

FLEXIBLE WORK POLICIES AS EVIDENCE - BASED HR PRACTICES: EXAMINING THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY AND ROLE CLARITY

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Abstract - Flexible work policies have emerged as important evidence-based human resource practices in contemporary organizations. This study examines the association between flexible work arrangements and employee productivity, while exploring the roles of accountability and role clarity in explaining these relationships. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was employed, using survey data collected from 350 employees working in organizations with flexible work practices. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling with bootstrapped indirect-effect analysis to assess both direct and indirect associations, while controlling for demographic variables. The findings indicate that flexible work policies are positively associated with productivity, and that accountability and role clarity also contribute significantly to enhancing productivity outcomes. Moreover, these factors help explain how flexible work arrangements translate into improved performance. However, due to the cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data, the results should be interpreted as associative rather than causal. The study highlights the importance of supporting flexible work systems with structured accountability mechanisms and clearly defined roles, and contributes to evidence-based HRM literature by identifying key explanatory pathways linking flexible work practices to employee productivity.

IndexTerms - Flexible Work Policies, Evidence-Based HRM, Employee Productivity, Accountability, Role Clarity, Remote Work, Hybrid Work, Organizational Performance, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), Human Resource Practices

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of workplace structures in the digital era has prompted organizations to rethink traditional human resource management (HRM) practices. Flexible work practices, such as remote work, hybrid arrangements, and flexible scheduling, have become essential components of contemporary organizational design. Flexible work arrangements (FWAs), which were first implemented in reaction to

global shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic and technological breakthroughs, have developed into a strategic HR practice that aims to improve both corporate performance and employee well-being.

Recent empirical evidence suggests that flexible work policies can influence key organizational outcomes, particularly productivity. Studies indicate that employees working under flexible arrangements often report improved efficiency due to reduced commuting time, increased autonomy, and better alignment between personal and professional responsibilities. Moreover, correlations between flexible work and employee performance have been found to be positively significant, emphasizing the potential of FWAs as performance-enhancing HR interventions. However, despite these positive indications, the relationship between flexible work policies and productivity remains complex and context-dependent.

Flexible work arrangements present new coordination, communication, and performance monitoring issues for organizations. They may increase motivation and individual autonomy, but they may also be linked to uncertainty in responsibilities and expectations, which, if improperly handled, can have a detrimental association with team productivity. Concerns about accountability and position clarity—two crucial concepts that affect employee productivity and organizational outcomes—are particularly raised by the lack of physical supervision and structured interactions in flexible work environments.

Accountability refers to the extent to which employees understand their responsibilities and are held answerable for their performance. In flexible work environments, accountability mechanisms rely less on direct supervision and more on outcome-based evaluation systems. In the same way, job clarity indicates how well workers comprehend their duties, responsibilities, and performance standards. Research on remote work suggests that communication structures and technological systems play an important role in enhancing role clarity, thereby reducing work-related ambiguity. When accountability and role clarity are effectively maintained, flexible work policies are more likely to yield positive productivity outcomes.

Despite growing interest in flexible work arrangements, existing research has largely focused on their direct effects on employee well-being, engagement, and job satisfaction. Relatively limited attention has been paid to understanding the mechanisms through which flexible work policies influence productivity, particularly from an evidence-based HR perspective. This gap is significant, as organizations require actionable insights into how HR practices can be designed and implemented to maximize performance outcomes.

In line with the principles of evidence-based human resource management, organizations are increasingly expected to base HR decisions on systematic empirical analysis rather than intuition or tradition. Evidence-based HRM emphasizes the integration of scientific research, organizational data, and practitioner expertise to make informed decisions that enhance organizational effectiveness. Within this framework, flexible work policies can be conceptualized as deliberate HR interventions whose effectiveness depends on underlying organizational processes, such as role structuring and performance accountability.

As a result, this study creates and evaluates a thorough model that looks at the connection between employee productivity and flexible work practices, with an emphasis on the mediating functions of job clarity and accountability. By doing so, the study contributes to literature by moving beyond direct relationships and exploring the process-based mechanisms through which flexible work policies affect organizational outcomes.

The study is guided by the following research objectives:

To examine the impact of flexible work policies on employee productivity

To analyze the effect of flexible work policies on accountability and role clarity

To investigate the Explanatory Role of accountability in the relationship between flexible work policies and productivity

To examine the Explanatory Role of role clarity in influencing productivity outcomes

By tackling these goals, the study offers a methodical, empirically supported understanding of how flexible work policies can be successfully applied to boost productivity in modern businesses. For HR professionals, legislators, and organizational leaders looking to create long-lasting, performance-driven work systems, the results are anticipated to have important implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

Flexible Work Policies as Strategic HR Practices

In response to changing workplace expectations and technology improvements, flexible work rules have become an essential feature of modern human resource management. Flexible scheduling, telecommuting, hybrid work arrangements, and reduced workweeks are just a few of the practices covered by these rules that give employees autonomy over when, where, and how they do their job.

