



Flexible work arrangements in the eyes of Indonesian

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ABSTRACT

Background: Many institutions in Indonesia, including government agencies, require employees to work long hours, which can negatively affect their physical and mental well-being. Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) have been proposed as a potential solution to mitigate these impacts.

Purpose: This study aims to explore Indonesian workers' understanding, sentiments, and expectations regarding FWAs and assess their perceptions of current flexibility versus their expectations.

Method: One hundred participants (38 males, 62 females) completed the study's online questionnaire. A qualitative text-mining approach was used to analyze open-ended survey responses to explore the meaning and sentiment of FWAs. Additionally, a closed-ended questionnaire assessed participants' perceptions of their current work flexibility and expectations for greater flexibility.

Findings: Participants associated FWAs with the freedom to manage their work schedule and location according to their responsibilities and workload. Sentiment analysis revealed positive and hopeful attitudes, with participants expressing trust in FWAs' potential benefits. Closed-ended data indicated that participants perceived their current work conditions as moderately flexible but desired even greater flexibility.

Implication: The findings underscore the importance of FWAs for enhancing employee well-being and suggest actionable insights for policymakers and organizations seeking to implement or expand FWAs in Indonesia.

KEYWORDS

Flexible work arrangements;
employee well-being;
sentiment analysis;
text-mining.

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Introduction

Long weekly working hours in Indonesia may hinder workforce productivity, as reflected in the labor productivity index, which is measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per hour worked. While it might seem logical that longer working hours would boost productivity, the data suggests otherwise. For example, productive countries such as Denmark and Germany, average only 26 to 27 working hours per week based on their annual working hours (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). In contrast, civil servants in Indonesia are required to work 37.5 hours per week (Ministry of State Apparatus Utilization and Bureaucratic Reform, 2022), while on average the general population spends as much as 42 hours per week working (Indonesia Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Despite these longer hours, Indonesia ranks among the bottom 10 countries regarding productivity (Our World in Data, 2022). This highlights that longer working hours may deter productivity rather than enhance it.

Research suggests that the optimal range of weekly working hours is between 22 and 30 hours, as exceeding this threshold can lead to declines in mental functioning (Kajitani et al., 2016). Long working hours often result in fatigue (Collewet & Sauermann, 2017). When combined with insufficient rest, they can contribute to a range of physical and psychological health issues, including sleep disorders, depression, anxiety, heart attacks, and diabetes mellitus (Bannai & Tamakoshi, 2014). These health problems significantly reduce individual productivity.

In addition to health impacts, prolonged working hours can restrict individuals from engaging in personal activities beyond their professional responsibilities (Scandura & Lankau, 1997). For example, parents must allocate time for their children's needs, such as school drop-

offs, extracurricular activities, and household tasks. This balancing act can generate considerable stress, diminishing psychological well-being and adversely affecting job satisfaction and productivity (Asiedu et al., 2018; Bijawat, 2013).

Reducing weekly work hours through policy changes is often difficult, despite evidence of their adverse effects. To address this, researchers in the 1970s proposed flexible working arrangements (FWAs) as an alternative solution (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). FWAs allow employees to adjust their workload, working hours, and/or location, providing greater flexibility to manage personal and professional responsibilities. FWAs have been shown to mitigate the negative health impacts of prolonged working hours by reducing stress and improving work-life balance (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). For example, workers with caregiving responsibilities can more effectively balance family and work demands, significantly alleviating the strain caused by rigid schedules (Hughes & Parkes, 2007).

While FWAs have shown potential in mitigating the negative effects of prolonged working hours, understanding how they are perceived and desired by Indonesian workers is crucial for their effective implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic provided many Indonesian workers with the opportunity to experience FWAs firsthand. Post-pandemic surveys indicate a strong desire for continued work flexibility: 85% of Indonesian workers expressed a preference for flexible work options (Ernst & Young Indonesia, 2021), and approximately 80% of employees at the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology shared similar sentiments (Sirait, 2021). This widespread interest underscores the relevance of exploring FWAs from the workers' perspective.

