DEMOGRAPHIC AND WORK DYNAMICS AFFECTING FUNCTIONAL FLEXIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract
This study examines the role of demographic and work factors in creating functional flexibility among employees working in higher education institutes in Pakistan. Data were collected from 323 employees including both teaching and administrative staff. The findings confirmed that teaching staff has a greater level of functional flexibility as compared to administrative staff. Furthermore, male staff showed higher level of functional flexibility than female staff. The findings also demonstrate that trust in management and autonomy positively predicts functional flexibility. Furthermore, task formalization was negatively associated with functional flexibility. These findings revealed that climate of trust and flexible work arrangements improve employee’s attitudes towards functional flexibility.

Keywords: Functional Flexibility, Demographic, Work Dynamics, Higher Education Institutes.

JEL Classification: J240, I230

Introduction
Unpredictable business environment and hyper competitiveness exert pressure on organizations to continuously promote flexible work environment (Yasir et al., 2017), which could be a significant source of organizational survival in a fast changing environment (Sarooghi et al., 2015; Hatum & Pettigrew, 2004). Flexible work environment is concerned with flexible working conditions perceived by employees at work place which can be established through autonomy, trustworthy climate and a lower level of task formalization (Van den Berg & Van den Velde, 2005). Clearly, this view has captured the interest of management scholars in the domain of organizational behavior for the better understanding of the factors that improve employee functional flexibility. In unpredictable organizational environment organizational efforts to increase flexible working conditions strengthen the feelings of employees to engage in discretionary behavior and go beyond their occupational boundaries (Bal & De Lange, 2015). Hodge et al. (2011) found that flexible working conditions such

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as autonomy and flexible procedures at workplace enhance the desirable behavior needed to perform diverse tasks across traditionally diverse occupational boundaries. This notion is closely linked to the employees’ functional flexibility concept (Atkinson, 1984).

In functional flexibility, complete range of skills and desirable behavior of the employees enhanced by acquiring the relative capacity for performing their job through traditional occupational boundaries (Atkinson, 1984; Majid et al., 2017)

Atkinson (1984) suggested a flexible modal for the firm provide an approach to achieve the functional flexibility which encourages the employees to execute diversified activities and tasks for the purpose of tackling the challenges of new services demand and new work requirements (Kok & Ligthart, 2014).

This concept gained a huge scholarly attention due to the emerging challenges of fast technological changes, organizational environment and demand for innovative work and services. Among organizational characteristics functional flexibility is of critical value (Atkinson, 1984) and it depends mostly on work dynamics (trust in management, job autonomy and task formalization) (Van den Berg & Van den Velde, 2005), and demographic characteristics (nature of job, age and gender) (Shacklock et al., 2009)

Work dynamics such as job autonomy, less formalization and trust in management enhance discretionary and desirable behavior of employees at workplace (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2008; Van den Berg & Van den Velde, 2005), that contribute to the successful operation in unpredictable and highly competitive business environment (Chen & Chen, 2012). Factors like trust worthy climate, task performance autonomy, and less formalization increases feelings regarding freedom at workplace and discretionary behavior needed to improve functional flexibility (Origo & Pagani, 2008). These factors induce the employees to transform their tasks and belligerently involve in extra-role behavior in order to sustain functional flexibility (Kok & Ligthart, 2014; Yasir & Majid, 2018). Beyond, these work related factors, demographic characteristics of workers also influence their attitude towards functional flexibility. Past studies explained that due to more expectations of professional enhancement, younger people are more excited to engage in functional flexibility. On the other hand, male employees prefer geographical mobility and alteration of jobs as compared to female staff (Shacklock et al., 2009). These preferences motivate and promote feelings of the young male employees to engage in activities beyond the traditional occupation.

In this study, we focus on higher education public sector institutes in Pakistan. In Pakistan, the structure of public sector higher education institutions is characterized by inflexible practices, bureaucratic structure, and various pressure and politics in decision-making. Rigid rules and regulation is a basic characteristic of public sector higher education institutes of Pakistan which specify the procedures for their establishment, administration and control (Education Policy 1998-
To improve the efficiency of higher education institutions in Pakistan, there is a dire need of those workers who are capable of doing diverse and multiple tasks. In line with these assumptions, the objectives of this research are to measure the work dynamics and demographic of the employees working in higher education institutes of Pakistan to explain: how does task formalization shape the employee attitude towards functional flexibility? To what extent age, gender and job nature explain functional flexibility? To accomplish the purposes of this investigation, section two discusses the literature. Section three elucidates the theoretical frame work, while, research methodology is explained in section four, whereas; results and findings are explained in section five.