From an HRM perspective, flexible work policies are not merely employee benefits but strategic organizational tools designed to enhance workforce productivity and adaptability. Organizations increasingly adopt such policies to improve operational efficiency, attract talent, and maintain competitiveness in dynamic environments. Empirical research indicates that flexible work arrangements can positively influence organizational outcomes, including productivity and performance, when implemented effectively. However, their impact is highly contingent upon the organizational processes and structures that support their implementation.

Despite the potential benefits, flexible work policies introduce complexity into work systems. They often require a shift from traditional supervision-based management to outcome-oriented performance systems, where employee effectiveness is assessed based on deliverables rather than presence. This transformation demands robust organizational mechanisms to ensure that flexibility does not compromise coordination, accountability, or clarity of roles.

Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory

A thorough foundation for comprehending how working conditions affect employee performance and well-being is provided by the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory.

According to this theory, every job is characterized by a combination of Job Demands & Resources. Job Demands, shows the elements that require sustained effort and may are linked to strain (e.g., ambiguity, coordination challenges). On the other hand, Job Resources, Elements that facilitate goal achievement, reduce demands, and promote performance (e.g., autonomy, clarity, support).

Flexible work policies can be conceptualized within the JD-R framework as both resources and demands. Flexible work arrangements increase: Employee autonomy; Temporal and spatial flexibility; Control over work processes.

These aspects function as job resources, enabling employees to manage their tasks more efficiently, leading to improved productivity and performance. Empirical studies suggest that flexible work enhances productivity through increased autonomy and reduced time constraints.

Flexible Work as a Demand, at the same time flexible work introduces Coordination complexity, communication challenges and reduced supervision.

These factors act as job demands, potentially increasing role ambiguity and reducing clarity if not properly managed.

The JD-R framework suggests that the net effect of flexible work policies on productivity depends on the balance between resources and demands. When organizations provide sufficient supporting mechanisms—such as clear communication and accountability structures—the positive effects of flexibility outweigh its challenges.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) offers a relational perspective on how HR practices influence employee behavior. Organizational practices foster mutually beneficial interactions between employees and the organization, according to SET. Employees are more likely to respond with positive behaviors like greater effort, accountability, and dedication when they believe the company offers empowering and supportive work environments.

The flexible work policies signal trust in employees, recognition of employee needs and organizational support. These signals encourage employees to reciprocate by demonstrating higher responsibility and accountability and aligning their efforts with organizational goals. It also enhances performance outcomes.

From an evidence-based HR perspective, flexible work policies can thus be viewed as trust-based HR practices that foster a positive exchange relationship, ultimately leading to improved productivity. However, the effectiveness of such exchanges depends on the presence of clear expectations and accountability mechanisms. Without these, flexibility may be interpreted as reduced control, weakening the reciprocal relationship.

Role Theory: Role Clarity and Accountability

Role Theory provides a critical lens for understanding how employees interpret and enact their responsibilities within an organization. It highlights that the degree to which people comprehend their tasks and the clarity of expected roles determine how well employees execute. The degree to which workers comprehend their job duties is referred to as role clarity. They know performance expectations and have clearly defined tasks and objectives. In flexible work environments, role clarity becomes especially important because physical supervision is limited and informal communication is reduced. Work is often

asynchronous. Research indicates that communication systems and structured processes in remote work environments are essential for maintaining role clarity and reducing ambiguity.

Accountability refers to being answerable for outcomes, meeting established performance standards and delivering expected results. In conventional work environments, direct supervision is frequently used to impose accountability. Accountability in flexible work contexts moves toward self-regulation and responsibility as well as outcome-based performance evaluation. Reduced performance monitoring, less effective coordination, and decreased productivity might result from weak accountability systems.

Flexible Work Policies, Accountability, and Role Clarity

The interplay between flexible work policies, accountability, and role clarity is central to understanding productivity outcomes. The flexible work policies enhance autonomy (positive effect) and reduce direct supervision (negative risk). To balance these effects organizations must implement clear accountability systems. Employees must have well-defined roles, without these mechanisms, flexibility can be linked to role ambiguity, reduced coordination or lower productivity. Conversely, when role clarity and accountability are high employees can effectively manage flexible work arrangements and the organizational performance improves.

Empirical findings support the view that while flexible work arrangements can improve individual performance, they also require structured management processes to ensure sustained productivity.

Flexible Work Policies and Productivity

Productivity remains one of the most critical outcomes in assessing the effectiveness of HR practices. In the context of flexible work, productivity is influenced by a combination of individual effort, task efficiency or organizational coordination. Studies indicate that flexible work arrangements can be linked to productivity gains when they reduce time inefficiencies (e.g., commuting), enhance focus and autonomy and improve work scheduling flexibility.

However, productivity gains are not automatic. They depend on effective communication systems, clear performance expectations and strong accountability frameworks.

Therefore, productivity in flexible work settings is best understood as an outcome of interacting organizational mechanisms, rather than a direct consequence of flexibility alone.

Integrated Theoretical Framework

The present study integrates three theoretical perspectives:

JD-R Theory, which explains how flexible work acts as both a resource and a demand influencing productivity.

Social Exchange Theory, it explains how flexibility fosters reciprocal employee behavior, such as accountability and performance.

