

DO GENDER, POSITION, AND ORGANIZATION SHAPE HUMAN RESOURCE FLEXIBILITY?

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Abstract: *Flexibility has been identified as a key practice to cope with uncertainties and enable organizations and its members to adjust with surroundings. Since two decades it has magnetized scholars and change agents and remains the central theme of organizational change process. Since, empirically studies proved the positive association between flexibility firm and performance. Recent trends in flexibility have raised new issues regarding how gender, levels, organizations interacts with individual flexibility at workplace. However, only limited efforts were done to investigate the interaction of employee characteristics with their flexibility. Present study was conducted to respond this view. A sample of 189 managers comprising of all categories (male, female, junior, middle, senior, private and public) were collected by using a five items instrument. Next, factorial 2×3×2 ANOVA was employed and the results indicate that managerial flexibility remains static irrespective of managerial characteristics (Gender, Position/levels and type of organizations).*

Key words: Junior, middle and senior managers, Human resource flexibility, Male and female managers, Private and Public organizations, Indian organizations.

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1. Problem Background

Business has to interact with both in-house and surrounding forces. Frequent economic fluctuations, unpredictable business events, and rapid inventive moves in technology have characterized the existing business environment volatile. These external moves have considerably challenged the organizational competitiveness and sustainability. Besides, these move some other business decisions like expansion, mergers and acquisition, and reengineering support the necessities of transaction. All these factors create pressure on businesses to adapt the shift and restructure their business process. As Verdu'-Jover et al., (2008) recommended organizations to develop new managerial practices and strategies to maintain competitive advantage. Organizational capability to neutralize the environmental changes determines its durable growth. In other words to be effective organizations need to accept and adjust these changes rapidly.

Organization's counter responsiveness to the changes has been termed as flexibility (Mott, 1971; Sanchez, 1995, Volberda, 1996). Sommer (2003, p. 177) has described flexibility as determinant of organizational competitiveness. Complementing with the view Moorman and Miner (1998) advice firms to take a flexible approach to adapt and improvise to achieve objectives. Therefore organizations those craving for effectiveness and competitiveness need to be flexible (Mott, 1971; Verdu'-Jover et al., 2008). Flexibility is a broad concept and concluded "as a managerial task, managerial capabilities that endow the firm with flexibility and; an organizational design task or the changeability of the organization" (Volberda, 1996, p. 361). Therefore, organizations to carry out the challenges of contemporary business settings fundamentally depends on their human resource flexibility or managerial flexibility (Zolin, Kuckertz, and Kautonen, 2011). Further similar to system approach managerial flexibility was considered as subsystem of organizational flexibility (Verdu'-Jover and Go'mez-Gras, 2009).

Flexibility of human resources significantly succeeds the strategic policy implementation during transition period. Moreover flexible people accept and respond in a constructive manner to contingency upshots of environmental and other uncertainties. These all assertions entail the organizations equipped with flexible human resources. Empirically studies significantly proved the positive association between firm performance and flexibility. Though, the predictors of managerial flexibility are still unidentified. Specifically, casual associations that how gender, role occupied, levels and ownership interact with individual flexibility unexplored so far. Present study was conducted in this view and seeks to answer these queries.

2. Human resource flexibility

Researchers (Atkinson, 1985; Atkinson and Gregory, 1986) in the middle of last century termed flexibility as an attempt to neutralize the consequences of environmental contingencies and organizational requirements. Thereafter, flexibility has emerged as an approach to exploit the pragmatic and opportunistic changes through flexible work arrangements. With passage of time flexibility appeared to dissolve the traditional and concrete work philosophy and faint the demarcation between management functions (Dyer, 1998). In literature numerous terms i.e., adaptation capacity, sensibility, elasticity and agility were used interchangeably with flexibility (Verdu´ and Go´mez-Gras, 2009). Seemingly, Sanchez (1995) termed flexibility as a process that reduces the switching cost and time from one resource to next and enable the integration and co-ordination of resources (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). Later on the term human resource flexibility originated from human resource management literature and subsequent scholar (Milliman et al., 1991, p. 325) defines it “as capacity of HRM to facilitate the organization’s ability to adapt effectively and in a timely manner to changing or diverse demands from either its environment or from within the firm itself”. Subsequently, due attention was paid to deeply understand the flexibility and Atkinson (1985) was the first who proposed a flexibility typology as numerical flexibility (matching the number of employees with market demand); functional flexibility (swiftly mobilizing and integrating the available talent within organization i.e., quality control circles, participative management, problem solving teams) and the last one financially flexibility (matching pay with performance i.e., pay for performance, variable pay structure, equitable pay structure etc.). Next, studies (Benach et al., 2002; Hanratty, 2000; Knights and McCabe, 2002) were conducted by adapting Atkinson’s (1985) flexibility typology in varied context and geographies. This typology represents the flexible work arrangements which foster performance and growth (Atkinson and Gregory, 1986). On the other hand, some empirical evidences raise the issues that flexible work arrangement some time negates job satisfaction, employee commitment and loyalty, workplace relations (Davis-Blake et al., 2003; Sheridan and Conway, 2001). These suppositions might have the byproduct of poorly installed transition process as majority of the research purports flexibility as determinants of overall performance.

