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Influence of workplace flexibility on employee engagement among young generation

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ABSTRACT

Workplace flexibility has become increasingly popular and important within the landscape of human resource management especially during and even after the COVID19-pandemic among young working adults. The objective of this study is to identify the influence of four forms of workplace flexibility on employee engagement. The study used online questionnaire and were answered by 185 young working adults below 30years old as of 2022 through Google Form. The data were analyzed by using partial least square (PLS) structural equation modelling (SEM) technique. The study found that workspace flexibility and operational flexibility have significant positive relationships with employee engagement. This study provides practical and direct implications for business and society. Besides that, this research also adds values to the understanding of workplace flexibility and employee engagement for human resource scholars.

IMPACT STATEMENT

Young generation emphasizes on workplace flexibility than any older generations in this modern world. They value the importance of workplace flexibility and prioritize work-life balance than any generation before them. Furthermore, workplace flexibility is playing an important role in human resource management particularly during and after the COVID19-pandemic. Meanwhile, employee engagement which represents the attitude, dedication, commitment and satisfaction of an employee towards the job which eventually affects the performance and productivity of an organization is vital. Hence, we need to figure out whether workplace flexibility that demands by young generation will influence employee engagement that highlights by organization. This study found out that workspace flexibility and functional flexibility have significant positive relationships with employee engagement. Therefore, it is believed that win-win situation can be created through the implementation of workplace flexibility in certain extent which benefits the business world and society.

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Introduction

Work values and the preferences of work conditions are different for different generations. It is important to understand the work preferences especially the issues regarding the workplace flexibility among young working adults to create an effective channel of communication and a good environment in the organization. Based on the recent studies, it is found that Generation Z prefers higher workplace flexibility which emphasizes on work-life balance (Kompa, 2019; Stankiewicz-Mróz, 2020). In addition, research found that flexible management tends to perform better during COVID-19 pandemic among small and medium enterprise (Asad & Kashif, 2021). It is also believed that the increase of training and dependence

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of technology can maintain the quality in work (Fadhel et al., 2022). Thus, human capital is playing a vital role in implement the change to survive especially during this pandemic (Kashif et al., 2020).

This research constitutes a relatively new area which has emerged from the high expectations regarding workplace flexibility among young working adults today. However, research also showed that workplace flexibility may bring negative impacts to employees' wellbeing too. A recent report by Ernest & Young (Smits, 2022) shows that many employees mostly working virtually during the pandemic had reported burnout and disengagement, and this increased the risks of reduced productivity and attrition. Hence, how to engage employees with workplace flexibility needs to be further researched. This research will look into the details of 4 different forms of workplace flexibility on employee engagement.

Having said that, the current knowledge or situation is insufficient to address this issue as many studies focused on the differences in workplace requirements between generations (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Tjiptono et al., 2020) but not much research have identified the influence of workplace flexibility on employee engagement especially among young working adults today. The research in this specific area is important as young working adults today will become the future workforce in the whole world. Moreover, employees are one of the key stakeholders in the formation of an organization. The needs of employees need to be satisfied by providing them with good working condition to increases organization efficiency, competitiveness, performance and promote sustainability (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). It is essential to put the focus on the turnover rate of the employees in the volatile labor market today. In relation to that, it is believed that employee engagement critically impacts the productivity and performance of an organization (Pintão et al., 2020). In this context, workplace flexibility plays a crucial role in direct and significant effects on the people management in the organization (Davidescu et al., 2020). This is because employees especially the young working adults need to be engaged with their work conditions and work environments to perform better (Chatzopoulou et al., 2015).

Moreover, there are many empirical studies relating to the employee satisfaction such as investigating factors influencing employee satisfaction (Gabriela & Mihaela, 2011), but not much studies about the employee engagement related to young working. Furthermore, previous research determined the effects of work flexibility on job satisfaction and even job performance which is mostly focused on all the generations regardless of their ages (Davidescu et al., 2020; Govender et al., 2018). There is very limited research using different forms of workplace flexibility and there has been less previous evidence for this approach and their influence on employee engagement. It is of interest to know whether workplace flexibility can increase employee engagement still hold true. In this research, we will mainly concentrate on the perceptions of workplace flexibility from young working and its influence on their employee engagements. Besides that, this study further identified the influence of workplace flexibility in term of working time flexibility, workspace flexibility, functional flexibility, and operational flexibility on the employee engagement respectively.

If the employers or organizations know more about the needs of workplace flexibility among young working adults, the organizational performance of the employers most probably can be highly increased (Bal & de Lange, 2015; Bran & Udrea, 2016; Michel & Michel, 2015). Thus, this research helps the organization to have a better understanding about the workplace flexibility among young working adults and how their employees can perform better when they have more autonomy in choosing a flexible work arrangement. If different forms of workplace flexibility are positively associated with employee engagement, the current insufficient level of flexibility might need to be improved. All these benefits will have long-term positive impacts to the organization in term of costs and productivity.

This study will generate new knowledge and findings mainly to the human resource management while documents several key contributions made to the fields of sustainable human resource management (Manzoor et al., 2019; Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018). The contributions made here also have wide applicability in all the organization. Furthermore, it might also have a huge impact on the future workforce around the world. For example, young working adults today most probably will become entrepreneur themselves and do not want to work as employees to any organization anymore if the working condition is not matching to their needs. Hence, this study also helps to ensure that the organization will remain its longevity and sustain in the long run.

Underpinning theories and reviews

This research applies multidimensional approach for assessing workplace flexibility in various context with major reference to Conservation of Resource (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). It stated that an employee uses various resources to complete the jobs such as energy, time, and cognitive attention, but the employee needs to replenish those resources during breaks to reduce stress (Kim et al., 2017). Cooper-Thomas et al. (2018) stated that employee engagement is related to emotions of caring and warmth through resource theory. Resources that nurture caring and warmth are more likely to enhance employee engagement. In relation to that, Beigi et al. (2018) stated that workplace flexibility is characterized as being supportive in nature. Hence, it is reasonable that employees who recognize workplace flexibility as supportive by the organization will portray higher level of employee engagement. Workplace flexibility will benefit the employee in the process of replenish those resources to decrease the stress and maintain the quality of health of the employee and hence bring positive effects on the employee engagement. The following show the details of the reviews.