**Literature Review**

**Demographic factors and Functional Flexibility**

Functional flexibility can be defined as a mechanism through which employees are able to perform multiple tasks and responsibilities at various position (Beltran-Martin et al., 2008). Functional flexibility of employees act as an imperative mechanism related to the achievements of diverse and multiple tasks requirements for organizations operating in dynamic environment (Roca-Puig et al., 2008). In line with this concept, functional flexibility embeds in the extensive capabilities of employees such as a variety of skills, behavior and attitude to undertake diverse and multiple tasks (Beltran-Martin & Roca-Puig, 2013). Campion et al. (1994) argued that demographic characteristics have strong and contingent effect on employees’ functional flexibility. There are various demographic variables available in the literature that strongly affects functional flexibility, some of these include: job nature, gender and age. Majid et al. (2017) found that nature of the work is positively and absolutely associated with functional flexibility of the employees. Employees working on important and critical positions have greater opportunities to work on different and more interesting jobs. As the nature of workers in higher education institutions of Pakistan is considered, usually there are dual categories of faculty i.e. teaching and administrative staff. Hence in this study, we assume that there is a distinction and dissimilarity among the teaching staff and administrative staff regarding feelings and perception of functional flexibility and we have formulated these following hypotheses:

*H1*: Teaching staff working in HEI have greater perception towards functional flexibility as compared to administrative staff of HEI in the Pakistan.

Furthermore, functional flexibility is also influenced by the demographic characteristic such as gender and age. Previous studies found that both gender have different and dissimilar attitude regarding their preference towards the nature and geographical location of the job. The findings of Shacklock et al. (2009) argued that male employees show a higher tendency towards the work-related variables and alteration of jobs than female employees. Moreover, researcher documented that the male employees shown more preferences for geographical mobility than female (Brody et al., 2014). Noback et al. (2016) discovered that male had a higher tendency to change occupations as compared to female. The outcomes of the previous studies clarified that female working faculty showed
insignificant willingness towards functional flexibility than men. In line with these arguments, we formulated that:

**H2**: Male workers in teaching and administrative staff have greater perception towards functional flexibility than female staff of HEI in Pakistan.

Cordery et al. (1993) recommended that older workers exposed the adverse behavior for functional flexibility on the other hand younger employees have greater preferences for functional flexibility. Looise et al. (1998) argued that aged employees have lower intention to involve in extra activities i.e. willingness to be flexible due to the fewer chances of professional enrichment, while, younger employees shown more involvement in extra-role behavior as they anticipate and expect favorable chances for increasing professional development. According to Campion et al. (1994), employee’s attention regarding involvement in extra role behavior was adversely related with age. Furthermore Van den Berg and Van den Velde (2005) argued that age factor is negatively linked with the functional flexibility. For this reason, in current study we have hypothesized that:

**H3**: Age has a negative association with the functional flexibility.

### Work Factors and Functional Flexibility

Previous studies documented that employees functional flexibility is a function of various factors such as organizational structure (Nasurdin et al., 2006; Yasir & Majid, 2017), individual self-efficacy (Majid et al., 2017), work dynamics such as low level of task formalization, trust in management and autonomy (Van den Berg & Van den Velde, 2005).

Consequently, employee’s functional flexibility depends upon work perceptions of employees. Therefore, Human resource practices concerning work design for employees to accomplish their task are considered crucial factors and directly influence the workers autonomy (Parker et al., 2001). According to Brink et al. (2015), autonomy is the magnitude of employee’s freedom regarding decisions, authority about aims (what), effort methods (how) and planning matters (when). Autonomy is another intervention of flexible job design that provides freedom and discretion to carry out the required tasks. There is a strong association of work autonomy with functional flexibility and task interdependence (Oldham & Hackman, 1981; Majid et al., 2017).

