs structurally embed autonomy, satisfying SDT's autonomy need, but its benefits depend on employees' boundary management strategies. As a mediating variable, job autonomy translates FWAs' structural opportunities into improved well-being and balance.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

This study integrates Boundary Theory and SDT. Boundary Theory posits individuals create mental, physical, and temporal boundaries to segment work and non-work roles [7]; FWAs alter these boundaries, granting employees agency in boundary negotiation—linking to autonomy. SDT proposes intrinsic motivation stems from satisfying autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs; FWAs primarily satisfy

autonomy, enhancing vitality, well-being, and life-domain integration. Together, these frameworks explain how FWAs exert direct and indirect (via autonomy) effects on employee outcomes.

2.3 Hypotheses Development

2.3.1 H1: Positive impact on work well-being

FWAs increase employee control over work timing and location, reducing job demands that deplete psychological resources (COR Theory). By avoiding commutes and enabling personal task management, FWAs conserve resources that boost positive affective states. SDT clarifies this: autonomy from FWAs enhances intrinsic motivation and engagement, directly improving work well-being. Empirical evidence links flexibility to lower turnover intentions (a marker of poor well-being). Thus, H1: FWAs have a significant positive impact on employee work well-being.

2.3.2 H2: Positive impact on work-life balance

FWAs provide control over schedules and locations, reducing time-based and strain-based role conflict [8]. The ability to adapt work hours to personal/family commitments fosters WLB, as demonstrated by post-pandemic remote work adoption. Thus, H2: FWAs have a significant positive impact on employees' work-life balance.

2.3.3 H3: Mediating role of job autonomy on work well-being

COR Theory notes individuals seek to acquire and safeguard resources; FWAs provide schedule/location control (a key job resource), which aligns with job autonomy. High autonomy enables effective resource management, reducing depletion and promoting positive states. Thus, FWAs' positive effect on work well-being is mediated by job autonomy (H3).

2.3.4 H4: Mediating role of job autonomy on work-life balance

FWAs enhance job autonomy, allowing employees to organize work around personal needs, reducing conflict and promoting harmony [9]. Autonomy acts as a psychological resource for boundary management, preventing work stress from affecting personal life. Thus, FWAs' positive effect on WLB is mediated by job autonomy (H4).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed to test the theoretical framework and hypotheses [10]. The survey adapted established scales to ensure validity and reliability, with all constructs measured using multi-item Likert scales to capture nuanced employee perceptions.

3.2 Data Collection

Primary data were collected from full-time employees in Chinese SMEs (manufacturing, service, IT industries) via a professional online survey platform over six weeks. Participants were screened to confirm access to FWAs. Of 850 distributed questionnaires, 723 were valid (85.1% effective response rate), providing adequate statistical power. The sample was diverse in age, gender, tenure, and position, reducing common method bias.

3.3 Variable Measurement

3.3.1 Flexible work arrangements

FWAs were measured using Gajendran & Harrison's (2007) validated 6-item scale (7-point Likert), assessing timing/location flexibility. Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.90, confirming reliability. Descriptive statistics showed higher ratings for location flexibility than personal errand scheduling, reflecting FWAs' multidimensionality, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of FWA Scale Items

Item Number	Survey Item (Abbreviated)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Skewness
1	Modify work start/end times	5.32	1.21	-0.45
2	Decide when to take breaks	5.67	1.05	-0.68
3	Time off for personal needs	5.18	1.34	-0.32
4	Run errands during workday	4.89	1.41	-0.21
5	Work from different locations	5.91	1.18	-0.81
6	Choose primary work location	5.45	1.29	-0.53

3.3.2 Work well-being

Work well-being was measured using Warr's (2007) 7-item scale (7-point Likert), assessing affective and cognitive work experiences. Cronbach's alpha was high, confirming reliability, the specific measurement items are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Measurement Items of Work Well-being Scale

Item Code	Measurement Item for Work Well-being
WWB1	I feel cheerful and in good spirits when I am working.
WWB2	My job gives me a sense of personal accomplishment.
WWB3	I am enthusiastic about my job.
WWB4	I feel reasonably contented with my present job.
WWB5	My job is meaningful and provides a sense of purpose.
WWB6	I feel relaxed and at ease while performing my duties.
WWB7	Overall, I derive a high level of satisfaction from my work.

