THE MEDIATING EFFECT AND THE MODERATING EFFECT OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ON NEGATIVE WORK HOME INTERFACE (NWHI) AND INTENTION TO LEAVE

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ABSTRACT

Research into employee turnover has been published in previous decades, although more empirical evidence and dissemination of practical information is needed to further illuminate the relationship between work-life balance and intention to leave. There is considerably less research on this topic as it has only been discussed in theoretical terms (i.e. Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Morris & Madsen, 2007; Peterson, 2004), particularly in the context of a developing country such as Malaysia. It is only very recently that interest to explore moderating effect of flexible working in relating negative work home interface with intention to leave. Although flexible working is not currently prevalent in Asian cultures, concerns about work-life balance have caused major employers, including the Malaysian government and multinational companies (MNCs), to introduce work-family programmes and family-friendly policies in recent times. The objective of this study is twofold: first, to examine the moderating effect of flexible working on the relationship between negative work home interface and intention to leave and second, to understand the importance of work-life balance among employees by determining the mediating effect of flexible working on the relationship of negative work home interface and intention to leave.

JEL Classifications: C3, J00, Y1, Z00

Keywords: flexible working, negative work home interface (NWHI), work-life balance (WLB), intention to leave (ITL)

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INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a developing country which has a vision of transforming its economy to become progressive in the South East Asian region (Davis & Gonzalez, 2003; Ku, 2008; Vanderberg, 2008). Although Malaysia has been described as a vibrant developing country which has potential for economic growth among the Asian tiger economies, it has also been reported as having a smaller percentage of skilled workers compared to Singapore, Taiwan and Korea. Those countries have more than 30% of their total workforce in professional and skilled categories, while Malaysia has around 27% (Manpower Group Malaysia, 2010). This means that Malaysian employers need to invest more resources either in finding new employees or retaining the skilled ones. With the shortage of skilled labour in certain organisations, employers might place a greater demand on employees to remain at work for a long time as there are a limited number of employees. Therefore, this situation will contribute to a hectic work life balance for employees in trying to keep up with the progressive economy and work demands.

Recently there has been a change in policies to improve the working environment in Malaysia, parallel to policies to bring about the nation’s economic transformation. The Malaysian Government has made efforts to provide better policies in the workplace to attract the least utilized labour resources within government agencies, and at the same encouraged private sectors to follow suit. The strategies can be referred to in the Government’s ‘Malaysia Plans’ in which the Malaysian Government constantly revises and plans better policies to restructure the national economy every five years.
In the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006–2010, the private sector is encouraged to facilitate greater female participation in the labour market through provisions that take into account the multiple roles and responsibilities of women. These include new flexible working arrangements (FWA) such as teleworking, part-time work, job-sharing and home office settings for small businesses (Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006–2010, p. 289). This strategy aims to retain female workers in the workforce by giving them flexibility rather than taking decisions to terminate their employment for family reasons. This will create long-term benefits in retaining women professionals and is in line with the Government’s objective in the Tenth Malaysia Plan 2011–2015. According to the Malaysia Statistics Department website, although the proportion of female labour is lower than that of male labour in Malaysia, the number of women employed has continuously increased, from 3.3 million in 2000 to 3.9 million in 2005 (Ninth Malaysia Plan). This shows that there is a gradually increasing use of the under-utilized workforce in response to the Malaysian Government’s efforts.

The Malaysian Government is concerned about, and responsive towards, female labour issues and acknowledges their contributions to economic development. Retaining employees in the labour workforce is challenging, and more factors should be considered in order to understand the phenomenon according to a different context of study. In the Women’s Summit Roundtable Report (2007), the Malaysia Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development has identified flexible working and WLB as among the main areas to be studied for policy-making and implementation, where there is a need to change outmoded mindsets of how work should be done (www.thewomensummit.org/category/women-summit-2007). It is interesting to pursue this specifically in the different cultural context of countries such as Malaysia as most previous studies related to flexible working and WLB have been conducted using Western samples (i.e. Allen, 2001; Batt & Valcour, 2003; Brough, Kalliath & O’Driscoll, 2008; Lewis, 2003). Poelman, O’Driscoll & Beham (2005) called for further studies to examine work-life balance in cultural contexts distinct from other countries. In particular, only 20% of work-family studies between 1980 and 2003 have been identified as using non-American samples and being conducted outside the United States (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood & Lambert, 2007). Thus, the present research seeks potential predictors in examining an intention-to-leave model in the Malaysian context.

