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Enhancing Millennial Workforce Motivation Through Flexible Work Arrangements: A Systematic Review

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Flexible Work Arrangements, Millennial Motivation, Remote Work, Self-Determination Theory, Work-Life Balance.

This systematic review investigates whether flexible work arrangements (FWAs) serve as effective motivators for millennial employees in contemporary workplaces. Millennials, born between 1980 and 2000, now constitute a significant proportion of the global workforce and exhibit distinct work preferences, particularly regarding autonomy, flexibility and work-life balance. The review is anchored in the Self-Determination Theory and Generational Theory to understand the psychological and generational underpinnings of motivation among millennials. The study employed a qualitative design, utilising systematic review methodology to analyse peer-reviewed articles. These studies were selected from Google Scholar using inclusion criteria that prioritised research-based articles addressing both flexible work arrangements and millennial motivation. Findings consistently demonstrated a positive impact between FWAs such as flex-time, remote working, telecommuting, compressed hours and job sharing and heightened motivation among millennials. Millennials were found to value flexibility in determining where, when and how they work, which in turn fostered a greater sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness to the core tenets of Self-Determination Theory. The study revealed that while flexible work arrangements are strong motivational factors, other elements like compensation, career development, recognition and inclusive organisational culture also contribute to overall engagement and retention of millennials. Based on the findings, the study recommends that organisations should institutionalise clear, inclusive and well-communicated FWA policies, invest in supportive technology infrastructure and train managers in remote supervision and trust-based leadership. Such strategic implementations will not only boost millennial motivation but also contribute to sustainable organisational performance in the digital era.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, the composition of the workforce is undergoing a significant demographic transition, marked by the retirement of the Baby Boomer generation and a growing influx of Millennials. Millennials, often referred to as Generation Y, typically include individuals born between 1980 and 2000, although some scholars and institutions define the range as 1981 to 1996. According to Merriam-Webster, Millennials are those born in the early 1980s to the mid-1990s. This generation has garnered mixed perceptions; some critics label them as entitled or prone to frequent job-hopping, while others praise their self-confidence, digital fluency and entrepreneurial drive (Bilal, 2018).

One emerging organisational response to the evolving preferences of this cohort is the adoption of Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs). FWAs refer to employment practices that offer employees greater control over when, where and how they perform their work duties (Sarbu, 2014, as cited in Rozlan & Subramaniam, 2021). Traditionally, work structures required physical presence in fixed locations during standardised hours. However, changes in technology, family dynamics and employee expectations have propelled a shift toward more adaptive models such as flextime, remote work (telecommuting), compressed workweeks, job sharing and staggered schedules

(TalentCorp, 2018; Himawan et al., 2020, as cited in Rozlan & Subramaniam, 2021).

Empirical studies highlight the benefits of FWAs in promoting work-life balance, reducing stress, and enhancing productivity. For instance, flextime allows employees to adjust their start and end times, accommodating personal responsibilities like childcare (International Labor Organization, 2004). Telecommuting, increasingly facilitated by advances in information and communication technology, enables employees to perform their duties from home, thereby minimising commuting time and providing flexibility during emergencies (ILO, 2004).

Millennials place high value on autonomy, flexibility and meaningful work attributes often embedded in FWA policies. Research suggests that FWAs can mitigate the conflict between professional and personal responsibilities, thereby serving as motivational tools for employees (MacCrea, Boreham & Ferguson, 2011; Fatima & Sahibzada, 2012).

The concept of motivation, derived from the Latin word '*movere*' ("to move"), refers to internal psychological processes that initiate, direct and sustain goal-oriented behaviours (Kretiner, 1998; Mitchell, 1982, as cited in Sunil, 2004). Robbins (1993, as cited in Sunil, 2004) defines motivation as the individual's willingness to exert considerable

effort toward organisational goals, contingent upon the capacity of that effort to satisfy personal needs. These needs, once unmet, create internal tension that drives behaviour aimed at achieving satisfaction and restoring equilibrium.

Given these dynamics, this study seeks to explore how flexible work arrangements influence the motivation of millennial employees. Understanding this relationship is critical for organisations seeking to attract, engage and retain talent in an increasingly competitive and generationally diverse labour market.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Employee motivation has long been a central theme in organisational behaviour and human resource management, explained through a variety of theoretical models. Among the most cited are Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), McClelland's Need Theory (McClelland, 1961), Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959), Vroom's Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), and the more recent Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1985). While these traditional theories have made significant contributions to understanding motivation in the workplace (Robbins, 1993; Mitchell, 1982; Steers, 1983, as cited in Sunil, 2004), their relevance to millennial employees who display unique generational attributes such as a desire for autonomy, purpose and flexibility is increasingly being questioned (Ramadan, 2014; Kelan, 2014).