Employee engagement

Employee engagement is positive fulfilling, work related state of mind distinguished by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Saks (2006) defined that there are two types of employee engagement. The first one is the job engagement which addressed the level of employee dedication to the job role while the second one is the organization engagement which referred to the degree of employee commitment and loyalty to the organization. Moreover Mercer (2008) stated that employee engagement as a state of mind that employees want the organization to success and ready to work more than the stated job requirements. According to Bin (2015), high involvement work practices and human resources management can significantly affect employee engagement. In relation to that, effective training, proper selection of employees, reward system and sharing of information can influence employee engagement (Bin, 2015).

According to van Bogaert et al. (2013), employee engagement is a combination of the capability to work and willingness to work. Employee engagement also related to workplace spirituality as study by Allam et al. (2021). Furthermore, Robinson et al. (2004) found out that positive employee attitude towards the value of the organization which included the concern about business context and perform to improve job and organizational effectiveness is engagement. Employee engagement is a wide topic that explores the symbiotic relationship between employees and the organization which related to employee satisfaction and performance (Bin, 2015).

In addition, Ipsos (2008) described engaged employees as individuals who are satisfied and get fulfillment from the job role. Hence, the needs and requirements from the employees should incorporate into the organizational strategy by the management of the organization (Uduji, 2013). There are also some other factors that remarkably affect employee engagement such as gender, age, work seniority, education level, abilities of employee and position in the organization (Origo & Pagani, 2006; Pook et al., 2003; Tang & Cousins, 2005). Moreover, good relationships with colleagues, high pay and proper supervision will lead to high employee engagement as shown in the study by Khalid et al. (2011). Employees that feel positively about their work have high employee engagement while employees that always feel negatively towards their work have low employee engagement (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Employee engagement level also significantly affected by their perceptions regarding the nature of work (Ipsos, 2008). In relation to that, the attitude of an employee towards the job also can justify whether an employee is engaged or disengaged in their job (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014).

Workplace flexibility

In the modern world with technological advancement today, new generation and professionals can choose from wide range of offers in the labor market. Organizations must redesign the new working styles which provide other potential benefits instead of just the financial ones. The workplace flexibility not only can retain the employees, it also can promote motivation and productivity among them, thus

provides advantages to the organization (Origo & Pagani, 2006). On the other hand, rigidity in the organization removes talent in a free and growing labor market. Workplace flexibility enables young employees to achieve balance between their working life and personal life (Kompa, 2019). All these will lead to employee engagement which then the overall performance of the organization (Govender et al., 2018). It becomes even more crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic because all the employees need to practice social distancing which further accelerate the norms of workplace flexibility (Davidescu et al., 2020).

It is believed that workplace flexibility managed to lower down the turnover rate and reduce absenteeism which give rise to higher performance and profitability to the organization (Asad (2020; PalkiSetia & Shah, 2015). Autonomy which highly related to workplace flexibility is one of the most important determinants of quality of work life (Allam & Shaik, 2020). Furthermore, workplace flexibility takes a leading role in the human resource management and industrial sociology. It is becoming a popular topic in the field and direction of research as it is essential in the modern workplace (Davidescu et al., 2020). Additionally, businesses or organizations that practice workplace flexibility mostly have different forms of flexible working models that can be apply based on the context (Dex & Scheibl, 2001).

There are also some studies regarding the workplace flexibility. The research by Dima et al., (2019) on a sample of 1180 employees proved that telework could promote work-life balance at individual level and lead to lasting effects for labor management at social level. The perspective on workplace flexibility by gender is investigated in the study by Vandello et al., (2013) revealed that women showed greater interest as compared to men in prioritizing workplace flexibility. Women who seek for workplace flexibility might be due to the perception that it will increase their femininity while men reluctance to seek for workplace flexibility could be fear of the discrimination on their masculinity (Wattis et al., 2013). Apart from that, it is believed that younger generation especially Alpha generation (Gomes et al., 2018) will have a higher need for workplace flexibility as this generation is the most experienced generation in using technology (Cirilli et al., 2019).

Workplace flexibility is the capability of employees to decide on where, when, and how they exert control over their tasks (Rastogi et al., 2018). This also related to employee empowerment which significantly affects performance of organization (Asad et al., 2021). Reilly (2001) came up with five types of workplace flexibility which are temporal, numerical, financial, functional, and local from the perspectives of employees. All these forms of workplace flexibility provide insight on how to discover the workplace flexibility in our study. Besides that, Origo & Pagani (2006) classified workplace flexibility arrangement into two types which are qualitative flexibility involving the quality of work and the content of competence while quantitative flexibility involves the working hours and number of employees. Furthermore, Cășuneanu (2013) figured out contractual flexibility, working time flexibility, wage flexibility and functional flexibility as four different forms of workplace flexibility which are very useful in our research. In addition, Davidescu et al. (2020) and Roskams & Haynes (2020) used workspace flexibility to identify the associations between workspace flexibility, job satisfaction, psychological comfort, enthusiasm, and productivity in the studies.

Furthermore, van den Berg and van der Velde (2005) determined the connections between functional flexibility with individual and work factors. In the study by Rastogi et al. (2018), temporal and operational flexibility are used as independent variables to determine their relationships with quality of work life, respectively. On the other hand, from the points of view regarding the environmental effects, flexible working time and workspaces also included in the research, not only cause less use of cars and workplaces, but also can improve the satisfaction, control, and freedom of young working adults (Stankevičiute & Savanevičiene, 2018). Apart from that, many organizations have increased their operational flexibility especially during the pandemic if the given tasks can be completed. In addition, functional flexibility also became more demanding as it provides many advantages to the organization, employers, and employees in the fast-changing world today (Friedrich et al., 1998). In this study, working time flexibility, workspace flexibility, functional flexibility and operational flexibility were identified as the four forms of workplace flexibility among young working adults.