Given the points above, it is crucial to conduct a study specifically for Malaysia on WLB and flexible working to take into account the different contexts and cultures, as only a few studies have been conducted in developing countries (Wickramasinghe & Jayabandu, 2007). Furthermore, Asian countries consist of various cultures based on cultural, political and ideological perspectives that differ from one country to another. Given that most recent studies have been established in Western contexts such as in the USA, the UK, the rest of Europe and Australia, there may be some difference in perceptions of the meaning of work-life balance and flexible working preferences in Malaysia compared to Western or other developed countries, and this may contribute to new knowledge of the working culture or suggest policy implications in that regard.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the relationship between WLB and employee turnover is at a relatively conceptual level, established studies in work–family conflict have been undertaken since the 1980s (Beham, Drobnic & Prag, 2011). Previous studies identified work and family as two separate entities in life which could battle over an individual’s resources and create tension and conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Frone, Yardley & Markel, 1997; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Most work–family studies have examined antecedents related to health and job-related stress (Lourel, Ford, Gammassou, Gueguen & Hartman, 2009; Janssen, Peeters, de Jonge, Houkes & Tummers, 2004). Recently, there has been an increase in the number of studies examining positive interactions relating to negative effects such as stress and health outcomes (Beham et al., 2011; DiRenzo, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2011; Hanson, Hammer & Colton, 2006; Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts & Pullkinen, 2006; Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne & Gryzwacz, 2006; Geurts, Taris, Kompiere, Dikkers, Van Hooff & Kinnunen, 2005; Demerouti, Bakker & Bulters, 2004). More developed concepts such as work–family facilitation, enhancement, enrichment, WLB, and work–home interaction are being introduced (Halpern & Murphy, 2005; Chang, McDonald & Burton, 2010; Maertz & Boyar, 2011).

Several recent studies note that it is important for employers to balance organisational needs and employees’ personal needs (Batt & Valcour, 2003; Brough, Holt, Bauld, Biggs & Ryan, 2008; Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003; Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Maertz & Boyar, 2011). For stressed employees who are seeking to balance work and personal lives, time is nearly as important as money; in fact, time may be more important for some people (Mondy & Noe, 2005).

Therefore, work-life balance could be potentially significant in predicting intention to leave. The increasing attention to the work–life balance issue has been focusing on a new dimension. Several studies, by Batt & Valcour (2003), Fisher (2001), Johnsrud & Rosser (2002), Ngo, Foley & Loi (2005), and Veloutsou & Panigyarakis (2004), have examined the significant relationship between work–life conflict and employee
turnover, as work–life balance is a possible contributing factor in employees’ intention-to-leave feelings. Fisher (2001) extends her research by developing a broader construct on work–life balance among 540 managers employed in a variety of organisations across the USA. The results indicated that work–life balance was significantly related to role overload, time pressure, time management behaviour, overall feelings of job stress, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, organisational commitment, and turnover intentions.

However, Heilmann, Bell & McDonald (2009) claimed that, although traditional turnover predictors such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment and intention to leave are prevalent in management literature, few studies have examined the effect of family life on the turnover process (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux & Brinley, 2005). Even fewer studies have been conducted to examine the effect of WLB strategies on the effect of family life, work-related behaviour and the turnover process. De Cieri et al. (2005) made suggestions from their findings that the formation of appropriate WLB and human resource (HR) strategies will enable employers and employees to meet the emerging challenges related to the need to balance work and life.

Furthermore, many studies found that flexible working arrangements are needed by employees as times change, to match the workforce situation (Eichner, 2007; Lewis, 2003; Perrons, 2003). Various types of flexible working arrangements have been introduced to cater for the needs of employees with children and to provide family-friendly policies such as part-time working, job-sharing, flexitime, unpaid leave, and unpaid maternity and paternity leave.

Figure 1 illustrates the overlapping of several important studies on work–life balance (WLB), intention to leave (ITL) and flexible working, which have been identified as research contributions and to show the focus of the present study. This study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge and complement research gaps that have been identified by Batt & Valcour (2003), Behson (2002), and Johnsrud & Rosser (2002).

