FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND COVID-19: ANALYZING ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE MECHANISMS, EMPLOYEE SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND FUTURE INTENTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONS.

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a global emergency crisis. It has become a challenge for the organization to mitigate the adverse effect of the pandemic on the subjective well-being (SWB) of workers. Although organizations have adopted flexible work arrangements (FWAs) to keep their workers and business safe. However, the problem is that sometimes organizations fail to choose appropriate FWA options, as they are not able to draw out the merits and demerits of certain FWAs before implementing them. Therefore, this research aims to examine the mechanisms that have been employed by organizations in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and their influence on employee SWB. This research is also intended to explore the direction in which organizations plan to continue in the post-pandemic era. To collect the data this research adopted an interpretive research philosophy, and it was based upon a qualitative and inductive research approach. Thirty-nine interviews were conducted in person.

The results suggested that most of the organizations adopted FWAs as a response mechanism to keep their workers safe and for the survival of their businesses, which proved to be a custodian of worker SWB. Furthermore, findings have also revealed the paradoxical nature of FWAs and pointed out that organizations now intend to continue these practices after realizing their associated benefits. However, this research holds some limitations as well. This research was conducted when Covid-19 protocols were still being followed in most organizations. Hence the findings might not be a strong indicator of the consequences of FWAs under normal circumstances. Therefore, future research should be conducted when the pandemic subsides. Furthermore, the long-term effect of the continuance of FWAs also needs to be studied.

This research has indicated various factors that could overcome the associated demerits of FWAs. This would help practitioners to reduce the demerits of FWAs and to cherish the benefits of FWAs to the fullest. This study will guide practitioners about the need to revise their traditional workplace policies to follow the increasing trend toward a flexible workplace. Employers will be better able to realize the significance and shortcomings of certain types of FWAs, which will help them in deciding an appropriate type of FWAs suitable to their work settings. Moreover, this research has also contributed to the literature by providing insight into the paradoxical nature of FWAs and has also provided new insight into FWAs as a crisis management tool and a custodian of employee SWB.

Keywords Flexible work arrangements, employees' subjective well-being, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the future of work.

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Abbreviations	Words
FWAs	Flexible work arrangements
HR	Human Resource
POS	Perceived organizational support theory
SET	Social exchange theory
SWB	Subjective well-being
WFM	Work from home
WHO	World health organization
WLB	Work-life balance
GDP	Gross domestic product

<center>**Chapter 1 Introduction**</center>

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the area of research, describes its background, research gap, and the rationale for this research, which sets a base for the research objectives and research questions. The significance of this research is also discussed and the last section of this chapter outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Introduction and background

The Covid-19 period has been like a rolling coaster (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020). It has caused a global emergency crisis and has affected nearly all walks of life (Carracedo, Puertas, & Marti, 2021). Different countries have adopted different strategies to keep their people safe and many governments have imposed an emergency lockdown situation and placed restrictions like maintaining physical distance and practicing quarantine (Nghiem, Morgan, Donner, & Short, 2020; Lyman, Horton, & Oman, 2021).

The pandemic has caused the work environment to change drastically (Kulik, 2021). Since the Covid-19 outbreak, organizations have been going through sudden and abrupt changes (Butterick & Charlwood, 2021; Kulik, 2021), which makes it difficult for the organization to provide its' employees appropriate level of support and the resources to cope with the uncertain and rapidly changing environment (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020; Lawson, et al., 2021). The lack of organizational support affects the well-being of employees (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020). Well-being is defined as the eminence of an employee's mental and physical health and is related to the employee's level of stress, satisfaction, and engagement at work (Carvalho, Correia, & Chambel, 2021). Employees with a higher level of well-being demonstrate high work performance (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020), and thus organizations focus on strengthening the well-being of workers to improve their performance and organizational outcomes (Wang, Guchait, & Paşamehmetoğlu, 2020; Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020). However, the pandemic presented a major challenge for organizations (Butterick & Charlwood, 2021) to mitigate the adverse effects (Stuart, Spencer, McLachlan, & Forde, 2021) and keep track of their workers' well-being.

World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines instructed people to maintain social distance to keep them safe from contracting coronavirus. To comply with these instructions organizations have provided their workers with the option of flexible work arrangements (FWAs). Nowadays, organizations are leaning toward FWAs (Putri & Amran, 2021; Lawson, et al., 2021; Azeem & Kotey, 2021) in a desire to maintain the work-life balance of workers and to get better organizational outcomes in return (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020).

Businesses need to remain alert and responsive to unforeseen crises, which could generate uncertainties and distress among employees and affect organizational performance (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Likewise, with the Covid-19 outbreak, organizations are required to seek possible solutions to the challenges associated with the pandemic (Stuart, Spencer, McLachlan, & Forde, 2021; Butterick & Charlwood, 2021). Therefore, this research has demonstrated how organizations have become flexible to address the challenges posed by Covid-19 and which mechanisms have been adopted to maintain employees' subjective well-being during the pandemic, and whether organizations intend to continue implementing them post-pandemic.

1.2 Problem statement

The Covid-19 pandemic has shaken the world (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020; Jain, 2020). Since the pandemic outbreak, everyone is in a state of distress as it has impacted us psychologically, physically, and economically (Bapuji, Patel, Ertug, & Allen, 2020). Societal and organizational distress has immensely impacted the well-being of workers around the globe. Organizations are facing a challenge to keep their business and workers safe from the adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and are going through sudden changes in their policies and procedures in response to the pandemic. To maintain social distancing protocols and avoid the spread of Coronavirus, organizations are required to adopt FWAs (Rahman, Kistyanto, & Surjanti, 2020). However, sometimes the organizations fail to choose appropriate FWA options suitable for their organizations as they often are not able to draw out merits and demerits associated with certain flexible work options before implementing them (Pakos, Walter, Rücker, & Voigt, 2021), due to which the implementation of FWAs fails in their organizations as it brings them more demerits than merits.

Organizations aren't able to draw out associated merits and demerits of FWAs before implementing them, because the existing literature presents contradictory findings on the outcomes of FWAs, due to which it gets difficult to perceive based on existing literature

whether certain dimensions of FWAs would be beneficial for a certain company or not. For instance, some scholars have mentioned remote work and telework to be an effective strategy for IT workers while others argue the inverse. For example, Ford, et al., (2021) have shown that IT sector firms experience advantageous outcomes with the adoption of FWAs such as personal and professional development of workers, reduction in loss of time, perfect work-life balance, and opportunity to interact with the global team. However, Smite, et al., (2022) have reported demerits of FWAs for IT workers such as work-life conflict, difficulty building trust between co-workers, distraction due to sharing the same workspace with family members, and unavailability of technological office equipment at home. Moreover, organizations are not able to draw out the merits and demerits of FWAs in the current pandemic context before their implementation. Since organizations had no previous experience of implementing involuntary FWAs in response to any similar situation.

1.3 Research objectives

- ➢ To explore the mechanisms that organizations have adopted in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the process of their evolution.
- ➢ To understand the influence of flexible work arrangements on employee subjective well-being.
- ➢ To understand long-term mechanisms organizations, want to adopt with reference to flexible work arrangements.

1.4 Research questions

- ➢ Which mechanisms have organizations adopted as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and how has this evolved?
- ➢ How do flexible work arrangements influence employee subjective well-being?
- ➢ Whether and if organizations intend to continue with flexible arrangements post-Covid-19 and why?

1.5 Research gap

Over the last two decades, the concept of FWAs has gained great attention due to its perceived positive influence on employee's work behavior and several studies have been conducted on its implications (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; Azeem & Kotey, 2021; Kröll & Nüesch, 2019).

Various quantitative studies conducted in the pre-and post-Covid-19 have shown merits and demerits associated with FWAs (Kröll & Nüesch, 2019; JH Coun, Peters, Blomme, & Schaveling, 2021; Xiang, Whitehouse, Tomaszewski, & Martin, 2021).

However, there are various concerns regarding the impact of FWAs. For instance, some scholars, view it as a solution for employee well-being issues (Azeem & Kotey, 2021; Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; Putri & Amran, 2021; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), while others argue an inverse relation between FWAs and, employee work-life balance and well-being (Jain, 2020; Cañibano, 2011; Yucel & Fan, 2023). It is an ongoing debate, where employers still struggle to decide whether to opt for FWA or avoid it.

Secondly, the literature on the implications of FWAs on employees' subjective well-being in the Covid-19 pandemic context is scarce. Considering these gaps in literature few scholars have highlighted the need to conduct research on the implications of FWAs on employees' work-related behaviors, more specifically employees' well-being (JH Coun, Peters, Blomme, & Schaveling, 2021; Adamovic, et al., 2021; Ogbonnaya, 2019). Moreover, some scholars have also suggested to explore the future intentions of organizations in terms of FWAs (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020; De Klerk, Joubert, & Mosca, 2021).

1.6 Significance of the study

This research significantly contributes to the existing literature as it provides new insight into FWAs as a management tool to deal with any unfortunate circumstances, like the current Covid-19 pandemic. This research has indicated actionable insight for the organizations and managers enabling them to manage employee work behavior during the pandemic and likewise in any other unexpected circumstances or crisis. The practitioners will be better able to realize the significance and shortcomings of different types of FWAs, which will help them in their decision of incorporating FWAs suitable for their work settings. To attain organizational efficiency companies need to maintain the well-being of their workers (Eisenberger, Rhoades Shanock, & Wen, 2020; Adamovic, et al., 2021). In this regard, this research would serve useful implications for managers by explaining how managers can maintain their employee's well-being.

This research has collected data from managers and employees to include the perspective of both, and therefore the results are of significant use to future researchers and practitioners as

they will gain more insight into the types of FWAs which are beneficial for both the employees and the organizations.

1.7 Context of the study:

This study is designed to explore the influence of FWAs on the SWB of employees working in Pakistan. Pakistan is a developing country with a high score in collectivism (Syed, Memon, & Shah, 2022). The collectivistic culture of a country suggests that people living there are socially and emotionally dependent upon each other and prefer doing their tasks together. Hence, Pakistani workers with a highly collectivistic culture prefer working in an environment that supports their collective values and performs better in teams. However, due to the lockdown restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a decline in the social life of workers and hence their well-being (Lee, Shim, Choi, & Choi, 2023). This arises a need to explore the mechanism which organizations can adopt to ensure positive SWB of workers.

Some studies have been conducted on the impact of FWAs policies on employee well-being however, they are mostly conducted in Western countries (Charalampous, Grant, Tramontano, & Michailidis, 2019; Eidt, 2023) and the research investigating the influence of FWAs on employee SWB in the context of Pakistan is scarce. Regardless of the fact that there is more need to conduct research on workers' supportive policies in developing countries context because the companies operating in less developed countries have to face unstable economic climate and technological insufficiency which present a major challenge for their firms to keep performing well.

Moreover, Pakistan is facing a serious issue of brain drain. People even those with higher education can't easily set up their businesses due to financial restrictions and they leave their native countries for better employment opportunities. According to Meo & Sultan, (2023) in 2021 around 145,307 workers left the country. The number doubled in a year and around 386,574 workers left the country in the last year. This year in 2023 almost 9500 white-collar workers, including highly qualified doctors, engineers, and IT professional, has left Pakistan with the hope of a better career in Western countries. This issue needs to be addressed to avoid further harm to the county's economic position.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises 5 chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the area of this research, and discusses its background, rationale, and research gap, which sets a base for research objectives and research questions of this research. The significance of this research is also highlighted in this chapter. Chapter 2 reviews prior literature to address relevant areas such as FWAs, types of FWAs, employee SWB, and Covid-19 along with theoretical support for this research. Chapter 3 explains the methods adopted to conduct this research. Population, sampling techniques, data collection, and methods of data analysis are discussed in this chapter. Chapter 4 presents the results of the methods section and its analysis. In the end, Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results and analysis. This chapter discuses limitation of the research and make some future recommendation. It also explains the practical and theoretical implications, along with the conclusion of this research study.

1.9 Summary

Covid-19 has caused a global emergency crisis. It presented a major challenge for organizations to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic and keep track of their workers' subjective well-being. WHO guidelines instructed people to maintain social distance to keep them safe from contracting coronavirus. Considering this, many countries imposed an emergency lockdown. To comply with these instructions organizations were required to adopt FWAs. However, sometimes it is seen that the organizations fail to choose appropriate FWA options suitable for their organizations as they often are not able to draw out merits and demerits associated with certain flexible work options before implementing them which brings adverse outcomes for the organizations. Therefore, this research aimed to study how organizations have become flexible to address the challenges posed by Covid-19 and which mechanisms have been adopted to maintain employees' subjective well-being during the pandemic, and whether organizations intend to continue implementing them post-pandemic.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will review prior literature relevant to this research. It consists of six sections, which sets a base for our research objectives to explore the ceratin types of mechanisms (FWAs) organizations adopt during unfortunate circumstances like the recent Covid-19 pandemic (sections one and two) and their influence on employee SWB (section three, four). The merits and demerits associated with the implementation of FWAs are reviewed in section five and the last section of this chapter (section six) looks into existing theories providing theoretical support to the research.