Role Theory explains how role clarity and accountability shape employee effectiveness in flexible work environments.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Conceptual Framework Overview

The current study creates a structured framework to investigate how flexible work policies, as evidence-based HR practices, affect employee productivity through the explanatory roles of accountability and role clarity, building on the theoretical underpinnings of Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Role Theory.

Traditional control-based HR methods are giving way to outcome-oriented, trust-based management with flexible work arrangements. Although these rules provide employee freedom and autonomy, they also present coordination, performance tracking, and expectation clarity issues. As discussed earlier, the effectiveness of these policies depends on the organizational mechanisms that regulate employee behavior and performance.

The proposed framework conceptualizes flexible Work Policies as a strategic HR intervention showing accountability and Role Clarity as process-based mediators. Also, productivity as the key organizational outcome. This structure aligns closely with the principles of evidence-based HRM, where HR practices are evaluated based on their measurable association with organizational performance through identifiable mechanisms.

Flexible Work Policies and Productivity

Flexible work policies can influence productivity through multiple pathways. From a JD-R perspective, flexibility provides employees with greater control over their work environment, which enhances motivation

and efficiency. According to empirical research, flexible work schedules can boost productivity by facilitating better time management, enhancing autonomy, and cutting down on travel time.

However, productivity outcomes are not always uniformly positive. While some studies report performance gains, others highlight coordination difficulties and reduced collaboration in flexible work environments. This suggests that the relationship between flexible work policies and productivity is not purely direct but may depend on intermediate organizational processes.

Hypothesis 1

H1: Flexible work policies are positively associated with employee productivity.

Flexible Work Policies and Accountability

Flexible work environments significantly alter traditional accountability mechanisms. In conventional office settings, accountability is reinforced through direct supervision and continuous monitoring. In contrast, flexible work policies necessitate a shift toward self-regulation and outcome-based accountability.

According to Social Exchange Theory, employees view companies that provide flexibility as a sign of trust and support. In response, they are more likely to demonstrate responsible behavior and take ownership of their tasks. This reciprocal relationship fosters accountability, as employees feel obligated to justify the trust placed in them.

However, in the absence of structured performance systems, flexibility may dilute accountability due to reduced oversight. Therefore, the design of flexible work policies plays a crucial role in shaping accountability outcomes.

Hypothesis 2

H2: Flexible work policies are positively associated with employee accountability.

Flexible Work Policies and Role Clarity

Flexible work arrangements can have both positive and negative effects on role clarity. On one hand, digital tools and structured workflows can enhance clarity by clearly defining tasks and expectations. On the other hand, reduced face-to-face communication and informal interactions may increase ambiguity.

According to role theory, employees must have a clear grasp of their roles in order to perform well. Because employees work more independently in flexible work situations, role clarification becomes more crucial.

Research indicates that communication systems and organizational support mechanisms influence role clarity, particularly in remote work contexts. Organizations that implement structured communication protocols and clear performance guidelines are more likely to maintain role clarity under flexible work conditions.

Hypothesis 3

H3: Flexible work policies are positively associated with role clarity.

Accountability and Productivity

Accountability has a crucial role in linking HR practices with performance outcomes. In flexible work environments, where direct supervision is limited, accountability becomes a key determinant of productivity. Workers are more likely to efficiently manage their time and coordinate their efforts with company objectives if they understand that they are accountable for their results. It also maintains high performance levels.

From the JD-R perspective, accountability functions as a job resource, promoting goal-oriented behavior and reducing performance variability.

Hypothesis 4

H4: Accountability is positively associated with employee productivity.

Role Clarity and Productivity

Role clarity significantly influences employee performance by reducing ambiguity and enhancing focus. Employees can allocate their efforts more efficiently and produce more when they are aware of their roles and expectations. Conversely, role ambiguity can be linked to Confusion regarding tasks & is linked to inefficient use of resources

Role clarity thus acts as a critical mechanism through which HR practices influence productivity outcomes.

Hypothesis 5

H5: Role clarity is positively associated with employee productivity.

Explanatory Role of Accountability

Flexible work policies influence productivity not only directly but also through accountability. As discussed earlier, flexible work arrangements encourage employees to take responsibility for their performance due to

increased autonomy and trust. This creates a mediated pathway: Flexible Work Policies → Accountability → Productivity

Employees who experience higher accountability under flexible work conditions are more likely to maintain performance standards, thereby enhancing productivity.

Hypothesis 6

H6: Accountability helps explain the association between flexible work policies and employee productivity.

Explanatory Role of Role Clarity

Role clarity represents another key mechanism linking flexible work policies to productivity. Clear expectations allow employees to operate efficiently despite the absence of direct supervision. The mediated pathway can be represented as: Flexible Work Policies → Role Clarity → Productivity

This pathway emphasizes that flexible work policies are effective only when supported by well-defined roles and communication structures.

Hypothesis 7

H7: Role clarity helps explain the association between flexible work policies and employee productivity.

Parallel Mediation Model

The study proposes a parallel mediation framework, where both accountability and role clarity simultaneously mediate the effect of flexible work policies on productivity.

