

Rethinking Rigid Work Structure *Employee Well-Being Meets Sustainability*

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ABSTRACT

Traditional work structures are characterised by fixed schedules, rigidity and mandatory physical presence. Such inflexible work arrangements often limit the employee's ability to manage personal and professional demands, thereby hindering their well-being, raising health concerns and also negatively affecting corporate performance and environmental sustainability. These models correlate with elevated stress, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction, and thus lead to increased employee turnover.

This study seeks to explore the relationship between work structure, employee health, productivity, and organisational sustainability through a hybrid analysis combining available theoretical insights on evolving human resource trends and a questionnaire addressed to employees across diverse industries. The research aims to understand how employees view, behave and prefer flexible work arrangements, on basis of which creative recommendations are accommodated.

By analysing both practical and theoretical insights, the study seeks to reveal key factors linking workplace flexibility with well-being, efficiency and sustainability. The findings aim to shape future human resource strategies that align workforce needs while promoting eco-friendly practices and building resilience in a dynamic work environment.

KEYWORDS: Rigid workplace setting, Work-life balance, Corporate performance, Flexible work schedule, Eco-friendly practices.

INTRODUCTION:

In today's rapidly evolving work landscape, the traditional 9-to-5, five-day-a-week model is being challenged more than ever. Originally designed to improve industrial-era efficiency, rigid work structures are now facing strong opposition.

DEFINING A RIGID WORK STRUCTURE:

Such a model is typically characterised by fixed working hours, location-bound tasks and restricted flexibility in scheduling. Scheduling work, productivity, and breaks can lead to a drain on human willpower, invite sickness, and lower labour productivity. These further lead to an increase in labour turnover. While this model provides predictability and control, it disregards the human need for a balance, autonomy and mental health. This rigidity often overlooks the diverse rhythms of human productivity, where creativity and focus rarely succumb to a fixed timetable. As a result, employees may feel disengaged, undervalued and unable to perform to their fullest potential. In the long run, such structures hinder innovation and erode the sense of purpose.

RELEVANCE IN THE PRESENT MOMENT:

This thesis is relevant in the present scenario, where generational shifts are shaping workplace expectations. Recent studies reveal a significant dissent among the near-future workforce towards a rigid work model. Gen Z, entering the workforce with a new perspective, prioritise more flexible work schedules, purpose, and digital freedom.

Unlike traditional workers who accepted and adapted to the rigid norms, younger employees resist the idea of sitting in an office for nine hours, five days a week. Trends reveal a growing preference for remote work, hybrid models, and reduced workweeks—highlighting a collective desire for healthier, more sustainable work environments.

Rethinking rigid work structures is not just about comfort—it's about aligning work with human needs and environmental sustainability. It will help reduce commutation, lowering the carbon footprint, and foster long-term employee engagement. Companies have started to realise that to retain talent and survive, the intersection between well-being and sustainability has become crucial to business strategies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- According to a research paper by Warista Firdausi and Dian Indiyati (published in the International Journal of Science, Technology & Management in July 2025), flexible working schedules have a significant effect on productivity. It not only provides autonomy but also actively supports the well-being of employees to drive sustainable productivity in startup environments. ^[1]
- According to a research paper by Nagaraju R and Geetha C (published in the Asian Journal of Management and Commerce on August 9, 2025), well-planned hybrid models can improve work-life balance, boosting productivity and job satisfaction. Providing time and project management tools along with regular assessments of hybrid work policies ensures balance and productivity. ^[2]
- According to a research paper titled “Flexible work arrangements for work-life balance: a cross-national policy evaluation from a capabilities perspective” (published in the International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy in the year 2023). The availability and accessibility of flexible work arrangements reflect how social policies implicitly or explicitly bring about structural restrictions and enablement to transform formal entitlements into effective flexible working arrangements. ^[3]

CONNECTING EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING WITH SUSTAINABILITY

Today, when companies set sustainability goals, they typically highlight the green elements: reduced carbon emissions, adopting energy-efficient practices, and minimising waste. Yet, there's a broader frame we can't overlook that lasting sustainability hinges on the well-being of the people powering the business. Without a healthy, motivated, and engaged workforce, organisations cannot sustain growth or drive meaningful change. Employee well-being and sustainability are, therefore, two sides of the same coin.

DEFINING WELL-BEING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Employee well-being is defined as the overall mental, physical, emotional and economic health of your employees. It's influenced by various factors such as their relationships with co-workers, the decisions they make, and the tools and resources they have access to. Issues such as inhumane hours, inadequate rest, and inadequate pay are affecting all areas of employee health. Clearly, employee well-being is a fundamental building block of all organisations. Flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and wellness initiatives reduce stress and burnout, leading to higher productivity and long-term retention. When employees feel supported, they are more likely to contribute positively to organisational goals, fostering resilience and innovation.