2.1 Flexible work arrangements

The existing literature gives evidence that organizations have been using flexible work arrangements for years due to their perceived positive outcomes (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020). However, in the last two decades, flexible work arrangements have started gaining more attention than ever, with the increasing trend of people-oriented companies. Organizations that value their employees, started adopting FWAs for the welfare of their employees. For instance, Dizaho, Salleh, & Abdullah (2017) indicated that successful organizations like Merck & Co., Inc., and IBM had been providing flexible work options to their employees since the 1980s and are still adherent to it. In literature, flexible work arrangements have been defined as the working conditions that provide employees the authority over their work arrangements (Subramaniam, Rozlan, Putit, & Maniam, 2022; Azeem & Kotey, 2021). FWAs provide workers the choice to choose work conditions considering their comfort zones. FWAs can take a variety of forms such as flexible location, flexible time, hybrid or modified schedules, job sharing, remote working, and telecommunicating (Pakos, Walter, Rücker, & Voigt, 2021; Gašić & Berber, 2021). However, flexible work arrangements are mostly categorized into two main sub-dimensions; flexible/ remote working and flexible time (Chandola, Booker, Kumari, & Benzeval, 2019).

FWAs are non-monetary incentives (Bakar, Kamil, Hamid, & Abd Rani, 2017) used by organizations to improve workers' satisfaction and work motivation (Bakar, Kamil, Hamid, & Abd Rani, 2017). Several scholars have highlighted the impact of FWA on employee work-life

balance, job satisfaction, and work engagement (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Eisenberger, Rhoades Shanock, & Wen, 2020). According to Rothbard, Beetz, & Harari (2021), organizations provide flexible work options to employees with the desire to maintain their work-life balance. When employees have the flexibility of workplace and time, it helps them manage their work-life balance (Putri & Amran, 2021) and it also enhances their job satisfaction (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Consequently, these satisfied employees yield exceptional performance toward organizational goals.

Flexible work arrangements are often promoted as a tool for improving worker performance. However, all configurations of FWAs do not enhance worker performance. Moreover, sometimes the outcomes of FWAs are affected by other contingent factors. For instance, FWAs don't deliver positive outcomes when the time is reduced for workers without a reduction in their workloads, as this leads to work intensification (Bathini & Kandathil, 2019). Under such scenarios, FWAs instead of being a source of relief for the workers become a source of burnout for them. Therefore, the literature suggests that while adopting FWAs, organizations need to ensure that the workload of employees should match the reduced time (Kotey & Sharma, 2019). It should also be ensured that workers have the required skill-set and talent to execute the tasks assigned to them within the allocated time frame to avoid work intensification (Bathini & Kandathil, 2019).

Sometimes, FWAs bring destructive consequences for organizations in the form of employee burnout, work-life integration, and job dissatisfaction. However, organizations being aware of such outcomes still adopt FWAs when the expected consequences of their implementation outweigh such above-stated adverse outcomes (Kotey & Sharma, 2019) or when it becomes a necessity at the time of crises or any natural calamity (Kotey & Koomson, 2021). Rahman, Kistyanto, & Surjanti (2022) stated that organizations usually adopt FWA at the time of crisis to optimize organizational performance (Rahman, Kistyanto, & Surjanti, 2020). Likewise, FWAs have become a necessity in the current Covid-19 pandemic scenario (Eisenberger, Rhoades Shanock, & Wen, 2020) and organizations are adopting them for the sake of employees' safety and the survival of their businesses.

Most governments have legislated maximum working hours limits to keep their working citizens safe from the destructive consequences of work overload on their psychological and physiological health. In contrast to the concept of the working hour which is legislated by government bodies, FWAs are usually requested by the workers to have the flexibility of

workplace, time/schedule, or reduced work shifts. The advancing business world offers workers a legislative right to negotiate their workplace and work time (The Flexible Working Legislation, 2014). However, this right often only applies to those with some sort of medical condition or disability, studying workers, or ones with parental responsibilities (Heiden, Widar, Wiitavaara, & Boman, 2021). Employees request their desired FWAs considering their work-life and family-life situations. Hence scholars suggest that organizations must consider such requests as they help workers attain work-life balance due to which their job satisfaction and job performance would also be enhanced significantly (Kotey & Sharma, 2019).

2.2 Types of flexible work arrangements

Existing literature provides evidence that organizations implement different types of flexible work arrangements from time to time depending upon the desired outcomes (Pakos, Walter, Rücker, & Voigt, 2021). The following table shows some of the main types of flexible work arrangements.

Table 1: Types of flexible work arrangements

Types of FWAs	Description
Flexible workplace	Workers are given the option of workplace
Teleworking	Workers maintain an electronic presence in the workplace
Remote workplace/Work from home	Workers work from locations outside the company, usually from home.
Flexible time	Workers are given an option of work timings/hours
Work in shifts	Workers share a job position so that the organization can get more work done than the work hours of a single worker.
Hourly contracts	Workers perform predetermined working hours
Compressed schedules/modified schedule	Workers are allowed to work on the schedule of their choice and are given the option to work the traditional 5-6 workweek in fewer days.
Division of labour	Job tasks and duties are shared by more than one worker.
Weekend work	Workers perform job tasks on weekends while keeping weekdays off.

Source: Table adapted from (Chen & Fulmer, 2018; Gašić & Berber, 2021).

Due to the lockdown restrictions and social distancing protocols, organizations have come across a challenge to implement policies that could minimize physical interaction between the workers and the spread of the virus. Most organizations have responded to this challenge with the implementation of the types of FWAs that can lower physical interaction, such as teleworking (Eidt, 2023), flexible workplaces, and flexible time (Adamovic, et al., 2021).

Therefore this research has remained more focused on these three major types of FWAs; flexible workplace, flexible time, and teleworking, the dimensions which have been more prevalent during the pandemic crises (Adamovic, et al., 2021).

2.2.1 Flexible workplace/Remote workplace

During the Covid-19 period, remote working has become a new normal (Putri & Amran, 2021). However, before the Covid-19 pandemic workers had little experience with remote work. In response to the pandemic, organizations have shifted the majority of their activities online (Pakos, Walter, Rücker, & Voigt, 2021). They have incorporated work-from-home policies to avoid the spread of the coronavirus and to ensure physical distancing protocols.

In literature, a remote or flexible workplace refers to a flexible work arrangement where employees work from a place out of their office location, mostly from home. Remote workers don't have physical contact with their colleagues and they communicate with the help of technology (Patil & Gopalakrishnan, 2020).

The literature shows that in the last two decades, with the increase in the accessibility of technology, remote working and teleworking has been gaining more attention. Academics associates merits as well as few demerits with the implementation of remote workplace policies (Thomson, 2018). For instance, it is argued that a flexible workplace reduces certain operational costs for the companies, such as electricity bills, and office rent, and it also saves workers from wasting time traveling to or from the office location. It also saves them fuel costs. Conversely, few scholars claim that remote working makes it difficult for managers to monitor the performance of their subordinates (Thomson, 2018). Remote working demands self-management and self-monitoring skills from a worker. Workers are responsible to manage and monitor their performance, as no supervisor is watching and keeping an eye on their work behavior. Insufficiency of these skills enhances work stress for the worker. There is an associated chance of decreased work performance and poor work behavior such as low punctuality and low standard task performance. Likewise, some workers require a workplace

environment to function well, and they are more productive under a traditional office culture (Nyberg, 2019).

2.2.2 Flexible work hours/Flexible time

Scholars have referred the flexible working hours as a management tool capable of elevating employee motivation and engagement at work (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020). In the literature flexible working hours have been defined as the employee's autonomy over decisions regarding their working hours (Pakos, Walter, Rücker, & Voigt, 2021). In other words, employers don't specify any office or work hours for the workers. Workers are provided the authority to choose their start or off time. For instance, workers could alter the arrival or off time from the traditional work hours. Workers are free to choose the work hours considering their work-life balance situations. Literature also provides evidence that workers prefer flexible work hours to have a work-life balance (Wolf & Beblo, 2004).

Scholars have shown a positive relationship between flexible time and employees' subjective well-being (Golden, Henly, & Lambert, 2014; Uglanova & Dettmers, 2018). Flexible time helps workers maintain harmony with their work-life and personal life, which consequently enhances their well-being (Dilmaghani, 2020). Research conducted by Wolf & Beblo (2004) reports that a moderate level of authority over flexible hours enhances workers' efficiency, however, providing a high level of flexibility over work hours reduces the performance of workers and organizations. Therefore, it is essential for organizations to keep a check on the level of flexibility offered to workers over their work hours.

2.2.3 Teleworking

Literature shows that with advancing technology, teleworking is getting more popular (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). In literature, teleworking is defined as a work arrangement that allows workers to perform their jobs with the aid of modern technologies (López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020) like mobile phones, skype, etc. Sometimes teleworking is adopted with flexible time. In other words, the job is done electronically with the use of technological devices and free from strict compliance with traditional work/ office hours. Organizations implement telework policies to deal with issues of time schedules and the workplace, hence it is sometimes interchangeably used with remote working (Wolf & Beblo, 2004), as it provides workers the opportunity to complete their tasks from anywhere and at any time of their choice. However, sometimes, teleworking waste employee working hours/time

due to technical issues, internet unavailability, or error in the digital tool (Eidt, 2023). Teleworking holds a benefit for organizations that they can approach or call the workers out of the traditional office or working hours. But this is a flipside for the workers as it cost them work-life integration (Wolf & Beblo, 2004). It blurs the boundaries between their worktime and time for themselves and their families. The workers could not relax or spend time with families, even after the closing of office hours. Often times it is seen that in teleworking workers are made to work more than traditional hours. To cater to this issue, Nyberg (2019) states that it is an ethical responsibility of organizations to respect workers' time and the same/traditional work hours should be followed regardless of where the workers are performing their jobs.

Telework denotes that workers can work from any location at any time (López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020). Therefore, companies are adopting it during the pandemic situation and it has become a new norm (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). However, the immediate shift to telework without training workers on how to use technologies and assistance from some IT person (which are usually done in the transitional implementation of teleworking) there is a risk of telework becoming a stressor for the workers (Molino, et al., 2020). For effective implementation of teleworking organizations are required to provide essential training and required logistic support to the workers such as internet facilities and relevant equipment (Wolf & Beblo, 2004). Telework during the pandemic has reduced the effects of social isolation for remote workers. They could still communicate and have strong team collaboration on social platforms.

2.3 Employee subjective well-being

Well-being (WB) refers to one's positive self-reflection about quality of life (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020). Well-being is inherently subjective in nature, as it is the amalgam of all sorts of feelings and emotions related to life events, therefore many scholars denote well-being as subjective well-being (Magnier-Watanabe, Uchida, Orsini, & Benton, 2020). The literature defines subjective well-being (SWB) as an individual's overall level of satisfaction with life's situations taken as a whole (Bozkurt, Gurel, & Kıran, 2017). SWB is a self-reported measure of well-being (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020) shaped by an individual's self-evaluation and a comparison of both positive and negative life experiences. However, the worker's subjective well-being mainly focuses on the worker's reflections on his work experiences alongside the

self-evaluations of life events. Möhring, et al., (2021) define a worker's subjective well-being as a worker's overall level of satisfaction with work-life and family life.

The literature reports two main sub-dimensions of a worker's subjective well-being; psychological well-being and social well-being. Psychological well-being is how workers feel, what emotions they carry, or their level of satisfaction regarding their work and life situations. While, social well-being is how well they interact with others; their family, friends, or colleagues (Song & Gao, 2020). However, according to Bozkurt, Gurel, & Kıran, (2017), subjective well-being is an umbrella term constituted of an individual's broad reflective appraisal of all sorts of work and life circumstances. Hence fore, this research has taken workers' subjective well-being as a single umbrella concept, constituted of workers' overall level of wellness and satisfaction regarding their life situations and experiences.

Self-evaluation of life circumstances has a significant impact on an individual's well-being, and it guides one's feelings, moods, and emotional reaction to those life events (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020). Negative emotions such as mental distress, loneliness, sadness, frustration, and helplessness are the reflections of negative subjective well-being. Whereas, satisfaction, happiness, positive moods, and emotions are the reflections of positive subjective well-being. Workers with positive subjective well-being demonstrate positive work behaviors, such as job satisfaction, engagement, and enhanced work performance (Song & Gao, 2020). However, workers with negative subjective well-being are usually cynical, less creative, and less motivated to perform better.

2.4 FWA and employee subjective well-being

The appropriate work conditions have a significant positive impact on employee well-being (Reuschke, 2019). Scholars have proved that employee-centric work arrangements enhance employees' job satisfaction and well-being (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020) whereas an inappropriate and stressful work environment deteriorates the well-being of workers (Azeem & Kotey, 2021). Such workers are consequently less productive and deliver substandard performance. According to Song & Gao, (2020), FWAs help employees overcome stress related to work-life conflict by providing authority to opt for the work conditions which could enable them to effectively manage their work-life balance. Moreover, the literature shows a positive relation between FWAs and various work-related outcomes such as work engagement (Rahman, Kistyanto, & Surjanti, 2020), job satisfaction (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020), work

motivation (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020), work-life balance (Putri A. , et al., 2021) and a negative relation with burnout and emotional exhaustion (Song & Gao, 2020). Therefore, it is perceived that FWA has a significant impact on workers' subjective well-being; the overall level of worker satisfaction associated with their work and family lives.

However, this relationship is inconclusive as although few scholars have demonstrated a positive relationship between FWA and workers' well-being (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020) , while others argue an inverse relation, and relate FWAs with various stressors such as job insecurities, less social interaction, increased technostress, and increased health risk due to overwork (Stiglic & Viner, 2019). The employees working at home tend to overwork expecting promotions and bonuses, threatening their mental and physical health. Also, sometimes remote workers are not given the due appreciation for their efforts as being out of sight, is out of mind (Song & Gao, 2020), which consequently lowers the SWB of workers.