This suggests that accountability captures the behavioral mechanism and role clarity captures the cognitive mechanism. Together, these mechanisms provide a comprehensive explanation of how flexible work policies influence performance outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy and Approach

The positivist research philosophy that underpins this work is based on the idea that organizational phenomena may be empirically measured and investigated. The study adopts a deductive approach, whereby theory-driven relationships are translated into testable hypotheses and evaluated through statistical analysis. This approach is consistent with evidence-based HRM research, where the effectiveness of HR practices is assessed using measurable outcomes and robust empirical testing.

Because the goal is to determine the strength and significance of relationships between latent constructs—Flexible Work Policies (FWP), Accountability (ACC), Role Clarity (RC), and Productivity (PROD)—and to assess mediation effects using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study employs a quantitative methodology. The analytical strategy is in line with accepted SEM validation procedures, such as reliability/validity evaluation and CFA fit indices.

Research Design

A cross-sectional, survey-based explanatory design is employed. This design is appropriate for Capturing employees' perceptions of HR policy exposure (flexible work practices) and work system characteristics (clarity and accountability). Testing mechanisms (mediation) explaining how HR practices translate into productivity outcomes. Applying SEM to simultaneously estimate multiple interdependent relationships while accounting for measurement error. Cross-sectional designs are widely used in HRM research when the research objective is to model relationships rather than track changes over time.

Population, Sampling, and Sample Size

Target Population

The target population comprises employees working in organizations where flexible work policies are available and used in some form (e.g., remote work, hybrid schedules, flexible hours). These contexts are appropriate because flexible policies change how performance is managed, how roles are communicated, and how responsibility is distributed.

Sampling Strategy

The study is designed for broad participation across roles and sectors where flexible work policies are operational. A non-probability sampling approach (e.g., convenience/network sampling) is suitable for reaching dispersed employees through digital channels, particularly where sampling frames are not available.

Sample Size Rationale

A sample size of $n = 350$ is used. SEM requires sufficiently large samples for stable parameter estimates and reliable model fit evaluation. This sample size supports:

- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for measurement validation
- Mediation testing via SEM

Data Collection Procedure

A systematic online survey is used to gather data, and it is disseminated via email and professional networks. Online administration is appropriate because:

- Respondents may work remotely/hybrid
- It reduces administrative burden
- It supports standardized measurement at scale

To enhance data quality, the following practices are applied. Clear instructions and definitions are provided at the beginning of the survey. Participation is voluntary and responses are treated as confidential and analyzed in aggregate

Research Instrument and Measurement

Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire is organized into two sections:

- Section A: Demographic and control variables
 - Gender
 - Age group
 - Work model (remote/hybrid/onsite)
 - Work experience (years)
- Section B: Latent construct measurement

Flexible Work Policies (FWP)

- Accountability (ACC)
- Role Clarity (RC)
- Productivity (PROD)

Measurement Scale

All constructs are measured using a 7-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree ... 7 = Strongly Agree

A 7-point scale improves variance sensitivity and is suitable for SEM-based latent variable models.

Operationalization of Constructs

Flexible Work Policies (FWP)

Employee opinions regarding the accessibility, usability, and clarity of flexible work arrangements (time and/or location flexibility) are recorded by FWP. Instead of being a personal preference, the construct represents flexible work as an HR practice.

Accountability (ACC)

Accountability reflects perceived responsibility, ownership, answerability for outcomes, and follow-through in flexible work environments. It operationalizes the extent to which employees feel performance is trackable and responsibility is explicit even without direct supervision.

Role Clarity (RC)

Role clarity captures the extent to which employees understand their responsibilities, priorities, performance expectations, reporting relationships and task boundaries. In flexible work contexts, clarity is a critical mechanism because informal cues and in-person alignment are reduced.

Productivity (PROD)

Productivity is operationalized as perceived task effectiveness and ability to meet targets efficiently. While productivity may be measured objectively in some settings, perceived productivity is commonly used in survey-based HR research when objective output measures are unavailable across different roles.

Control Variables

To isolate the effect of flexible work policies and mediators on productivity, the model includes controls that may influence performance perceptions:

- Gender: to account for differential experiences of flexibility and accountability norms
- Age group: to capture variation in work style and adaptability
- Work model (remote/hybrid/onsite): because policy effects may differ across arrangements
- Experience (years): because tenure/experience may influence productivity and role understanding.

Controls are entered as exogenous predictors of productivity (and optionally the mediators, depending on model specification).

Reliability and Validity Assessment

Measurement quality is established using a two-step SEM procedure, measurement validation followed by structural testing.

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR) are used to evaluate internal consistency. The thresholds commonly applied $\alpha \geq 0.70$ and $CR \geq 0.70$

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is supported when standardized factor loadings are acceptable

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.50

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is evaluated by ensuring constructs are empirically distinct. A standard approach is the Fornell–Larcker logic (square root of AVE exceeds inter-construct correlations).

Common Method Bias (CMB) Control

Because data is collected through self-report surveys, potential CMB is addressed using procedural and statistical controls. Procedural remedies for nononymity and confidentiality to reduce evaluation apprehension are to be clear and neutral item wording, the separation of construct blocks to reduce response patterning. The statistical remedies are Harman's single-factor assessment and full collinearity (VIF) test for common method variance using a recommended threshold.

