

**Flexible Working Arrangements (FWAs) in Unstable Times: An Exploratory Discourse on Current Changing Employment Contexts**

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**Abstract**

Organizations today are facing tremendous competing challenges as they continue to navigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world of work which disrupted work stability and resulted in an unprecedented global loss of working hours. These challenges facilitated by globalization are tackled by these organizations with a spirit of reinvention— continuous accelerated advancements in technology and digital transformation and establishment of variable work arrangements. Work, enabled in part by technology is evolving and currently becoming increasingly non-traditional resulting in the emergence of new trends. These new forms of employment known as flexible working arrangements (FWAs) can expand choice in terms of where, how and when people work. This paper embraces analytical discussion of secondary data anchored on Self Determination Theory (SDT) as its theoretical framework to assess to what extent these flexible working arrangements have become adopted and their efficacy in current unstable times while considering the demographics of today’s employees. The analysis focuses on how key megatrends such as new forms of work organisations, technological progress and digital transformation, globalisation and demographic change are not only affecting the employment contexts currently and possibly in years to come but are also shaping the labour market. It is recommended that in current unstable times, organisations should adopt flexible working arrangements since it helps employees both in balancing their work-life, and in performing optimally. Finally, based on the paucity of research in the area in Nigerian work context, the investigation equally recommends that an empirical field research be conducted to ascertain the efficacy of flexible working arrangement (FWAs) in the Nigerian work environment.

**Keywords:** 1. Flexible working arrangements (FWAs) 2. Workforce demographics 3. COVID-19 pandemic 4. Information communication technology (ICT) 5. Globalisation 6. Self Determination Theory (SDT) 7. Work-life balance

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## 1. Background to the Study

Work can literally be depicted as any human act of production of goods and services, embarked on as a profession or occupation, which is not only undertaken in return for payment or reward in money or in kind but brings economic and social satisfaction to the individual. Work does not only take up a substantial amount of an individual's time and attention, it equally plays a significant role in shaping an individual's identity and sense of worth. Anugwuom (2009) refers to work as participating in the labour or employment process. The world of work is evolving. The praxis of globalization which includes trade, capital flows, economic and social restructuring (Wokoma, 2013) enhanced by contemporary digitalization and automation trends in employment as well as the COVID-19 pandemic has produced divergent effects on the workplace. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s estimates, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and its ongoing aftermath, has had a devastating impact on the world of work resulting in an unprecedented global loss of nearly nine per cent of working hours, corresponding to about 255 million full-time jobs in 2020 (ILO, 2021). This is in addition to its (COVID-19's) effect on the nature of the work environment, aided by globalization and the rapid technological changes which generates options for alternatives in the nature of work itself and has resulted in the emergence of new trends.

Considering that organizations are not static but rather evolve in response to the changing technological and work environment (Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma&Nwokorie, 2020), full-time jobs under open-ended contracts and involving direct relationships between employer and employee are noticeably on the decrease while the more flexible working arrangements highlighted by Berkery, Morley, Tiernan, Purtill and Parry (2017) and Stavrou, (2005) to include flexible working hours, teleworking, flexi-time, overtime, job sharing, part-time work, shift and weekend work, temporary work, paid parental leave, annual hours, annual hours contracts, flexible leave arrangements, choice of rosters and shifts, variable year employment, compressed working weeks, fixed-term contract, subcontracting or outsourcing and working from home are rising. Klindzic and Marić (2019) posit that flexible working arrangements (FWAs) are designed by employers to accord employees more scheduling freedom to empower them in performing the obligations required of their positions, with the aim of achieving better work-life balance, increased flexibility for organizations and more improved organizational performance. These flexible working arrangements (FWAs) according to Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma and Nwokorie (2020) are very common practices embarked on currently by organizations globally in response to numerous reoccurring challenges resulting from evolving technological and work environments.

Bearing the above assertions in mind, the general objective of this investigation is to examine if and to what extent these flexible working arrangements have been embraced globally in recent unstable times. The investigation equally seeks to find out their effect on the organization with regards to performance and on the employees with regards to reducing work-life conflict and hence balancing employees' work-life. Library research involving

analytical discussion of secondary data gotten from textbooks, journals, etc. is the methodology adopted in this investigation. The adoption of this approach is based on the certitude that the onus of the investigation is on general principles relating to flexible working arrangements as it relates to contemporary employment context in present unstable times as necessitated by world-wide reinvention of digital technology and the attendant devices.