Working time flexibility and employee engagement

Working time flexibility refers to the arrangement of time on how the employee performs the work or task (Rastogi et al., 2018). For instance, flextime enables employees themselves to arrange their

working time according to the core business hours of the organization while still fulfilled the required hours of work per day. Compressed work weeks allows the employees to work more during any days of the week to make up the required working hours per week and take one day off. Then, flexible shifts permit workers to swap their shifts with other colleagues according to their personal requirements as long as fulfilled the working hour requirements. Time banking enables the employees to accumulate their overtime for time off when they want to Kossek et al. (2015). There are also some studies related to the working time flexibility. For instance, Halpern (2005) asserted that working time flexibility can decrease stress, improve physical health and save money. Lastly, the study by Hill et al. (2004) determined the influence of flextime on women and it showed that working time flexibility assists women becoming a better mother.

Most of the organization implement working time flexibility to help employees in arranging their time in a better way. It is found that the major consumption of employees' time is the commuting time (Chen & Fulmer, 2018). The total travel time is significantly affected by congestion during peak travel time. van Ommeren and Gutiérrez-i-Puigarnau (2011) also validated the correlation between commute times and absenteeism in the study. Besides that, the study by Zhou et al. (2017) showed that there is significant relationship between commuting and stress. In relation to that, both absenteeism and stress which linked to work-life conflict are constructs used to identify the degree of employee engagement (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Besides that, Gazioglu & Tansel (2006) discovered that long working hours will reduce employee engagement. Hence, based on the previous literatures, it is believed that working time flexibility which shorten commute times can reduce work-life conflict and stress which further enhances employee engagement. This can be explained using the Role Conflict Theory (Frone, 2003; Madsen, 2003), which focuses on the limited quantity of time and energy due to various roles. This is based on the inter-role assumption that work and life have different requirements and norms and both are fundamentally incompatible. Research reported that those with high role conflict were more attracted to working time flexibility (Rau & Hyland, 2022, Salehati & Rojuaniah, 2022). On the other hand, there was research that showed that having too much flexibility could cause employees to have trouble scheduling their time effectively and thus reducing employee engagement (Nord et al., 2002). Hence, Hypothesis 1 (H1) are formed in the study.

H1: There is a positive relationship between working time flexibility and employee engagement among young working adults.

Workspace flexibility and employee engagement

Workspace flexibility describes how the employee can use the workspace which including control over the general appearance, the extent to which the workspace can be personalized and the availability of different workspaces (Roskams & Haynes, 2020). Besides that, workspace flexibility also included the indoor environment control such as temperature, light, and noise (Roskams & Haynes, 2020). In addition, there are many new forms of working environment existing today instead of the traditional working environment. This includes flex office, combi office, co-working, full time home office and partial home office (Davidescu et al., 2020). Flex office is an environment with no assigned workspaces for any individual and all the spaces can be used for activities during meetings (de Been & Beijer, 2014). Combi office is a working environment with assigned workspaces for every employee but normally in open or half-open spaced, there are also additional spaces just for specific activities (de Been & Beijer, 2014). Co-working means that the activities are conducted in rented spaces by employees from different organization, some complementary activities can be carried out in this multi-relationship environment, otherwise they could also perform the work at home. Full time home office refers to work from home all the time and only go to the organization when necessary or requested by the employer. Partial home office is partial of the time work from home and the rest of the time work in office.

Interestingly, the study by Pienaar (2008) suggested that where to work is less important as compared to emotional coping mechanisms when dealing with the issues related to work stress. Schmidt and

Neubach (2007) reported that working from home results in reduction of productivity because procrastination might occur due to many distractions at home. Besides that, Hill et al. (2003) also found out that working from home will cause employees unable to differentiate work from personal lives mentally which subsequently induces negative effect on work-life balance.

Hence, further exploration is needed to better understand the connections between workspace flexibility and employee engagement. According to Ecological Systems Theory as suggested by Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994), workspace flexibility promotes person-environment interactions from ecological perspective. People in a specific environment have a dynamic relationship with their social, physiological, and physical environments (Gu et al., 2022). This theory also states that the workplace environments are inter-related in which the job settings are connected with each other and have an effect on activities at workplace in terms of context, time and processes (Ferschmann et al., 2022). This theory underpins the importance of environment at workplace for the workers and individuals involved in organizational processes. This will further provide positive impacts to employees, their families and the organization. This statement is also justified by the Person-Environment (P-E) fit theory which focuses on the outcomes from the individuals relative to the resources and abilities around them (Edwards, 1996). Hence, it is more important to discover the influences of workspace flexibility such as the control of temperature, lighting, sound level, organization, appearance, and selection of workspace on employee engagement. In relation to that, flexibility that enables more control over the workspace will generate higher levels of engagement which subsequently enables the employees to put in more effort and improve performance (Alfes et al., 2013). Thus, Hypothesis 2 (H2) are formed to answer one of the research questions in the study.

H2: There is a positive relationship between workspace flexibility and employee engagement among young working adults.

Functional flexibility and employee engagement

Functional flexibility is defined as the capability of the organization to make sure of the skills of the employees over several tasks to match the changing tasks because of rapid changes in the methods, technology, and demand (van den Berg & van der Velde, 2005). In other word, it also referred as the process of increasing and diversifying the skill of employees to work across traditionally distinct occupational boundaries (Friedrich et al., 1998). Organization can respond rapidly to future changes by utilized the functional flexibility. Furthermore, employer can benefit more as diverse pool of skills produces greater labor flexibility which then reduce costs and improves organizational performance. Functional flexibility can increase the humanization of work, creates more interesting and varied tasks, and increase the security of employment for employee (van den Berg & van der Velde, 2005).

Having said this, Job Characteristics Theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) can be used to help in explaining the connections between functional flexibility and employee engagement (Stavrou, 2005). Functional Flexibility is a concept in companies where employees can work in different functions or can be deployed purposely to various functions with different roles and responsibilities. This can be accomplished by making the employees multi-skilled so that they can perform various types of tasks whenever required. Thus, the development of employees needs to take into account the investment in future skills through continuous training and education for the workforce.