Data Screening and Preparation

Before SEM analysis, the dataset is screened for missing data (and appropriate handling strategy, if needed), outliers and response quality issues (e.g., straight-lining), Normality (skewness/kurtosis as supporting diagnostics) and multicollinearity using VIF as require. This screening ensures that the assumptions for CFA/SEM are reasonably satisfied and the dataset is suitable for robust model estimation.

Data Analysis Strategy (CFA → SEM with Mediation)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA is used to determine overall model fit, confirm item loadings, and validate the measurement model. Model fit is evaluated using established indices, including:

- CMIN/DF (≤ 3.0)
- GFI, TLI, CFI (≥ 0.90)
- RMSEA (≤ 0.08)

Structural Model Testing

SEM is used to test:

- Direct effects (FWP \rightarrow PROD, FWP \rightarrow ACC, FWP \rightarrow RC)
- Mediator effects (ACC \rightarrow PROD, RC \rightarrow PROD)
- Indirect effects (FWP \rightarrow ACC \rightarrow PROD; FWP \rightarrow RC \rightarrow PROD)

Mediation Testing

Indirect effects are evaluated using mediation testing within SEM (commonly with bootstrapped confidence intervals, where available). The study is designed as a parallel mediation model, where accountability and role clarity act as simultaneous mediators.

Summary

This methodology provides a rigorous evidence-based HR evaluation of flexible work policies by treating flexible work as a measurable HR practice, explaining productivity through theoretically grounded mechanisms (accountability and role clarity), and applying SEM to estimate direct and indirect effects while ensuring measurement validity and controlling for demographic and work arrangement differences.

RESULTS

Sample and Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (n = 350)

Construct	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Flexible Work Policies (FWP)	4.092	1.540	1.0	7.0
Accountability (ACC)	3.972	1.464	1.0	7.0
Role Clarity (RC)	4.019	1.513	1.0	7.0
Productivity (PROD)	4.251	1.667	1.0	7.0

Reliability (Internal Consistency)

Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the reliability of internal consistency. Strong dependability is demonstrated by all constructs exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α
Flexible Work Policies (FWP)	6	0.891
Accountability (ACC)	5	0.849
Role Clarity (RC)	5	0.865
Productivity (PROD)	4	0.873

Correlation Analysis

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

Construct	FWP	ACC	RC	PROD
FWP	1.000	0.534	0.534	0.514
ACC	0.534	1.000	0.349	0.479
RC	0.534	0.349	1.000	0.476
PROD	0.514	0.479	0.476	1.000

Hypotheses Testing (Direct Effects)

Hypotheses were tested using standardized regression models with controls (Gender, Age Group, Work Model, Experience Years). results indicate that flexible work policies show a significant association with accountability and role clarity. Flexible work policies show a significant association with productivity. Accountability and role clarity show a significant association with productivity (supporting mediation logic)

Table 4: Structural Paths and Hypothesis Testing (Standardized β)

Hypothesis	Path	Std β	p-value	Decision
H1	FWP → Productivity	0.243	< .001	Supported
H2	FWP → Accountability	0.515	< .001	Supported
H3	FWP → Role Clarity	0.519	< .001	Supported
H4	Accountability → Productivity	0.239	< .001	Supported
H5	Role Clarity → Productivity	0.235	< .001	Supported

Control Variables (Productivity Model)

Among the controls, experience shows a significant positive association with productivity, while gender, age group, and work model are not statistically significant in this specification.

Table 5: Control Effects on Productivity (Standardized β)

Control Variable	Std β	p-value	Interpretation
Experience (years)	0.170	< .001	Significant positive effect
Gender	0.037	0.669	Not significant
Age group (30–44)	0.009	0.931	Not significant
Age group (45+)	0.141	0.234	Not significant
Work model (Hybrid)	0.007	0.939	Not significant
Work model (Onsite)	-0.057	0.637	Not significant

Indirect Effects (Associational Interpretation) (Indirect Effects)

A bootstrapped indirect-effect analysis with 2,000 resamples was conducted to estimate indirect effects. Mediation was considered significant when the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals did not include zero.

Their key interpretations are:

Flexible work policies improve productivity indirectly by increasing accountability.

Flexible work policies improve productivity indirectly by improving role clarity.

The total indirect effect is substantial, indicating that the mechanism-based pathways explain a meaningful portion of the relationship.

Table 6: Mediation Results (Bootstrapped Indirect Effects, 95% CI)

Effect	Estimate	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)	Decision
Indirect: FWP → ACC → PROD	0.123	0.072	0.180	Supported (H6)
Indirect: FWP → RC → PROD	0.121	0.069	0.176	Supported (H7)
Total Indirect Effect	0.244	0.173	0.318	Significant
Total Effect (overall)	0.487	0.398	0.577	Significant

Model Explanatory Power (R²)

Model explanatory power (R²) indicates that flexible work policies explain a meaningful portion of variance in accountability and role clarity, and the full model explains a substantial portion of variance in productivity.

Table 7: Variance Explained (R²)

Dependent Variable	R ²
Accountability	0.318
Role Clarity	0.303
Productivity	0.401

Summary of Findings (Narrative)

Overall, results provide strong support for the evidence-based HR logic of the model. Flexible work policies are associated with higher productivity both directly and indirectly. The indirect pathways through accountability and role clarity are particularly meaningful, suggesting that flexible policies translate into productivity gains when they strengthen (a) responsibility structures and (b) clarity of expectations.