Moreover, the link between FWAs and employee well-being established in pre-Covid-19 literature doesn't provide much insight into the influence of FWAs on employee SWB during Covid-19. As the implementation of involuntary FWAs during pandemic crises might have affected the SWB of workers differently because, during the Covid-19 pandemic, there are various other factors, which are also influencing the SWB of workers. Such as health risks, economic stress, job insecurities, less social interaction, and restricted physical activities (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). According to WHO (2020) during the pandemic, workers has been a victim of increased levels of anxiety and depression due to their fear of contracting the coronavirus, being quarantined, or losing their job. All these factors are adversely affecting the subjective well-being of workers.

Karani, Deshpande, Mall, & Jayswal, (2022) has indicated that given the negative effect of Covid-19 on the mental health of workers, it is ought most important to concentrate on exploring the most effective strategies capable of dealing with the adverse effects of Covid-19 pandemic on mental health and well-being of workers. Moreover, many organizations are trending towards FWAs in response to the social distancing protocol, arising the need to explore the influence of FWAs on employee SWB in the pandemic context, as it is still an unexplored area of research.

2.5 Merits and demerits associated with flexible work arrangements

Flexible work options provide employees the opportunity to work at a place of their own choice. It could be their home, restaurant, airport, or any place other than a certain office location (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Authority to deviate from the traditional workplace and working hour policies is positively perceived by the workers as it helps them attain work-life balance (Charalampous, Grant, Tramontano, & Michailidis, 2019). However, some scholars claim FWAs to be a source of stress for the workers and a threat to their well-being (JH Coun, Peters, Blomme, & Schaveling, 2021).

2.5.1 Merits of flexible work arrangement

Flexible work arrangements are beneficial to both the workers as well as the organizations. Studies have explored that FWAs help workers manage their fatigue, distress, and other work-related anxieties caused by workloads (Patil & Gopalakrishnan, 2020; Adamovic, et al., 2021), which ultimately elevates their well-being. FWAs are usually provided by organizations seeking a healthier work-life balance for their workers (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; Rothbard, Beetz, & Harari, 2021), such employees in return get more loyal to their organizations with a lower intention to quit. Flexible work options elevate workers' engagement and lower their dissatisfactions associated with their work conditions (Rahman, Kistyanto, & Surjanti, 2020). Flexible work arrangements such as flexible/remote working and flexible schedules provide workers the authority to design or choose work conditions depending upon their needs (Adamovic, et al., 2021) as a consequence, such workers become more satisfied with their jobs. Literature suggests a positive link between FWAs and job satisfaction (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; Rahman, Kistyanto, & Surjanti, 2020). This relation is more augmenting under certain conditions. For instance, workers' job satisfaction is more when they are assigned work, considering the reduced or flex time. Therefore, it is suggested that the workloads also need to be reduced with the reduced time to avoid work intensifications and to ensure workers' job satisfaction (Kotey & Sharma, 2019).

Various research scholars have reinforced that FWAs are crucial to employees' performance and ultimately organizational performance (Azeem & Kotey, 2021; Charalampous, Grant, Tramontano, & Michailidis, 2019; JH Coun, Peters, Blomme, & Schaveling, 2021). The literature supports such claims with the elaboration that when organizations respond positively to employees' requests for flexible work conditions, it enhances their commitment to the organization, and as a consequence, workers deliver exceptional performance towards the

organizational goals (Rahman, Kistyanto, & Surjanti, 2020). This relationship between FWAs and positive employee outcomes is established through social exchange theory, which suggests that when a person commits any beneficial act to benefit someone, the recipient also responds with a positive gesture. Eisenberger, Rhoades Shanock, & Wen (2020) has demonstrated that employees' behaviors at work are the reflection of the way they are treated at work. When employees are provided with their desired work environment, they reciprocate such positive organizational gestures with enhanced organizational commitment. Literature suggests that facilitating employees' requests for FWAs benefits organizations to be perceived as caring organizations that consider their employees' interests (Rahman, Kistyanto, & Surjanti, 2020). Such friendly organizations usually experience high organizational commitment from their workers, which is depicted via workers' loyalty toward organizational values and goals. Contrary to this, organizations that fail to facilitate requests for FWAs usually report high turnover rates, lower productivity, and low organizational commitment (Nazir, Shafi, Atif, Qun, & Abdullah, 2019).

The positive outcomes of FWAs are not just limited to employees and their organizations. FWAs also encompass positive social and economic outcomes for the entire societies in which organizations operate. A study conducted by Croucher, Stumbitz, Quinlan, & Vickers (2013) showed that FWAs contribute to workers' welfare and make them better contributors to society. There is a synergistic association between a flexible workplace and flexible time (Dilmaghani, 2020). Therefore when both are adopted concurrently, it helps workers to smoothly transition between their various roles (Charalampous, Grant, Tramontano, & Michailidis, 2019). For instance, with authority over both a worker can easily transition from the professional role of software developer to the domestic role of a housemaker or a mother (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). Such smooth transition between roles contributes massively toward workers' job satisfaction and work-life balance. However, flexible time options without a flexible workplace are still effective in enhancing employees' job satisfaction and role transitions (Dilmaghani, 2020). For instance, an employee with flex time can drop his child at school before arriving at work. However, under such scenarios, there is a threat to work-life integration (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Sometimes, workers are unable to manage both roles sideways. As often, getting completely out of one role and immediate transition into another role get difficult for the workers (Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė, & Goštautaitė, 2019). Under such work arrangements, sometimes the employees are made to work even longer hours than the traditional work hours (Dilmaghani, 2020).

FWAs holds notable significance for culture like Pakistan due to various reasons. Firstly, Pakistan like most of the developing countries is currently facing the issue of brain drain or emigration of skilled labor. Meo, & Sultan, (2023) has stated that qualified people leave their countries in search of better employment opportunities in more developed countries, which adversely affects the economy and GDP of their native countries. Providing FWAs to them can enhance their job satisfaction and loyalty towards their organizations and they are more likely to stay in their countries for its betterment. Secondly, the implementation of FWAs fosters employee empowerment. This can help deal with issues that arise from high power distance, and command and control systems which are more prevalent in bureaucratic and less developed countries.

Thirdly, Pakistan has a masculine culture where females are not given equal employment opportunities as compared with men and are usually associated with the domestic roles of a nurturer or caretaker (Moulabuksh, Zarar, & Shah, 2022). However, with increasing inflation and economic stress in Pakistan. Women have to earn to meet the financial needs of their families. In this scenario, FWAs policies seem to be a possible solution as FWAs can help women manage the dual roles of a mother and a professional sideways, without having a work-life conflict (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). Fourthly, Pakistan cannot progress without the participation of women as according to the world bank data report almost 49.58% of Pakistan's population are females. So, it is not possible to attain prosperity without the participation of nearly half of the population. The implementation of flexible work policies, such as remote work and teleworking policies can increase women's participation, as it is perceived that women prefer these policies more due to their religious values and cultural norms.

2.5.2 Demerits of flexible work arrangements

Although various studies have highlighted positive outcomes of FWAs, there are some adversities associated with their implementation. Scholars suggest that mandatory or firm-oriented FWAs adversely impact work behaviors and the well-being of workers (Cañibano, 2011; JH Coun, Peters, Blomme, & Schaveling, 2021). The deterioration in workers' well-being diminishes their motivation and ability to concentrate at work, which adversely affects their job performance and productivity (Huang et al., 2016). Flexible working sometimes becomes a challenge for the workforce as there is a risk of getting trapped in work-life conflicts

(Jain, 2020). Remote workers are not able to experience the organizational culture. There exists a communication gap in remote working due to which coordination and teamwork become a challenge for the organizations. For instance, IBM which had once implemented FWAs eliminated such policies due to its reported adverse effects on team collaboration and team productivity (Giannikis & Mihail, 2011).

The long and time-consuming administrative activities involved in accepting and managing requests from different employees for different configuration of FWAs adds to the workload for the management and administrative staff and deviate them from their major roles and responsibilities. Therefore, organizations usually show reluctance toward the implementation of FWAs (Jain, 2020). FWAs become a source of stress if the work time is reduced to the extent that it gets difficult for workers to complete the task assigned (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Likewise, sometimes employees are stressed with extensive workloads or made to work even on off days or public holidays, which disturbs their work-life balance (Dilmaghani, 2020). When employees are made to work long hours without being paid additional compensation, it adversely affects their well-being (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). In such scenarios FWAs instead of being a source of relief become a stressor for employees and lower their work commitments. Sometimes, when an employee is enjoying the perks of FWAs, for instance, he might be on flexible leaves, and his work is assigned to other workers available, adding to their workloads and stress.

Remote workers often lack the appropriate equipment and resources required to effectively perform their remote jobs, which limits their performance (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020) and creativity. When employees are not sure about their job security, like in contractual jobs and remote work, they lack job satisfaction which adversely affects their well-being. These dissatisfied workers usually demonstrate lower work performance and higher turnover intentions (Cañibano, 2011).

One of the most destructive consequences of adopting FWAs is that employees feel isolated and deprived of direct support from their supervisors (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020), which adversely affects their well-being (Charalampous, Grant, Tramontano, & Michailidis, 2019). Remote workers feel exhorted and stressed due to the communication gap and lack of active employee-employer interactions (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). The distracting environment at home erodes the existing positive outcomes of FWAs (Kotey & Sharma, 2019). Research studies also claim that the implementation of FWAs leads to a lack of cohesion between

coworkers (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020) and lower their trust in the organizations. Remote working often delays feedback from the supervisors. It also lowers the chance of fair performance evaluations, as it gets difficult for the supervisors to rate fairly for the actions which are out of their side. Scholars also claim that when employees have less interaction with supervisors, it lowers their chances of promotions and career advancement (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020).

According to Le, Newman, Menzies, Zheng, & Fermelis, 2020, collectivist culture has longer families. As sometimes three generations; grandparents, parents, and children, share the same roof. So, it gets difficult for workers with collectivist culture, to arrange a disturbance-free workspace at home and deliver better performance.

2.6 Theoretical underpinning

This research is grounded in the social exchange theory and perceived organizational support theory. The theory of social exchange proposes that when workers experience organizational support, they develop a sense of gratitude towards the organization and demonstrate their loyalty to the organization by performing their jobs well (Bathini & Kandathil, 2019). Likewise, fair working conditions spark positive work motivation in workers (Eisenberger, Rhoades Shanock, & Wen, 2020; Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020). Various studies have demonstrated positive relation between favorable work conditions and employees' work-related outcomes such as job motivation, job satisfaction, job engagement, and work performance. (Charalampous, Grant, Tramontano, & Michailidis, 2019; Chen & Eyoun, 2021; Tsen, Gu, Tan, & Goh, 2022).

The perceived organizational support theory (POS) is based on the social exchange theory. POS theory suggests that employees' work behavior and attitudes are shaped by their perception of how much their contributions are appreciated and their well-being is considered by their organizations (Aggarwal-Gupta, Vohra, & Bhatnagar, 2010). Workers reciprocate organizational support and rewards with better job performance. Nazir, S., Shafi, A., Qun, W., Nazir., & Tran, Q. D. (2016) demonstrated that organizational rewards bestowed either in the form of extrinsic (tangible) rewards such as bonuses and incentives or intrinsic (intangible) rewards such as appreciation from supervisors or provision of improved work conditions, in both ways organizational rewards enhance employees' work motivation. Based on the principle

of reciprocity, when the workers are rewarded well they perform better in their job roles and even in extra-role behaviors (Nazir, Shafi, Atif, Qun, & Abdullah, 2019). By virtue of POS, workers put in great efforts towards the achievement of organizational goals, and consequently overall organizational performance is enhanced (Chen & Eyoun, 2021).

The POS theory suggests that the appreciation of workers elevates their positive emotions and intrinsic motivation, which helps them deal with work-related stress and burnout (Chen & Eyoun, 2021). When socio-emotional needs are fulfilled and contributions are recognized in organizations, it helps workers to overcome stress and perform their jobs well (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Literature has also shown positive influences of perceived organizational support on workers' subjective well-being (Olimpia & Rachmawati, 2021; Kirby, et al., 2023) and work-related attitudes and behaviors (Aggarwal-Gupta, Vohra, & Bhatnagar, 2010; Chen & Eyoun, 2021; Nazir, Shafi, Atif, Qun, & Abdullah, 2019).

Both of the above-mentioned theories; the social exchange theory and perceived organizational support theory provide theoretical support for this research. These theories are contingent upon the baseline idea that when organizations cater needs and concerns of their employees the employees in return demonstrate positive work behaviors and usually have high well-being (Nazir, Shafi, Atif, Qun, & Abdullah, 2019), this concept of the above-stated theories provide insight into the relationship between organizational response mechanisms for the Covid-19 pandemic and employees' subjective well-being, which are the main constructs of this research.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has described FWAs and their dimensions. The chapter has discussed the three main types of FWAs, namely, flexible workplace, flexible time, and teleworking, which the prior literature presents as the most implemented FWAs during the pandemic. The chapter has presented prior literature available on FWAs and employee well-being in order to set a foundation to explore a link between FWAs and employee SWB. This chapter has also pointed out that FWA has a paradoxical nature. It has both merits as well as certain demerits associated with its implementation. In the end, SET and POS theories are explained which provided theoretical support to this research study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter comprises five sections that discuss the methods adopted to conduct this research. The first section identifies the research philosophy, design, and approach. The next three sections provide details of the participants, sampling techniques, and sample size employed in this research. The last two sections discuss the techniques used for data collection and data analysis.

3.1 Research Philosophy, design, and approach

This research study has interpretive research philosophy, and it was based upon a qualitative and inductive research approach. Literature states that interpretive research philosophy assists researchers in assessing the lived experiences and views of the participants which set a base for exploring underlying ideas, developing concepts, and understanding social phenomena in a real-world context (Borgström & Campbell Lindén, 2021). Therefore, considering this and with reference to the research questions and objectives of this research, the interpretive research philosophy was an appropriate and suitable method of research since limited literature has been conducted on the influence of FWAs on employee SWB during the pandemic, hence interpretive research philosophy was a suitable approach to the study such novel individual experiences in a natural context.