Despite the high expectations for FWAs, cultural factors may influence their adoption and effectiveness in Indonesia. A study involving 21 countries found that societies with high collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance tend to resist adopting flexible work arrangements (Peretz et al., 2018). Indonesian society scores high on these cultural dimensions (Hofstede et al., 2010), suggesting potential resistance to FWAs despite their benefits. This cultural context necessitates a deeper examination of workers' attitudes and preferences toward FWAs to ensure that such policies are culturally sensitive and effectively address workers' needs.

This study aims to explore FWAs from the perspective of Indonesian workers by focusing on three key aspects (1) Meaning: understanding how Indonesian workers conceptualize FWAs is crucial, as their definitions and expectations may differ based on cultural norms, job roles, and personal circumstances; (2) sentiment: examining the attitudes of workers toward FWAs can reveal potential facilitators or barriers to their acceptance and successful implementation; (3) and preferences: identifying the specific types of flexibility that workers desire—such as flexible hours, remote work options, or adjustable workloads—can help tailor FWAs to meet the diverse needs of the workforce.

To address these aspects, we employ a qualitative text-mining approach, which offers a novel methodological contribution to FWAs research in Indonesia. This method allows for the analysis of large volumes of textual data to uncover patterns and insights into workers' perspectives. By capturing both the positive sentiments and the gaps between workers' current experiences and expectations, the study provides practical insights for policymakers and organizations aiming to implement FWAs effectively. However, before delving into the core of the study, it is important to first provide an overview of the various types of FWAs, as outlined below.

FWAs encompass a variety of structures designed to provide employees with greater autonomy over their work schedules and locations. According to de Menezes and Kelliher (2011), one of the most common types of FWAs is flexible hours of work, or flexi-time, which allows employees to determine when they start and finish their workday. For example, an employee required to work eight hours daily might choose to start at noon and finish at 8:00 p.m. Alternatively, they could split their day, working four hours in the morning, two hours after lunch,

and another two hours in the evening, adapting their schedule to their personal needs and responsibilities.

Another approach is the compressed working week, where employees condense their required hours into fewer days. During Ramadan, for instance, a university might reduce the duration of a 3-credit hour class from 3 x 50 minutes to 3 x 20 minutes, enabling lecturers and students to work more efficiently within shorter timeframes (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2015). Similarly, time-in-lieu arrangements provide flexibility by allowing employees to work overtime on one day in exchange for shorter hours on another. For example, an employee might work a 12-hour day on Monday, followed by a 6-hour day on Tuesday, and adjust the remainder of the week to suit their needs (McNall et al., 2009).

Remote working or telecommuting, as described by Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2015), is another widely recognized form of FWA. This arrangement enables employees to work from locations other than the office, with coordination facilitated through communication technologies such as phone or video calls. Part-time work, or reduced working hours, offers employees the opportunity to balance work with other commitments. During Ramadan, for instance, many institutions implement policies to reduce weekly working hours for their staff (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011).

Job sharing, another innovative form of FWA, involves multiple employees collaborating on a single project, with each contributing to specific tasks and receiving compensation proportional to their input. This arrangement not only allows organizations to leverage diverse skill sets but also provides employees with greater flexibility in managing their workloads (McNall et al., 2009).

In addition to these specific arrangements, Neirotti et al. (2019) categorized FWAs into two broad types based on their driving forces: employee-oriented and job-oriented flexibility. Employee-oriented FWAs, often referred to as employment practices, grant employees the freedom to choose when and where they work. The arrangements described earlier (i.e., flexi-time, compressed work weeks, telecommuting) generally fall into this category. On the other hand, job-oriented FWAs, or work practices, are primarily determined by the employer's needs. For instance, a university might require lecturers to conduct teaching activities in classrooms while allowing off-campus work for community service projects.

FWAs can also be distinguished by its formality. Formal regulations are written and binding, explicitly allowing employees to adjust their work schedules, locations, or workloads. For instance, civil servants in Indonesia are entitled to flexible working hours and locations (Peraturan Presiden Republik Indonesia Nomor 21, 2023). Similarly, private sector organizations may establish formal remote work policies that enable employees to work from home under certain conditions.