Maslow's theory (1943), as cited in Sunil (2004), posits that individuals are motivated to satisfy five hierarchical needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualisation. However, this model does not adequately address emerging workplace dynamics such as autonomy and flexibility, nor does it reflect the fluid, non-linear motivations exhibited by millennials. Similarly, McClelland's Need Theory (1961), focusing on achievement, power and affiliation, does not sufficiently capture motivations stemming from

non-traditional work structures such as remote work or flextime.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959), which distinguishes between intrinsic motivators and extrinsic hygiene factors, provides insight into job satisfaction but fails to consider the growing demand for work-life balance and digital flexibility as key priorities for millennials. Likewise, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, which links motivation to the expectation of performance-related outcomes, lacks specificity regarding how workplace structures, for example, flexible work models, influence these expectations among younger cohorts.

In contrast, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), offers a more relevant and contemporary lens through which to understand millennial motivation. SDT emphasises three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. When these needs are fulfilled, employees are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, psychological well-being and sustained engagement (CIPD, 2021; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Autonomy, the ability to determine when, where and how work is completed, is particularly significant in the context of flexible work arrangements (FWAs). Competence reflects the need to feel effective and successful at work, while relatedness pertains to the desire to feel connected and valued within a social context (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting, flextime and hybrid work models, satisfy the autonomy need by giving millennials the freedom to self-direct their work (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005). These arrangements also support competence by allowing employees to align work with their peak productivity times and relatedness by enabling a healthier balance between personal and professional relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), when these three psychological needs autonomy, competence and relatedness are fulfilled, individuals experience greater intrinsic

motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Leaders who foster environments that meet these needs are more likely to cultivate high-quality, self-endorsed motivation, which in turn enhances job performance, engagement and retention (Gagné et al., 2010; Pink, 2009; Manganelli et al., 2018).

To further contextualise millennial work behaviour, this study also draws on the Generational Theory proposed by Strauss and Howe (1991). This theory conceptualises generations as socio-historical cohorts shaped by major events and characterised by distinct value systems. According to Strauss and Howe, millennials, those born approximately between 1980 and 1995, are a dominant generation marked by digital fluency, social awareness and a preference for flexible, purpose-driven work environments (Kelan, 2014). This theoretical lens helps explain why millennials prioritise autonomy, technological integration and work-life balance over traditional markers of career success.

Despite criticisms of generational stereotyping, the theory offers practical insights into the collective preferences and workplace expectations of millennial employees. As such, integrating Self-Determination Theory with Generational Theory provides a robust theoretical foundation for analysing the motivational impacts of flexible work arrangements on millennial workers.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative and descriptive research design using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to investigate how Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) influence the motivation of millennial employees. The SLR methodology was chosen due to its methodological rigour, transparency, and replicability in identifying, evaluating, and synthesising existing scholarly evidence. As defined by Liberati et al. (2009, as cited in Snyder, 2019), a systematic review is a structured process designed to gather and analyse all relevant empirical studies that address a

specific research question, while minimising bias and increasing the validity and reliability of findings. The SLR framework adopted in this study adhered to these principles.

The primary objective was to consolidate empirical and theoretical insights regarding the relationship between FWAs and motivation among millennials, a generational cohort generally defined as individuals born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s. This population is recognised for valuing autonomy, work-life balance, and purposeful engagement in the workplace, factors that align closely with the principles of flexible work models.

Data were collected from secondary sources, primarily peer-reviewed academic articles and policy-based publications that focus on workplace flexibility and generational motivation. The search was conducted through scholarly databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate and Emerald Insight. Search strings and keywords included: Flexible work arrangements, millennials, employee motivation, telecommuting and remote work, work-life balance and generational workforce preferences.

The selection process followed a three-phase screening procedure to ensure academic rigor and thematic relevance: Studies were initially retrieved using the defined search terms aligned with the study's objectives, abstracts and full texts were reviewed to determine inclusion based on thematic relevance to flexible work and millennial motivation and final selection was limited to empirical or theory-based research published in English, that focused on millennial employees and directly addressed FWAs and motivation.