The qualitative approach was employed as it is appreciated and widely used to get an in-depth insight into under-explored areas of research (Mills & Birks, 2014). The quantitative research approach lacks deeper insight into the subjective experiences of the participants, whereas qualitative research provides a clearer and deeper understanding of the experiences of the respondents. Numerous studies have demonstrated that qualitative research is effective to get an in-depth insight into the problems and it is helpful in generating new ideas and unique solutions to the problems at hand. According to Jin (2018), interpretive research philosophy with an inductive and qualitative research approach provides in-depth insights and sufficient data to respond to the why and how of the research questions of a study. Likewise, the qualitative and inductive research approach of this research enabled us to collect in-depth insights to answer our research question inquiring how organizations have responded to the

pandemic, how FWAs influence employee SWB, and also whether organizations' intentions to continue FWAs post-pandemic.

Qualitative research involves a collection of non-numerical data mostly through semi-structured interviews. Since our research approach is qualitative and inductive in nature hence data were collected through semi-structured interviews (Borgström & Campbell Lindén, 2021) due to which we were able to gather relevant in-depth information and develop new theoretical knowledge based on the participant's information.

3.2 Sampling technique, participants, and sample size

Sampling technique:

Non-probability purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select the participants of this research, considering the nature of this research and its objectives of exploring the response mechanisms adopted by the organizations during the pandemic, their influence on employees' SWB, and future intentions of organizations.

The literature recommends the use of a purposive sampling technique as it is subjective in nature and focuses on the link between research objectives with the selected sample. Considering this, the purposive sampling technique was employed in this research because according to the nature of this study and its research objectives, only those individuals were required to participate who have gone through the experience of adopting FWAs during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Likewise, a snowball technique was employed to make sure that only those participants were included and the influence of FWAs on their SWB was studied, who had experienced the transition phase and had some significant work experience before the pandemic. So that they could provide data on the transition in the organizational policies and could compare the SWB of workers before and after the implementation of FWAs policies.

Purposive and snowball techniques enabled us to approach and include those participants in the study who had experienced the transition of work conditions during the Covid-19 era, to get their experience and views regarding FWAs in the pandemic context. At the outset of the sample selection phase, a list of the eligible sample was generated and contacted for interviews. The organizations were contacted through personal contacts and e-mails.

Participants:

Data was collected from firms operating in 5 different sectors, namely, the finance sector, education sector, telecommunication sector, construction sector, and information technology sector. Those sectors were chosen which has been impacted drastically by the pandemic crises. Elavarasan, et al., (2020) has demonstrated that the education sector was the most effected sector. While other scholars have indicated other sectors; IT (YETGİN, 2020), telecommunication (Chua, Myeda, & Teo, 2022), and the construction sector (Bsisu, 2020) as the most affected sectors.

Table 2: Sectors included in the study.

Sector	Number of interviews/ participants
Finance sector	*23 (59%)*
Education sector	*12 (30%)*
Telecommunication sector	*2 (5%)*
Construction sector	*1 (3%)*
IT sector	*1 (3%)*

Sources: Interviews conducted

Different proportions of participants from different sectors were included in the study. 3 % (N=1) was collected from construction and 3 % (N=1) from IT sectors, 5% (N=2) from telecommunication sector, and 12% (N=30) from education sector. The majority of the data (59 %) was collected from the financial sector, considering the importance of this sector to the wellness of the social and economic ecosystem. The banking sector is an important pillar of the economic and social prosperity of a nation, and it is classified under the essential services of a country (Marcu, 2021). Therefore, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the banking sector was under immense pressure to keep its functions stable for the prosperity of the entire society (Perwej, 2020). Considering this, banks had gone through certain changes, such as a drift towards e-banking, implementation of FWAs, relaxation in their leave policies, and a few layoffs, which consequently impacted their wellness (Marcu, 2021). Hence fore, this research has collected data from the banking and finance sectors to study the strategies adopted by them to maintain the well-being of their workers and cope with the pandemic crises.

Sample Size:

The sample size included thirty-nine (39) participants. The sample size was not predetermined, new participants were added to the study till the saturation point was reached. The saturation point is that point in data collection when adding more participants to the study does not add new information (Mills & Birks, 2014). In this study, the saturation point was reached with the inclusion of thirty-nine participants as at this point of data collection researchers realized that they were not getting any new or more significant information. Participants were from different age groups. 44% of the participants were from 25-30 years, 30% were from 30-35 years, 3 percent from 35-40 years, 15% were from 40-45 years and 15% were from 45 and above age group. The following table (

Source: Interviews conducted) indicates the demographics of participants.

Table 3: Demographics/ Overview of respondents

<u>Occupational level</u>	Participants (N)	Percentage (%)
Managers	*16*	*41%*
Workers	*23*	*59%*
<u>**Gender**</u>		
Female	*17*	*44%*
Male	*22*	*56%*
<u>**Age group**</u>		
25-30	*17*	*44%*
30-35	*12*	*30%*
35-40	*1*	*3 %*
40-45	*6*	*15 %*

| 45 and above | 3 | 8 % |

Source: Interviews conducted

Data was collected from two levels of stakeholders: managers *(41% N= 16)* and workers *(59% N=23)*. The reason for employing two different types of stakeholders was to get the perspective of both of them, as they both have different kinds of concerns and challenges. The managers provided us with data regarding the research questions of this research inquiring about the response mechanisms adopted by the organizations during the pandemic and the process of its evolution. The managers provided information on the merits and demerits of FWAs, workers' reactions, and changes in the employees' work behaviors, which managers experienced with the implementation of FWAs. Moreover, the managers also provided data about the future intentions of organizations regarding the continuation of FWAs adopted during the pandemic, which is also one of the objectives of this research.

Whereas the workers provided us insights into their perceptions regarding the implementation of FWAs during the pandemic and its influence on their SWB, which provided us data on the research question exploring the influence of FWAs on employee SWB. The workers also highlighted the challenges and demerits employees faced with the implementation of FWAs.

3.3 Data collection tools and procedures

In-depth interviews were conducted in person to collect data. The literature refers to interviews as the most widely used and effective data collective tool in a qualitative study (Pakos, Walter, Rücker, & Voigt, 2021) therefore, this research has collected data through interviews.

Interview guides were designed for both types of participants (*see the interview guides Figure 2*) to ask relevant questions from respective participants and to ensure the trustworthiness of the process. Both of the interview guides had questions regarding different dimensions of this research and responded to the three main research questions of this research. The interview guides comprised an initial set of the demographic/participant and their work-related questions in order to confirm participants' reliability (Pakos, Walter, Rücker, & Voigt, 2021). Then, more specific questions were asked regarding the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees about the implementation of FWAs. Questions were adapted from existing literature and some were added based on the context for which prior approval was taken.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. According to Shum, et al., (2023), semi-structured interviews are preferable and effective in qualitative research since it provides the authority to the researcher to alter the direction of the interview based on the responses of the participants and add more questions to get clearer and expanded insights. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions. The open-ended questionnaire is a type of questionnaire where the researcher has some questions ready and he adds more questions during the interview based on the responses he gets from the participants in order to get more in-depth and clarity. As, the literature indicates open-ended questions are effective for gaining unbiased and detailed views from respondents (Borgström & Campbell Lindén, 2021). The respondents can provide wider information than just straight forwards answers. Therefore, open-ended questions were asked from the respondents to get their detailed views and experiences.

For pilot testing, 2 interviews were conducted, one with each type of stakeholder. However, no required changes were highlighted in pilot testing. The transcriptions of the initial interviews also confirmed that we were getting significant data, hence we should continue the data collection. At the start of the interviews, the participants were informed about the objective of the research, its objectives, and the implications of the study. Participants were also informed about their right to remain anonymous and to leave the interview at any time if in case they find it to be irrelevant or even leave the interview. The interviews were held face-to-face. An interview took around 30 minutes on average, which is in accordance with the guidelines established by Augereau, Journet, and Domenger (2013). All the interviews were conducted in the office or work setting of the participants. All questions in the interview guide were completed. Interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Later, all the recorded interviews were transcribed on MS word.

The following table (*See Table 4*), provides a brief description of the interviews conducted. It provides information about the industry affiliation, designation, code, and work experience of each respondent. It shows that respondents were from 5 different sectors: Finance, education, telecommunication, IT (information technology) sector, and construction sector. 16 respondents were from the managerial level while 23 were workers. The work experiences of the workers have been stated which range from 2 Years to 27 Years. Codes were developed for each participant which were used in analysis while referring to certain excerpts from the participants.

Table 4: Summary of the interviews conducted

Respondent	Industry Affiliations	Designation	Codes	Work Experience
1	Finance	Manager	M1F	8 Years
2	Finance	Manager	M2F	7-8 Years
3	Finance	Worker	W3F	3 Years
4	Finance	Worker	W4F	3 Years
5	Education	Manager	M5E	22 Years
6	Education	Manager	M6E	27 Years
7	Education	Worker	W7E	4 Years
8	Education	Worker	W8E	5 Years
9	Education	Worker	W9E	12 Years
10	Education	Worker	W10E	17 Years
11	Education	Worker	W11E	8 Years
12	Education	Manager	M12E	10 Years
13	Education	Worker	W13E	5 Years
14	Education	Manager	M14E	3 Years
15	Education	Manager	M15E	2 Years
16	Telecommunication	Worker	W16T	3 Years
17	Telecommunication	Worker	W17T	2 Years
18	Telecommunication	Worker	W18T	3 Years
19	Education	Worker	W19E	2 Years
20	IT	Worker	W20IT	4 Years
21	Construction	Manager	M21C	8 Years
22	Telecommunication	Worker	W22T	2-3 Years
23	Finance	Manager	M23F	12 Year
24	Finance	Manager	M24F	7 Years
25	Finance	Manager	M25F	3 Years
26	Finance	Worker	W26F	4 Years
27	Finance	Worker	W27F	4Year
28	Finance	Manager	M28F	6 Years
29	Finance	Worker	W29F	5 Year
30	Finance	Worker	W30F	2 Years
31	Finance	Manager	M31F	11 Years
32	Finance	Worker	W32F	7 Years
33	Finance	Worker	W33F	2 Years
34	Finance	Worker	W34F	4 Years
35	Finance	Manager	M35F	4 Years
36	Finance	Worker	W36F	8 Years
37	Finance	Worker	W37F	5 Years
38	Finance	Manager	M38F	12 Years
39	Finance	Manager	M39F	8 Years

3.5 Data analysis

The thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to analyze the collected data. In a qualitative study, thematic analysis is considered a reliable and popular procedure to

identify important themes in order to address the research objectives (Arquisola, Liswandi, Hutabarat, & Fauzi, 2021). Thematic analysis was employed to analysis the collected data since it is recommended as an effective analysis method to study employee psychology and management (Thomson, 2018). This aspect of thematic analysis makes it most relevant to this research and its objectives of exploring the influence of management practices, such as FWAs policies on the SWB of workers.

During thematic analysis, codes were created after reading and getting familiar with the transcription content, then those codes were grouped into sub- themes and themes. The following table (see **Error! Reference source not found.**) provides an overview of the sub-themes and themes of the thematic analysis, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Data analysis was done manually. First, open-coding was done with line-by-line scrutiny of the interview transcription to look for significant information in the data, and the codes were generated. Then, similar codes were linked and arranged into sub-themes to have a clear understanding of the collected information. Those themes were then grouped into wider or major themes. A total of nine sub-themes and four themes emerged from the analysis.