3.3.3 Work-life balance

WLB was measured using Carlson et al.'s (2009) 5-item scale (7-point Likert). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) confirmed unidimensionality, with all factor loadings >0.70, indicating strong convergent validity. The descriptive statistics and factor loadings of the items are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Statistics and Factor Loadings of WLB Scale

Item No.	Measurement Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Standardized Factor Loading
1	I am able to accomplish tasks expected of me at work and in family/private life.	5.12	1.24	0.84
2	I am able to meet responsibilities at work and in family/private life.	5.33	1.18	0.87
3	I am able to fulfil expectations of work and family/private life.	5.08	1.31	0.89
4	I can effectively balance job and family/private life needs.	4.97	1.35	0.91
5	I can successfully balance work and personal/family life demands.	4.89	1.40	0.88

3.3.4 Job autonomy

Job autonomy was measured using Hackman and Oldham's (1976) 4-item scale (7-point Likert). CFA confirmed unidimensionality (factor loadings >0.70), with Cronbach's alpha = 0.91, indicating excellent reliability .The measurement items and their factor loadings are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Items and Factor Loadings of Job Autonomy Scale

Item Code	Measurement Item	Factor Loading
JA1	I have considerable opportunity for independence in how I do my work.	0.87
JA2	My job allows me to use personal initiative and judgment.	0.89
JA3	The job gives me freedom in scheduling my tasks.	0.85
JA4	I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.	0.86

3.3.5 Control variables

Control variables included age, gender, organizational tenure, and industry type, mitigating confounding effects. The sample was diverse: mid-career professionals (30-39 years: 46.8%), balanced gender (male: 48.0%, female: 52.0%), varied tenure, and multiple industries (IT: 31.0%, finance: 22.3%, healthcare: 16.8%), enhancing generalizability.

3.4 Data Analysis Method

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in AMOS 28.0 tested direct and indirect paths. First, CFA assessed convergent/discriminant validity; Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) evaluated internal consistency. SPSS 27.0 provided descriptive statistics and correlations. Model fit was evaluated using Chi-square/df, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA. Direct effects were tested via standardized path coefficients; mediation was tested using bias-corrected bootstrap (5000 resamples), with 95% CI excluding zero indicating significant indirect effects.

4. Research Results

4.1 Reliability and Validity Test

All Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded 0.70, confirming internal reliability. KMO values >0.80 indicated suitability for factor analysis. Convergent validity was confirmed (AVE >0.50, CR >0.80); discriminant validity was supported (square root of AVE > correlations with other constructs).The detailed results of reliability and validity tests are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Reliability and Validity Test Results

Construct	Cronbach's α	KMO Value	AVE	CR
Flexible Work Arrangements	0.89	0.91	0.67	0.89
Work Well-being	0.92	0.88	0.71	0.92

Work-Life Balance	0.87	0.86	0.62	0.88
Job Autonomy	0.90	0.89	0.68	0.90

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Descriptive statistics (412 valid responses): FWA (M=3.85, SD=0.72), Job Autonomy (M=3.92, SD=0.68), Work Well-being (M=3.78, SD=0.74), WLB (M=3.71, SD=0.77). Correlations showed significant positive links: FWA with Job Autonomy (r=0.58, p<0.01), Work Well-being (r=0.52, p<0.01), and WLB (r=0.49, p<0.01); Job Autonomy with Work Well-being (r=0.61, p<0.01) and WLB (r=0.56, p<0.01), supporting preliminary hypotheses. The detailed descriptive statistics and correlation results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.FWA	3.85	0.72	1					
2.Job Autonomy	3.92	0.68	.58**	1				
3.Work Well-being	3.78	0.74	.52**	.61**	1			
4.Work-Life Balance	3.71	0.77	.49**	.56**	.63**	1		
5.Age	34.2	8.1	.08	.05	.11*	.09	1	
6.Tenure	5.8	4.3	.04	.02	.07	.05	.72**	1