Employee characteristics and flexibility

There is large body of research which confirms that flexibility practices advance competitiveness (Brewester et al., 1994; Lansbury, 1995; Locke et al., 1995; Mott, 1971; Sommer, 2003; Verdu'-Jover et al., 2008). Since, only limited efforts were done to investigate the interaction of employee characteristics with their flexibility. However, scholars have been continually involving in identifying that how gender (Adekola, 2006; Akintayo, 2010; Hogan et al., 1994; Ivy and Backlund, 2000; Neher, 1997; Reardon, 1995), level of position occupies (Hamlin, 2002), and type of organization (Bao, 2009; Lan & Rainey 1992; McKenna, 2004, Meets, 2007), mediates their work place behavior. Similarly, Blau and Shvydko (2011) explored two level interactions of older employer and young female employer with workplace rigidity, and found considerable variation among their behavior and perception. Considering these view present study aims to explore the interaction between employee characteristic and their flexibility.

3. Research design

Sample characteristics

Present study based on the 189 responses collected from the managers of Indian organizations situated mainly in north region of the country. Due to inherent interest in studying the flexibility according gender wise, position (junior, middle and senior) wise, and type of organization wise; responses from a comprehensive sample comprising of each category mentioned above were collected. The sample consists 60% undergraduate and 40% postgraduate managers. Next, sample comprised of 41% junior managers whereas middle and senior managers contributed 29.5% each. Private sector participation was 60% and public sector shared 40% of sample. Table 1 provides a comprehensive picture of sample demography.

Instrument

Numbers of instruments were available to map flexibility from different point of view as number flexibility, functional flexibility, financial flexibility (Atkinson, 1985). Some other types of flexibility which were considered are operational flexibility, structural flexibility, internal and external flexibility, and manufacturing flexibility. However as the terms indicate theses all type of flexibility are specific and May not be appropriate to map the human resource flexibility. Thus for the purpose of study a five item based instrument was drawn from the work of Mott (1971). Originally these five items has been recommended as measures of flexibility and adaptability. But to the reason that adaptability was also

considered as part of flexibility (Verdu' and Go'mez-Gras, 2009); for this reason in present study these five items were signified as determinant of human resource flexibility. The croanbach alpha for the instrument was 0.87, and signifies its reliability.

4. Results

To pacify the research query whether employee characteristics (gender, position and type of organization) causes their flexibility GLM univariate ANOVA was performed by using PASW 18. Factorial ANOVA was used because it is a technique which examines main effect and interaction simple. Gender (male and female), positions/levels (junior manager, middle manager and senior manager) and organization (private and public) was taken as independent variable of the study whereas managerial flexibility was taken as criterion or outcome variable of the study. Therefore a 2×3×2 ANOVA was referred for the present study.

Results in table 2 reported that main effect for gender was not significant as $F(1, 177) = 0.872, p = 0.35$. Similarly, main effect of level $\{F(2, 177) = 0.946, p = 0.39\}$ and type of organization was not found significant $\{F(1, 177) = 0.682, p = 0.41\}$. Next, the interaction effects of gender*levels $\{F(2, 177) = 0.84, p = 0.43\}$, gender*type of organization $\{F(1, 177) = 2, p = 0.15\}$, and levels*type of organization $\{F(2, 177) = 0.40, p = 0.67\}$ were also not found significant on managerial flexibility.

Table 3 further shows the correlation score for selected variables and only organization and levels was found significantly correlated (0.42, p 0.01).