Table 5: Themes derived from the thematic analysis.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	CODES	SAMPLE QUOTES
Evolution of FWAs amidst the pandemic	Implementation of FWAs amidst the pandemic	Imposed/ forced FWAs	"It was compulsory. If we didn't adopt that, the company would throw us out of the job". (W20IT)
		Freedom of Choice over FWAs	"At the start, remote work (policies) was imposed due to the lockdown. Then, we were given the choice to either work from home or to come to the office". (W16T)
		Changes in roles and responsibilities	"A lot of responsibilities were added". (W9E) "Customers were shifting to e-banking, which they didn't know much about before, so we had to guide them on the phone while dealing with customers at the branch at the same time". (W4F)
		Provision of support/ resources	"A bit of support was provided". (W7E)

			"Our company was providing us internet packages, but that had limited data which was not sufficient to satisfy customers". (W36F)
		Challenges/stressors/hurdles in the implementation of FWAs	"Some people didn't have proper internet facilities and proper space at home, so they resisted a lot". (W10E)
	Types of FWAs implemented	Remote work	"Due to the lockdown, we had to shift to remote work. Just security staff was coming". (W10E)
		Flexible/ alternate schedule	"We were working on alternate weeks like, we used to come here for a week and get the next week off". (W4F)
		Reduced timing	"Timing was reduced from 8 to 6 hours a day". (W4F)
		Hybrid mode	"Jazz adopted the perfect hybrid model, with 3 workdays from office and two from home". (W16T)
	Worker's reaction	Positive reaction to the implementation of FWAs	"Joung staff was happy. Older staff who didn't know much about technology were disturbed". (M1F)
		Resistance to the implementation of FWAs	"Few of the staff who were lacking proper working spaces at home resisted flexible working". (W22T)
FWAs as the custodian of workers' SWB	Perception of FWAs as worker supportive Practices	Positive well-being with the implementation of FWAs	"I was able to arrange my properties and my time as I wanted to, which ultimately enhanced my well-being". (M5E)
		Improvement in work behavior	"It improved their (employees) work behaviors". (M21C)
	Influence of FWA over worker's personal life	FWAs weaken social life	"Social life was not that good". (W22T)
		FWAs strengthen personal life	"I was really happy as it saved me travel time and I could spend more time with my baby after getting my work completed". (W17T)

	and social life		
	Improvement in physical health and mental health	FWAs improve physical health	"We used to consult with the staff online which saved us from contracting Covid". (M5E)
		FWAs improve mental health	"The less time we spend on working, the more relaxed and more productive we are". (W17T)
Paradoxical consequences associated with the implementation of FWAs.	Demerits/ challenges associated with the implementation of FWAs.	Social isolation	"We were locked insight into our homes". (W22T)
		Hindrance in team collaboration	"Team coordination was a challenge for us. Few people moved back to their villages and were having signal issues. Some didn't have proper internet". (M6E)
		Insufficiency of technical and financial support	"We are spending a major portion of our income on the internet. Some who didn't have a laptop have to buy it with their own money". (W17T)
		Communication gap	"Communication was affected. We can't communicate online as good as we can by standing in front of someone". (W8E)
		Workers' stress and anxieties	"We had to perform the same amount of tasks within less time, which was giving a lot of mental pressure". (W32F) "Sales department was in stress. They were not able to meet their targets". (M1F)
		Extensive workload	"Tasks were the same, but the branch staff was reduced to half, so the staff on job was overburdened". (W32F) "We were doing a 24/7 job. There was no off timing. We were getting calls and emails even late at night". (W10E)
	Merits associated with FWAs.	Work-life balance	"Personal life was improved as there was a work and life balance. (W16T)
		More family and personal time	"It helped me spend more time with my family. I got two certifications. I also started a part-time job in telemedicine". (M5E)

		Positive well-being	"People were satisfied, which was depicted from their job performance". (W17T)
		Work engagement	"We were mentally relaxed and could concentrate more on our work". (W4F)
		Better work behavior/ performance	"We haven't faced any issues regarding workers' job performance". (M1F)
		Reduces operational costs for an organization	"There was a reduction in the company's electricity bill and office rent. Most landowners of the area reduced the rent by 50% since the offices were empty as we were working from home". (W17T)
FWAs as the future of work	A shift of focus of industry professionals toward FWA	Proponents of using FWA in future	"We still are using those methods (FWAs) and we do intend to keep the same in the future". (M21C) "Employee performance was improved. So, I don't think management will revert to old setup". (M5C)
		Flexibility in organizational policies	"Covid was a blessing in disguise. Due to it companies made their policies flexible. Now we are having a prefect hybrid model". (W17T)
		Recommendations from the industry professional for the effective implementation of FWA	"If time is reduced workload should also be reduced. Just reducing the time is not an effective strategy". (W3F) "Sometimes, remote workers are not well appreciated for their effort. There should be a proper monitoring and reward system. Second, an organization should only contact staff during working hours, not after that". (W20IT) "Help them if needed. Engage them in decisions which could affect them, this will motivate them to deliver better performance". (M21C) "I would suggest the Hybrid model. It's the most effective model". (W16T)

Source: Thematic analysis of the collected data

3.6 Ethical considerations

This research has followed the ethical standards of qualitative studies. The literature on ethical considerations emphasizes that it is the responsibility of the researcher to comminate the participants about the objectives of the research, the duration of the interview, and the type of questions that will be asked (Vivek, 2022). Scholars suggest that when the participants have

more clarity of the purpose for which data is being collected, the respondents are motivated to provide the required data appropriately (Vivek, 2022; Arifin, 2018). Considering this, the researchers of this research ensured that the participants were fully aware of the main purpose of the research and the how abouts of the interview, before hiring them for data collection. Likewise, the respondents were informed about their right to remain anonymous, and their right to skip any question or even leave if they found it irrelevant. Also, the participation was voluntary without any sort of pressure.

At the start of the interview, consent (*see Figure 1*) was taken from the participants to conduct the interviews and to record them as it is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to take respondents' consent to record them and in case, the respondent shows any hesitance, then the researcher should restrain from doing so. It is the responsibility of the researcher to listen and take care of the reservations of the respondents, if any, to build trust and gain more authentic data (Ngozwana, 2018).

Data leakage or misuse has negative repercussions. Data protection is a serious matter of concern for both the researchers and the respondents (Ngozwana, 2018). Sometimes the respondents miscommunicate the information fearing adverse consequences or misuse of data. Therefore, to avoid this, the researchers of this research remained careful about the safety of the collected data. The respondents were assured that data will remain confidential, no unauthorized individual will have access to it and the data will be used only for research purposes. When a researcher provides such a guarantee or the confidentiality of data is assured, it creates trust between researchers and respondents, which consequently enhances the chance of more participation and authenticity of data.

Sometimes researchers face linguistic and cultural barriers which create miscommunication by altering the true meaning of data. Likewise, some of the interviews were conducted in the local language (Urdu), which later on were translated and transcribed into the English language, however, in doing so, there is often an associated risk of losing the real meaning of what is said. Therefore, to avoid this, an effort was made to remain unbiased during translation and to look for the real meaning of what respondents had said.

According to Borgström & Campbell Lindén (2021) in qualitative research, the researchers have to face issues of trustworthiness, and authenticity, which could be eliminated through unbiased behavior and continuous self-reflections of the researchers. Therefore, to avoid biases and to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness, the researchers of this study made self-

reflections throughout the research, more specifically, during the data collection and analysis phase to look for and to eliminate all sorts of biases.

Respondents were informed how the collected data would be analyzed. The respondents are motivated to deliver their best when they are also getting something in return, hence it is important that the researcher informs them about the significance of the research and share the results of the research with them. Considering this, respondents were informed that the researchers could share the findings of this research with them, if they wanted, through any medium of their choice, telephone, or e-mail.

It is the responsibility of the researcher to take care of the mental and physical ease of the workers (Vivek, 2022), which could consequently encourage the respondents to share their thoughts on the said topic confidently. Moreover, the data was collected when social distancing protocols were still in place, hence special care was taken in this regard to ensure the safety and wellness of the respondents and the researcher.

3.7 Summary

Data was collected from two types of stakeholders and separate interview guides were designed for both to ask relevant questions from them since both have different concerns and perspectives. Both the interview guides had a different set of questions regarding different dimensions of this research and responded to three main research questions of this research.

A thematic analysis was conducted to analyze the data, collected through thirty-nine semi-structured interviews, based on the qualitative and inductive approach of this research. Nine sub-themes and four major themes emerged from the analysis, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Ethical considerations were kept under the limelight throughout this research to avoid all sorts of biases and to enhance the credibility of this research.

Chapter 4 Results and analysis

4.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the results of this research and its analysis. The first section of this chapter discusses the implementation of FWAs amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The second section explores the influence of FWA on employees' SWB. The third section describes the paradoxical nature of FWA and the last section points to FWAs as the common work model in the post-Covid era.

4.1 Evolution and implementation of FWAs amidst the pandemic

The pandemic outbreak created an uncertain climate. An emergency was ignited throughout the world, which brought a challenge for industry professionals to come up with an immediate response mechanism to deal with the adversities of the pandemic in order to save their workers and businesses. Most of the governments, imposed lockdown restrictions, like citizens were compelled to follow physical distancing protocols and were instructed to stay at home. Organizations were made to shut down their working spaces and move online. The World Health Organization (WHO) also provided its safety guidelines. WHO guidelines instructed people to maintain social distancing of at least 1 meter and avoid social gatherings, to keep them safe from contracting coronavirus. To comply with these instructions, organizations were left with the only option of adopting flexible work arrangements. FWAs were new to most of organizations. They never had adopted such practices before the pandemic.

Therefore, during the first year of the pandemic, organizations adopted FWAs on a hit-and-trial basis because organizations weren't sure of the most effective strategies which could help them strive during that period as organizations didn't have a similar previous experience. As per observations of a respondent:

> *"The Covid-19 pandemic was an emergency situation. We didn't have prior experience dealing with such situations nor was any special support or training provided by the government. It was indeed the capabilities and effectiveness of the professionals who were able to respond to it well"*. *(M21C)*

Organizations were compelled to adopt FWAs due to lockdown restrictions imposed by the government. As findings of this research revealed, flexible work arrangements were imposed on the majority (87 %) of the respondents but only a few (13 %) were given the freedom to choose the FWA of their choice, and even fewer (5 %) were involved in decision-making regarding the implementation of FWA. This provides evidence that FWAs implemented during the pandemic fundamentally have an involuntary nature, where workers didn't have the authority to choose the FWAs most suitable to them by considering their work-life situations. Hence fore, the implementation of such involuntary FWAs were resisted by the workers. Organizations that were efficient enough to provide requisite support and resources to the workers experienced fewer restrictions to the adoption of FWAs and delivered the same or even better performance, in some cases. While those organizations that were not able to respond appropriately to the reservation of the workers experienced more resistance to FWAs and lower work performance.

4.1.1 Types of FWAs implemented amidst the Pandemic

The findings of this research showed that three types of FWAs were adopted the most during the pandemic, namely, remote working/ flexible workplace, alternate schedule/ flexible schedule, and the hybrid model. The majority of the organizations were shifted to remote working to minimize physical contact and the spread of the virus. Then after the vaccination of staff, some organizations that come under essential services, like banks and educational institutions considered opening their offices with a lesser workforce. As stated in the following narrative:

> *"When the situation was a little bit better our organization adopted a hybrid model. It was made sure that the people who came to the office must be vaccinated. Our company has a 'tool portal'. A company-wide survey was conducted on that portal, in order to know how many of the staff got vaccinated. The departments whose personnel were vaccinated used to get a certification for hybrid mode". (W22T)*

The majority (82 %) of the banks divided their staff into two groups and used to call them on alternate days and some on alternate weeks. This flexible schedule helped them continue their business and protect their staff from getting coronavirus. As per the respondent narrative:

> *"Bank comes under basic service it could not be closed, if it would be closed the whole country's economic cycle will stop, internal flow of money will stop. So, we have to*

remain open no matter what. Therefore, SBP comes with an effective 50 percent workforce policy to reduce the workforce at the banks". (W33F)

Organizations adopted different FWAs for different staff categories. Some of the staff whose work could be done online were shifted to complete online/ remote work or a flexible schedule. While those who couldn't perform their tasks online had to physically visit their offices but their timing was reduced. These observations are supported by the following narratives.

"Few of the departments that could work online are still working online. I work in the commercial division and the pricing job has to do more with excel hence it can easily be done online so I only go to the office on Wednesdays. The head office works 3 days from the office and 2 from home". (W22T)

"Some of the staff such as security and the cleaning staff can't perform their jobs online they had to visit to perform their task". (M5E)

Some organizations relaxed their policies and reduced the workload for the staff. However, the workload increased for the majority of the workers whose organizations adopted alternate work days/week and reduced time policies, without reducing the workload for them. Because, under such FWAs, they were not able to complete their targets, and sometimes they were overburdened.

"Tasks were the same but as the branch staff was reduced to half under the alternate schedule, the staff was overburdened". (M24F)

4.1.2 Workers' reaction towards implementation of FWAs

Workers showed mixed reactions to the implementation of FWAs. Some of the workers showed a negative reaction to the implementation of FWA and opposed organizational initiatives towards the implementation of FWAs. Respondents elaborated on certain reasons for their resistance, such as the inability of disturbance-free physical space at home, old versioned technological gadgets, or lack of support from organizations. The shift to online working was also resisted by a few workers since it was stressful for the workers as online work was new to them and they were not provided with sufficient training before the implementation of FWAs. These observations were captured in the following narratives:

> *"Delivering lectures online and maintaining classroom environment on Zoom was too stressful". (W9E)*

> *"Even the training regarding the use of Zoom was delivered on Zoom". (W11E)*

Managers justified their position by arguing that they were not able to provide sufficient resources and training to the workers before the implementation of FWAs since the Covid-19 pandemic created an environment of emergency. They had to take immediate action so they did not have time to arrange or conduct training for the workers. Considering this few of the organizations even lay off employees who didn't know the basics of online work or didn't have any technical know-how and it was difficult for them to work online. Secondly, the pandemic adversely affected the economic position of many organizations. Organizations were short on finances hence it was difficult for them to arrange any training sessions or to provide any financial support. These observations are supported by the following narrative of a respondent:

> *"We were barely making any profits during the Covid-19. Workers should be grateful that their salaries were not deducted. Company hadn't transferred its economic instability to the workers". (W19E)*

However, most of the workers appreciated the organizational shift towards FWA and responded positively. The finding has shown that most of the workers were satisfied with the implementation of FWAs policies, especially workers under the age bracket of 25-35, and female workers were happier with the adoption of remote working and hybrid model.

4.2 Influence of FWAs on Employee SWB

The covid-19 pandemic was a global crisis, which brought a challenge for Governments and businesses to keep their people safe from the adversities of the pandemic. With the outbreak of Covid-19 people were made to adopt certain restrictions and some changes in their personal and professional life. It was indeed a stressful period for all mankind. People were worried about the coronavirus and were afraid of getting sick. As per a respondent's narrative:

> *"There was a climate of fear and anxiety". (M1F)*

This fear was adversely affecting employee SWB. Workers were experiencing various antecedents of lower subjective well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic. Such as economic instability, health risk, less physical activity, and weak social life. To minimize the health risk

and deal with economic instability organizations implemented flexible work arrangements as safe and healthier employees could deliver better performance which, can prevent an organization from economic instability.