## **2. Conceptual Clarifications**

### **2.1. Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs):**

Erlinghagen (2019) distinguishes standard employment relations (SER- which includes full-time and permanent employment in a subordinate employment relationship) and non-standard employment relations (NER; atypical employment including mainly target part-time employment, temporary employment, and temporary agency work) as different forms of employment contracts generally allowed by Labor law. Many workers currently prefer the flexibility, diverse income sources and ability to control their work schedule and activities that are associated with atypical employment. This has contributed in most employers considering offering flexible schedules which differ from the typical pattern of arriving at the workplace by 8am and leaving at 4pm daily, and amended to fit the time and space in which employees need to work in accordance with personal or familial needs. These evolving worker preferences are contributory factors to the emergence of new forms of work known as Flexible working arrangements (FWAs). Iheriohanma and Austin-Egole (2020) aver that in contemporary employment contexts, work flexibility, facilitated by advancements in technology is inculcated to enable workers make the choice of where, when and how they want to work. According to Iheriohanma and Austin-Egole (2020) work flexibility is evident when the employee is given relative or full freedom by the employer to choose the time (when), location (where), and manner (how) in which they work to help align organisational goals with individual goals. To Austin-Egole (2019) work flexibility fundamentally involves the choices that allow an employee to work outside the conventional limits of a standard organization of work with respect to such different modalities as distribution of working time, amount and place of work (Kattenbach, Demerouti, & Nachreiner, 2010; Shockley and Allen, 2007; Spreitzer, Cameron, & Garrett, 2017; Austin-Egole, 2019; Iheriohanma and Austin-Egole (2020). Thus, work flexibility can be said to be in direct contrast with traditional work arrangements that require employees to work at a standard time and place daily.

Avery and Zabel (2001) aver that flexible work arrangement was first introduced at a German aerospace company in 1967 as an approach to lessen worker absenteeism due to commuting issues. Flexible working arrangements (FWAs) according to Klindzic and Marić (2019) are common practices and programmes, designed by employers to enable employees have increased scheduling freedom to enable them execute the duties required of their positions, with the aim of achieving increased flexibility for organizations, improved organizational performance and better work-life balance. Flexible work arrangements FWAs harmonizes a wide variety of both formal and informal workplace practices designed to meet the life expectancies for diverse employees especially in Nigeria (Ogueyungbo, Akinnusi, Igbino, Salau, Olokundun, & Falola (2019). Kossek, Hammer, Thompson and Burke (2014) point out

time, location and connectivity, amount of work and continuity/time off as the four primary categories of workplace flexibility.

1. Flexibility in time gives employees leverage of some level of choice with regards to how the total weekly hours are spread out to manage non-work demands. Options under flexibility in time include;

i. Flextime - which according to ILO (2011) allows full-time workers to choose when to start and finish work as long as they are onsite during the core band hours, such as 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

ii. Compressed workweeks – which consists of working less than the standard five days a week, but requires that employees work increased work hours during each workday to achieve same or better performance. In which case, full-time job responsibilities are accomplished fewer than five days per week or 10 days in two weeks (Kossek & Michel (2011)

iii. Flexible shift works - involves work that is outside of standard work hours and often includes working at night which allows for continuous production as workers are given different time periods (shifts) to work during one day thus ensuring that the operations continue non-stop 24/7 while equally expanding workers' availability to meet client demands and increase productivity. (Smith, Folkard, Tucker & Evans, (2010).

iv. Part-year and seasonal schedules - some industries and professions have predictable busy and slow times of the year and so they maintain part-year or seasonal work schedules that benefits both the employees and the organizations. In this case, flexibility occurs over the course of a year, rather than over the course of a week or a day. For instance, Kossek, Hammer, Thompson and Burke (2014) point out that a tax accountant will normally work more hours during the busy tax season than during the summer months. The firm as well as the employee benefits from this flexibility.

v. Flexible breaks during the workday - here employees who work on an hourly basis and are eligible for overtime, have control to determine who will take which break time. For instance, it allows an employee to program his or her break to coincide with a daily routine phone call to an elderly relative or to address other non-work needs. However, managers are to set expectations as well as identify how scheduling needs are addressed to ensure that the same employees are not always covering the least desirable times.