Furthermore, different models of work systems such as job enlargement, job enrichment and job rotation are utilized to support functional flexibility (van den Berg & van der Velde, 2005). Job enlargement focused on expanding the tasks quantitatively by increasing the content of work. Job enrichment deals with the tasks that expanded qualitative by enriching the tasks with some planning, controlling and decision-making process. Job rotation defined as change of work role by transferring employees between multiple areas of responsibility in an organization. Job training provided by organization or employer and participation in some training courses from employees themselves both can enhance the functional flexibility (Davidescu et al., 2020). An employee that works in different geographical locations also exhibits high functional flexibility (van den Berg & van der Velde, 2005). In the aspects of functional flexibility in handling tasks, it is believed that young generation today has even greater ability to multitasking than

previous generation and this related to their extensive access to information at the early age (Iorgulescu, 2016). Besides that, young working adults now are also very creative and innovative which tend to have entrepreneurial initiatives to work independently (Iorgulescu, 2016).

Apart from that, Robinson (2007) also stated that informal development through coaching and performance development plan were associated with higher engagement levels. The study by May et al. (2004) figured out that job enrichment positively predicts meaningfulness at work which then more likely to have engaged employees as supported by Lockwood (2007). Furthermore, greater employee engagement and corresponding career success can be achieved through the use of flexible career as reported by Bal et al. (2015). Also, availability for employee to perform job enlargement, job rotation, job enrichment and job replacement in different geographical locations would contribute to higher employee engagement and performance growth in the organization (Bal et al., 2015). Hence, Hypothesis 3 (H3) is constructed in this research.

H3: There is a positive relationship between functional flexibility and employee engagement among young working adults.

Operational flexibility and employee employment

Operational flexibility allow the employees to decide how the work is done without restrictions or interferences from the superiors which described as workplace flexibility by Greenhaus & Powell, (2006). Besides that, operational flexibility will provide some positive outcomes for employee and organization as shown in some studies. For instance, there are decrease in turnover intentions and reduction in work-family conflicts with operational flexibility (Ahuja et al., 2007). Moreover, Clark (2001) also proved that operational flexibility can enhance the overall work-family balance. Then, Chiang et al. (2010) also found out that reduction in stress can be achieved through job control and work-family policies for the hospitality industry. Lastly, previous research also indicated that operational flexibility positively associated with the psychological well-being (Häusser et al., 2010). In relation to that, Result-Only Work Environment where the employers only emphasize on the performance and not the presence of the employee might further enhance the operational flexibility (Govender et al., 2018). From that, the employees will get paid for the results by just need to accomplish the task within the deadline without interfering their work schedule and care about the number of working hours.

The study by Zeijen et al. (2018) emphasizes on the concept of self-management and it was believed that self-management could increase job engagement. Self-management refers to policy that enables employee to have more freedom in managing their own behaviors which proved to enhance employee engagement by Breevaart et al. (2014). It is also believed that transformational leadership will further enhance operational flexibility in promoting organizational sustainability (Ullah et al., 2021). Besides that, transformational leadership also affects sustainable human resource practices which subsequently influences sustainable innovation and performance of organization (Asad et al., 2021). Future research is needed as suggested by researchers to understand the effects of different self-management strategies on organizational outcomes (Zeijen et al., 2018). Hence, further research about operational flexibility as part of the self-management policy is necessary to identify its influence on employee engagement.

Apart from that, perceived autonomy also will increase employee engagement as shown in the study by Llorens et al. (2007). This most probably because the employees can use various resources and consider everything related to work is under their areas of control. Moreover, Social Exchange Theory stated that many positive outcomes are related to the actual use of flexibility (Blau, 2017). In relation to that, making an agreement between employees and employers on control over the conditions of work can increase employee engagement and stronger fits between employee and the job. This is because the relationships between employee and their employers can be strengthened as employers emphasize on the long-term well-being of the employee (Bal & de Lange, 2015). Furthermore, there is research by Rastogi et al. (2018) which determined the influences of

operational flexibility on quality of life but there are no definitive findings around the factor of operational flexibility on employee engagement. Thus, further research is required to understand whether operational flexibility can affect the employee engagement in this study as shown in Hypothesis 4 (H4).

H4: There is a positive relationship between operational flexibility and employee engagement among young working adults.

This study aims to better understand the relationship between each form of workplace flexibility and employee engagement as shown in [Figure 1](#) which is the conceptual framework.

Methodology

Sampling frame, sample size and sampling procedure

This study received responses from 185 young working adults which below 30 years old in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The participants can be from any backgrounds regardless of their races. Our research target is the young working adults which require the participants to fulfill the criteria as discussed above. Snowball sampling method was used in this study as the population is difficult to access especially during this pandemic. The more the initial participants join the study, the more the total amounts of participants join at last of the data collection process and there is not equal chance of being selected. The survey was conducted in the period of 1 April 2022 to 10 April 2022. The participants completed the online questionnaire using a specific link indicated through email, social media or other communication platform.

Research instrument and operationalization of variables

There are total 45 questions in the survey that answered by the respondents. The questionnaire was developed using Google Form and were already checked based on the ethical considerations. In this study, all the variables were adopted from previous literature and measured through the 5-points Likert Scale. 4 questions were asked on working time flexibility (Rastogi et al, 2018); 6 questions on workspace flexibility (Roskams & Haynes, 2020); 5 questions on functional flexibility (van den Berg & van der Velde, 2005); 5 questions on operational flexibility astogi et al., 2018); and lastly, the employee engagement was measured using the nine-statement version of “Utrecht Work Engagement Scale” (Gerards et al. (2018). The data are reliable as all the Cronbach’s Alpha value of the variables are above 0.7. Hence, the data can be considered as an acceptable, sufficient, and satisfactory level (Taber, 2018).