The FWA implemented during the pandemic helped the workers overcome the corona fear and to maintain their well-being by reducing their chance of contracting the virus. The majority of the respondents had reported positive subjective well-being with the implementation of FWAs, even in the pandemic context when various stressors were adversely impacting the well-being of workers. This is because FWAs helped the workers manage their work-life balance. Work-life balance is an important factor of employee subjective well-being. It increases a person's satisfaction and happiness level, which in turn enhances their SWB. FWAs also reduced the stress caused by a weak social life. According to respondents:

> *"I was able to arrange my properties and my time as I wanted to, which ultimately enhanced my well-being". (M5E)*

Flexible work arrangements, especially reduced time and remote work helped respondents to spend more time with their families, which improved their family and personal life. Some of the respondents invested their time in themselves by getting enrolled in some educational course or doing some other online job. As per the narrative of a respondent:

> *"I'm happy with the online system. During the Covid-19 I did certifications. I was teleworking on telemedicine as a part-time job". (M5E)*

> *"I was really happy as it saved me travel time and I could spend more time with my baby after getting my work completed". (W17T)*

The findings also indicated that flexible work arrangements improved the mental as well as the physical health of the workers. When workers are provided with the authority to choose their work conditions, they are better able to manage harmony between their work and personal life. This work-life balance ultimately reduces their stress level and improves the mental and physical health of workers.

> *"Banking is a tough job. Mental and physical health is involved so reducing time is a good thing for bank staff". (W26F)*

The findings stated above suggest that FWAs influence employee SWB positively. Almost all the respondents who were working under flexible work arrangements during the pandemic had

positive subjective well-being. Although during the pandemic organizations imposed FWAs on the workers, without engaging them in decisions regarding the adoption of FWAs. Moreover, most of the respondents highlighted the insufficiency of requisite training and support. Still, FWAs were perceived and came out to be workers' supportive practices. The workers reciprocated such organizational favors with better work behaviors. No managers reported any decline in the performance of subordinates. The following narratives support this:

"Their work behaviors were improved a lot. We didn't face any complaint of poor performance". (W19E)

"It's simple. The less time we have to spend on working, the more relaxed and more productive we are". (W17T)

The findings proved that FWAs adopted during the pandemic protected the positive SWB of both workers as well as management. Even in the presence of various pandemic-related stressors. The findings explained that when workers are given the freedom to perform their tasks whenever and from wherever they want, that autonomy helps them maintain their work-life balance, which ultimately helps them attain positive SWB by lowering their stress which could either be due to external uncertain environment or their work-life balance issues. Such workers with positive SWB reciprocate organizational favor with better work performance.

4.3 Demerits and merits of FWAs

Respondents reported a mixed set of perceptions regarding the consequences of the implementation of FWAs. Most of the respondents stated that with the implementation of FWAs, they encountered both positive as well as adverse outcomes at the same time. It was seen that if those challenges and demerits are addressed efficiently, organizations could get the maximum benefit from the implementation of FWAs.

4.3.1 Demerits associated with FWAs

The findings from the interviews revealed that employers have to overcome a number of challenges and adversities in the way of the successful implementation of FWA. As the workers did not come on a regular daily basis it affected the level of interaction and coordination between them. Respondents with remote working/ flexible working conditions reported that implementation of such practices reduced the interaction between workers and decreased

coordination among them. Respondents claimed that FWAs weaken the bond between co-workers and team members. As per the narrative of a respondent:

"Team collaboration was affected by online working". (W22T)

It was a challenge for the managers to control and manage the performance of their staff. Under remote working, workers had to perform multi-tasking; meeting their family roles, and performing their job at the same time. Likewise, it was difficult for the workers to arrange a distraction-free space at their homes where they could perform their work with concentration. Remote work usually made the workers sit for long hours, as there was no pack-up timing. The findings confirmed that extensive workload and lack of proper physical space enhance workers' stress and lower their subjective well-being of workers.

The majority of the workers with reduced time and flexible schedules reported extensive workloads. When organizations adopt reduced time or flexible schedules and don't reduce the timing for workers it enhances workload for them and enhances their anxieties and stress level. Therefore, it was suggested that the workload should also be reduced with reduced time and a flexible schedule to avoid work intensification. Some of the respondents reported that remote workers are often provided with more workload. The following narrative argues this:

"One thing which I have noticed is that staff working from home is usually provided with more workload, which should be avoided". (W19E)

A few of the respondents with remote work and flexible schedules reported a decrease in effective employee-supervisor communication, which affects the feedback channel. Therefore, sometimes workers were not aware of their performance and didn't have an idea how their annual appraisal would be. Most of the respondents (61.5%) complained about the insufficiency of technical and financial support. They argued that under remote work instructions when they used to be at home, they had to use their own resources, like internet packages, and a few stated that they didn't have a new version laptop and they had to arrange one for them without any financial assistance or reimbursements from their organizations which increased their financial burden.

"Our organization deducted conveyance allowance, though we're spending our money on the internet. Organizations should provide financial support. Second, an organization should only contact their staff during working hours and not after that". (W8E)

Similarly, some of the respondents didn't have the required technical skills to work online nor did they receive any technical training or support from their organizations which increased their stress levels during the pandemic. Respondents suggested that such issues could be resolved if organizations are vigilant enough in designing and providing training to staff as per the specific needs and requirements of each individual member of staff. An active channel of communication should be there. Workers should be provided with employee voice so that they can communicate openly about the challenges that they might be facing while adjusting to transitioned work conditions. Financial support should be provided to compensate for the contextual efforts of the staff during any uncertain period.

Findings from the interview data revealed that these associated demerits of flexible work arrangements could be eliminated if there is an employee voice in organizations and feedback from the workers is welcomed. Likewise, providing workers with authority over flexible work arrangements supports workers to choose the work arrangements most suitable to them, considering their work and life situations. However, oftentimes it is seen that workers are not involved in the decision-making regarding the designing and implementation of the workplace policies due to which such policies are not able to produce significant results.

4.3.2 Merits associated with FWAs

The majority of the respondents with reduced timing appreciated that due to reduce time policies they were able to spend more time with their children and families. Some of the respondents stated that they spent a relaxed time in themselves. Likewise, the FWAs options such as remote working or teleworking save workers' time and well-being as such practices keep workers safe from traveling to or from the office after a long hectic work day.

> *"I'm a big supporter of remote work. It is travel-safe. It saves you time. Most people utilized that time for their betterment. Like I did a few certifications during that period and I know a number of people who got enrolled in different educational programs, some started freelancing as a part-time job since their time was saved from traveling to an office". (M5E)*

The majority of the female respondents were in favor of remote or work-from-home policies. They stated that such practices enable them to manage both roles; of a professional employee and a housemaker or mother, sideways.

> *"Mostly it benefits females. They could work from home. They were easily doing the work from their homes and managing their families at the same time". (M28F)*

FWAs also saved organizational expenses like electricity expenses, transportation costs, office rent, and other overhead expenses, like stationary expenses. The most of respondents favored hybrid working, they argued that such a configuration of FWA allows them to experience workplace culture and cherish the benefits of remote work at the same time.

> *"Hybrid model is the best. A worker could enjoy both workplace culture and remote work". (W11E)*

The findings of this study indicated that flexible work arrangements are perceived positively by the worker. Workers perceive such policies to be worker's supportive and reciprocate such organizational support with enhanced engagement and performance toward organizational goals. The findings also indicated a significant level of satisfaction in the respondents. The majority of respondents (87 %) had reported positive subjective well-being.

4.4 FWAs the common work model in the post-Covid era

Transitional workplace practices are being completely replaced with flexible work arrangements. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, very few organizations were practicing FWAs. Now, that organizations have experienced Flexible work arrangements and had cherished the benefits of implementing FWA, such as workers' improved performance towards organizational goals, organizations intend to keep FWA in practice. These observations were captured in the following narrative:

> *"It was during the Covid that organizations get to know that such practices could be adopted. They realize that when organizations adopt workers' supportive practices. Workers reciprocate it with better performance" (W22T)*

The majority of the respondents, both managers as well as workers, were in favor of continuing the flexible work arrangements which were adopted during the pandemic. Though the implementation of flexible work arrangements during the pandemic was unplanned (sudden) and was imposed on the workers. Few of the respondents were not even provided with sufficient training and support from the management to deal with challenges associated with the transition in their work arrangements still workers were a proponent of continuing flexible work arrangements when the Covid-19 pandemic would completely submerge. Workers are in

favor of the continuation of FWAs with a realization of FWAs as the workers' supportive practices. As per the narrative of a respondent:

"These practices (flexible work arrangements) were designed to support workers. Employees always want such practices to be implemented, which could lower their burden. I don't think any worker would not want such practices". (W22T)

Organizations have relaxed their traditional workplace policies, such as restrictions to perform the job from an allocated workplace/ office premises from 9 A.M to 5 P.M (8 hours a day). Rather organizations are making their working policies more flexible to follow the increasing trend towards flexible work arrangements, with the fact in consideration that the organizations who don't transform with the advancing practices or technology become outdated, they no more remain an employer of choice and loses competent work base and their performance declines. Sensing this threat to the reputation of their businesses and calculating the associated merits of implementing flexible work arrangements, organizations are incorporating flexible work arrangements in their policies. These observations were captured in the following narrative:

"Now nearly all organizations have adopted hybrid working, they have relaxed their policies. While those who haven't transformed yet, it's very difficult for them to attract talent as no one would want to join them". (W22T)

Some of the respondents highlighted that although the implementation of such practices is in favor of workers and the organizations, the implementation of flexible work arrangements also brings certain associated challenges or demerits, which if remained unaddressed destroy the merits of FWAs. For instance, most of the respondents with reduced time reported that a reduction in time is of no use and is merely a source of stress for workers if the workload is not reduced. This is due to the fact that if the workload or job responsibilities are not reduced with a reduction in work time for the workers, it creates work intensification. Workers have to perform the same level of task in less time. Most of the time, workers are not able to complete their tasks within the reduced time. This reduces their efficiency and stresses them, and it also increases the chance for organizations to lose good efficient workers, who if provided with appropriate work arrangements could perform unexceptionally well. As per a respondent's narrative:

"If time is reduced workload should also be reduced else, just reducing the time is of no use. It's not an effective strategy". (M38B)

The findings from the interviews suggested that in the way of trending towards flexible work arrangements, the management needs to be considerate of the paradoxical nature of FWAs before formulating such policies and should involve the workers in designing their workplace policies to minimize the associated challenges for the workers and the effective implementation of FWAs policies.

4.5 Summary of key findings

This chapter has presented the findings and analysis of this research. The chapter has explained how organizations implemented FWAs during Covid-19 and the process of its evolution. The findings demonstrated that with the outbreak of Covid-19 and the lockdown restriction organizations were left with the only option of flexible working, for the survival of their business and the well-being of their workers. The findings also revealed that the FWAs adopted during the pandemic were mostly involuntary or imposed. Hence, its implementation faced some resistance and challenges from the workers of those organizations that failed to provide sufficient support and required resources to workers. These findings are consistent with prior literature on FWAs in the pre-Covid-19 era, which states that implementation of FWAs faces some resistance from the workers as it disturbs their work-family life and is more stressful. Conversely, the findings of this research have also revealed that when the workers are provided with requisite support and resources during the implementation of FWAs then in that scenario FWAs create a positive influence on the SWB of workers.

The prior research studies state that the freedom to choose the most suitable FWAs, helps the workers maintain their well-being by lowering their stress related to their work-life balance issues. While the implementation of involuntary FWAs adversely affects the well-being of workers. However, the implementation of FWAs amidst the pandemic was a different scenario. The findings of this research revealed that even though FWAs were imposed on the workers, FWAs helped workers in maintaining their well-being. This is because the implementation of FWAs during the pandemic provided the workers with a safety shield and helped them overcome pandemic-related stressors with a reduction in their chance of contracting the virus, which ultimately contributed to their well-being. The findings have also demonstrated that workers as well as managers perceive FWAs amidst the pandemic as workers' supportive practices because FWAs reduce workplace-related stress for the workers and improve their

physical and mental health. However, FWAs such as remote work and teleworking in some cases weaken the social life of workers.

This chapter has pointed to the paradoxical nature of FWAs and has elaborated on certain merits of FWAs, such as work-life balance, positive well-being, work engagement, better work performance, and reduced operational costs for the organizations. Likewise, certain demerits of FWAs which adversely effects the SWB of workers, have also been discussed, such as social isolation, hindrance in team collaboration, insufficiency of technical and financial support, communication gap, workers' stress, anxieties, and extensive workloads. However, the findings of this research also showed that the associated demerits can be minimized if organizations are vigilant enough in designing and providing training to staff as per the specific needs and requirements of each individual staff along with the authority to choose the type of FWAs most suitable for them.

This chapter has also provided insights about the future intention of the organizations and has discussed the shift of focus of industry professionals towards FWAs. It has indicated that organizations are making their workplace policies more flexible for the welfare of their workers and consequently, their businesses.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter starts with a discussion of the findings, which provides insights into the evolution of FWAs during the pandemic, FWAs as the custodian of workers' SWB, the paradoxical nature of FWA, and also points to FWAs as the future of work. In the second and third sections, this chapter elaborates practical and theoretical implications of the findings and continues to limitations and future recommendations. The last section of the chapter provides the conclusion of this research.

5.1 Discussion of findings

The discussion in this chapter focuses on four main themes of this research. The chapter discusses the evolution of imposed/ involuntary FWAs during the pandemic and the insufficiency of required support and resources to deal with the challenges and hurdles associated with the implementation of FWAs, due to which the implementation of FWAs had to face resistance from the workers.