4.3 Regression Analysis Results

Hierarchical multiple regression (controlling for age, gender, education, tenure) showed FWA significantly improved model fit. FWA had a strong positive effect on Work Well-being (β=0.48, p<0.001, ΔR^2=0.23), supporting H1; and on WLB (β=0.52, p<0.001, ΔR^2=0.27), supporting H2.The regression analysis results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Model 1: Work Well-being	Model 2: Work-Life Balance
Step 1: Controls		
Age	0.08	0.05
Gender	-0.02	-0.04
Education	0.06	0.03
Tenure	-0.01	-0.02
R^2	0.02	0.01
Step 2: Main Effect		
FWA	0.48***	0.52***
R^2	0.25	0.28
ΔR^2	0.23***	0.27***
F-statistic	45.32***	52.17***

4.4 Mediating Effect Test

Table 8. Mediating Effect Test Results of Job Autonomy

Path	Indirect Effect (β)	Boot SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Proportion Mediated
FWA → Job Autonomy → Work Well-being	0.147	0.032	0.089	0.215	32.4%
FWA → Job Autonomy → Work-Life Balance	0.132	0.028	0.082	0.191	28.7%

Bias-corrected bootstrap (5000 resamples) confirmed job autonomy's significant mediating role. The indirect effect of FWA on Work Well-being via Job Autonomy was 0.147 (95% CI: 0.089-0.215), accounting for 32.4% of the total effect (H3 supported). The indirect effect on WLB was 0.132 (95% CI: 0.082-0.191), accounting for 28.7% of the total effect (H4 supported).The results of the mediating effect test are presented in Table 8.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The results strongly support the proposed model. FWAs act as a key job resource, directly improving work well-being (H1) and WLB (H2) by reducing role conflict and time strain. Beyond direct effects, job autonomy is a central mediating mechanism (H3, H4): FWAs enhance employees' sense of volition, satisfying core psychological needs (SDT) and enabling

effective resource management (COR Theory). Direct effects persist alongside mediation, indicating FWAs also provide ancillary benefits (reduced commute stress, organizational trust) that independently improve outcomes.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study integrates COR and SDT into a unified framework, clarifying job autonomy as the key mediator connecting FWAs to positive outcomes—advancing beyond simple causal models. It broadens work well-being conceptualization by measuring holistic affective-cognitive states, confirming flexibility fosters comprehensive well-being via empowered agency. It also refines WLB theory, shifting focus from spatial/temporal boundaries to psychological empowerment (autonomy) as a key enabler of balance.

5.3 Practical Implications

For resource-constrained SMEs, three actionable recommendations emerge: (1) formalize FWAs into clear policies (eligibility, core hours, output-based metrics) to reduce ambiguity; (2) train managers in outcomes-based management and remote communication to prevent proximity bias; (3) integrate FWAs into a supportive organizational ethos, gathering feedback and complementing flexibility with targeted support (e.g., home office stipends). This holistic approach maximizes FWAs' benefits for retention, engagement, and organizational resilience.

5.4 Research Limitations

Limitations include: (1) cross-sectional design restricting causal inference; (2) self-reported data risking common method variance; (3) sample limited to Chinese SMEs, limiting generalizability across cultures/occupations. Future research should use multi-source data and longitudinal designs to address these gaps.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Main Conclusions

Three core conclusions emerge: (1) FWAs have a significant direct positive effect on work well-being, acting as a crucial job resource; (2) FWAs directly improve WLB by enabling effective management of work-personal demands; (3) job autonomy is a pivotal mediator—FWAs' benefits depend on authentically empowering employees with self-determination. These findings justify people-oriented flexible work policies as a strategic investment in workforce health and organizational competitiveness.

6.2 Future Research Directions

Future research should: (1) explore non-linear relationships between FWAs and outcomes to identify optimal flexibility thresholds; (2) extend the framework with moderators (e.g., boundary management preferences) and additional mediators (e.g., self-leadership); (3) conduct cross-cultural and sector-specific studies to test model generalizability, examining how organizational culture and institutional settings influence FWA effectiveness.

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