2. Flexibility in location and connectivity. Kossek and Michel (2011) posit that flexibility in location, also known as telework or flexplace, permits employees to perform their work duties away from the main worksite, communicating with the organization and clients electronically. Valenduc and Vendramin (2001) highlight forms of telework arrangements to include;

i. Home-based telework – here employees are permitted to work from home (Kotey & Sharma, 2016)

ii. Satellite offices or neighbourhood work centers - in which several employees work from a single location, away from the main worksite, that is convenient for employees and/or customers.

iii. Remote work, typically quite far from the main worksite

iv. Hoteling, in which employers assign office space on an as-needed basis to employees who frequently work offsite.

3. Flexibility in amount of work includes part-time, reduced-load work and job-sharing.

i. part-time work - involves employees agreeing to work fewer hours weekly than the standard workweek (Zeytinoglu, Cooke, & Mann, 2009).

ii. Reduced-load work - is defined by Lee, MacDermid and Buck (2000) as working less than what is expected of a standard full-time position, with commensurate reduction in pay.

iii. job-sharing– this involves splitting work between two employees in such a way that their joint weekly work hours equate the standard week working hours of one employee (Kottery & Sharma, 2016).

4. Flexibility in work continuity and time off includes leaves and sabbaticals, vacation and sick time, comp time and career flexibility. Leave policies are basically the total number of hours/days that an employee is given consent to be away from his job position without consequences. Organizations usually pay for the time off and employees can make requests for leaves for reasons such as military service, educational or family activities, travel or helping with a family business at the particular time they want to be off work. Employers support leaves so that their employees can acquire improved skills as well as come back to work refreshed and energized. Some forms of leaves are explained more below;

(a) Parental Leave: This is an official permission given by organisations to employees that have child care duties to perform especially women. Women are normally allowed to have twelve weeks leave with half pay but the welfares are more substantial with fully paid maternity leave.

(b) Career's leave: Career's leave is the permission that is official in nature and allows employee to be away from work either to take care of an immediate family or someone injured.

(c) Emergency Leave: is given to employee to enable them deal with unplanned and somewhat unusual disruptive circumstances such as burglary at home.

(d) Medical and paid family leave: This according to Oludayo, Gberevbie and Popoola (2015) is the formal leave of absence given to employees to enable them take care of dependent care issues or concerns related to their health.

(e) Sick leave: Sick leave to Ogueyungbo, Akinnusi, Igbinoba, Salau, Olokundun, and Falola (2019) is the official leave given to an employee to take time off from work to attend to their health needs without losing their pay.

(f) Study leave: An employee going through a study course that is approved by the employer is given a study leave. Employee are equally given training leave for both individual and organizational development.

Oludayo, Falola, Ahaka and Fatogun (2018) categorized flexible work arrangements in Nigeria into two - formal and informal support policies.

The formal support policies include time policies, dependent care initiatives and leave policies.

- Time policies: these include flexi-time, telecommuting, compressed work week, overtime, shift and part-time work, moon-lighting (here organizations agree to pay a bonus to an employee that offers to take up a second job in the same organization (Osinbajo, Falola, Akinbode&Adeniji, 2015) and subcontracting or outsourcing (the use of proficient professionals as contract workers who are mostly able to accomplish a given task within the stipulated period of time).

- Dependent care initiatives are those policies provided by employer to reduce work and family conflict as well as give employees that have care giving roles the opportunity to concentrate on the care giving activities. They include off-site child care, on- site child care and elder care initiatives.

A). On-site child care: establishment of on-site child-care facilities like schools and day care centers within the organization's premises mainly for the children and wards of employees (Austin-Egole, 2019).

B). Off-site child care: organizations provide these supports services by subsidizing child care service to their employee.

C). Elder care initiatives: Organization offer assistance to employee by providing referral services as well as subsidizing the cost of employing elder care-giver to employee with elders to care for. According to Oludayo et al (2015) these initiatives aid employees in accessing quality and safe dependent care services while concentrating on their jobs without distractions resulting in improved organizational outcomes delivery.

- Leave policies from Oludayo et al (2015)'s perspective includes maternity vacations, parental leave, paid family & medical leaves, and sabbatical leave

Informal support policies are crucial variables that ensure that there is link between work and non-work responsibilities and relate to the wider concept of organizational culture. To Oludayo, et al (2015), informal support in organizations can be looked at from the general notion of social support which revitalizes employees' perception of physical and emotional comfort and care from employers, co-workers and others. The quality of the of flexible initiatives notwithstanding, its impact will not be felt effectively if it is not supported by the culture of the organization. These informal support policies are in the forms of organizational support, managerial support and co-worker support.