Further, plots were drawn to see the interaction pattern of independent variables with dependent variable. As figure 1 depicts that junior and middle level private manger flexibility increases from female to male whereas the process is reverse for middle level private managers as female were found more flexible than male. Subsequently, junior private male manager toppled the flexibility but in case of private female middle level managers scored well comparative to their counterparts. Next to this figure 2 explains the pattern between gender and public sector managers. No interaction effect was found between junior and middle public mangers. However female managers of middle and junior were found more flexible than male. Conversely, flexibility for senior level public managers was increases from female to male.

In addition figure 3 and 4 explains the interaction pattern between type of organization levels and female managers. As it shown, that all three levels of female managers exhibit positive movement from private to public sector mangers. Figure 3 supplemented that middle female managers are more flexible than remaining two levels. Additionally figure 4 explains the

same pattern by taking public organization in account and found a cross over interaction. In case of junior level private male managers' flexibility were high than junior level male managers from public organizations. However junior level private managers topped the score and junior level public managers were score at lowered side. Correspondingly, middle male and senior male level private manager scored same and the variation was also not so wide in case of public managers. By plotting the interaction association this study explored the mechanism of employee characteristics with their flexibility.

5. Discussion

To move with flux of time organizations need continuity in change process, equally organizations also require some sort of stability. Considering the view of change management scholars (Atkinson, 1985; Knights and McCabe, 2002; Verdu'- Jover and Go'-mez-Gras, 2008, 2009) identified flexibility as a technique to counter uncertainties. Then, author(s) (Atkinson, 1985; Benach et al., 2002; Hanratty, 2000) differentiate flexibility, focused on antecedents and consequences of flexibility, and correlates flexibility with performance (Verdu'- Jover and Go'-mez-Gras, 2008, 2009) both at individual and organizational levels.

Besides, presents study tried to focus on how managerial characteristics (gender, organization type and levels) shape their flexibility. As some studies have predicted that gender cause variations in workplace behavior (Stringer et al., 2011). Likely, Hatfield (2005) concludes that people are different and they all have different profiles i.e., personality, knowledge, skills, abilities, interests, qualifications and competencies. And these variations might cause variations in their workplace outcomes. Hill et al. (2008) supported this view and reported how workplace flexibility options differ by gender and life stage, and found a curvilinear difference relationship between men and women with workplace flexibility. Managerial post was held appropriate in terms of masculinity as Adekola (2006) and Williams & Warrens (2003) accounted that gender cause variations in managerial performance. However, the empirical findings form present study suggests that gender may not exert influence over managerial flexibility. Maintaining this MacLean (2006) uphold that gender balance at the workplace is showing a marked improvement over time. This notion proposes to bring gender discriminations to an end at work place. Despite all these development the issue that gender exercise over performance and business outcome remains a hotcake for debate among scholars.

Next, present study holds that organization type does not influence flexibility of their members. Following, managerial levels also not found significantly interacting with

flexibility of managers. This might mean that managers irrespective of their level would be comfortable with the degree of flexibility required to cope the process of organizational restructuring, downsizing, expansion and other contingent forces. Generally, workforce diversity enduring as segregation of employees on the basis of gender, vertical positions and nature of organizations exists. This complex mix of workers may interact unconstructively and can become antecedents of low output and organizational unrest. Also, the good employee mix produces a competent workforce which enables an organization to progress. This diversity also develops a skill inventory for conveniences as variety goes up with diversity. And the flexibility of diverse workforce increase competencies of organizations. More, these flexible managers enable an organization more adaptable and flexible (Iles et al., 1996).

6. Conclusion and policy implications

Scope of flexibility is very broad and it can be studied with different objectives and in different circumstances. As the main objective of this study was not to see antecedents and consequences of flexibility but to see whether managerial flexibility could be predicted by gender, position, and organization of managers. And from the empirical findings of the study it can be concluded that:

- Managerial flexibility is not predicted by their gender.
- Positions (junior, middle and senior) occupied by managers do not interact with their flexibility.
- Types of organizations (private, public) also do not predict managerial flexibility.
- The interaction of gender, position and organization also do not predict managerial flexibility.