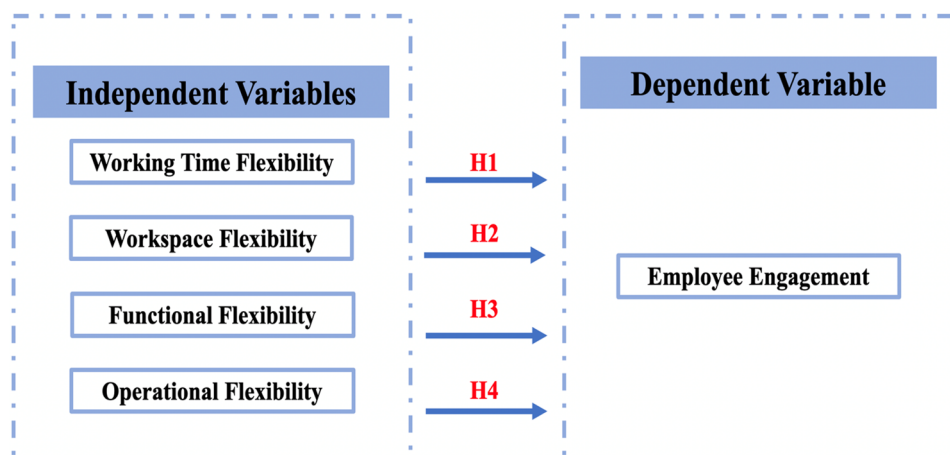


Figure 1. Framework of the study.

Data analysis and results

Demographic Profiles

Table 1 shows that 59.5% of the respondents in this study are males and 40.5% are females. In all, 1.1% below 21 years old, 17.8% between 21 and 25 years old and 81.1% between 26 to 30 years old. 4.9% of the respondents have foundation, pre-u or below, 3.8% have diploma, 82.1% have degree or professional paper and 9.2% have masters as their highest education qualification. A total of 7.6% of the respondents were married while 92.4% of them are not married. 91.4% of the respondents are in the private sector while 8.6% are in the public sector. 14.1% of the respondents have less than 1 year of working experience, 34.6% of them have 1 to 3 years of working experience, 43.2% have more than 3 years but less than 5 years of working experience and 8.1% have more than 5 years of working experience.

Bivariate correlational

Based on Table 2, the correlations between the independent variables are all lower than 0.9, thereby indicating no multicollinearity issues. All the independent variables except for working time flexibility (-0.059), show significant positive correlation with the employee engagement. Workspace flexibility, functional flexibility and operational flexibility are significantly associated with employee engagement at a p-value of 0.001, with magnitude of 0.402, 0.518 and 0.390, respectively.

Common method bias (CMB)

This study is based on data collected from single respondent, making it susceptible to CMB. In line with Guide and Ketokivi (2015), relevant procedural and statistical steps were taken to minimize the effect of CMB. The former includes the sending the questionnaire with cover letter that explains the purpose of study, with the commitment to guarantee the respondents anonymity.

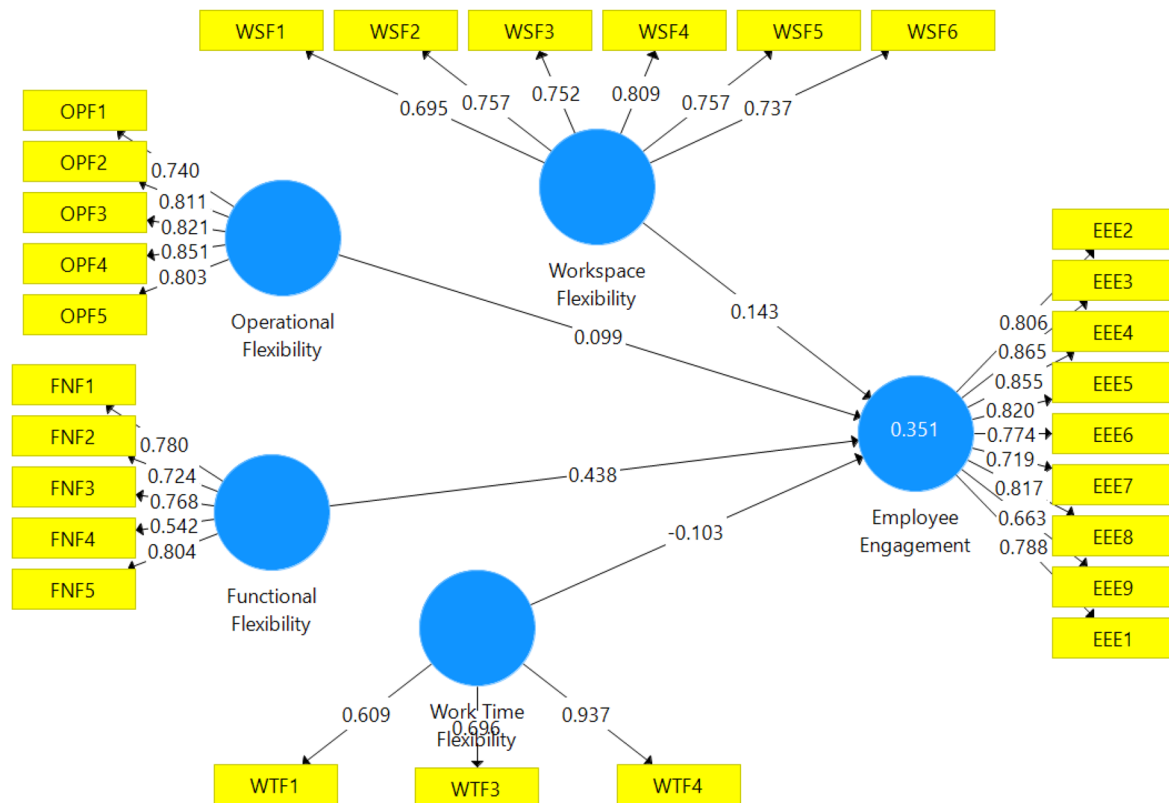
For the latter, the Harman's single-factor test was performed to ascertain the likely statistical effect of CMB. The result reveals that the largest single factor accounts for 31.26 percent of the variance, which is lower than the suggested value of 50 percent (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Thus, CMB has not significantly impacted the self-reported data.

Table 1. Demographic profiles.