Organizational support is very crucial for successful implementation of flexible work arrangement which must be imbedded in organizational structure, starting from the right job description and work policies. For managerial support, a supportive manager is an important part of the informal support received by the employee (Clark, 2001). Employee's idea of organizational support is deduced from the favorable and/or unfavorable attitude of their managers towards them and this influences productivity rates such as job satisfaction, retention and employee commitment (Rhoades & Eisenberger 2002). Co-worker support according to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) involves communication that relates to both positive and negative issues at work as well as nonwork issues. This communication helps decrease frustration and depression amongst employees.

In the Nigerian employment context, Ogueyungbo, et al (2019) posit that the term flexible work arrangements integrate a wide range of both formal and informal workplace practices designed to meet the life desires for diversity of employees. The growth in popularity of the flexible work arrangements trend can be attributable to changes in the workforce demographics and increasing demands for greater work-life balance by employee.

## **2.2. Workforce Demographics**

The diverse workforce demographics of today's employees captures a multi-generational workforce which includes the traditionalists, baby boomers and millennials (Ogueyungbo, et al (2019) considered as global generations by Catalyst (2021). Global generations include Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Millennials (1981-1996), Generation Z (After 1996). The expanding youth populations in some parts of the world and ageing populations in others may place pressure on labour markets. For instance, while the Pew Research Center (2018) declares the Millennials as the largest generation in the US labor force in 2016, International Labour Organization (2020) asserts that almost 21% of the world's working-age population is made up of people between the ages of 15 and 24. Millennial generation grew up with technology and have the ability to multitask than the older generations. Being very versatile with modern technological devices, they can effortlessly switch between numerous devices at once and they can still learn significantly while paying attention to other activities. Steinberg (2012) posits that millennials are known to switch attention between media (such as tablets, television, smart phones and laptops) twenty-seven times per hour on average, sixty percent more than traditionalist and baby boomers in the organization who happen to be of the older generations.

Labour markets have equally evolved to include social groups that were previously left out, most notably women. The demographics of today's employees are also changing with women making up nearly half of the labor force. (National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (2017). Wokoma (2013) avers that the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century changed the role of women, from being regarded as only home makers with the principal role of taking care of the homes, bearing and raising children with no significant economic

contribution to both the society and family at large to becoming members of the industrial society by joining paid employment.

### **2.3. COVID-19 pandemic in brief**

COVID-19 is caused by the virus SARS-COV2 discovered in the city of Wuhan, China in December in 2019 (WHO, 2020). The disease can spread from person to person when droplets released by an infected person through coughing, talking or sneezing touches the eyes, nose, mouth on objects (Austin-Egole&Iheriohanma, 2021).WHO (2020) highlights some common symptoms of COVID-19 to include fever,fatigue, respiratory symptoms such as sore throat, cough and shortness of breath, loss of taste and/or smell,skin rashes and in very severe cases, pneumonia or organ failure and even death. Despite, the availability of vaccines against the virus such as the Oxford AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine and PFIZER Johnson & Johnson vaccine more infections are still being reported globally from the virus. This is attributable to the emergence of different variants of the virus especially theDelta variant which is not onlyhighly contagious but about twice as contagious as previous variants, has increased transmissibility and causes a severe form of the disease(UNICEF, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has causedinstability and unprecedented dramatic changes with implications on countries and organizations globally. For instance, OECD (2020), posits that private investment are likely to decline due to the high degree of economic uncertainty, contraction of economic output, and binding liquidity constraints resulting from theCOVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, Gigauri (2020) noted acceleration of the digitalisation processes as an economic effect of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic can be said to have resulted in not only the suspension and re-organization of a lot of economic and employment activities worldwide (including recreation, manufacturing and education)but has equally weathered away boundaries between work at work and work at home making it very important for a working arrangement that will help curb all the resultant conflicting outcomes be imbibed.