Parker et al. 1997 articulates that for the generation of flexible role orientation autonomous structure plays a vital role. Therefore, in this study we presumed that work perceptions of employees effects their willingness towards flexibility, which is used as a determinant of functional flexibility. Consequently, HR practices concerning work design for employees to accomplish their multiple tasks are considered crucial factor and directly influence the workers autonomy (Parker et al., 2001). Therefore, in this study we hypothesized that:

**H4**: Autonomy has a positive relation with functional flexibility.
According to Wagner and Rush (2000), Trust in the management is an additional work factor that can accomplish the employees’ requirements and it may encourage employees for social conversation with their organizations. According to Rousseau et al. (1998), trust is a psychological state of an individual which comprises the intention to receive vulnerability and depends upon positive behavior and intentions of others. Bal and De Lange (2015) found that support from organizational top management increases the employees’ willingness to be flexible. Moreover, the willingness of employees to be flexible largely depends on trust in management which is also documented in the study of Van der Velde and Van den Berg (2005). In line with these arguments we hypothesized that: 

\[ H5: \text{Trust in management positively predicts functional flexibility.} \]

Flexibility in instructions for assignment recital is critical work factor that is also associated with the functional flexibility. Formalization is explained as the degree to which actions, directions, rules and communications are written and discussed (Patel, 2011). On the other hand, flexible organizational structure is mainly designed to facilitate operational relationships and enduring configuration of tasks and activities among various units for the improvement of their performance (Zheng et al., 2010). The flexible organizational structure achieved either providing involvement in decision making process through decentralization or providing task autonomy to the employees through low level of formalization (Van der Velde & Van den Berg, 2005).

According to Van der Velde and Van den Berg (2005) task formalization is negatively correlated with employee’s functional flexibility. Organizations with mechanistic and rigid structure with a higher level of task formalization show lower level of functional flexibility among its employees than the organizations with organic and flexible structures with a lower level of task formalization (Yasir & Majid, 2017). So in this current study we hypothesized that:

\[ H6: \text{Task formalization negatively predicts the functional flexibility.} \]

**Framework**

Figure 1 shows the association and direction of the variables employed in this study. We have used seven variables. Figure 1 presents all the association among these variables in the framework.
Research Methodology

The population consists of teaching and administrative staff of the public sector higher education institutes in Pakistan. Sample consisted of 323 teaching and administrative staff. Two hundred and seventy two respondents were male (84.22%) and only fifty one were female (15.78%). Eighty four per cent of the respondents were Post-Graduate (16 years of education) (273); thirteen per cent of the respondents were Graduate (14 years education) (41) and three per cent were Under-Graduate (less than 14 years education) (9). Sixty three per cent of the respondents were teachers (206) and thirty seven percent were administrative staff (117).

Data Collection Process

The current study was quantitative in nature for which cross-sectional design was used to test the hypothesized model. Questionnaire was developed using latest techniques and program of “Google doc” because all sort of internet browser can open it and can be shared with numerous respondents. Covering letter (e-mail) of the questionnaire was comprised of purpose of research, guidelines about how to complete the questionnaire, researcher request and appreciation to the respondent for his participation. The process of data collection was initiated in the month of April 2015. The data collection process took five months. Initially questionnaires were sent via electronic mail to the 835 employees of higher education institutions. Out of received responses, only 323 were considered for analysis purposes which were completed in all respect.

Measures

The measures for the study in hand were adapted from the work of Van den Berg and Van den Velde (2005). Five-point Likert scale “Strongly Disagree=1 and Strongly Agree=5” was used for the measurement of study variables.

Demographic Factors

Several demographics variables were assumed to be associated to the determinants of functional flexibility. To test the influence of demographic characteristics towards functional flexibility, current study used following demographic variables: job nature (teachers and administrator), age (in years), and gender (male and female).

Work factors

Autonomy was measured with five items scales; these items generated α value of 0.87. Trust in management was measured with 3 items scales; these items generated α value of 0.83. Task formalization was measured with 3 items scales; these items generated α value of 0.89.
Functional Flexibility

Functional flexibility of teachers and administrative staff was measured by 7 items generated α value of 0.86. Table 1 shows the results of confirmatory factor analysis and internal consistency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.951</td>
<td>0.952</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.923</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Formulation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.961</td>
<td>0.952</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Flexibility</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>0.934</td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results and Discussions

Initially, in order to find out the differences among teachers and administrative staff for functional flexibility regarding job nature and gender independent samples t-test was used. The outcomes of independent samples test shows that teaching staff shown a higher level of functional flexibility as compared to administrative staff i.e. teacher \( t(76.178) = 4.567, P = 0.000 \) and administrative staff \( t(23.314) = 0.719, P = 0.479 \). Independent samples t-test analyses showed significant dissimilarity between teachers and administrator for their functional flexibility.