Each selected study was critically appraised based on: Research design and methodology, theoretical framework, type(s) of flexible work arrangements discussed, for example, telecommuting, flextime, and compressed work weeks and key findings related to motivation and organisational outcomes. Studies were excluded if they lacked empirical

grounding, did not focus on millennials, or did not explore motivational outcomes of FWAs.

The analysis employed descriptive and thematic synthesis techniques. First, descriptive summaries of each study were compiled, capturing key variables such as FWA types, motivational drivers, and theoretical perspectives. Subsequently, thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns and recurring concepts across the studies. These themes included: Autonomy and self-direction, work-life balance, technological facilitation, for example, remote work tools, organisational culture and trust and recognition, development, and purpose-driven work.

This process enabled the categorisation of studies based on their contributions to understanding how FWAs influence intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among millennials.

Additionally, other non-FWA motivators such as career advancement, inclusive leadership, psychological safety and organisational branding emerged across the literature and were synthesised to provide a holistic view of what drives millennial engagement and performance.

The review was conducted with strict adherence to academic integrity principles. Proper citation and acknowledgement of intellectual contributions were ensured throughout the process. No primary data involving human participants were collected; hence, no ethical clearance was required beyond scholarly standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study employed a systematic literature review to critically examine the relationship between Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) and the motivation of millennial employees. Drawing on a curated body of empirical and theoretical literature, the analysis focused on identifying how various forms of FWAs, such as telecommuting, flextime and hybrid work models, align with the values and preferences of the millennial workforce.

A total of eleven peer-reviewed studies and institutional reports met the predefined inclusion criteria. These sources were analysed across four key dimensions, which include the Theoretical frameworks underpinning the studies, the research methodologies applied, the influence of FWAs on millennial motivation, and other relevant motivational drivers beyond flexible work.

The use of a systematic review methodology allowed for a rigorous, transparent, and unbiased synthesis of evidence. It ensured the inclusion of methodologically sound studies while offering a structured lens through which recurring themes, knowledge gaps, and contextual variations could be analysed.

This Review Yielded Several Critical Insights:

FWAs were consistently identified as significant drivers of millennial motivation, with flex-time and telecommuting emerging as the most frequently cited forms.

Across the literature, millennials expressed a strong preference for autonomy, purposeful work, and balanced lifestyles needs which FWAs directly support.

While traditional motivational theories, for example, Maslow, Herzberg, and McClelland, were found to be less applicable to millennial preferences, more contemporary models, such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Generational Theory, provided a more relevant explanatory framework.

Additional motivational factors such as career advancement, meaningful work, inclusive leadership, and psychological safety were also noted to enhance millennial engagement, either independently or in conjunction with FWAs.

The systematic approach adopted in this study not only facilitated thematic coherence across diverse findings but also contributed to theory development and practical recommendations for modern

organisational contexts. The results affirm that organisations seeking to attract, retain, and motivate millennial talent must adapt to evolving generational expectations by embedding flexibility, autonomy, and employee-centred practices into their workplace models.

Flexible Work Arrangements as Motivators of Millennial Employees

Across all eleven studies included in this systematic review, flexible work arrangements (FWAs) were consistently identified as significant drivers of motivation for millennial employees. Millennials, typically defined as individuals born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Pew Research Center, 2019), demonstrate distinct workplace preferences compared to previous generations. They prioritise autonomy, meaningful work, work-life balance, and flexibility over traditional motivators such as hierarchical advancement or monetary compensation (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Statnickè, 2016).

FWAs directly respond to these generational needs by offering employees greater control over their schedules, work environments and methods of task execution. The key forms of FWAs identified as most impactful include:

Flexible working hours (Flex-time): This arrangement allows employees to determine their daily start and end times within a predefined range, thereby supporting individualised work rhythms and reducing work-life conflict. Flex-time has been shown to enhance job satisfaction, reduce stress, and improve motivation, particularly for workers managing family and personal obligations (International Labor Organization, 2004; McNall et al., 2010).

Telecommuting/Remote Work: Enabled by advancements in information and communication technologies, telecommuting allows employees to perform work duties from home or alternative locations. This flexibility is especially appealing to millennials, who value outcome-based performance

and technological integration in their professional lives (Smith et al., 2018; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Studies show that telework increases productivity and job engagement while reducing commuting stress and absenteeism (Kurkland & Bailey, 1999; Forsberg & Junghagen, 2018).