Demographic Details	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	110	59.5
Female	75	40.5
Age		
Below 21	2	1.1
21 to 25	33	17.8
26 to 30	150	81.1
Highest education qualification		
Foundation/Pre-U and below	9	4.9
Diploma	7	3.8
Degree/Professional paper	152	82.1
Masters	17	9.2
Marital status		
Married	14	7.6
Not Married	171	92.4
Organization type		
Private sector	169	91.4
Public sector	16	8.6
Years of working experience		
Less than 1 year	26	14.1
1 to 3 years	64	34.6
More than 3 years but less than 5 years	80	43.2
5 years and more	15	8.1

Table 2. Bivariate correlations between variables.

	Employee Engagement	Operational Flexibility	Functional Flexibility	Workspace Flexibility	Working Time Flexibility
Employee Engagement	1				
Operational Flexibility	.390**	1			
Functional Flexibility	.518**	.521**	1		
Workspace Flexibility	.402**	.502**	.439**	1	
Working Time Flexibility	-.059	.032	.046	-.103	1

**Figure 2.** Measurement model.

Measurement Model

Using the partial least square (PLS) structural equation modelling (SEM) technique (see Figure 2), we assessed the reliability of the measurement model based on the values of Cronbach alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR). The obtained α and CR values are higher than the recommended 0.7, indicating the measurement scales' reliability (see Table 3). Also, the convergent and discriminant validities were examined using the average variance extracted (AVE) values and the variables correlation matrix (Ojo & Fauzi, 2020; Peng & Lai, 2012). Except for an item of working time flexibility (WT2), all the factor loadings were greater than 0.50. As shown in Table 3, upon deleting the item WT2, the AVEs values for all the variables were above the threshold value of 0.5. Hence, the model fulfills the conditions for convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Peng & Lai, 2012).

We evaluated the discriminant validity by comparing the construct's pair correlation values with the corresponding square root of the AVEs (see Table 4). The AVEs values presented in the main diagonal are higher than the pair correlations between the associated constructs, satisfying the conditions for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Structural Model

The structural model was validated (see Figure 3) by running the bootstrapping procedure to estimate the significance of the p-values of the coefficients for the hypothesized paths, as summarized in Table 5

Table 3. Item Statistics of Variables.

Variables / Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Factor Loading
<i>Working Time Flexibility (α = 0.719; CR = 0.799; AVE = 0.578)</i>			
wt1	3.716	1.227	0.609
wt2	3.568	1.265	0.696
wt4	3.532	1.250	0.937
<i>Workspace Flexibility (α = 0.846; CR = 0.886; AVE = 0.565)</i>			
ws1	3.616	1.076	0.695
ws2	3.668	1.034	0.757
ws3	3.574	1.156	0.752
ws4	3.553	1.157	0.809
ws5	3.711	1.184	0.757
ws6	3.490	1.121	0.737
<i>Functional Flexibility (α = 0.778; CR = 0.849; AVE = 0.533)</i>			
f1	3.011	1.247	0.780
f2	3.326	1.117	0.724
f3	3.563	1.095	0.768
f4	2.853	1.376	0.542
f5	3.168	1.188	0.804
<i>Operational Flexibility (α = 0.865; CR = 0.902; AVE = 0.649)</i>			
o1	3.236	1.024	0.740
o2	3.131	1.181	0.811
o3	3.684	0.968	0.821
o4	3.695	1.009	0.851
o5	3.521	1.068	0.803
<i>Employee Engagement (α = 0.925; CR = 0.938; AVE = 0.627)</i>			
EE1	3.116	0.980	0.788
EE2	3.158	0.946	0.806
EE3	3.468	1.072	0.865
EE4	3.432	1.010	0.855
EE5	2.911	1.185	0.820
EE6	3.168	1.192	0.774
EE7	3.826	0.974	0.719
EE8	3.521	1.032	0.817
EE9	3.416	1.014	0.663

Table 4. Results of discriminant validity.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Employee Engagement	0.792				
2. Functional Flexibility	0.552	0.730			
3. Operational Flexibility	0.391	0.503	0.806		
4. Work Time Flexibility	-0.124	-0.003	-0.005	0.760	
5. Workspace Flexibility	0.403	0.448	0.499	-0.137	0.752

(Ojo & Fauzi, 2020). Contrary to expectation, working time flexibility was not significantly associated with employee engagement ($\beta = -0.103$ $p > 0.1$). However, the data support the significant relationship between workspace flexibility and employee engagement ($\beta = 0.143$ $p < 0.05$). Also, our data support the significant relationship between functional flexibility and employee engagement ($\beta = 0.438$ $p < 0.001$). On the other hand, the operational flexibility was not significantly associated with employee engagement ($\beta = 0.099$ $p > 0.1$).

Following Cohen's (1988) recommendations, we considered the effect sizes of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 as small, medium, and large, respectively. As shown in Table 4, workspace flexibility (0.021) and functional flexibility (0.205) have small and medium effect sizes, respectively. According to Chin et al. (2003), the independent variables' influence on the dependent variable allows even the smallest strength of effect sizes to be considered. Besides, the model's explanatory power was assessed from the obtained value of the coefficient of determination (R^2). The R^2 (i.e., 0.337) indicates that all the predictors can explain 37.7% of the variance in employee engagement.

Discussion

Based on the results, the study reveals that working time flexibility is not significantly associated with employee engagement, thereby supporting earlier findings (Nord et al., 2002). This may be due to having too much flexibility might cause the employee having trouble scheduling their time effectively and then