Whereas sustainability refers to the ability to maintain or support a process continuously over time. In business and policy contexts, sustainability seeks to prevent the depletion of natural or physical resources, so that they will remain available for future generations. Remote and hybrid work models, for example, cut down commuting-related emissions, while technology-driven approaches reduce paper and resource usage.

INTEGRATING WELLNESS AND SUSTAINABILITY – A FUTURE-READY APPROACH

Well-being and sustainability intersect in the realm of organisational culture. By integrating wellness and sustainability, organisations can build resilience, improve employee engagement, and contribute positively to global challenges. These interconnected priorities strengthen organisational culture, improve productivity, and encourage innovation while addressing environmental and social challenges. Employees who feel valued are more likely to embrace sustainability initiatives, while sustainable practices enhance workplace satisfaction. Together, they build a model of work that is future-ready, socially responsible, and environmentally conscious.

Organisations embracing this dual focus are redefining workplace success and setting standards for responsible corporate social responsibility. This holistic approach represents the future of organisational strategy—one where employee well-being and environmental responsibility go hand in hand.

Thus, rethinking rigid work structures from the perspective of well-being is not just an employee-focused initiative but a sustainability strategy. By embedding well-being into sustainability programs, organisations can create a balance between people, planet and profit, ensuring that growth today does not compromise the needs of tomorrow.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used in this survey includes both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through a Google Form survey: a questionnaire designed to gauge the workforce's opinions on current work structures. Responses from 53 participants were systematically analysed and presented in pie charts, providing a structured and comprehensive overview of preferences. The secondary data was sourced from published research papers, which aided in a deeper understanding of the workforce's opinions and confirmed that flexible work structures are a viable and practical solution.

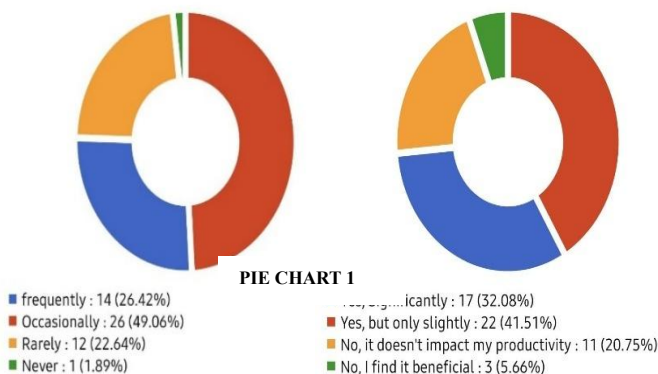
DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

The following are the study's derivatives, derived from the questionnaire. Over the course of the survey, responses from 53 participants (corporate employees) were collected and analysed with the following demographic overview.

View of traditional work structure-

How often do you experience burnout or fatigue due to fixed work schedules?

Do you feel that rigid work hours impact your productivity negatively?



The adjacent charts indicate that a majority of the sample feel that traditional work arrangements cause

- Occasional burnouts
- Feeling of tiredness
- Lower productivity

Around 40 people (75.48%) have voted to frequently experience fatigue.

Thereafter, 73.59% believe that this system hurts productivity.

View of flexible work structure-

Upon analysing the sample on their views on flexible work arrangements, the adjacent charts were generated. They indicate a strong and positive opinion on how such a system will help in

- Increased employee well-being
- Improved productivity

Around 48 people (90.57%) and 47 people (88.68%) have voted to the benefits of flexible work structure.

Do you believe flexible work structures improve employee well-being



How do you think flexible work arrangements affect productivity



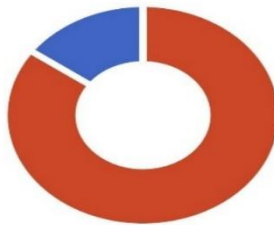
PIE CHART 2

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■ Yes, significantly : 38 (71.7%)
 ■ Yes, but only slightly : 10 (18.87%)
 ■ No, it doesn't make a difference : 4 (7.55%)
 ■ No, it has a negative impact : 1 (1.89%)

■ Increases productivity significantly : 31 (58.49%)
 ■ Increases productivity slightly : 16 (30.19%)
 ■ No impact on productivity : 3 (5.66%)
 ■ Decreases productivity : 3 (5.66%)

If given a choice, which work structure would you prefer?



■ Traditional work structure : 8 (15.09%)
 ■ Flexible work structure : 45 (84.91%)

Do you think flexible work structures are sustainable for the long term?



■ Yes, absolutely : 25 (47.17%)
 ■ Yes, but with some challenges : 26 (49.06%)
 ■ No, they are not sustainable : 2 (3.77%)

PIE CHART 3

84.91% of respondents—mostly aged 21-50—prefer flexible work setups like remote or hybrid models, citing better well-being and efficiency.

While 47% see such a work model to be sustainable in the long run, 49% of the sample find it viable but challenging.