This directly supports the study's core argument: flexible work policies operate as effective HR practices when they create the conditions for accountable performance and clear role execution, rather than relying on presence-based supervision.

DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

The goal of the current study was to investigate flexible work rules as evidence-based HR practices and to comprehend how job clarity and accountability affect employee productivity. The findings give the suggested conceptual model substantial empirical support. Importantly, both responsibility and job clarity revealed as significant mediators in the relationship between flexible work practices and productivity. All of the expected direct associations were shown to be positive and statistically significant. These results support the study's main thesis, which is that organizational principles underlie flexible work policies' ability to increase productivity.

Flexible Work Policies and Productivity

The findings indicate that flexible work arrangements directly increase productivity ($\beta = 0.243$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggest that flexibility enhances employee performance by increasing autonomy, reducing time inefficiencies, and improving work-life integration.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, which views flexibility as a job resource that boosts motivation and efficiency, provides strong theoretical support for this outcome. Employees operating in flexible environments are better able to manage their time and tasks, leading to improved performance outcomes.

However, the magnitude of the direct effect is moderate, which indicates that flexibility alone is not sufficient to maximize productivity. This supports the argument that process-based variables must be accounted for, which is precisely what the mediation analysis reveals.

Role of Accountability as a Mediator

The study finds that flexible work policies significantly enhance accountability ($\beta = 0.515$, $p < 0.001$), and accountability, in turn, significantly influences productivity ($\beta = 0.239$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect through accountability ($\beta \approx 0.123$) is statistically significant, confirming partial mediation.

This finding can be interpreted through Social Exchange Theory (SET). Flexible work policies signal organizational trust and support. Employees reciprocate this trust by:

- Taking greater ownership of tasks
- Being more responsible for outcomes
- Maintaining performance standards

Thus, accountability emerges as a behavioral mechanism through which flexibility translates into productivity.

From an HR perspective, this result is particularly important. It suggests that flexible work environments require self-regulation rather than supervision. Accountability systems (e.g., goal tracking, output evaluation) become critical in ensuring performance. Without accountability structures, flexibility may be linked to reduced control and inconsistent productivity, which reinforces the need for evidence-based HR systems that monitor outcomes rather than presence.

Role of Role Clarity as a Mediator

The study also finds that flexible work policies significantly enhance role clarity ($\beta = 0.519, p < 0.001$), and role clarity significantly improves productivity ($\beta = 0.235, p < 0.001$). The indirect effect through role clarity ($\beta \approx 0.121$) is significant, confirming mediating effects.

This finding is well explained by Role Theory, which emphasizes that employees require clear expectations, defined responsibilities, structured communication. In flexible work environments, ambiguity may arise due to reduced face-to-face interaction, Asynchronous communication or decentralized work structures. The results indicate that when organizations successfully maintain role clarity, employees are able to focus their efforts efficiently, they avoid confusion and misalignment. They deliver better performance outcomes.

Thus, role clarity represents a cognitive mechanism that enables employees to translate flexibility into productivity.

Parallel Mediation Effects: A Process-Based Understanding

The discovery of a parallel mediation structure, in which role clarity and responsibility both concurrently explain the effect of flexible work arrangements on productivity, is one of the study's most significant achievements. The results show that the total indirect effect (≈ 0.244) is substantial. The indirect effects are almost equal for accountability and role clarity. This indicates that Accountability (behavioral pathway) and

Role clarity (cognitive pathway) are equally important mechanisms through which flexible work policies influence performance.

Influence of Control Variables

Work experience was found to significantly increase productivity among the control variables, indicating that experienced employees are better equipped to handle flexible work arrangements. However, variables such as gender, age group, and work model (remote/hybrid/onsite) were not statistically significant predictors of productivity. This indicates that the effectiveness of flexible work policies is not dependent on demographic differences. Instead, productivity outcomes are primarily driven by organizational mechanisms (accountability and clarity). This strengthens the argument that HR systems—not individual characteristics—play a dominant role in determining outcomes in flexible work environments.

Overall Interpretation

The study's main finding can be summed up as flexible work policies only increase productivity when they are backed by robust accountability frameworks and precise role definitions.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Introduction to Practical Value

The study's conclusions offer significant and useful information for companies implementing flexible work arrangements. Although flexible work has evolved from a short-term solution to a strategic priority in many industries, our study reveals a crucial gap in practice: companies frequently adopt flexibility without fortifying the processes necessary to make it successful.

This gap is filled by the current study by showing that flexible work policies enhance productivity only when supported by two critical mechanisms—accountability and role clarity. Therefore, the implications extend beyond policy design to the broader architecture of HR systems and managerial practices.

Implications for HR Policy Design

To Reframe flexible Work as an Evidence-Based HR Practice, the Organizations must reconceptualize flexible work policies from being Employee-centric perks to Core, performance-oriented HR practices grounded in measurable outcomes. This shift aligns with the principles of evidence-based HRM, which requires HR initiatives to demonstrate clear linkages to organizational performance. The managerial Actions develop formal flexible work policies integrated into HR strategy and linking flexibility to performance

metrics rather than employee satisfaction alone. Also, they continuously monitor outcomes using data analytics.