### **2.4. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)**

Information and Communication Technologies ICT have contributed strongly to the development of the workplace (Murray &Rostis, 2007). The growth in information and communication technologies (ICT) use in the workplace according to OECD Employment Outlook (2019) provides a clear indication of how quickly new technologies permeate the workplace. Some authors (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2011; Mokyr, Vickers and Ziebarth, 2015) have argued that the speed and intensity of technological progress is increasing and that the new wave of transformation may have more turbulent effects for workers. The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (2017) posits that ICT seems to be eradicating the boundary between other arenas of life and work forged by the combination of technologies, social understandings, and institutions that marked the mid-20th century. ICT not only affects the nature of work and the labor market, it equally reshapes

organizations by changing internal and geographical divisions of labor. With the emergence of new work patterns, information and communications technology makes the workplace flexible, freeing employees from specific work locations. The gradual but transformative improvements in computer and communication technology has equally reduced the need for geographic proximity, by enabling a more refined division of labor, particularly in the area of outsourcing, helping firms to easier offshore/outsource numerous stages of production to parts of the world where labor is cheaper hence they could be performed more cheaply.

ICT has equally created teamwork through interaction via technological means thus removing all barriers created by distance and enabled the rise of distributed teams who help firms to take advantage of pockets of expertise regardless of their location hence ensuring the availability of an employee to work on any project literally 24/7 (Fiore, Salas, Cuevas & Bowers (2003). Aneesh (2006) avers that variations of novel technologies have not only changed the way work is performed but have equally impacted on the roles that workers play in a firm's division of labor, as well as altered the structure of organizations. Technological developments can thus be said to at least indirectly shape how people experience the place of work in their lives.

The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (2017) highlights four fronts where computerized information and communication technologies has seemingly affected workers' lives: (1) the gradual erosion of the boundaries between work and other spheres of life, especially the family; (2) the use of computer systems to monitor workers' performance, with potential intrusion on the workers' privacy; (3) the potential to displace the physical workplace as a primary locus of social identity and sociality; and (4) shifts in the labor market that could help confound gender stereotypes.

ICT in the forms of teleconferencing systems, e-mail, and the use of the Web as a work tool, has made it much easier now for work to spill over into workers' family life. The fact notwithstanding that these developments, often maximize a worker's temporal freedom and flexibility by allowing them the freedom to work from anywhere at any time, there is considerable evidence that such flexibility has resulted in the blurring of the boundaries between work and other aspects of life.

## **2.5 Globalization**

The world has witnessed tremendous changes since the 1980s which has resulted in the increasing rate at which world economies and societies are coming together to become an integrated and interconnected whole (Austin-Egole, Wokoma, & Iheriohanma, (2014). Iheriohanma (2008) sees globalization as both a phenomenon and a process which sees the world as being linked by economic interdependence, political and socio-cultural relations through the bridging of the factors of geographic distance in the establishment and sustenance of free border crossing thereby eroding national boundaries. Globalization has become a major force for increased participation of men and women in the labor force. As globalization increases, the number of workforce also multiplied with a sparing increase in attrition, marital

instability and divorce of women specifically. This eventually call for the need and implementation of work flexible patterns that accommodate workforce differences.

## **2.6 Work-life balance**

Austin-Egole (2019) asserts that work-life balance is basically a novel concept which denotes a condition of equilibrium where a person's work demand equates that of his personal life. To Muchiti and Gachunga (2015), work-life balance is summarily a satisfactory level of involvement or fit between the multiple roles in a person's life based on the premise that paid work and personal life shouldn't be competing rather they should be more like complementary elements of life. Work-life balance involves the study of people's ability to manage the multifaceted demands of life simultaneously. The concept portrays the ability to satisfy fundamental domains of life such as work and family. Delecta (2011) posits that the demands of work domain of life included the hours spent working, the intensity of the work being done and the proportion of working hours actually spent in work while family demands as the roles of people as father, mother, wife etc, family commitments like children upbringing, taking care of the elderly family members and related house chores etc. If more hours were taken from hours spent at home and vice versa it results in work-life imbalance which may possibly lead to both fatigue and anxiety and could cause some physiological impact that will have a negative effect on family or work domain of life.