THE FLEXIBLE WORK STRUCTURE: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

CHALLENGES:

1. Resistance from Leadership: *The Old Guard's Grip*: The primary challenge is the ingrained resistance to change among long-tenured managers who are accustomed to traditional, rigid workflows. This attitude, often results in a lack of genuine support and a subtle sabotage of new initiatives, hindering the organization's ability to adapt.

2. Infrastructure and Policy gaps: *Stuck in the Stone Age*: Existing infrastructure and policies are often ill-equipped for a modern, hybrid work model. A lack of secure digital platforms and clear frameworks for remote work leads to disorganization and security vulnerabilities.

3. Balancing Flexibility with Accountability: *The Freedom Paradox*: While flexibility is a powerful tool, it can create a paradox where accountability gets lost. Traditional time-based tracking fails to measure output, and without outcome-based evaluation, managers and employees can feel adrift.

4. Employee Well-being and Mental health: *The Burnout Black Hole*: The blurring of work and personal life can lead to a silent epidemic of burnout. Without clear boundaries and supportive wellness programs, employees risk increased stress and higher turnover.

5. Aligning with Sustainability and Social impact: *Beyond the Bottom Line*: While a flexible model offers a clear opportunity to align with sustainability goals, it's a significant challenge to operationalize. It requires moving beyond rhetoric and embedding these values into the organization's culture and processes, ensuring that it's not just a superficial exercise.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Leadership development and Cultural Shift: Transform leadership from a position of control to one of empowerment using a comprehensive program to create **"Future-Ready Leaders"**.

- **Embrace a Coaching Mindset:** Train mentors who guide their teams toward self-sufficiency.
- **Focus on Outcomes:** Implement training that shifts the focus from time spent to results achieved, using tools like **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**.
- **Foster Empathy and Trust:** Create a culture of psychological safety where leaders are trained to listen, understand, and trust their teams.

2. Strengthening Infrastructure and Policies: Invest in a robust digital ecosystem that serves as the organization's **"digital nerve center"**.

- **Automated HR and Workflow Management:** Use AI-powered platforms to automate administrative tasks, freeing up both employees and HR for higher-value work.
- **Comprehensive Policy Framework:** Develop and communicate a clear, transparent policy that outlines expectations for remote work, cybersecurity, and employee well-being.

3. Outcome - based Performance metrics: Replace outdated time-tracking systems with a dynamic **"What, Not Where"** Framework.

- **OKRs (Objectives and Key Results):** Implement the **OKR framework** to align individual, team, and organizational goals, providing a transparent way to track progress.
- **AI-Powered Performance Analytics:** Use **AI** to provide insights into performance based on objective data points like project completion and customer feedback.
- **360-Degree Feedback:** Introduce a continuous feedback loop that includes peer and subordinate input for a holistic view of performance.

4. Investment in Digital Detox periods: Using **"intentional rest culture"** to combat burnout.

- **Protected Time:** Encourage teams to set specific **"do not disturb"** periods for focused, deep work.
- **Immersive Wellness Programs:** Invest in immersive wellness programs that utilize technologies like **VR/AR** for guided meditation or virtual nature escapes.
- **Mental Health Support:** Provide easy access to mental health professionals and resources.

5. Embedding Sustainability into Work Practices: Integrate sustainability into every aspect of the flexible model to become a **"Conscious Organization"**.

- **Carbon Footprint Tracking:** Use **AI and IoT (Internet of Things)** to track and report on the company's carbon footprint.
- **Sustainable Incentives:** Create gamified challenges and rewards that incentivize eco-friendly behaviors.
- **Local Community Engagement:** Empower employees to engage with their local communities through virtual volunteering.

6. VR and AR as Strategic Enablers: Creating the **"Metaverse Office"**: Leverage Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) to build a truly immersive and collaborative work environment.:

- **VR for Presence Without Proximity:** Create **"metaverse offices"** with realistic avatars for meetings and brainstorming, replicating the social dynamics of an in-person office.
- **AR for Just-in-Time Learning:** Use **AR** to overlay real-time instructions and data visualizations directly onto the physical world for training or troubleshooting.
- **VR for Mental Wellness:** Provide a wellness **"sanctuary"** for employees using **VR** for guided meditation or stress-reduction games.
- **AR for Sustainability Tracking:** Deploy **AR** dashboards that visualize real-time sustainability metrics, such as energy consumption or waste reduction, on physical objects in the office or home.

CONCLUSION:

The future of work is not about desks, clocks or rigid hierarchies—it is about people. This research reaffirms that flexibility is more than a workplace perk; it is the bridge between human well-being and organizational sustainability. By loosening the grip of rigid structures, we do not lose control—we gain innovation, resilience and purpose in a dynamic work environment.

Flexible work arrangements, such as remote or hybrid models, are the seeds of a healthier workforce and a greener planet. They are preferred by most respondents and are seen as a way to significantly improve employee well-being and productivity while also reducing the environmental costs of outdated work.

Companies that embrace this shift and invest in proposed ideas will not only survive the tides of change but will lead the way towards a future where productivity and humanity co-exist in harmony.

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