Informal arrangements, on the other hand, arise from habits, unwritten norms, or mutual agreements within the workplace (Friedman & Hayden, 2017). In many cases, employees rely on informal rules to manage their work activities, particularly when formal policies are absent. For example, administrative staff in private companies may work from home on an ad-hoc basis if they meet their deliverables, even without an official remote work policy. Similarly, retail workers might adjust their schedules to accommodate peak hours or personal commitments based on verbal agreements with their supervisors. In the manufacturing sector, workers may compress their work weeks during busy periods, relying on informal flexibility to complete their tasks efficiently.

These distinctions highlight that even in organizations without formal flexible work policies, informal practices often create opportunities for employees to adapt their work schedules and environments. By exploring both formal and informal dimensions of flexibility, this study seeks to understand how Indonesian workers perceive and implement flexible working arrangements in their daily lives.

Method

The study included 100 participants (38 males, 62 females), with an average age of 36.63 years ($SD = 10.09$). The participants were employed across various sectors: 33% were civil servants (ASN), 14% were government employees under work agreements (non-ASN), 39% worked in the private sector, and the remaining 14% held various other jobs. On average, participants had been working for 12.82 years ($SD = 23.04$). Participation was voluntary, and participants had the opportunity to receive a ShopeePay voucher worth IDR 20,000 as an incentive.

Participants were recruited using an incidental sampling technique through social media platforms (WhatsApp and Instagram) to complete an online research questionnaire via Google Forms. The inclusion criteria required participants to be: (1) currently active Indonesian workers employed in an organization and (2) at least 18 years old. After reviewing the research information page, participants provided informed consent before proceeding to answer open-ended questions about flexible work arrangements. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants were directed to a debriefing page explaining the study's purpose and objectives. Once data collection was concluded, we announced 10 lucky participants who would receive ShopeePay vouchers via email.

The research questionnaire included the following open-ended questions: (1) "In your opinion, what is the ideal work flexibility for you in general?"; (2) "In terms of time, what is the ideal work flexibility for you?"; (3) "In terms of workload, what is the ideal work flexibility?"; (4) "In terms of work location, what is the ideal work flexibility for you?"; (5) "Please describe any formal flexibilities (according to the regulations of your company/organization/institution) that you can implement."; and (7) "Please describe any informal flexibilities that apply in your company."

These six open-ended questions were designed to explore participants' conceptualizations of flexible work arrangements (FWAs). These questions were developed based on the core dimensions of FWAs commonly identified in the literature: time, workload, and location (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011; McNall et al., 2009). Specifically, the first four questions aimed to elicit participants' ideal perceptions of flexibility across these dimensions, reflecting their importance in balancing professional and personal responsibilities.

To further investigate the practical application of FWAs in the Indonesian context, two additional questions differentiated between formal and informal flexibilities. Formal flexibilities refer to written, regulated policies, while informal flexibilities encompass unwritten norms and practices that emerge within workplace cultures (Friedman & Hayden, 2017).

The open-ended format was chosen to allow participants to provide nuanced and detailed responses, aligning with qualitative research methods aimed at capturing diverse perspectives. This exploratory approach supports the study's use of a text-mining methodology to uncover patterns and insights into participants' meanings, sentiments, and expectations regarding FWAs.

After answering the open-ended questions, participants rated their perceptions of the implementation of work flexibility in the workplace using three items (e.g., "How flexible is your company/organization/institution regarding scheduling?"; "How flexible is your company/organization/institution regarding workload arrangements?"; "How flexible is your company/organization/institution regarding work location arrangements?") on a scale from 1 = "no flexibility" to 5 = "very flexible"; $\alpha = .79$). Additionally, we assessed participants' expectations for the implementation of work flexibility in the workplace with three items (e.g., "In terms of working hours, to what extent do you want your institution to become more flexible (vs. standardized)?"; "In terms of workload, to what extent do you want your institution to become more flexible (vs. standardized)?"; "In terms of work location, to what extent do you want your institution to become more flexible (vs. standardized)?") on a scale from 1 = "no flexibility" to 5 = "very flexible" ($\alpha = .74$).