## **3. Empirical Review**

Recent survey trends globally show widespread support for and use of technologies that allow for more enabled flexibility in work locations. One such survey conducted by a flexible workspace company known as International Workplace Group (IPG) of over 15,000 professionals around 80 countries showed that many companies have recognized that employees prefer workplace flexibility. According to the survey (International Workplace Group (2019) results 84% of Australian companies have embraced workspace flexibility as an employee retaining tool, 80% of German companies have either already imbibed workspace flexibility or have intensions of implementing flexibility while 82% of US companies use workspace flexibility as a tool for improving work-life balance. in another survey, more than 90% of the over 1000 respondents who took part in the 2019 Staples Workplace Survey indicated that work-related flexibility would increase their employees' morale. (KRC Research (2019).

Flexibility has equally been found to be connected to productivity in other recent research. For instance, 87% of Argentinian business people considered their companies to be more productive on account of the flexibility in working and 45% reported that their businesses were over 40% more productive. Globally, 85% of employees believe that they are more productive due to their workplace flexibility and 65% of respondents believe that organizations with workspace flexibility are more productive than other less flexible organizations. During the pandemic, 97% of North American employees and 88% of global employees who worked in offices were working from home more than once a week and about 70% of employees reported being satisfied working in both places and that they believed they had the tools to perform efficiently working from home. These perceptions about

performance appear to be corroborated by managers, 70% of whom indicated in the first work-from-home survey done during COVID-19 that working remotely has had the same impact or has improved team performance on average. Kamouri, & Lister (2020). Evidence from these empirical researches attest to the efficacy of flexible working arrangements in unstable times like pandemics.

#### **4. Theoretical Framework: Self Determination Theory (SDT)**

Self-determination is a theory of psychology that emerged from the work of psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan and refers to an individual's ability to not only make choices but to equally manage their own life. Ryan and Deci (2000) propose that people prefer having the feeling of control over their actions so much so that anything that will make an earlier relished task seem more like an obligation than a freely chosen activity will erode motivation. Self - determination theory also proposes that in addition to being driven by a need for autonomy (the need for people to feel in control of their own behaviors and goals) such as part time working and freelancing, people equally seek ways to achieve competence (gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills) as well as have positive connections or relatedness to others (the need to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people (Cherry, 2021). Cherry (2021) asserts that the first notion of self-determination theory is that people are actively directed toward growth and gaining expertise over challenges and taking in new experiences are crucial for developing a well-integrated sense of self. The self-determination theory has its major connotation relating to intrinsic rewards gotten out of work – basically the feeling of fulfilment an employee gets as a result of engaging in the work one loves to do. Bono and Judge (2003) aver that working towards organizational goals for intrinsic reasons make employees usually more satisfied with their jobs and according to Austin-Egole, Iheriohanmaand Nwokorie (2020), perform better because they feel like they are better fitted into their organization. This is in agreement with Cherry (2021) view that in the workplace, people who feel that they are able to have a positive effect at work tend to feel more engaged and motivated. As Berkery, Morley, Tiernan, Purtill, and Parry (2017) point out, it is possible that employees will increase their efforts if their chosen flexible arrangements help them manage their work-life balance by reducing levels of stress, exhaustion and/or burnout. Furthermore, Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe (2004) opine that employees are likely to be motivated by their work and committed to the employers if they feel that what they do is within their control and as a result of free choice. SDT was selected as a conceptual framework because it is not only an empirically-validated approach, it is one of the contemporary theories that represents the current state of thinking in explaining employee motivation, behaviour change and wellbeing over time (Ryan, Patrick, Deci, and Williams, (2008); Peters, Calvo and Ryan, (2018), it equally validates the assertion that behaviour change is much more effective and sustainable when people are autonomously motivated (Ng, Ntoumanis, Thøgersen-Ntoumani, Deci, Ryan, Duda, and Williams, (2012). The employment relations in present unstable times occasioned by not only the COVID-19 pandemic but also the effects of globalization and technological advancement requires adherence to policies and practices that allows employees to have a degree of control over

several measures needed for not only their personal career growth but also the protection of the society as a whole as well as for maintaining/sustaining businesses and the economies of organisations. Therefore, knowledge of the efficacy of employees' perceived higher level of autonomy (the possibility of chosen flexible arrangements), helps organizations to sustain increased productivity during this unstable times.