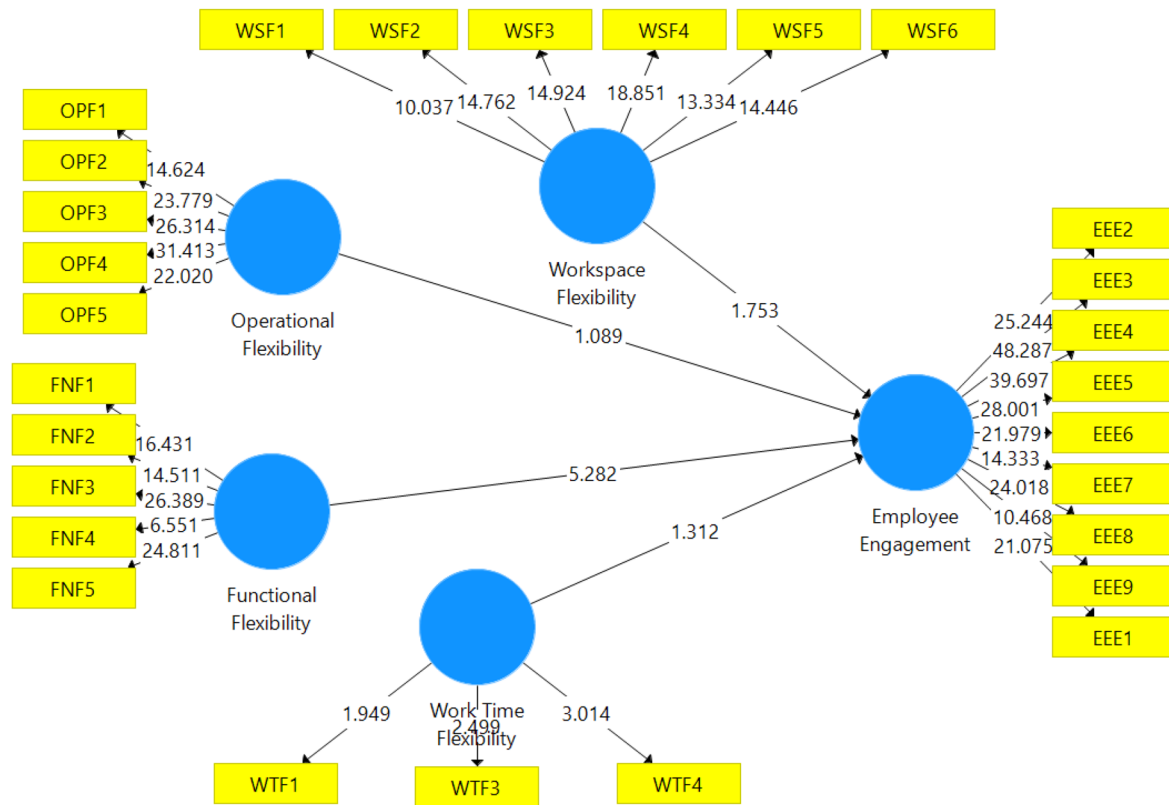


Figure 3. Structural model.

Table 5. Results of Hypotheses Testing.

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	t- Value	f ²	Decision
H1	WTF → EEE	-0.103	1.312	0.016	Not Supported
H2	WSF → EEE	0.143	1.753*	0.021	Supported
H3	FNF → EEE	0.438	5.282***	0.205	Supported
H4	OPF → EEE	0.099	1.089	0.010	Not Supported

Note. *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$; WTF: Working Time Flexibility; WSF: Workspace Flexibility; FNF: Functional Flexibility; OPF: Operational Flexibility; EEE: Employee Engagement.

reduce the overall employee engagement. This concerns with the time management and how the employee focuses on the tasks. A recent study by Çemberci et al. (2022) also reported that flexible working policy has resulted in serious problems in the work-life balance. Working remotely reduces the effects on work-life balance and increases work-family conflict (Waples and Brock-Baskin, 2021). According to Palumbo (2020), working from home has caused public sector workers to be exposed to increased work-life conflict and increased work-related fatigue and worsened the perception of work-life balance. This is also supported by Zhang et al (2023) in which they reported that flexible working hours also represent the beginning of an unlimited extension of working hours and the disruption of life.

Having said so, there are a number of studies show the positive relationship between commuting and work life balance and thus enhancing engagement. A study by Zhou et al. (2017) showed that there is significant negative relationship between commuting and stress, they are different from the construct in this study which measures the overall employee engagement directly. Furthermore, the research by Gazioglu & Tansel (2006) which discovered that long working hours will reduce employee engagement and Resource Drain Model that based on the Role Conflict Theory (Frone, 2003) which supported the positive correlation between working time flexibility and employee engagement does not justify the relationship directly. Therefore, further studies need to be made to identify the relationship between working time flexibility and employee engagement. It is essential because this might influence on how the practitioners implement the workplace flexibility especially the area related to working time.

Meanwhile, hypothesis 2 (H2) which stated that there is a positive correlation between workspace flexibility and employee engagement among young working adults can be proved in this study. This statement is supported by Ecological Systems Theory which stated that the interaction between the attributes of an individual and the environment enables better understanding of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). In relation to that, workspace flexibility also promotes complex person-environment interactions from ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Hence, this will further provide benefits for employees, their families, and the organizations which also justified by the Person-Environment (P-E) fit theory. This theory suggests that the interplay between personal and environmental attributes is the primary driver of human behavior (Cooman & Vleugels, 2022) and it focuses on the outcomes from the individuals relative to the resources and abilities around them (Schaufeli, 2017; Van Zyl et al., 2022). Furthermore, the finding in this study is also supported by Armitage and Amar (2021) which proves that flexibility in working provides employees with more control over the workspace and will generate higher levels of engagement which subsequently enables the employees to put in more effort and improve performance. However, some concerns need to be addressed when allowing the employee to work from home. This is because some studies showed that there are many distractions which give rise to procrastination and reduction in productivity when working from home (Schmidt & Neubach, 2007). Besides that, Como et al. (2020) found out that working from home may have a negative effect on work-life balance as employees might be unable to mentally differentiate work from personal lives. Lastly, the finding in this study proved that the management could focus more on the workspace flexibility that available to the employees which further increase the employee engagement. The result also provided the foundation to the researchers for future study regarding the workspace flexibility and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) which stated that there is a positive correlation between functional flexibility and employee engagement among young working adults is justified in this study. This statement is justified by Job Characteristics Theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) which helps in explaining the connections between functional flexibility and improved attitudes and behaviors towards work especially the employee engagement (Stavrou, 2005). Apart from that, the finding also supported by many previous studies. For instance, Bhakuni and Saxena (2023) found out that employees that had training chances were more engaged than employees who had no job training in the organization and training also helps to reduce the revenge motive in managing stress levels and conflicts. In addition, a supportive organizational culture that provides employees with sufficient learning chances and development besides having a pleasant work environment enhanced employee engagement (Mone & London, 2018; Soni et al., 2022). Apart from that, Lyons and Bandura (2023) also stated that informal development through coaching and performance development plan were associated with higher engagement levels. In addition, Albrecht et al. (2021) reported that job variety, opportunities development, authority positively predicts meaningfulness at work which then more likely to have engaged employees. Lastly, the availability for employee to perform job rotation, job enlargement, job enrichment and job replacement in different geographical locations will contribute to greater employee engagement and performance growth in the organization (Bal et al. 2015; Muneer et al., 2018). Since functional flexibility can provide so many positive impacts to the employee engagement, human resource management of the organization can consider including more functional flexibility in their policies.