The first argument of this study relates to the fact that much research has been concentrated on family responsibilities and work–family conflicts in designing policies to help employees’ wellbeing, and some human resource practices such as flexible working, job redesign, and benefits and incentives have been taken into consideration to help employees who have family responsibilities (Batt & Valcour, 2003; Lewis, 2003; Albion, 2004; De Cieri et al., 2005). However, fewer studies have been conducted on employees who, despite having no care responsibilities, may still be intending to leave their jobs.

The standpoint of this study is to understand the phenomenon of intention-to-leave feelings of Malaysian professional workers regardless of their marital status and gender, because work–life balance and intention to leave seems to be significant to everyone. There will be some life demands for employees that could increase their motivation to produce a better performance in their job and work demands. Therefore, employers should consider the needs of all employees rather than focusing on human resource practices which offer flexibility for those who have care responsibilities. It would be interesting to examine employees’ perceptions of balancing their work and life commitments and to explore their awareness of the implementation of flexible working at their workplaces, including non-traditional work settings (not 9 to 5) or career breaks, as few studies have fully examined the meaning of workplace flexibility and what kinds of flexibility are beneficial for employees as well as employers (Batt & Valcour, 2003).
Figure 1: Literature on work–life balance (WLB), flexible working arrangements (FWA) and intention to leave (ITL)

Behson (2002) suggested that flexible working arrangements should benefit other workers and not be perceived as only for those who have children. Albion & Chee (2006) supported Behson’s suggestions as their findings indicated that flexible practices are reflected in a broader spectrum of life interests, from managing families to taking study leave. Study and exam leave have been seen as the most popular and preferred options for younger employees, while those over 30 or with dependent children preferred flexitime or homeworking. This concurs with the definition of flexible working practices given by CIPD in their survey report on flexible working impact and implementation conducted among employers in the UK in 2005. The definition referred to “the length of time an employee works, where they carry out the work, and the pattern of working, including leave or other absence taken from work” (CIPD, 2005).

Byron (2005) proposed antecedents related to work-family interference (WIF) including job involvement, hours spent at work, schedule flexibility, work stress and work support. In contrast, another set of antecedents of family-work interference (FIW) were introduced, namely time spent with household activities, family support, family stress, conflict within the family, number of children, age of youngest child, marital status, and spousal employment. Demographic or individual characteristics included gender, income, and coping style and skills. This study found that work-related antecedents tend to have a stronger influence on WIF than FIW. The same was true for family-related antecedents, which have a stronger influence on FIW than WIF (Voydanoff, 2005b). However, Geurts, Taris, Kompier, Dikkers, Van Hooff & Kinnunen (2005) found that work-related antecedents have a greater effect on the outcomes than family or home-related antecedents. As expected, work factors related more strongly to WIF, and some non-work factors were more strongly related to
Demographic factors, such as an employee’s gender and marital status, tended to relate weakly to WIF and FIW. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore and identify antecedents of work-life balance in the Malaysian context. The present study is concerned with investigating whether work–life balance is one of the major factors that might affect employees’ feelings regarding intention to leave their current job in Malaysia. This study aims to understand and analyse intention to leave and employee turnover, where work–life balance can be seen as an important element to be considered by employers in managing their human capital.

Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between negative work home interface (NWHI) and intention to leave moderated by flexible working.

H2: There is a significant relationship between negative work home interface (NWHI) and intention to leave mediated by flexible working.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed all types of employees including managers and non-managers in both government and private sectors in Klang Valley areas of Malaysia. It is the most developed area and most populated for working samples which come from large organisations in Malaysia; the marital status of the employees was no bar to inclusion. However, an age restriction was applied for those who were born between 1966 and 1986, which the sample comprised of middle age and mid-career respondents for the online survey. Bristol Online Survey was adopted to facilitate the online survey via https://www.survey.leeds.ac.uk/wlbos1.

Data Collection and Online Survey

Organisations in Kuala Lumpur, or more specifically the Klang Valley area, were selected as the sample population because there are a large number of employees working in large organisations. The sample was drawn from 18 out of 60 randomly selected large organizations in public and private sectors from Malaysia Brands Directory 2007-2008 for the private sector, and the directory of government agencies from the website of www.gov.my/gov.directory for the public sector. A total of 382 usable responses were sorted out from 661 responses received, taking into account no missing values, the right target age group and being free from invalid responses.