Results for Independent samples t-test of male and female confirmed that male respondents shown significant attitudes for functional flexibility as compared to female respondents from public sector institutes of Pakistan. The results of independent sample test shown statistics \( t(231.392) = 2.827, P = 0.005 \) and \( t(26.103) = 1.975, P = 0.59 \) for male and female respectively. These statistics confirmed that male employees shown higher score on functional flexibility than female faculty members of public sector institutes of Pakistan. The findings of the study confirmed the hypotheses 1 and 2.

The results showed in Table 2 presents coefficient of correlations among independents and dependent variables. The results revealed positive correlation between autonomy and functional flexibility \( (r = 0.275**, p < .001) \), trust in management and functional flexibility \( (r = 0.429**, p < .001) \), gender and functional flexibility \( (r = 0.133*, p < .005) \), age and functional flexibility \( (r = 0.30*, p < .005) \). Furthermore, negative correlation between task formalization and functional flexibility \( (r = -0.113**, p < .001) \).
The results in Table 3 shown the value of Beta Coefficient (age) is \((-0.25*)\) and p-value (0.008) which is less than p-value of (0.01) with functional flexibility which confirmed the study hypothesis 3, i.e. age is negatively correlated to functional flexibility, was established and result are consistent with Campion et al., (1994).

The results in Table 3 also shown the value of beta Coefficient (autonomy) is \((0.43*)\) and p-value (0.000) which is less than p-value of (0.01) with functional flexibility which confirmed the study hypothesis 4, i.e. autonomy has a positive association with functional flexibility. Furthermore, beta coefficient \((0.51**)\) 51 per cent and p-value (0.000), trust in management was explain significant relation with functional flexibility, which confirm the study hypothesis 5. Finally, beta coefficient \((-0.18**)\) and p-value (0.001), task formulation has negative connection with functional flexibility, which confirmed the hypothesis 6.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>(\beta)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.25*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Management</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Formalization</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The coefficients estimated at step 2 are presented.

\(P<.05; **P<.001\)
Conclusions

The importance of the study in hand is to provide understanding about the attitudes of teachers and administrative staff towards functional flexibility working in higher education institutes in Pakistan. The aim of this study was to empirically investigate the effect of work dynamics and demographic characteristics on flexibility. Moreover, the results confirmed significant variation among teaching and administrative staff for functional flexibility working in institutes of higher education in Pakistan. These findings propose that both teachers and administrative staff have the different attitudes towards functional level flexibility.

The results supported that trust in management and autonomy shows positive relationship with functional flexibility. These findings suggest that management can increase the level of functional flexibility of employees by providing them flexible work arrangements and autonomy to work. Furthermore, results of this study also confirm that trust in management also enhance functional flexibility among employees. Moreover, it is also evident that, lower degree of formalization in work processes increases the discretionary power of workers needed to engage in functional flexibility. The findings shown that task formalization negatively predict the attitude of functional flexibility which suggests that inflexible work arrangements discourage employees’ to take part in extra-role behavior.

The study in hand also has theoretical significance, e.g. study confirmed the role of task formalization and trust-worthy attitude of management and consider as important antecedents for improving the willingness of faculty members towards flexibility. When we apply social exchange theory in order to find out the association between employees and organization, it can be concluded that employee’s encouraging image about work leads them to so commitment towards organization.

Moreover, the findings also recommend that organization improve the attitudes of its workforce to perform extra activities by providing flexible infrastructure using flexible procedures for task performance, equal and fair treatment on the achievement of novel tasks. These findings are consistent with (Majid et al., 2017). Furthermore, the results confirm that management policy regarding flexible infrastructure increases the chance for improving the level of employee’s flexibility. These results of the current study confirmed the findings of previous studies (Van den Berg & Van den Velde, 2005; Yasir & Majid, 2017).

The study in hand also provides in-depth knowledge about the relationship between demographics of workers and administrative staff and their attitude towards functional flexibility. Moreover, the positive effect of demographics factors on functional flexibility show that teaching staff working in higher education institutes are more inclined towards functional flexibility as compared to administrative staff. These findings are consistent with (Shacklock et al., 2009; Brody et al., 2014). Moreover, male workers are more inclined towards functional flexibility than female workers. These findings are consistent with (Noback et al., 2016).
References


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