Besides, on the basis of present study some recommendation can be made for policy implication. First, the empirical findings signify the importance of flexibility in every area of business irrespective of its functionality. Therefore, management in Indian organizations should consider the issue utmost. Secondly, however statistically no significant difference was found among selected categories of managers, yet the interaction pattern shows that senior female managers in private organizations and junior male managers in public sector organizations need to tackle the issue of flexibility greatly. However besides these critics the managerial flexibility was found satisfactory.

Further, present study also has some implied constraints, as the sample size could be large and other geographical regions could have focused for a comprehensive view of concept. Next, the design could be more rigorous by selecting antecedents and consequences of managerial flexibility in Indian organizations. And with present design also industry wise view could be explored.

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Table 1 Demographic Statics

	UG	PG	Junior	Middle	Senior	Private	Public
Male %	64%	36%	85%	80%	93%	84%	83%
Female %	45%	55%	15%	20%	7%	16%	17%
Sample %	60%	40%	41%	29.5%	29.5%	60%	40%

(Source primary data, UG undergraduate and PG postgraduate)

Table 2 Factorial ANOVA score

<i>Source</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Corrected Model</i>	38.986 ^a	11		1.047
<i>Intercept</i>	18649.244	1		5509.315
<i>gender</i>	2.952	1		.872
<i>level</i>	6.407	2		.946
<i>org</i>	2.308	1		.682
<i>gender * level</i>	5.718	2		.845
<i>gender * org</i>	6.788	1		2.005
<i>level * org</i>	2.709	2		.400
<i>gender * level *</i>	3.827	2		.565
<i>org</i>				
<i>Error</i>	599.152	177		
<i>Total</i>	51616.000	189		
<i>Corrected Total</i>	638.138	188		

Source primary data

	gender	level	org
Gender			
Level	.125		
Organization	.027	.42*	
Flexibility	-.081	-.058	-.028

Table 3 Correlation Score

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), N 189.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

gender	levels	type of organization	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
female	junior	private	16.42	1.929	12
		public	17.67	2.309	3
		Total	16.67	1.988	15
	middle	private	16.60	1.517	5
		public	17.83	1.602	6
		Total	17.27	1.618	11
	senior	private	15.50	2.121	2
		public	16.00	1.414	2
		Total	15.75	1.500	4
	Total	private	16.37	1.770	19
		public	17.45	1.753	11
		Total	16.77	1.813	30
male	junior	private	16.74	1.771	50
		public	15.50	2.029	14
		Total	16.47	1.885	64
	middle	private	16.19	1.615	32
		public	16.58	2.193	12
		Total	16.30	1.773	44
	senior	private	16.23	1.964	13
		public	16.29	1.887	38

		Total	16.27	1.888	51
	Total	private	16.48	1.750	95
		public	16.17	1.980	64
		Total	16.36	1.846	159
Total	junior	private	16.68	1.790	62
		public	15.88	2.176	17
		Total	16.51	1.894	79
	middle	private	16.24	1.588	37
		public	17.00	2.058	18
		Total	16.49	1.773	55
	senior	private	16.13	1.922	15
		public	16.27	1.853	40
		Total	16.24	1.856	55
Total	private	16.46	1.746	114	
	public	16.36	1.991	75	
	Total	16.42	1.842	189	