Respondents were contacted via Human Resource Managers in order to get permission to distribute the web survey link into their internal mailing system. For some organizations, the survey calls were directed to the Corporate Communication Division, the Public Interest Division, or the Research Department. Once the contact person directed the survey link and survey invitation letter to the IT Department, the data then started to roll in quickly. This study had participation by 62.04% of female participants and 37.96% were male. Most participants were married (59.42%), 30.11% were single, 8.90% were in relationships and 1.57% were divorcees. The marital status statistics may have been affected by the fact that this study focused on those who were born between the years 1966 and 1986. Based on the age requirement, 68.32% of respondents in this study were aged 34 and below. The remaining 31.68% came from the age group of 35-45, and the average age of respondents was 32. A higher response rate was received from the younger group of respondents probably because they have better IT access and have an interest in IT literacy as most of the time their work requires them to be in front of a computer. The older group probably hold higher positions in organisations and have greater job responsibilities which require them to be involved in administrative work, thus making them less likely to be available to contribute to the completed responses.

Questionnaire Development

Negative work home interface (NWHI) was measured by 9 items ($\alpha = 0.93$) adopted from SWING (Survey Work-home Interaction-NijmeGen of Geurts et al, 2005) with the scale of $3 = $ Always, $2 = $ Often, $= $ Sometimes and $0 = $ Never. The flexible working has been measured by 7 items ($\alpha = 0.78$) including unpaid leave,
homeworking-internet, flexihours, compressed working week, switching from full-time to part-time, job sharing and carer break. The list of flexible working options was developed and inspired from Albion (2004) and Lambert (2000). The flexible working options were also being referred to the Talent Corp Malaysia website at http://flexworklife.my/#. Intention to leave was assessed with 3 items (α = 0.89) from Voice Climate Survey which developed by Langford (2009).

RESULTS

Moderation analysis

This study aims to identify whether flexible working has had some impact on the relationship between NWHI and intention to leave. It has been hypothesized that the negative work-home interface is positively related to intention to leave but there is a significant moderation effect of flexible working. Does the importance of NWHI in predicting ITL remain the same with the adoption of flexible working?

In order to determine the moderation effect of flexible working on the relationship of NWHI and intention to leave, hierarchical regression has been adopted. All three variables in this analysis are continuous data. The first step, NWHI and flexible working, were centred and standardized in order to produce means of 0 and standard deviations of 1 for each variable. According to Tabachnick & Fidell (2007), these are important steps necessary to avoid multicollinearity when conducting moderation analysis. Multicollinearity can cause problems in interpretation and computation of data analysis (Frazier, Tix & Barron, 2004). Then, the interactions of NWHI and flexible working in predicting intention to leave were included in the second step of hierarchical regression analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; p. 157).

The second step of hierarchical regression contains the interaction term of NWHI and flexible working in z-score, when NWHI and flexible working remain constant. Table 3 displays the values of the $R^2$ change for each step where, firstly, NWHI and flexible working significantly explain 9.1% of the variance in intention to leave, $F (2, 379) = 18.91$, p<.001. With the inclusion of the interaction between NWHI and flexible working in the second step, an addition of 0.2% over and above the first prediction was found. The significant result of the interaction shows that flexible working does indeed have a small effect on the relationship between NWHI and intention to leave, $F (1, 378) = 12.95$, p<.001. Thus, it is quite difficult to see the difference between the two models if one tries to plot them on a graph.

Based on Table 2, there is no moderation effect of flexible working in the relationship between NWHI and intention to leave (ITL). Therefore, H1 is rejected. This means that flexible working does not significantly affect NWHI when NWHI and flexible working are constant. However, there is still a significant relationship between NWHI and intention to leave. The insignificant interaction term tells us that the association between NWHI and ITL is insignificantly different between highly adopters and lower adopters of flexible working.

This is not a surprising finding as flexible working is not widely known or implemented in Malaysia. Therefore, mediation analyses (indirect effect of middle variable) were conducted in order to identify the causal effect of flexible working in the relationship between NWHI and ITL. Baron & Kenny (1986) suggested that the moderator could also be tested as a mediator in situations where a moderator variable has been useful in suggesting a possible mediator variable. It might be proposed that, when someone has high NWHI, this will cause the person to use and adopt FW, which in turn causes low ITL.
Table 2: Moderation effect of flexible working (FW) on the relationship between negative work–home interface (NWHI) and intention to leave

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moderation analysis</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predictors</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWHI</td>
<td>.29***</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible working</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWHI x FW</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>18.91***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in R²</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05.