Standardization of Flexible Work Frameworks

Unstructured flexibility can be linked to inconsistencies and inefficiencies. Organizations must design clear and standardized frameworks governing flexible work arrangements.

They must provide key components of Policy Design, define eligibility criteria across roles and functions. They should establish clear working expectations (e.g., availability, deadlines) and specify communication protocols. It implies that Standardization reduces ambiguity and ensures that flexibility does not compromise coordination or productivity across teams.

Implications for Accountability Systems

Transition to Outcome-Based Performance Management

One of the most critical implications is the need to replace presence-based management systems with outcome-based systems. In traditional settings the performance is equal to time spent. However, in flexible settings the performance is equal to results delivered. The managerial actions are defined clear, measurable KPIs at the individual level, introduction of performance dashboards and tracking systems, and evaluation of employees based on output quality and timeliness

Building a Culture of Accountability

The study demonstrates that accountability serves as a behavioral pathway linking flexibility to performance. Therefore, organizations must actively cultivate a culture where employees feel responsible for outcomes. The organizational Mechanisms shows goal-setting systems (e.g., OKRs), regular performance feedback cycles and transparent reporting structures. Whereas for leadership Role, the managers should communicate expectations clearly and reinforce responsibility through consistent evaluation, also avoid over-monitoring, which undermines autonomy

Leveraging Technology to Strengthen Accountability

Digital infrastructure plays a central role in enabling accountability in flexible work environments. Here the technological Tools can be Task management platforms, Workflow tracking systems and Collaboration tools. It implies that Technology ensures visibility into performance without relying on physical supervision, thereby maintaining accountability in distributed work settings.

Implications for Role Clarity

Importance of Role Definition in Flexible Work

The results show that role clarity is equally critical as accountability in driving productivity. In flexible work environments, where informal communication is limited, ambiguity can significantly affect performance. Here, managerial actions are to Develop detailed job descriptions, clearly define deliverables and expectations and to establish structured reporting relationships.

Enhancing Communication Structures

Flexible work reduces spontaneous workplace interactions, which are key to clarifying tasks and expectations. Here, the recommended Practices are to regular virtual team meetings, structured check-ins between managers and employees, to clear documentation of tasks and responsibilities. It implies that Effective communication systems act as substitutes for physical workplace interactions, ensuring alignment and clarity.

Institutionalizing Clear Workflows

Organizations must formalize processes through Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Workflow charts and task guidelines. Here, the benefits are, that it reduces employee uncertainty, it enhances task execution efficiency and improves coordination across teams.

Implications for Hybrid and Remote Work Models

Focus on System Design Rather Than Work Location

The findings indicate that work model (remote/hybrid/onsite) does not significantly influence productivity. This has important implications that productivity is determined not by where employees work, but by how work is managed. The organizations should shift their focus from debating remote vs onsite models to designing effective performance and communication systems.

Customization of Flexible Work Practices

Although work model itself is not significant, organizations should still tailor flexibility based on job characteristics, team requirements and the nature of tasks. It implies that a one-size-fits-all approach to flexible work is ineffective. Customization improves alignment between flexibility and operational needs.

Implications for Leadership and Managerial Roles

Transition from Control-Based to Trust-Based Leadership

Flexible work environments require a shift in leadership style:

<i>Traditional Leadership</i>	<i>Flexible Work Leadership</i>
Monitoring presence	Managing Outcomes
Direct Supervision	Trust-based Management
Task Control	Empowerment

The managerial actions are to delegate authority effectively, to focus on outcomes rather than processes and to encourage autonomy while maintaining accountability

Managerial Capability Development

Managers play a critical role in ensuring the success of flexible work policies. They require skills like clear communication, performance management, remote team coordination and also conflict resolution in virtual settings. It implies that organizations must invest in managerial training programs to adapt to flexible work environments.

Implications for HR Systems Integration

Aligning HR Systems with Flexible Work Policies

Flexible work policies must be integrated into broader HR systems, including performance management, training and development & Employee engagement. It implies that fragmented HR systems reduce the effectiveness of flexible work policies.

Continuous Evaluation and Feedback

In line with evidence-based HRM principles, organizations must continuously assess policy effectiveness, must use employee feedback and performance data and should refine policies dynamically.

Strategic Implications for Organizations

Flexibility as a Competitive Advantage

The study shows that well-designed flexible work policies can enhance productivity, it can improve operational efficiency and strengthen organizational competitiveness.

Balancing Flexibility and Control

Organizations must strike an appropriate balance:

- High flexibility + Low control → Inefficiency
- Low flexibility + High control → Employee dissatisfaction

Where in result Optimal performance requires: Flexibility + Accountability + Role Clarity

Key Managerial Takeaways

The practical implications of this study can be summarized as follows:

- Flexible work policies must be designed strategically, not implemented informally
- Productivity gains depend on accountability systems
- Clear role definitions are essential in flexible work environments
- Organizational design matters more than work location
- Leadership style must evolve toward trust-based management
- HR systems must be integrated and data-driven

Core Insight for Practitioners

Flexible work policies create the potential for productivity, but accountability ensures performance, and role clarity provides direction. Only the combination of these factors is linked to sustained organizational effectiveness.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

Although the current study offers valuable insights into how flexible work rules impact productivity through job clarity and accountability, it is crucial to recognize several limitations that may impact the findings' generalizability and interpretation. Recognizing these limitations not only ensures transparency but also provides a foundation for future research directions in evidence-based HRM.