### **5. Flexible Working Arrangements (FWAs) in Unstable Times: Discussion and Analysis**

Widespread anxiety driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, globalisation and technological changes cum advancements, has resulted in numerous unforeseen circumstances such as the disappearance of some jobs and tasks and emergence of others. These significant jobs transformation witnessed are notably aided by technology. While ILO (2020) posits that the unforeseen circumstances require firms to restructure for business continuity, Delali, Yaa, & Cedric (2020) seemingly in agreement avers that dynamism is equally necessary in dealing with these circumstances considering the growing concern in all sectors across the world. To Carnevale and Hatak (2020) organisations need to respond and adapt to the alterations and manage the workforce accordingly by adopting technologies that are platform-based as well as developing novel business models (Sheppard, 2020). There is need therefore for management structures to be flexible rather than rigid in order to be adaptable to these changing unstable environment and circumstances.

The immense benefits accruable from flexible work arrangements makes it the better option in current employment context to aid organizations in navigating through the unstable vague present and unforeseeable future. Organizations in the United States have long recognized flexible work arrangements (FWAs) as a tool for attracting talented and retaining competent employees across various sectors (Allen & Shockley, 2015). Working when and where one prefers has become an option for more people with the increased access to work through digital devices and internet connections. Such arrangements accord the employees the opportunity for sustained improved work relationships since they are able to not only make choices but to equally manage their own life. They may be responsible for providing a particular output but be free to select how to arrive at that outcome and this is in line with the tenets of the self-determination theory STD which postulates that people prefer having the feeling of control over their actions.

Significant changes have been brought into workplace demography as a result of globalization. Flexible work arrangements make it possible for organizations to adapt to current numerous diverse changes evident in work force demographics (Iheriohanma and Austin-Egole (2020). Evident from literature ((Wokoma, 2013; Sumita, 2007) show that more women are joining the world of workforce and that the number of mothers in the work force with children is expected to rise. The implication is that contemporary workforce increasingly comprises of women who need to strike a balance between family and work. Flexible work arrangements allow these women to maintain a healthy work-life balance through such policies as on-site child-care facilities, telecommuting opportunities, and even on-site sleeping quarters for the employees and their families (Hacker and Doolen, 2003). Furthermore, with the involvement of multitasking millennial generation that grew up with

technology in the workplace, there is need for FWAs which will not only enable them to work free of supervision and in their own space (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010) which is in line with the Self Determination Theory (SDT) but will also enable the organization retain them in their workforce.

Outsourcing jobs has been known to significantly reduce production costs in the manufacturing sector, translating into cheaper prices for consumers. This is a win-win situation for both the organization, the employees and the consumers. American companies for instance have sent manufacturing work overseas to places with significantly lower wages, such as China, Vietnam, India, and the Philippines for decades now. Communication between headquarters and remote locations is facilitated through improved ICT.

WHO (2020)'s recommendation that people maintain at least one-meter distance from each other within this pandemic period to ensure observance of physical distancing and other preventive safeguards applies not only to workspaces, assigned and/or unassigned seating, as well as conference rooms, café tables and elevator capacity. This, according to Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma, and Iheanacho (2021) will result in structural changes by the organization to enable her accommodate this latest directive for safe physical distancing and will inevitably affect the overall office space requirements resulting in organizations incurring more facilities and occupancy costs. Embracing the different forms flexible work arrangements will save organizations the costs that would have been incurred from the expansive corporate square footage.

It is pertinent to point out at this juncture that notwithstanding the evident numerous benefits of flexible work arrangement as a work option for both government and private owned firms across the globe, there is very limited evidence on the implementation of such practices in Nigeria's context (Ojo, Salau & Falola, 2014). Flexible work arrangements according to Wokoma (2013) are alien to organizations in Nigeria hence there is need for restructuring of organizational design to reflect this fad spread by globalization.

## **Conclusion**

The interruption of workflow in current unstable times by COVID-19 pandemic, globalisation and technological changes has challenged organizations with decisions on dealing with service exigencies. It also caused an acceleration of workplace flexibility that were already underway involving the migration of work to online or virtual environments. Given the current work force demographics and the accelerated digitalisation processes enabled by technological advancement and the evolving functionality of smartphones, there is no reason to believe that flexible working arrangement is an employment context that should be embraced by any organizations that wants to remain productive, relevant and still in competition with others in its area of expertise.

## Recommendation

1. There is need immediate policy action to implement flexible working arrangement among organizations in Nigeria. This recommendation is based on the lack of evidence of its implementation from the few research conducted on the subject matter in the Nigerian context.
2. It is recommended that an empirical field research be conducted to ascertain the efficacy of flexible working arrangement (FWAs) in the Nigerian work environment.

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