We analyzed participants' understanding and sentiments toward flexible work arrangements using a text-mining approach. The analysis was conducted in R (version 4.4.1) within RStudio (version 2024.9.0.375) using the "tidytext" package (Silge & Robinson, 2024). Specifically, we performed word frequency analysis, word association analysis, and sentiment analysis. Word frequency and word association analyses were conducted on the participants' original responses in Indonesian. For sentiment analysis, participants' responses were first translated into English using the artificial intelligence (AI) tool DeepL due to the limited availability of sentiment lexicons in Indonesian.

In addition, we treated the word association analysis as a map to manually delve into participants' expressions, allowing us to explore the details and context of their responses more thoroughly. Finally, comparisons between participants' current and future expectations regarding flexible work arrangements were analyzed using a t-test.

Result and Discussion

The Meaning of Flexible Arrangements

To analyze the meaning of flexible work arrangements, we tabulated the frequency of each word expressed by the participants. The results are shown in Figure 1. Notably, in Figure 1, words with larger font sizes indicate a higher frequency of occurrence compared to those with smaller sizes.

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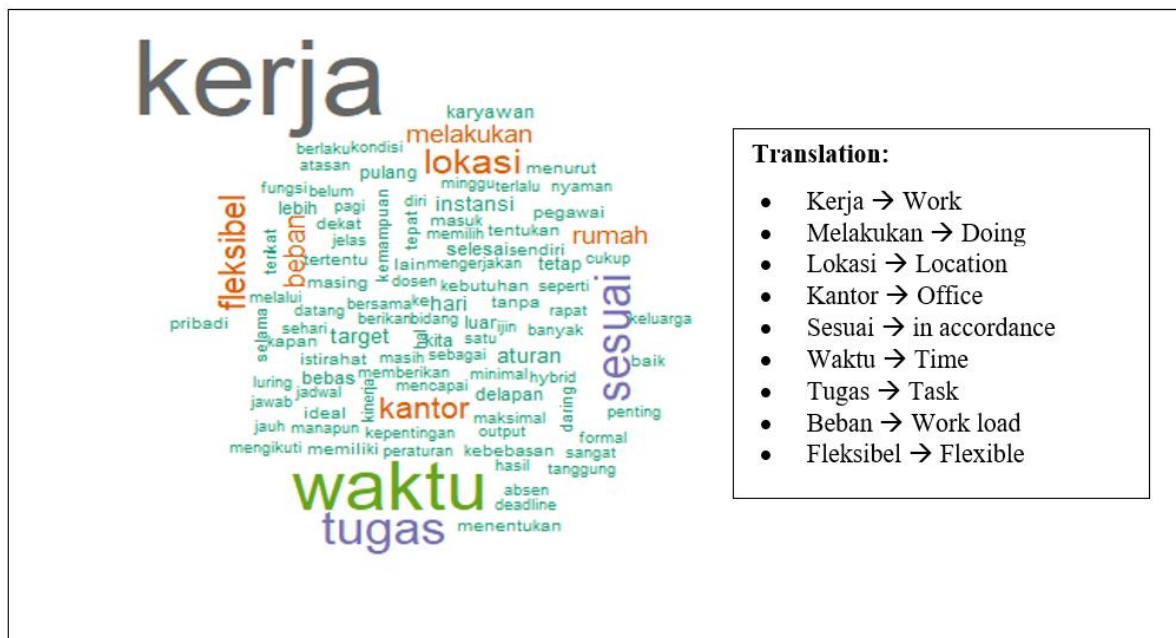


Figure 1. Word cloud of flexible work arrangements

Participants associated flexible work arrangements with several key terms (see Figure 1). This frequency analysis suggests that, participants viewed flexible work arrangements by the ability to manage their time and work location—whether at the office or at home—based on their workload and responsibilities. To validate this interpretation, we conducted a more in-depth analysis by calculating pairwise correlations (ϕ coefficient) among the words. This analysis helps