Source primary data

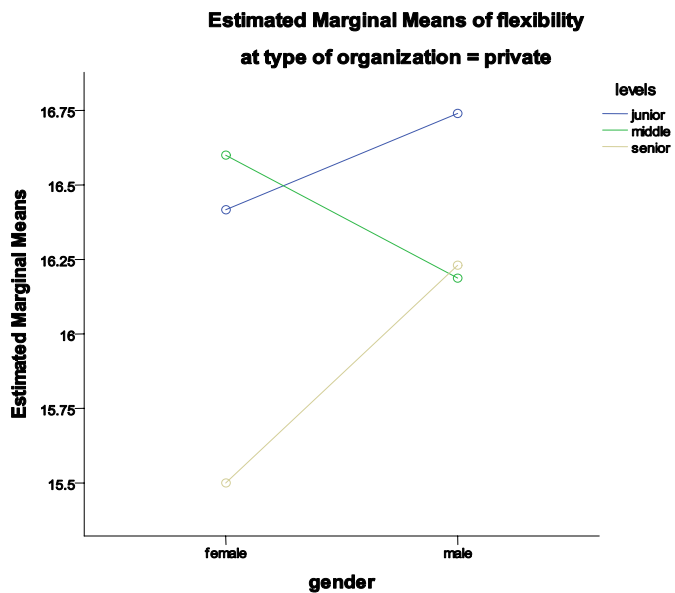


Figure 1 interaction effect gender and private organization

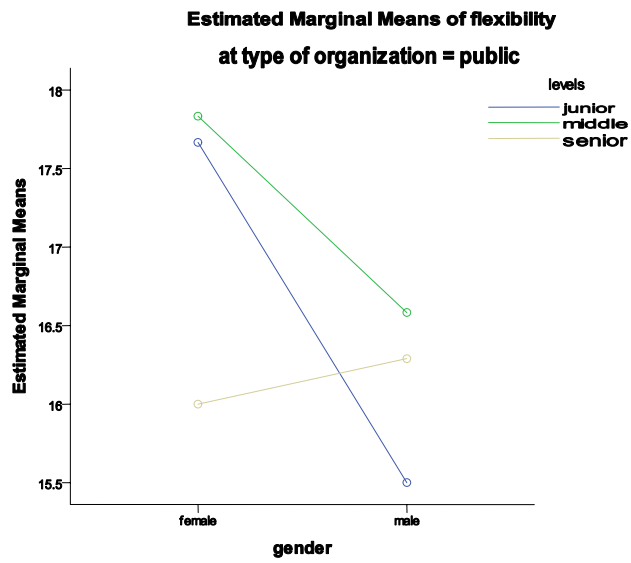


Figure 2 Interaction between gender and public organization

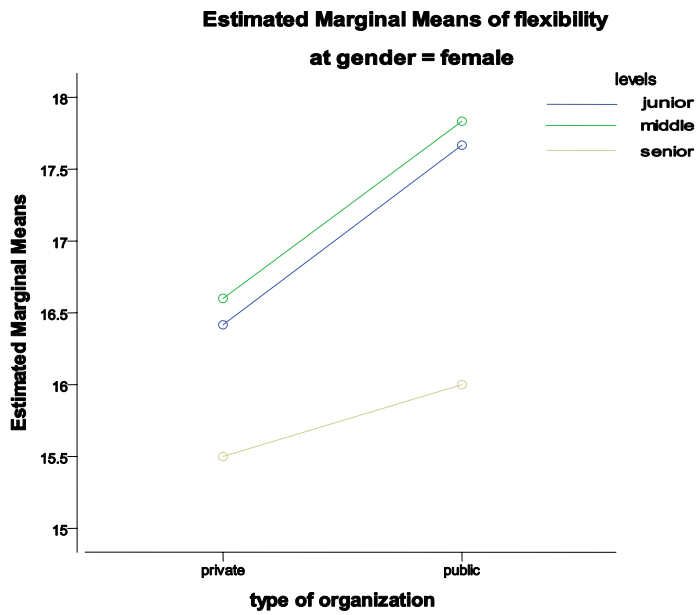


Figure 3 Interaction between type of organization and female

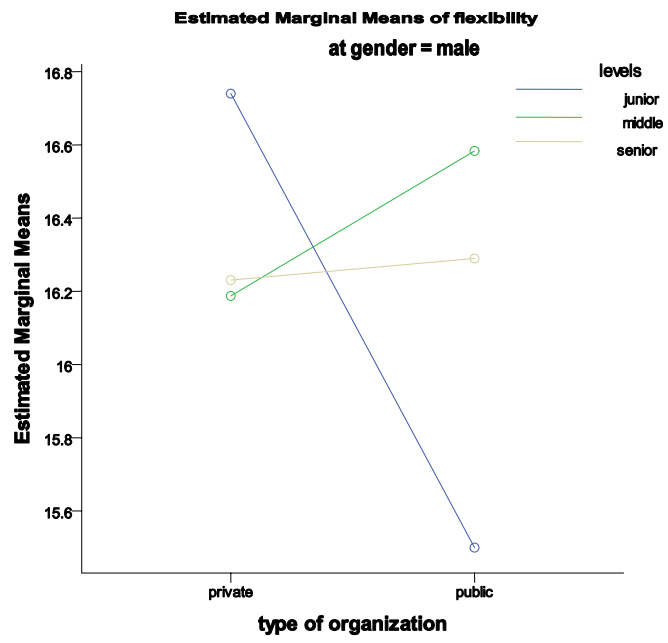


Figure 4 Interaction between type of organization and female