

Concept of flexibility



It is noted by Mike Emmott and Sue Hutchinson in 1998 that nowadays more and more employees seeking greater flexibility in their pattern and organisations of work, and this kind of workers' attitude meets a clearly continue upward trend . Furthermore, they also mentioned that part-time and full-time working continues to grow and some extent this is at the expense of full-time permanent jobs. At the same time, they added, other forms flexible working, such as annual hours and job sharing, are also increasing.

The flexible work arrangements are being adopted to satisfy organisations' needs. Moreover, according to the latest Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS), it can be found that lots of organisations offering their staff the opportunity to work flexibility has almost doubled since the last six year. In the following section, what is flexibility of labour, the reasons of increasing the flexibility in current market and the argument about outcomes of increasing flexible work in organisations and employees will be explained relates to Microsoft Company.

Concept of flexibility There is no a unity of definition of flexibility, as there are national differences in interpretation of the term of flexibility; the term has been used usually in various organisational senses, said by Sauer in 1998. Also, they states that many kinds of organisational re-structuring has been taken as an indicator of the existence of 'flexibility'. An organisational change is often related with changes in labour flexibility. There are other ways of explanation of labour flexibility.

Atkinson and Meager (1986) defined four types of flexibility: 'numerical flexibility', which is the adjustment of numbers of employees in relation to changes in demand; 'functional flexibility', which changing views of what organisations should be doing based on competences and involving external contracting or outsourcing; 'pay flexibility' that performance-related pay and distancing flexibility which is the provision of labour by external contracting or outsourcing whilst 'distancing flexibility', which relates the provision of labour by external contracting or outsourcing.

In addition, Stephen Procter and Stephen Ackroyd states " labour flexibility cab be understood in two different ways: as the ability and willingness of individual workers to perform a wider range of tasks, jobs or skills, and as the ability of organisations to vary the amount of labour they use in accordance with fluctuations in demand".

According to the website (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety. 2002), it explained flexible work offers opportunity for employees to choose a different work schedule to meet personal or family need; alternatively, for employers, they may create different schedules to meet their customers' needs. Why labour flexibility has increased? As it mentioned before, currently, more and more both employees and organisations claim to adopt flexibility in their workplaces, there are some of factors contributing to increased interest in the use of flexible working are suggested by CIPD 2006.

Flexible working has the potential value as a recruitment and retention tool in a tight labour market, and the changing profile of the workforce, for example, with more women in the labour market and an ageing population.

Another factor is advances in technology (facilitating, for example, remote working and hotdesking arrangements) and an increasing need for businesses to be able to deliver services to customers on a 24/7 basis.

Furthermore, as it is mentioned by Mike Emmott and Sue Hutchison in 1998 that, the most common factors driving organisations to adopt more flexible working practices are well known as increased both national and global, new technology also may be a factor to increase using flexible working, for instance, computers and mobile phones enable to be used by employees to communicate when working out of offices. In another hand, in 2001, Michael Collins argued that technology is the enabler but the key drivers for growth of using flexible working should be economic and social.

He explained that employers see flexible working as a way of remaining competitive in the global society. In addition, change in labour demand and supply that is changes in the types of employment available and changes in the composition of labour supply such as increased women workers. This also can be a factor which leads to greater flexible work in organisations.

There is strong evidence that demand for this kind of flexibility will increase, Monkcom said in 1998, and at the same year, Jupp states that it fits with the current labour market trends, such as working partners, flexibility, portfolio and whole life view.