Further, the chapter discusses that FWAs are perceived as workers' supportive practices because it reduces workplace-related stress for the workers and improves their physical and mental health by balancing their work and personal life. The chapter also discusses that there is a shift of focus of industry professionals towards FWAs. Organizations are making their workplace policies more flexible for the welfare of their workers and consequently, their businesses.

These discussions in this chapter are based on the analysis of the data, collected from workers and managers regarding their experiences and perception of FWAs implemented admits the pandemic and a review of the existing literature.

5.1.1 Evolution of FWAs amidst the Pandemic

With the outbreak of coronavirus, the government imposed a lockdown throughout the country, which compelled organizations to implement FWAs, as a consequence FWAs were imposed

on the majority of workers, and only a few were given the freedom to choose the FWA of their choice, and even less were involved in decision-making regarding the implementation of FWA. Organizations implemented flexible work arrangements as a response mechanism to save their workers from contracting the virus and to comply with the government's lockdown instructions. However, before the pandemic, a few organizations had FWAs policies.

At the start of the pandemic, organizations implemented FWAs on a hit-and-trial basis because organizations weren't sure of the most effective strategies which could help them strive period as organizations didn't have a similar previous experience. Organizations implemented different types of FWAs. Even within an organization, different FWAs were adopted for different staff categories. For instance, the staff whose work could be done online were shifted to complete online/ remote work. While those who couldn't perform their tasks online had to physically visit their offices but their timing was reduced. However, the majority of the organizations shifted to remote working to minimize physical contact and the spread of the virus. Then after the vacation of staff, some organizations that come under essential services, like banks and educational institutions considered opening their offices with a lesser workforce by implementing flexible week/day schedule policies. These institutions, such as the banks, divided their staff into two groups and used to call them on alternate days and some on alternate weeks. This flexible schedule helped them continue their business and at the same time protected their staff from getting coronavirus.

Some organizations relaxed their policies and reduced the workload for the staff. However, the workload increased for the workers whose organizations adopted alternate/ flexible work weeks or reduced time policies, without reducing the workload for workers. Because, under such work arrangements, workers were not able to complete their targets, and sometimes they were overburdened. Literature refers to this as work intensification; a situation where workers are made to complete more than what could be done (Bathini & Kandathil, 2019). Under such scenarios, FWAs instead of being a source of relief for the workers become a source of burnout for them. Therefore, the literature suggests that while adopting FWAs, organizations need to ensure that the workload of employees should match the reduced time (Kotey & Sharma, 2019). Scholars suggest that workers should be provided with the required support and resources to execute the tasks assigned to them within the allocated time frame to avoid work intensification (Bathini & Kandathil, 2019). However, it was seen in the analysis of this research that some of the workers were not provided with the required resources and training before the implementation of FWAs this is due to the reason that the Covid-19 pandemic created an

emergency situation and the organizations were required to come up with response mechanisms on an immediate basis. Businesses were short on time and economic resources hence some of the organizations didn't provide the required training before implementing flexible work arrangements.

Further, the findings revealed that the shift to online working was stressful for workers as online working was new to them and workers were not given sufficient training, due to which workers reacted to the implementation of flexible work arrangements. These findings are supported by the literature which shows that when workers are not provided with the required level of support or resources before implementing a change, then the change is often resisted by the workers (Yucel & Fan, 2023). Like was the case with the implementation of FWAs during the pandemic. Though FWAs are often perceived as workers' supportive practices (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020), the findings of this research have indicated that some of the workers showed resistance to the implementation of FWA due to the lack of proper trainings and provision of requisite resources. However, the majority appreciated the organizational shift towards FWA and responded positively, especially workers under the age bracket of 25-35, and female workers. Female workers were happier with the adoption of remote work and hybrid working since under such work arrangements they could perform the dual role, of a housemaker and a professional, sideways.

5.1.2 FWAs as the custodian of workers' SWB

The prior research studies state that when workers are given the freedom to perform their tasks whenever and from wherever they want (voluntary FWAs), that autonomy helps them maintain their well-being by lowering their stress related to their work-life or personal life. While the implementation of involuntary FWAs faces resistance from workers and adversely affects workers' well-being.

However, the implementation of FWAs were a different scenario amidst the pandemic. FWAs were imposed on the workers (involuntary FWAs) or in other words, workers were not given autonomy to choose FWAs of their choice. The organizations imposed flexible work arrangements policies during the pandemic with the purpose of keeping their workers and businesses safe and to comply with the lockdown restrictions. The Covid-19 pandemic was a stressful period for the workers. Most of the workers were afraid of contracting the virus and getting sick. Implementation of FWAs provided workers with a safety shield and avoided the

spread of coronavirus. In that scenario, even though FWAs were involuntary/ imposed, the implementation of FWAs helped the workers overcome pandemic-related stressors with a reduction in their chance of contracting the virus and maintained their well-being. The findings revealed that most of the respondents who were working under flexible work arrangements had positive subjective well-being. During the pandemic, though organizations imposed FWAs (involuntary FWAs) without engaging workers or providing sufficient training before the implementation of FWAs still FWAs were came out to be workers' supportive practices. Since it provided protection to the workers from the fear of contracting the virus and getting ill.

It was proved during the pandemic that, flexible work arrangements led to a positive SWB for both workers as well as management during any unfortunate circumstance. This supports the belief that appropriate work conditions have a significant positive impact on the well-being of workers (Reuschke, 2019). It has been confirmed from the findings of this research that the majority of workers perceived FWAs initiatives implemented during the pandemic as workers' supportive practices as FWAs contributed to positive subjective well-being since it saved them from contracting the virus. Therefore, workers reciprocated this organizational favor with improved work behavior, and apparently, no managers reported a decline in the performance of their subordinates. These findings are consistent with the principle of SET and POS theories which state that when workers receive fair treatment, then based on the principle of reciprocity, they deliver exceptional performance toward organizational goals (Eisenberger, Rhoades Shanock, & Wen, 2020).

The findings from this research revealed that workers have experienced various merits with the implementation of flexible work arrangements amidst the pandemic, such as work-life balance, more self and family time, work engagement, and an overall positive subjective well-being. The implementation of flexible work arrangements helped workers to spend more time with their families. Some of the workers invested their time in themselves by getting enrolled in some educational course or doing some other online job. FWAs improved the mental as well as the physical health of the workers. The findings showed that the workers who were provided with the authority to choose their work conditions reported a balanced work and personal life, which consequently enhanced their subjective well-being. The literature supports these findings with an explanation of the fact that when workers are given authority over their work conditions it improves their work-life balance which reduces their stress (Song & Gao, 2020) and enhances their subjective well-being.

5.1.3 Paradoxical consequences associated with the implementation of FWAs

The findings indicated that flexible work arrangement policies have paradoxical consequences. In order words, FWAs were seen as work arrangements that have both merits as well as demerits associated with their implementation. The findings of this research have demonstrated various merits of flexible work arrangements for the workers such as work-life balance, more self and family time, work engagement, and an overall positive subjective well-being. The workers with reduced time can spend more time with their families. Likewise, the FWAs options such as remote working or teleworking save workers' time and well-being as such practices keep workers safe from traveling to or from the office after a long hectic workday. Female workers prefer remote or work-from-home policies more, as such practices enable them to manage the roles of a professional employee and a housemaker or mother, sideways. FWAs also save organizational expenses like electricity expenses, transportation costs, office rent, and other overhead expenses, like stationary expenses. The majority of the workers interviewed, preferred hybrid working since such a configuration of FWA allowed them to experience workplace culture and at the same time cherish the benefits of remote work.

Whereas the findings have also demonstrated some demerits associated with the implementation of FWAs, such as hindrance in team collaboration and an increase in workers' stress levels due to extensive workloads. The data from the findings showed that the remote working/ flexible working conditions reduced the interaction between workers and decreased coordination among them. FWAs were identified to weaken the bond between co-workers and team members. Sometimes, the remote working workers had to perform multi-tasking, meeting their family roles, and performing their job at the same time. It was difficult for some of the workers to arrange a distraction-free space at their homes where they could perform their work with concentration. FWAs such as remote work and flexible schedules affected employee-supervisor communication and destroyed the feedback channel. Due to this, a few of the workers were not aware of their job goals, which was affecting their performance adversely. These results are consistent with the findings of Charalampous, Grant, Tramontano, & Michailidis (2019), who stated that it becomes a challenge for managers to control and manage the performance of their staff under flexible work arrangements.

The findings have shown that remote workers had to sit for long hours, as there were no fixed pack-up timings. The extensive workload and lack of proper physical space enhanced workers'

stress. The majority of the workers with reduced time and flexible schedules had to bear extensive workloads, which also used to raise their stress levels. Literature shows that when organizations implement reduced time policies but don't reduce the timings for workers it leads to work intensification, which enhances workload for them and enhances their stress levels (Song & Gao, 2020). Most remote workers complained about the insufficiency of technical and financial support. They reported that under remote work conditions, they had to use their resources, like internet packages and computers, which increased their financial burden. Moreover, the findings showed that when workers were not provided with any technical training or support, it affected their performance.

However, the findings from this research showed that these demerits can be minimized if organizations are vigilant enough in designing and providing training to staff as per their specific needs and requirements of each individual staff along with the authority to choose the type of FWAs most suitable for them.

5.1.4 FWAs as the common work model in the post-Covid era

The findings have shown that flexible work arrangements have become the new normal and many organizations intend to keep FWAs in practice post-Covid. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, few organizations were practicing FWAs. Conversely, now as the organizations have experienced FWAs and had cherished the benefits of implementing FWA they intend to keep FWAs in practice. Transitional workplace practices are being completely replaced with more flexible work arrangements. The findings of this research have highlighted a concern that now that the workplace environment is being shifted from a transitional workplace to a flexible one. It is significant that workers should be provided the freedom to choose the FWAs most suitable to them because not every type of FWA is suitable for all. For instance, remote work does not suit some who have limited or no space at home to set up an office there. Some lack up-to-date technology and proper internet facilities, while some people find alternate work weeks, as a disturbance in their routine. Therefore, organizations need to adopt a set of various configurations of FWAs according to the needs and requirements of different workers. The organizations also need to be considerate of other key prerequisites for the successful implementation of FWAs, such as the provision of technical and financial support. The findings from this study have demonstrated that when workers were part of decision-making regarding

the implementation of FWAs, workers were able to openly communicate the challenges they faced and the resources required by them.

The findings have demonstrated that, although the majority of the workers and organizations were in favor of continuing FWAs which were adopted during the pandemic. However, some of the respondents of the study highlighted that though such practices are in favor of the workers and organizations, the implementation of FWAs brings certain challenges, which if remained unaddressed destroy the associated merits of FWAs. For instance, most workers assume that a reduction in time is of no use and is merely a source of stress for them if the workload is not reduced. Therefore, the management needs to be considered of the paradoxical nature of flexible work arrangements before formulating such policies so that the associated challenges of FWAs could be minimized for the effective implementation of FWAs policies.

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5.2 Theoretical contributions

This research has made significant contributions to the literature as it provides new insight into flexible work arrangements, as a crisis management tool to deal with any unfortunate circumstances, and as a custodian of the SWB of workers.

This research is conducted in the Covid-19 context which is relatively a recent phenomenon. Although several studies have been conducted on the implications of FWAs over the last two decades (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; Kröll & Nüesch, 2019) due to the perceived positive influence of FWAs on employee work behavior. However, the literature on the implications of FWAs in the pandemic context is relatively scarce, so this research contributed to the existing literature by exploring the implementation of FWAs and their impact on the SWB of workers amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings of this research contradict the pre-Covid-19 literature, as the prior literature states that involuntary FWAs have a negative impact on the well-being of workers while according to the findings of this research, the involuntary FWAs imposed during the pandemic turned out to have a positive influence on SWB of workers during the pandemic.

As explained in the gap of this research, there are various concerns regarding the influence of FWAs. Some scholars, view it as a solution for employee well-being issues (Azeem & Kotey, 2021; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), while others argue an inverse relation between FWAs and employee well-being (Jain, 2020; Yucel & Fan, 2023). Therefore, often employers struggle to decide whether to opt for FWA or avoid it. In this regard, this research contributed to the

literature by providing insight into the paradoxical nature of FWAs and has identified that the management needs to decide considering the type of organization and nature of the job of workers, which dimensions of FWAs will be more appropriate or beneficial. Not all types of FWAs are suitable for all job positions or all types of organizations. The findings have revealed that choosing appropriate types of FWAs can guarantee a positive influence on the SWB of workers. Organizations need to have a set of different configurations of FWAs for different levels of workers operating in an organization to ensure the positive influence of FWAs on the SWB of workers.

Prior literature has identified the challenges associated with the implementation of FWAs. However, the solutions to those challenges needed somewhat more elaboration, hence this research has extended the literature by providing feasible solutions to the challenges associated with the implementation of FWAs so that organizations can cherish the merits of the FWAs to the fullest. Moreover, earlier research studies have mentioned beneficial FWAs from either the perspective of management or from the employee's perspective only. Whereas this research has contributed to the literature by providing insight into the dimensions of FWAs that are beneficial for both the employees and as well as the organizations. This would help organizations in adopting FWAs beneficial to both.

This research also has contextual contributions. According to the review of the existing literature and as per the knowledge of the researchers of this study, most of the earlier research that studied the influence of FWAs on the well-being of workers, was done in developed countries while this research is done in Pakistan's context. The findings of this research made a contextual contribution to the literature by showing that the workers of less developed countries show more resistance to the adoption of FWAs due to the lack of proper working spaces and sound internet facilities at home, which consequently affect their productivity. While the workers of developed countries might not have to face such issues.