Compressed Work Weeks: This model permits employees to complete the standard number of weekly hours over fewer days, for example, four 10-hour days, granting them longer weekends and more time for personal activities. Research suggests that such schedules can boost employee morale, reduce fatigue, and support millennial priorities around work-life harmony (Griffin & Moorhead, 2013).

Job Sharing and Part-time Work: These arrangements provide customised work options that cater to individual lifestyle needs. They are particularly valued by millennials seeking non-traditional career paths, such as those pursuing parallel careers, education, or caregiving responsibilities (Darby et al., 2019; Udayangi & Perera, 2022).

Overall, the literature clearly demonstrates that FWAs are not merely perks but essential components of a motivational strategy tailored to the millennial workforce. By aligning with millennials' generational values and expectations, FWAs contribute directly to improved job satisfaction, retention, and organisational commitment.

Specific Findings on Flexible Work Arrangements and Millennial Motivation

The systematic review of selected studies revealed a strong, consistent correlation between flexible work arrangements (FWAs) and increased motivation among millennial employees. Various empirical findings across multiple contexts reinforced the central argument that flexibility in the workplace is not merely a preference but a critical motivational factor for this generational cohort.

Chala et al. (2022) and Udayangi and Perera (2022) highlighted the importance of non-monetary motivators, such as flexible work schedules, psychological well-being support, and high-quality communication structures. These were found to be pivotal in enhancing millennial engagement and motivation, especially in the evolving post-pandemic work environment.

Cates (2014), as cited in Spurlock (2016), observed that millennials often prioritise adjustable working hours and personalised benefits such as support for education or caregiving over traditional financial compensation. This shift indicates a generational value system centred more on autonomy and life integration than on salary alone.

McNall et al. (2010) and Rahman Ahmad et al. (2013) provided quantitative evidence that flexible scheduling arrangements significantly contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction, employee engagement and morale, particularly among workers managing caregiving responsibilities. These findings underscore the importance of FWAs in supporting both productivity and well-being.

Simmons (2008) found that millennials often prefer late-start work schedules over traditional early shifts, emphasising the importance of temporal autonomy. This aligns with broader research suggesting that millennials value the ability to tailor their work schedules around personal energy levels and commitments.

The role of telecommuting as a motivational factor was particularly emphasised by Forsberg and Junghagen (2018), who found that employees with access to remote work options reported higher motivation and job satisfaction, while those without such access experienced lower levels of engagement. This supports the growing consensus that location flexibility is integral to millennial motivation.

Moreover, Thompson and Gregory (2012) confirmed that millennials are inclined to blur the

boundaries between work and personal life, favouring work arrangements that prioritise outputs and results rather than traditional metrics like presenteeism or rigid office hours. Their preference for a results-oriented culture over hierarchical control structures reflects a broader generational shift in work expectations.

Collectively, these findings provide robust support for the hypothesis that flexible work arrangements enhance intrinsic motivation, organisational commitment and employee retention among millennial workers. The near-universal endorsement of FWAs across reviewed studies underscores their critical role in shaping modern human resource practices tailored to generational needs.

Other Motivational Factors Identified

While flexible work arrangements emerged as the most dominant motivational factor among millennial employees, the systematic review also uncovered a variety of additional elements that contribute significantly to millennial motivation and engagement in the workplace. One of the most frequently cited motivators was competitive compensation and high salaries, which, although not the primary driver for most millennials, remain essential for perceived fairness and value (Saragih et al., 2016; Setiyania et al., 2020). In parallel, career development opportunities, such as training, mentorship, and clear promotion pathways, were highlighted as crucial by Saragih et al. (2016) and Bilal (2018), reinforcing millennials' desire for continuous growth and rapid advancement.

Employer branding and organisational culture also play a central role in attracting and retaining millennials, with studies by Setiyania et al. (2020) and Darby et al. (2019) emphasising the importance of alignment between personal values and company identity. Furthermore, millennials were shown to be highly responsive to recognition and transparent communication, as documented by Bilal (2018), who found that regular feedback and an open-door

communication policy contributed positively to employee motivation.

The desire for purpose-driven and meaningful work was another recurrent theme, with Lancaster and Stillman (2003) and Darby et al. (2019) noting that millennials are more engaged when they perceive their work as impactful and aligned with a greater mission. Additionally, autonomy in decision-making, the freedom to organize tasks and work schedules was identified as a key intrinsic motivator (Susanna & Riitta, 2014). Finally psychological safety and overall well-being, including emotional support and mental health resources, were emphasized by Chala et al. (2022) and Udayangi & Perera (2022) as critical to maintaining motivation in increasingly complex and uncertain work environments.