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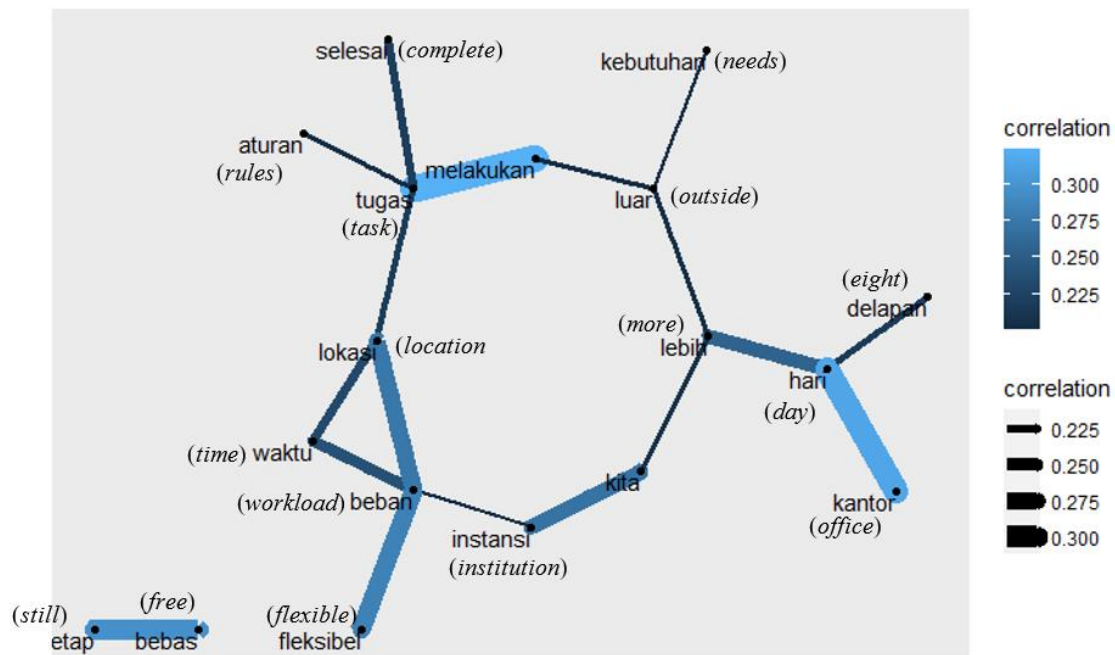


Figure 2. Word association map

Figure 2 illustrates the relationships among words related to flexible work arrangements. For the sake of parsimony, we focused only on words with a ϕ value greater than 0.2. Next, we used Figure 2 as a map to qualitatively explore the meanings of flexible work arrangements that emerged in the dataset.

Based on Figure 2, the word “flexible” most frequently appeared alongside the word “workload.” This indicates the participants' view of the importance of flexible work arrangements as a method for managing professional workloads alongside personal responsibilities, as shown in the following excerpt:

“In my opinion, the ideal flexible work arrangement is one that provides a balance between the demands of work and personal needs. A good flexible work arrangement allows employees to regulate their work schedules so they can remain productive while also maintaining their physical and mental health. With the right flexibility, employees can adjust their work hours to fit their personal situations, avoid burnout, and contribute optimally to their tasks and daily lives.” (Participant 8)

"The workload is not too heavy, so there's time for other things." (Participant 18)

Some participants also interpreted work flexibility in terms of the certainty of work hours, allowing them to manage and balance their professional and personal “workloads” more confidently:

"The institution should be able to determine the start time, break time, and end time for work. That way, employees can easily manage their time." (Participant 2)

"Time should match the workload for just one day. For example, just eight hours, no need to add more." (Participant 7)

The word "workload" was also associated with the word "location." Some participants believed that certain workloads were better suited for the office, while others were more appropriate outside the office, depending on the context of the workloads they faced:

"According to the type or workload being done. If the type of task is not too mentally taxing, one can choose a more relaxed work location." (Participant 34)

Others associated specific locations, such as home, as a means for refreshing or coping:

"For me, it's close to all the access I need: Family, siblings, colleagues, relaxation, and recreation locations." (Participant 14)

"Working with colleagues at a café or other locations is not a bad idea for refreshing." (Participant 27)

The word "location" itself was also positively associated with the words "doing," "task," "complete," and "rules." This indicated participants' awareness that, despite having the freedom to manage their work, they still needed to maintain their commitment to completing tasks according to the rules:

"Flexible, to me, means doing something well and enjoying it so that it doesn't feel like it's finished and has good results." (Participant 59)