Mediation analysis

The steps described in Baron & Kenny (1986) were adopted in conducting mediation analysis in this study. According to Tabachnick & Fidell (2007), the mediation analysis of Baron & Kenny (1986) involves four steps which can be tested by using regressions. Fritz & MacKinnon (2007) and MacKinnon (2008) noted that Baron & Kenny’s causal steps have been widely applied in mediation analysis by far.

A variable is confirmed as a mediator when, in the first step of analysis, there is a significant relationship between the two main variables. Here there is a significant relationship between NWHI and ITL (β = 0.36, p<.001). Secondly, there is a significant relationship between NWHI and mediator (FW) with (β = -0.18, p<.001).

Step 1: Effect of NWHI and ITL is statistically significant (β = 0.36, p<.001).
Step 2: Effect of NWHI and FW is statistically significant (β = -0.18, p<.001).
Step 3: Effect of FW and ITL is statistically significant (β = 0.17, p<.05).
Step 4: Effect of NWHI shrinks upon the addition of FW (β = 0.35, p<.001) to the model (ITL).

In the third step, the mediator must affect ITL after controlling for NWHI in the hierarchical regression, which it does (β = 0.17, p<.05). Finally, the fourth step indicated that the relationship between the IV (NWHI) and the DV (ITL) is reduced when the mediator is included in the equation of analysis (β = 0.35, p<.001). According to MacKinnon (2008), reflecting upon the Baron & Kenny method, the other condition of coefficient C’ in Figure 3 should also be met. The direct effect of coefficient C’ must be non-significant (must not be significantly different from zero) to show that complete mediation exists. If all steps and conditions are met, except that C’ is found to be significant in the final step, it is plausible that only a partial mediation exists when the coefficient of C’ is less than C. In partial mediation, it is acceptable for C’ to be significant and this makes sense given that complete mediation is probably unrealistic in much social science research because of the many causes of behaviour (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon, 2008).
Figure 3: Mediation analysis (partial mediation)

Therefore, the results of the first mediation analysis indicated that partial mediation was established for this particular analysis when the relationship between the IV (NWHI) and the DV (ITL) is diminished, but not to zero. The effect of NWHI on ITL is reduced upon the addition of FW as mediator to the model, as can be seen in Figure 3. According to Baron & Kenny (1986), the complete or full mediation only occurs when the relationship between the IV and the DV is zero when the mediator is included in the equation. Table 4 depicts the steps taken in mediation analysis and Figure 4 illustrates the B-values of each variable in the mediation analysis model involving NWHI, FW and ITL.

Table 4: Testing mediation analysis using multiple regressions involving NWHI, FW and ITL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testing steps in the mediation model</th>
<th>IVs</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>NWHI</td>
<td>ITL</td>
<td>0.36***</td>
<td>0.09 (0.086)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NWHI</td>
<td>FW</td>
<td>-0.18***</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>FW</td>
<td>ITL</td>
<td>-0.17**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NWHI</td>
<td>ITL</td>
<td>0.35***</td>
<td>0.09 (0.091)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FW</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001, **p<.05, *p<.10

As a result, the mediation analysis has met a partial mediation effect as adding FW to the model increases the value of R² from 0.086 to 0.091. Thus, the change in R² associated with adding FW is 0.005 and the result also indicates that the inclusion of FW in the model accounts for an additional 1% of the variance in ITL. Therefore, H2 is accepted in this study.

Sobel test for mediation analysis

The Sobel test was conducted to provide the weight of the mediator. Table 5 shows that flexible working has a value of 2.085 when the coefficients of A and B and the standard errors of A and B were calculated in an online Sobel test calculator. The statistical significance of the mediation was calculated using the Sobel test at http://www.quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm and at http://danielsoper.com/statcalc3/calc.aspx (Soper, 2012). The main reason for conducting the Sobel test is to determine whether a mediator (flexible working) carries the influence of an IV (NWHI) to a DV (ITL) (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2012) and can therefore explain full or partial mediation, or is not a mediator at all. The cut-off point of Sobel tests must have a z-value greater than 1.96 (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). For the mediation analysis of the present study, the Sobel test result indicated that z = 2.09, p < 0.05.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Input</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A:</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B:</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE&lt;sub&gt;A&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE&lt;sub&gt;B&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sobel test statistic:</td>
<td>2.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-tailed probability:</td>
<td>0.037</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DISCUSSION**

Surprisingly, and somewhat counter to other Western literature (Allen, 2001; Batt & Valcour, 2003; Lambert, 2000), the present study found that the adoption of flexible working does not moderate the relationship between NWHI and ITL. This corroborates the findings of Casper and Harris (2008) in testing the self-interest model where Usage of Work–life Benefits for Schedule Flexibility did not moderate relationships between WLB availability and organisational attachment. However, mediation results for the present study still prove a partially mediated effect of flexible working.