Hypothesis 4 (H4) which stated that there is a positive correlation between operational flexibility and employee engagement among young working adults cannot be proven in this study. This statement is not aligned with Social Exchange Theory which stated that many positive outcomes are related to the actual use of flexibility (Blau, 2017). For example, making an agreement between employees and employers on control over the conditions of work can increase employee engagement and ensure stronger fits between employee and the job. This is because the relationships between employee and their employers can be strengthened as employers emphasize on the long-term well-being of the employee (Bal & de Lange, 2015). Furthermore, the finding also contradicts to the study of Zeijen et al. (2018) which focused on the concept of self-management to increase job engagement. Self-management is the practice which allows employee to control their own behavior without supervision which shown to increase job engagement in the study by Breevaart et al. (2014). It is believed that individuals that have poor self-management will affect their engagement. Apart from that, perceived autonomy which highly related to operational flexibility also will increase employee engagement as shown in the study by Llorens et al. (2007). This is

most probably because the employees can use various resources and consider all aspects of work as a part of their sphere. However, this might only influence individuals that really concern about more aspects of work and resources that are available to them.

Implications

Practical Implications for business

The research has recognized that workplace flexibility especially workspace flexibility and functional flexibility have some influences on employee engagement which serves as the driver for organizations to gain competitive advantages and better outcomes. Workplace flexibility can help organizations to save costs, cater for the needs of employees while attracting and retaining talents. It also acts as a tool to promote employee well-being through enhanced employee engagement. Therefore, it is also more likely for employees to put more efforts and commitments to the organization because employees recognize the organizational support and autonomy as trust and respect. This is in line with the report by Allam and Shaik (2020) as well as Malik and Allam (2021) that suggested that management must enrich the work atmosphere, provide adequate training to enhance the skills, and apply workplace flexibility since these factors play a crucial role to provide satisfaction and are more prone to create quality of work life at workplace among workforce. More importantly, organizations are now able to use workplace flexibility to cater for different working styles of employees which subsequently improve the overall performance of the organization and ultimately helps to achieve the sustainable development goal of Decent Work and Economic Growth.

Furthermore, it is believed that the society can achieve work-life balance easier after the implementation of workplace flexibility in most of the organizations. In relation to that, it is also hope that the satisfaction, productivity and performance of employees can be increased as there are enhancements in the employee engagements after the implementation of workplace flexibility. Thus, sustainable development goal of Good Health and Well-Being can be attained throughout the society in a faster way. A happier and high productivity society can be produced.

Contribution to knowledge

Workplace flexibility, with the aspects of working time, workspace, functional and operational was discussed in this study and this allows the researchers to dive into each aspect in details in the future. This study provides the foundation for researchers to identify the relationships of each aspect of workplace flexibility with other antecedents and descendants of employee engagement. In addition, this study also provides some recommendations on how workplace flexibility can improve employee engagement through different forms of workplace flexibility. Lastly, it ignites new information in the contemporary knowledge of work life balance especially among the young generation in Malaysian context. As empirical research, it offers the benefit of new research directions for researchers or organizations in understanding and promoting the workplace flexibility among the youth.

Assumptions, limitations and directions for future study

This study was bounded by certain assumptions. For instance, the survey measures were perceived measures and not actual measures. The perceived measures were used to identify the relationships in this study. Then, whether the survey items represented and measured the variables, including the use of workplace flexibility and employee engagement could challenge the validity of the study. Besides that, the study only got responses from the young working adults that below 30 years old in Malaysia which may encouraged bias in the study. The influence of workplace flexibility also could be somewhat distorted by other factors that contribute to the employee engagement.

Furthermore, there are also some limitations in this study. For example, the relatively small sample size might limit the ability to generalize the findings. Then, the questionnaire participants' honesty is a

possible limitation, which could raise questions on the study's validity. In relation to that, it is difficult to determine whether the participants responded truthfully to the survey.

Lastly, there are some suggestions or directions for future research. For instance, there are other factors that influence employee engagement and further research can be done to identify those factors. Next, there are also little empirical evidence around different generational views of workplace flexibility. Therefore, the influence of workplace flexibility on employee engagement can be determined on older generations. Further research around gender preferences to workplace flexibility also can be carried out to better understand the value each gender placed on the aspect as some previous studies stated that women were perceived to value workplace flexibility than men. This study focused more on the positive effects of workplace flexibility and future study can figure out the drawbacks associated to workplace flexibility.

Recommendations from the study

Since workspace flexibility can increase employee engagement as justified in this study, some recommendations can be made related to workspace flexibility. For instance, employers always need to ensure that the workplace environment is good for employees to carry out their tasks. The temperature, intensity of lightings, sound level around the workplace, organization and appearance of workspace must be adjusted to the needs of employees. It is more beneficial if employers allow their employees to personalize their workspaces and even enable them to choose their workspaces.

Furthermore, the organization also needs to take note about the functional flexibility of the employees since it has been proven that it can increase the employee engagement in this study. The organization should allow the employees to move to another function within their departments if they want to, combine their jobs with other jobs, allocate time and energy in training the employees and let the employee to work in different geographical locations if situation permitted. The employers also can consider allowing the employees to change jobs within the overall organization.

Besides that, employers or superiors should pay more attention regarding the operational flexibility in the organization because it plays an important role in enhancing the employee engagement as shown in this research. The employers should not direct much at the activities of employees at work and let them choose what they want to do at work. In that case, the employees are in charge of their activities at work while determine where they can place their time and energies in their works. Hence, they have a say in what goes on at work.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Data availability statement

Upon request.

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