"Being free to self-actualize, but still adhering to the applicable rules." (Participant 95)

Interestingly, the word "workload" was also associated with the word "institution." Further exploration showed that the word "institution" was indirectly related to the word "excess" via its association with the word "we." In this context, some participants viewed flexible work arrangements as the freedom to determine their own workloads:

"Having the freedom to assess my own workload and voice any excessive workload to my supervisor." (Participant 97)

The findings suggest that the Indonesian interpretation of flexible work aligns with existing international literature, which underscores the freedom to manage time, location, and workload (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011; McNall et al., 2009; Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2015). However, this research contributes by emphasizing the centrality of the term "workload" in the context of flexible work arrangements. Participants sought work flexibility primarily as a means to manage their professional workloads and enhance their personal lives. Achieving a balance between professional and personal domains is essential for promoting and maintaining worker well-being (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021).

The findings align with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that individuals are more motivated and satisfied when they experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000). FWAs provide employees with greater autonomy over their work schedules and locations, satisfying one of the core components of SDT. By enabling employees to balance their professional and personal responsibilities, FWAs can enhance intrinsic motivation and overall well-being. Moreover, the emphasis on clearer institutional

guidelines supports the idea that competence, another component of SDT, is compromised when employees lack structured policies to navigate their flexibility effectively.

Participants' calls for balance between work and personal life also resonate with Role Theory, which examines the conflicts and facilitators between multiple roles (Kahn et al., 1964; Morrisette & Kisamore, 2020). FWAs act as a resource that mitigates role conflict by enabling employees to manage their overlapping professional and personal responsibilities more effectively. This is particularly critical in cultures like Indonesia, where collectivist values often place significant emphasis on familial and communal obligations (Hofstede et al., 2010). The findings suggest that FWAs can reduce inter-role conflicts, thereby improving employees' psychological well-being and productivity.

Additionally, the study's findings align with Self-Regulation Theory (Baumeister et al., 2018), which highlights the finite nature of individuals' self-regulatory resources. Balancing work and personal life require effortful self-regulation, and prolonged demands can lead to resource depletion, causing stress and reduced performance. FWAs can buffer this depletion by allowing employees to allocate their time and energy more effectively, helping them conserve resources for both professional and personal activities. For example, the ability to choose one's work location or schedule can facilitate recovery and prevent burnout, enabling individuals to sustain their self-regulatory capacity over time.

An intriguing aspect of the results was the participants' call for clearer institutional guidelines regarding work hours. This expectation resonates with concerns raised during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many workers felt that their employers continuously demanded their availability while working from home (de Laat, 2023; Lazauskaite-Zabielske et al., 2022; Walsh, 2009). It is evident that the practice of work-related communication outside regular hours (e.g., meetings or assignments) increased during the pandemic (Nahum, 2020). This aligns with the concept of psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1989, 2016), which refers to the unwritten expectations between employees and employers. Participants' desire for more definitive work hours indicates a breach in these psychological contracts, where the perceived fairness and trust in employers may be diminished due to unclear boundaries. Organizations that perpetuate this norm may exploit their workforce by imposing demands that extend beyond standard working hours, potentially leading to burnout and turnover.

Sentiments Towards Flexible Work Arrangements

Next, we conducted a sentiment analysis on flexible work arrangements. Since sentiment analysis using R is still limited to certain languages (e.g., English, Spanish), we translated all participant responses into English using Artificial Intelligence technology DeepL.

The sentiment regarding flexible work arrangements is illustrated in Figure 3. Participants predominantly utilized positive and anticipatory language when describing their experiences with flexible work arrangements. This tendency indicates a prevalent desire and hope for increased flexibility within their work environments. Notably, the frequency of the term "trust" was relatively high, suggesting participants' confidence in the potential benefits of flexible work arrangements for both their professional and personal lives.