Together, these findings suggest that while flexible work arrangements are a cornerstone of millennial motivation, a holistic and multifaceted approach, one that addresses professional, emotional, and cultural needs, is essential for creating a thriving and committed millennial workforce.

Summary of Key Findings

The systematic review of relevant empirical and theoretical studies yielded several compelling insights regarding the motivation of millennial employees through flexible work arrangements. First and foremost, all the reviewed studies confirmed that flexible work arrangements (FWAs) serve as significant motivators for millennials. Across different contexts and geographies, millennials consistently expressed a strong preference for work models that provide them with greater control over their schedules, locations, and methods of working.

Secondly, the findings revealed that millennials are not primarily driven by financial incentives alone, but rather by a complex interplay of autonomy, flexibility, purpose, and work-life balance. Flex-time and telecommuting emerged as the two most frequently cited and effective types of FWAs,

allowing employees to balance personal responsibilities with professional obligations more seamlessly.

The evidence gathered from these studies aligns strongly with the study's core objective and research question, reinforcing the central argument that FWAs are essential components of modern human resource management strategies. Moreover, the review identified a range of complementary motivational factors, including opportunities for career advancement, regular recognition and feedback, a supportive organisational culture, and access to psychological safety and well-being resources.

Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of adopting a holistic and employee-centric approach to motivation, one that extends beyond salary to include flexibility, personal development, and emotional support. For organisations seeking to attract, retain, and engage millennial talent, implementing well-structured flexible work policies in tandem with other motivational strategies is not only beneficial but increasingly imperative.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings from the systematic review unequivocally support the conclusion that flexible work arrangements (FWAs) have a positive and significant influence on the motivation of millennial employees. Millennials, as a generational cohort, exhibit distinct workplace values characterised by a strong preference for autonomy, flexibility and work-life integration. The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that FWAs, particularly flex-time and telecommuting/remote work, align effectively with these values, making them powerful tools for enhancing motivation, job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

By granting employees greater control over when, where, and how they work, FWAs enable millennials to harmonise their professional responsibilities with personal goals and family

demands. This sense of autonomy and empowerment contributes not only to increased motivation but also to lower absenteeism, higher engagement, and a greater sense of purpose at work.

Furthermore, FWAs were shown to foster a more inclusive, adaptive and responsive work culture, which is essential for attracting and retaining millennial talent in today's dynamic labour market. When combined with other motivational drivers such as opportunities for growth, recognition, meaningful work, and open communication, flexible work models become even more effective in sustaining long-term employee engagement.

In conclusion, organisations that seek to maximise the productivity and retention of millennial employees must prioritise the institutionalisation of flexible work arrangements as a core component of their human resource strategies. Doing so will not only meet the evolving expectations of the workforce but also drive organisational performance through a more motivated and committed millennial workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, which underscore the strong motivational impact of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) on millennial employees, the following recommendations are proposed for organisations aiming to attract, retain, and engage this generational cohort more effectively:

Develop comprehensive and clearly articulated policies on flexible work arrangements. Organisations should formalise FWAs through well-documented policies that outline eligibility criteria, expected outcomes, modes of implementation, for example, flex-time, telecommuting and performance expectations. These policies must be clearly communicated to all employees to ensure transparency, consistency, and equitable access.

Invest in robust technology infrastructure to support remote and flexible work. Reliable digital tools and platforms, for example, video conferencing, project management systems and cloud-based document sharing, are essential to facilitate seamless communication, collaboration, and productivity in flexible work environments. Organisations should prioritise secure and user-friendly technologies that support both individual and team effectiveness.

Train managers to lead and evaluate distributed teams effectively. Managers play a pivotal role in the success of flexible work models. Training should focus on managing remote teams, setting measurable goals, monitoring performance based on outcomes rather than presence, and providing ongoing feedback and support. Emphasis should also be placed on inclusive leadership practices that foster team cohesion across physical boundaries.

Foster a culture of trust, autonomy and accountability. For flexible work arrangements to thrive, organisational culture must evolve to prioritise trust and outcome-based performance. Employees should be empowered to take ownership of their schedules and deliverables, while also being held accountable for results. Creating this balance between autonomy and responsibility is key to sustaining motivation and productivity among millennial workers.

These recommendations, if implemented effectively, will enable organisations to harness the full potential of flexible work as a strategic driver of employee motivation and organisational success, particularly among millennials who value flexibility, purpose, and work-life harmony.

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