There are two possible explanations for the result. It might be related to the 1) awareness and 2) availability of flexible working for employees, as their opportunity to practise the options is questionable or minimal. Malaysia is a developing country where development of internet coverage and perceptions of flexible working (in terms of flexi-location) are still in progress.

Firstly, the adoption of flexi-location has not been widely implemented so far but it is expected to increase concurrently with the expansion of internet access and coverage to facilitate technology diffusion in Malaysia. Kuppusamy, Raman and Lee (2009) have mentioned that Malaysia has seen an increasing internet penetration and access, from a total of 7.1% of every 1000 people in 2000 to 13.9% in 2005, and it was expected to increase to 35% per 1000 people in 2010. This has resulted from intensified efforts and the Government’s investment in ICT-related programmes, including internet and telecommunication (telephones and mobile phones) during the periods of the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001–2005) and the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006–2010) and continuing to the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011–2015) for the next five years (Kuppusamy et al., 2009; Minges, Gray & Firth, 2002; Salman, 2009; The Tenth Malaysia Plan). This will make flexible working policies more widely accepted and implemented in future.

This might trigger some concern that secondly, the availability of flexible working that is currently practised by organisations in Malaysia might have some limitations. On the other hand, employees may not have direct information and awareness of flexible working, which may have affected their responses in the present study. The reason for this result is not clear but it may be connected with the limited cooperation and openness provided by the Human Resource Departments in the private sector. In this study, the strict adherence to procedure and half-hearted cooperation by the private sector may be due to the low availability of flexible working practices offered in most organisations.

Based on this experience, one may speculate that the management of private organisations fear that feedback from employees will create further demand for and awareness of flexible working and organisational support in future. For example, in Australia, Brough & O’Driscoll (2010) reported concern that discrimination against pregnant employees in the USA, the UK and Australia seems to be increasing during times of financial uncertainty. The present situation of economic recession means some organisations may reduce their benefits in order to remain financially viable. This might hinder the growing support for and development of better flexible working by employers.

Next, another possible factor in explaining flexible working is related to the level of usage by employees themselves. The usefulness of certain types of flexible working depends heavily on employees’ needs and awareness (Albion & Chee, 2006; Allen, 2001). It might be that, in some cases, organisations provide an extensive range of family-friendly benefits including flexible working. However, lack of acceptance by employees due to negative perceptions of implementation affecting their career progression and less managerial support from supervisors or management in explaining the policies may diminish the benefits of uptake (Haar & Spell, 2004; Lambert, 2000).
CONCLUSIONS

In summary, it could be argued that the study of flexible working in the Malaysian context is still developing as technology does not really cover the whole country. Although this limitation is diminishing, it will take some time to develop the practice of working flexibly from the non-work place (flexi-location) and make it commonly accepted in society. However, action has been taken by the Government in the public sector, where there is improved and better flexible working and an improvement in policies, which covers not only arrangements about a flexible place to work from but also about flexible time. Lewis (2003) defines flexible working arrangements as organisational practices that enable employees to work flexibly out of office hours or from anywhere else; this reflects flexitime, term-time working, part-time or reduced hours, job-sharing, career breaks, family-related and other leave, compressed work weeks and teleworking. The basis of the arrangement is about time management and strategies to support employees in accommodating their non-work commitments. The changes in working policy might influence the acceptance and the perceptions of the flexible concept at the workplace among developing countries like Malaysia, for its sustainable human development and improvement for quality work of life among its employees.

Interestingly, time is not the only determining factor for adopting flexible working in the Malaysian context. This situation is different in Malaysia, where flexible working is not very common and, there will be other stronger predictors which could high significantly relating to intention to leave. More future research is needed to identify plausible factors affecting intention to leave and how flexible working can be measured and implemented effectively in Malaysian working environment and culture.

REFERENCES


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