Research Design Limitations

Cross-Sectional Research Design

This study uses a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish temporal ordering among the variables examined. Although indirect effects are estimated using structural equation modeling, these results

should be interpreted as statistically significant associations that are consistent with the proposed theoretical model rather than as evidence of causality. Future research should adopt longitudinal or time-lagged designs to strengthen causal inference and assess whether these relationships hold over time.

Implication: Although significant associations were observed, it is not possible to confirm temporal causality and examine how flexible work policies evolve in their impact

Future research should ideally use Longitudinal designs to monitor changes over time. Panel data methods for examining the long-term effects of flexible work arrangements. Such designs would provide deeper insights into whether accountability and role clarity strengthen or weaken over time and productivity effects remain stable or fluctuate

Data Collection Limitations

Reliance on Self-Reported Data

Because the study relies on self-reported survey responses, response bias, social desirability bias, and perceptual distortions may be introduced. The results still depend on the subjective opinions of the employees, despite the use of statistical and procedural techniques to lessen common method bias.

Future research can strengthen validity by incorporating objective performance metrics (e.g., productivity records, output data) and multi-source data (e.g., supervisor evaluations, team-level performance). This will enhance the robustness and credibility of findings in line with evidence-based HRM principles.

Measurement Limitations

Focus on Perceived Productivity

Productivity in this study is measured as perceived productivity, rather than objective performance. While this approach is commonly used in HR research, it may not fully capture actual organizational output.

Future studies may integrate objective productivity indicators and compare perceived and actual productivity outcomes. This dual approach would allow researchers to better understand whether perceptions align with actual performance and how HR systems influence both subjective and objective outcomes.

Limited Set of Variables

The study focuses on flexible work policies, accountability and Role clarity. While this allows for a clear and focused model, it does not capture the full complexity of flexible work environments. According to

research, organizational culture, team dynamics, leadership style, and communication quality can all have an association with flexible work outcomes.

Future research can extend the model by including moderators (e.g., leadership support, digital infrastructure) and additional mediators (e.g., employee engagement, trust, autonomy). This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms driving productivity.

Contextual and Generalizability Limitations

Lack of Industry-Specific Analysis

The study does not differentiate between industries or job roles. However, the effectiveness of flexible work policies may vary depending on task interdependence, nature of work and level of required coordination. Research suggests that flexible work can create both benefits and coordination challenges depending on context

Future research should conduct industry-specific analyses, sectors should be compared such as knowledge-intensive industries and manufacturing and service sectors. This will identify where flexible work policies are most effective.

Cultural and Organizational Context

The study does not explicitly account for cultural differences organizational structures. Flexible work policies may produce different outcomes across individualistic vs collectivistic cultures and hierarchical vs flat organizations. Future studies can conduct cross-cultural comparisons and investigate how organizational culture moderates flexible work outcomes. This will enhance the external validity of findings.

Methodological Limitations

Single-Method Approach

The study employs a purely quantitative approach, focusing on statistical relationships.

While this provides strong analytical rigor, it does not fully capture employee experiences, managerial challenges and context-specific complexities. Future research may adopt mixed-method approaches (quantitative + qualitative) and Case studies or interviews. This will provide deeper insights into how flexible work policies are implemented and richer understanding of organizational processes.

Scope Limitations in Flexible Work Research

Focus on Policy Outcomes Rather than Implementation

The study evaluates the outcomes of flexible work policies but does not examine policy implementation processes and differences between policy availability and actual usage. Existing literature highlights that flexible work research often underexamines implementation and usage dynamics. Future studies should explore differences between policy availability vs usage and implementation challenges at organizational and managerial levels

Underexplored Organizational-Level Outcomes

While this study focuses on individual productivity, broader organizational outcomes such as innovation, long-term organizational performance and employee retention. Future studies can examine multi-level outcomes (individual, team, organizational) and long-term strategic implications of flexible work policies.

Emerging Areas for Future Research

Several exciting directions for further investigation arise based on present trends:

- Digital and AI-Enabled Work Environments- The role of AI tools in managing accountability and the impact of digital infrastructure on role clarity.
- Hybrid Work Optimization – The optimal balance between remote and onsite work and the impact of hybrid models on team coordination.
- Psychological and Behavioral Outcomes- The role of trust, motivation, and autonomy and the impact on employee well-being and engagement
- Work-Life Boundary Management - Flexible work blurs boundaries between personal and professional life, which may influence productivity and well-being

Future research should explore the boundary management strategies and their role in sustaining performance

Conclusion of Limitations and Future Research

Despite the above limitations, the study provides a robust evidence-based framework for understanding how flexible work policies influence productivity. Additionally, it draws attention to a number of important prospects for furthering this field of study.

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