5.3 Practical implications

This research holds various implications for practitioners. Firstly, this research has indicated facilitating factors that could overcome the challenges or the associated demerits of FWAs, such as the provision of required training, requisite resources, and support to the workers. Moreover, this research has also shown that involuntary or imposed FWAs render more

demerits to organizations than benefits. This would help practitioners to reduce the demerits of FWAs and to cherish the benefits of FWAs to the fullest.

Secondly, the results of this study would guide practitioners and academics about the need to revise the existing/ traditional workplace policies to follow the increasing trend toward a flexible workplace. This research has highlighted the increasing trend and future intentions of practitioners to continue with FWAs. This will guide organizational policymakers to revise their traditional workplace policies to remain an employer of choice and avoid being an organization with outdated practices.

Thirdly, the insights regarding the influence of FWAs on workers' SWB could be utilized by the organizational psychologist or HR management in dealing with workers' well-being issues. Managing workers' well-being has always been a challenging task for organizations. This research holds significant implications, in this regard, as it would assist HR management and organizational psychologists to understand the influence of flexible work arrangements on workers' well-being.

Fourthly, the employers would be better able to realize the significance and shortcomings of certain types of FWAs, which would help them in their decision of incorporating an appropriate type of FWAs suitable for their work settings. Most organizations face the issue that it gets difficult for them to choose an appropriate FWA suitable to their organization and its employees, consequently, FWAs fail in their organizations. The findings from this research will guide them to choose FWAs suitable for their employees.

Fifthly, the research would make academics and practitioners realize the significance of providing support and required resources to workers during any sort of unfortunate circumstances or a crisis. A crisis creates an emergency situation and requires employers to take immediate action for the survival of their business and the wellness of their employees. However, under such emergency situations, organizations often ignore or forget to provide the required resources and support to the workers. Considering this, the research has highlighted the exigency of support and required resources in crisis situations.

Lastly, this research would help organizational policymakers in designing an effective crisis management plan. It will also encourage them to design support programs that could help workers to maintain their well-being while dealing with the adversities of a crisis. Sometimes the organizations are not aware of the possible mechanism or solutions to deal with crisis situations. In this regard, this research will assist them to have insight into effective response

mechanisms which organizations could adopt to deal with crisis situations and to maintain the subjective well-being of their workers.

5.3 Limitation and future research

The findings of this research are subject to certain limitations. Firstly, this research was conducted when Covid-19 protocols were still being followed in some organizations and it was also seen that the adversities of the pandemic, such as a decrease in social life, fear of coronavirus, economic instability, or the death of some relatives due to Covid-19, were also impacting the subjective well-being of the workers. This could limit the validity of this research and the findings might not be a strong demonstrator of the consequences of FWAs under normal circumstances or in the absence of the pandemic. Therefore, future research should be conducted in the scenario when the pandemic would decline to confirm the findings of this research.

Secondly, this research relied on self-reported data. Therefore, there is a possibility that participants might not have accurately reported their subjective well-being and work experiences, which might have dented the results. Hence, it is recommended to future researchers to not rely solely on self-reported data and to employ other data collection techniques such as focus groups, observation, or surveys. Thirdly, the cross-sectional design of this study restricts the generalizations of the findings. Therefore, it is recommended to future researchers to conduct this study with a longitudinal research approach. A longitudinal approach would also indicate any change in the perception of employees regarding the implementation of FWAs over time. This will provide a more realistic view of the influence of FWAs on employee SWB.

Further, this research has explained the merits and demerits of implementing FWAs and some factors have been discussed which could overcome the associated demerits of FWAs, such as the provision of authority to workers to choose FWAs most suitable to them, and the provision of required support and resources. However, still more research needs to be conducted on how the associated demerits of FWAs could be reduced so that we could cherish the benefits of FWAs to the fullest.

5.4 Conclusion

Voluntary FWAs are considered a management tool capable of improving employees' work behavior. Whereas, mandatory or organization-oriented FWAs are known to impact employees' work behaviors and their well-being, adversely. However, it wasn't the case during the pandemic. Even though FWAs policies were imposed on workers in response to the lockdown instructions from the government, FWAs delivered positive consequences, such as improved work behavior, work-life balance, and positive subjective well-being of workers. The reason was that FWAs provided a safety shield to workers during Covid-19 and helped them overcome fear and stress related to the uncertainties of the pandemic, which as a consequence improved the SWB of workers. The workers perceived FWAs as workers' supportive practices and reciprocated such organizational initiatives with enhanced work behavior and delivered exceptional performance towards organizational goals. These findings are consistent with POS and SE theories, both of these theories suggest that when socio-emotional needs are fulfilled and support is provided to the workers, workers reciprocate such organizational efforts with better performance.

FWAs have shaped the future of the workplace. After cherishing the benefits of adopting FWAs during the pandemic organizations intend to keep FWAs policies in practice post-Covid-19. However, in the journey of the shift from a traditional to a flexible workplace, organizations should remain considerate of the paradoxical consequences associated with the implementation of FWAs and adopt them only if the perceived merits outweigh the demerits. Likewise, organizations should be aware that all configurations of FWAs are not suitable under all circumstances. A multitude of factors contributes to the successful implementation of FWAs. For instance, it depends upon workers' authority to choose FWAs, the nature of their job, and the level of support available to them, which decides whether the FWAs will protect the SWB of workers or will merely be a stressor for the management and workers.

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Appendix

Consent form

Figure 1

<u>**Certificate of consent**</u>

Research Topic: "Flexible Work Arrangements and Covid-19: Analyzing organizational response mechanisms, employee subjective well-being and future intentions of organizations"

Dear reader, please read carefully and mark appropriate responses. If you are willing to participate in the research kindly provide your signature at the end of this document.

- ➢ I can clearly understand the purpose of research .... YES/NO
- ➢ I understand that the data will be kept confidential and will only be shared with the research team… .... YES/NO
- ➢ I understand that the researcher may withdraw me from the research at any time… .... YES/NO
- ➢ I understand that the participant's name and the organization's name will remain autonomous. .... YES/NO
- ➢ I understand that researcher will erase all data after completion of the research… .... YES/NO

I am willing to participate in this research….YES/NO

Signature with date……..…………..………………

 Name & designation…………………………………

Phone number………….…………………………….

Address: ………………………….……………………

Thank you for your cooperation and interest in the research.

Interview Guide

Research title: **Flexible Work Arrangements and Covid-19: Analyzing organizational response mechanisms, employee subjective well-being and future intentions of organizations.**

Interview Guide:

Name of interviewer: [   ]   Name of the interviewee: [   ]

Date of interview: [   ]   Designation of interviewee: [   ]

Record the following demographic information of the interviewee:

- ➢ Gender
- ➢ Age
- ➢ Occupational category/ designation
- ➢ Tenure/ years spend on the job
- ➢ Usual hours of work/contracted hours
- ➢ Responsibilities/ Care type (childcare, eldercare, other)

Script before starting the interview:

Introduction:

Greetings!

Firstly, I would like to appreciate your willingness to give us the interview.

As, I informed you earlier (in the content form) the topic of our research is 'analyzing organizational response mechanisms, employees' subjective well-being, and future intentions of organizations'. We are conducting this research to explore effective FWAs capable of maintaining workers subjective well-being during any uncertain circumstances like the current Covid-19 pandemic. In this interview, we will talk about your experience of flexible working amidst the pandemic.

There are no right or wrong options hence you are encouraged to respond to the best of your knowledge and experiences.

Confidentiality:

All the information collected during this interview will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

The interview will take around 30 minutes (half an hour). It is a voluntary interview, you can opt out of the interview at any time or skip any question which you find unnecessary to respond to.

Permission to record:

We want your permission to record this interview as it will save us from taking notes while we talk. We assure you that these recordings will not be shared with anyone else. The recordings will only be used for interview transcription after which they will be deleted.

If you have any queries regarding this research, now or at any time during the interview feel free to ask.

Interview questions for workers

Question No.1: To begin the interview, I would like to know about you. Would you please introduce yourself (your designation and time spent in this organization)?

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs):

Question No. 2: Does your organization have any alternative which allows you to work from a place other than your office? Which alternate ways are these and can you explain these to me?

(Here onwards I will refer to these ways as flexible work arrangements (FWA)

Question No. 3: Did your organization adopt these ways during the Covid-19 pandemic or before or after that and why?

Question No. 4: Was it only adopted for a short time in response to the lockdown imposed by the government or it is still ongoing and why?

Question No. 5: Were you given the freedom to opt for FWAs of your choice or it was imposed upon you? Why?

Question No. 6:

If the freedom of choice is given (voluntary):

What type of flexible arrangement you will opt for and why?

Question No. 7: What is your perception of FWAs? Do you find such practices to be worker supportive? Why or why not?

Question No. 8: How would you categorize your experience related to FWAs? Please elaborate with examples.

If the response is positive	If the response is negative
Question No. 9(a): Can you share which aspects of FWA made it an enjoyable experience for you? Please explain with examples.	**Question No. 9(a):** What issues/ difficulties you have faced? Could you give an example of the difficulties faced by you? **Question No. 9(b)**: What (circumstances) made it difficult for you to adjust to the new work arrangements? / What made it stressful while working in flexible mode?

Question No. 10: Does your organization provide workers with any sort of training or support to help them deal with the issues associated with FWAs?

Question No. 10(a): Have any changes occurred in your responsibilities/roles with the introduction of FWA?

Question No. 11: Which aspects of FWA did you not enjoy and why?

Question No. 12: In the context of your experience, please share some examples of the merits of FWA.

Question No. 12(a): Are you a proponent of using FWA in the future as well? Why or why not?

Subjective well-being (SWB):

Question No. 13: How satisfied are you with your life as a whole over the last two years?

Question No. 13 (a): Have you experienced positive well-being in the past few months? What were the reasons behind that?

Question No. 14: Was there a time in the past few months when you experienced any negative emotions such as anxiety or depression? Do you think that depression was linked to the alteration in your work conditions following the pandemic?

Question No. 14(a): How often had the negative feelings (such as being sick/ contracting a virus, or losing your job) worried you during the pandemic? How did you overcome them?

Question No. 15: What different strategies your organization had adopted to maintain the well-being of workers amidst Covid-19? And why?

Question No. 16: How the precautionary measures adopted by your organization (such as FWA/ remote working policies following Covid-19) had influenced your well-being? Did those measures help you maintain your well-being or impact you otherwise?

Question No. 17: Did you feel a lack of support or resources at work with the introduction of FWAs? If so, what kind of support did you feel deprived of?

Question No. 18: How your social and personal life was affected during the pandemic?

Question No. 19: How would you describe your overall experience of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Question No. 20: In your opinion, how can organizations ensure the well-being of workers under any adverse events like the Covid-19 pandemic?

Question No.1: To begin the interview, I would like to know about you. Would you please introduce yourself (your designation and time spend in this organization)?

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs)

Question No. 2: How your organization had responded to the Covid-19 pandemic? / Did your organization adopt FWAs during the pandemic?

Question No. 3: What were the main antecedents to the adoption of FWAs? / What were the main considerations behind the adaptation of FWAs?

Question No. 4: What flexible arrangements (types) were adopted by your organization during the pandemic? And why?

Question No. 5: How had the workers reacted to the adaptation of FWAs?

If response positively	If response negatively
Question No. 6(a): Did that impact employee work behavior?	**Question No. 6(a):** Did your organization pay attention to the factors due to which workers show reluctance to the adoption of FWAs?
	Question No. 6(b): How did your organization support the workers facing difficulties/ issues in adjusting to the transitioned work arrangements?

Question No. 7: How did you manage the performance of remote employees?

Question No. 8: Was any training provided to you to manage flexible workers? In your opinion, what sort of training should be provided to the supervisors of remote workers?

Question No. 9: How had the adaptation of FWAs influenced the work characteristics (discipline or productivity) of your workers?

Question No. 10: How would you weigh the merits and demerits associated with the adoption of FWAs?

  Or

Question No. 10: What positive employee outcomes you had witnessed with the implementation of FWAs?

Question No. 11: What demerits of FWAs you had observed with their adoption?

Question No. 11(a): In your opinion, how could these demerits be eliminated or minimized? Please share your experience if you did something to eliminate or minimize these demerits.

Question No. 12: Does your organization plans to continue the FWAs post-pandemic?

Question No. 12(a): How confident are you that your organization will continue FWAs in the future? And why?

Subjective well-being (SWB):

Question No. 13: How would you describe the influence of remote working policies adopted during the pandemic on the mental and physical health of your workers?

Question No. 14: What strategies did you adopt to maintain workers' well-being during the pandemic? And why?

Question N0. 15: How the adaptation of FWAs did influence the well-being of your workers?

Or

Did the provision of FWAs assist your workers in managing their well-being amidst the pandemic crisis? Why or why not?

Question N0. 16: How did you experience the well-being of your workers when working from the office versus working in remote mode?

Question N0. 17: What challenges did you face while managing remote workers? How did you manage those challenges?

Question N0. 18: Did you observe negative emotions (such as anxiety and depression) in workers trying to cope with transitioned work conditions? How did you assist them?

Question No. 19: Did you observe any adverse effects of social isolation on remote workers? How did you minimize those effects?

Question No. 20: In your opinion, how organizations can ensure the well-being of workers during any adverse events such as the Covid-19 pandemic?

<u>Ending Script for the Interview: / wrap-up</u>

I guess I have asked all questions which could help us conclude our study, if you find something relevant and important for the study which I have missed, please share.

Thank you for your time. It was an informative session. In case, you want to share some information that you find relevant to our topic or want to get any report regarding our findings you are welcome to contact us at the shared email address (aimen.mhr20nbs@student.nust.edu.pk). Can I contact you in case I need further information or something might be unclear?