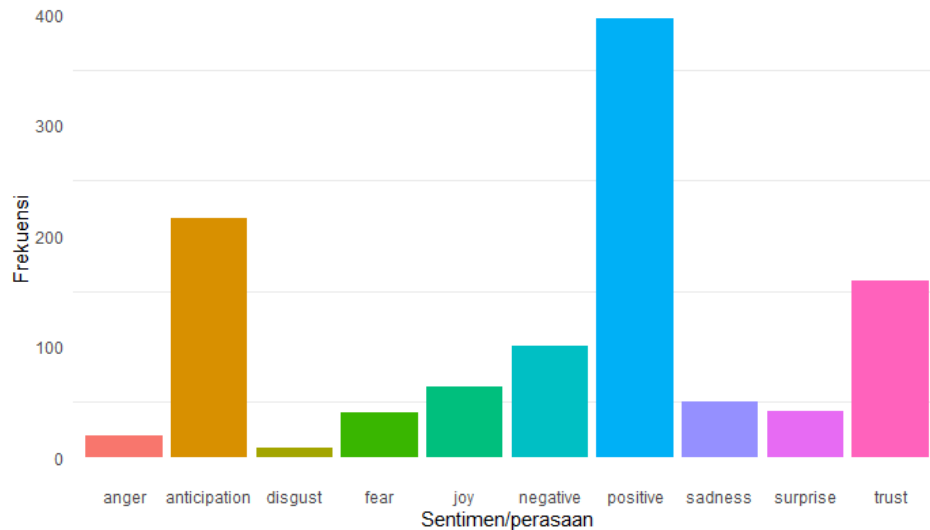


Figure 3. Sentiment analysis on Flexible Work Arrangements

Expectations vs. Perceptions of Current Flexible Work Arrangements

In addition, we examined participants' expectations and perceptions of the flexibility they currently experience in their roles. On average, participants rated the flexibility of their current jobs as somewhat limited ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.94$), while expressing a desire for greater flexibility ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.78$). The statistical analysis revealed a significant difference between participants' expectations and their current perceptions of work flexibility, $t(99) = 4.66$, $p < .001$, with a small effect size ($d = 0.47$). These findings indicate that while participants perceive their work as somewhat flexible, they aspire to achieve a level of flexibility that exceeds their current circumstances.

Limitations and Future Research

Like any study, this research has its limitations. By utilizing open-ended questions, we aimed for participants to provide comprehensive responses. However, the average participant response consisted of only approximately 69 words per question, suggesting that they tended to express the essence of their views rather than provide in-depth insights. Despite these limitations, the findings offer valuable references for future, more detailed research. For instance, the word association map (Figure 2) provides insights into the relationships between keywords that participants used to interpret flexible work arrangements. This map could serve as a foundation for further exploration of the meanings associated with flexible work in subsequent studies. Additionally, the text-mining approach employed in this research allowed for a direct examination of workers' sentiments toward flexible work arrangements based on participants' own descriptions. To our knowledge, this approach remains relatively uncommon in the Indonesian context.

Implication and Recommendations

Based on the findings, we propose several recommendations. First, it is important to address participants' desires for achieving work-life balance, particularly given that research consistently highlights excessive workload as a significant predictor of the intent to quit (Holland et al., 2019; Li & Yao, 2022). Flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options, compressed workweeks, or adjustable hours, could serve as viable strategies to mitigate turnover intentions. By reducing workload-related stress and promoting better work-life integration, organizations may improve employee retention and overall satisfaction.

Second, the results suggest that despite the transition away from remote work policies, some participants still perceive that their organizations demand work beyond regular hours. Such practices can be classified as compulsory extra-role behavior, which encompasses activities outside employees' formal obligations and job descriptions, potentially leading to feelings of exploitation among workers.

Conclusion

This study revealed the meanings, sentiments, and expectations of Indonesian workers regarding flexible work arrangements, which are understood as the freedom to manage time, workload, and work location to achieve a balance between professional responsibilities and personal life. While workers assessed their current work conditions as reasonably flexible, they expressed a desire for increased flexibility and clearer guidelines concerning work hours. Sentiment analysis indicated the use of positive language, reflecting hope for flexible work arrangements. Aligned with Self-Determination Theory and Self-Regulation Theory, the findings suggest that flexible work arrangements can enhance autonomy, reduce stress, and mitigate resource depletion, promoting well-being and reducing turnover intentions among Indonesian workers. However, from a psychological contract perspective, the study also highlights the risk of worker exploitation due to demands for work outside designated hours.

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