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CONCEPTUALISING THE ROLES OF HUMAN RESOURCE IN MANAGING FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Flexible working arrangements (FWAs) have been progressively becoming more prevalent in recent decades, notably in fast-growing economic countries. Human resource (HR) roles in managing FWAs is undeniable since it involves managing employees and work design. Nevertheless, the existing literature has not adequately delved far into conceptualizing the functions of HR in managing FWAs. Therefore, this paper aimed to enlighten the grey area of the HR role in FWAs. This paper is crucial as it established the critical role of HR in initiating, implementing, and developing FWAs in an organization. Understanding HR roles will lead to the success of FWAs implementation or enhancement.

1. INTRODUCTION
The pressing demands of having flexible working arrangements (FWA) is accelerating these decades. Today's 24/7 business culture and globalization of the merging market have compelled businesses to be more adaptable and always available to customers (Amirul, Mail, Amirul, & Dasan, 2021; Burgmann, 2012). Along with this global evolution, technology is increasingly technology is increasingly contributing to the adoption of flexible work (Burgmann, 2012; Richardson & Mckenna, 2014). FWA can be defined as a process of negotiation between employees and employers regarding developing employees flexible work hours (Barney & Elias, 2010; Caillier, 2018; Coenen & Kok, 2014) for example, when, how and where they work (Barney & Elias, 2010; Caillier, 2018; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010) while fulfilling their usual tasks and responsibilities (Groen, van Triest, Coers, & Wtenweerde, 2018).

The growing interest in FWA implementation and enhancement has brought a significant challenge to HR in managing people needs and, at the same time, not jeopardizing business benefits. HR roles in managing FWAs is undeniable since it involves employees and work design. Despite that, the existing literature has not adequately delved far into conceptualizing the functions of HR in managing FWAs.

Human resource management (HRM) is a comprehensive and coherent approach to the employment and development of people. HRM is the process by which managed people becomes the philosophy, which is underpinned by several theories relating to the behaviour of people and organizations (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Understanding HR roles is critical to the success of FWAs implementation or enhancement. Therefore, this paper aimed to enlighten the grey area of the HR role in FWAs. This paper is essential as it established the key role of HR in initiating, implementing, and developing FWAs in an organization. This paper reviews the literature on FWA in order to provide an overview of the field such as FWA's growth, the benefits, and the role of HR in managing FWA implementation and enhancement. The third section conceptualizes the role of human resources in FWA management and drawing implication from the conclusions derived from this conceptual paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Overview of flexible working arrangements
Flexible working arrangements (FWAs) comes with various names such as work-life arrangements (Pascale et al., 2014), family-friendly working practices (Lai-Ching & Kam-Wah, 2012; Lee & Hong, 2011; Zhao & Ghiselli, 2016) and flexible working arrangements. Several researchers recently knew it as flexible working arrangements (Amirul, Amirul, & Mail, 2020; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017; TalentCorp, 2018). FWAs comprise several types of arrangements such as flexible working hours (Atkinson & Hall, 2011; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017; Galea, Houkes, & Rijk, 2014; Human Resource Management International Digest, 2019; Kotey, 2017), compressed working weeks (Armstrong, 2006; Cooper & Baird, 2015; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Park, Jo, & Park, 2019; TalentCorp, 2018), part time work (CIPD, 2014; Cooper & Baird, 2015; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017; McMahon & Pocock, 2011), teleworking (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015; Caillier, 2018; Groen et al., 2018; Lee & Hong, 2011; Munsch, 2016; Raghuram & Fang, 2014), working from home (Bloom, Liang, Roberts, & Ying, 2015; Human Resource Management International Digest, 2019; Kotey, 2017; Kotey & Sharma, 2019; McMahon & Pocock, 2011; Noor & Mahudin, 2012), staggered working hours (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017; Future of Work Institute, 2012; Noor & Mahudin, 2012; Strategic Human Resource Management, 2020), reduced work hours (Cooper & Baird, 2015; Noor & Mahudin, 2012; TalentCorp, 2018), job sharing (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; Human Resource Management International Digest, 2019; Idris, 2016; Noor & Mahudin, 2012), flex leave (Idris, 2016; Mansor & Idris, 2015) and flex career (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; Idris, 2016; Mansor & Idris, 2015). Shaari and Amirul (2019) categorised FWAs into four main categories such as flexi time saving account or time banking, alternative work schedule (staggered hours arrangement and compressed workweek arrangement), workload flexibility (job sharing, contingent work, part time work) and flexibility of place (work from home, teleworking, virtual working).

2.2 The growth of FWAs
FWA was no longer unfamiliar because FWA is one of Malaysia's work-life balance (WLB) policies and legal initiatives (Dousin, 2017). In the 12th Malaysia Plan, the Malaysian Government encourages more women workers to achieve 59 per cent female participation in the labour market by 2025 by enabling women in middle management to rise to the top management environment (Ministry of Human Resource, 2020).

Subramaniam and Maniam (2011) found that upwards of 86% of women are interested in FWA at work. In Europe and the United States, flexible working practices were first adopted in the public sector, mainly due to Generation Y and women employees (Mansor & Idris, 2015). However, when it comes to women workers is the problem of achieving a balance between work and family commitments, leading to work-life distress (Mahpul & Abdullah, 2011). Thus, work-life distress is one of the factors why FWA is increasingly needed today, especially in developed countries such as America, China, Australia and Europe (Mansor & Idris, 2015; Raghuram & Fang, 2014; Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2014). The demand for FWAs has significantly increased worldwide due to the emerging of globalization; it has encouraged companies to create a 24/7 culture to meet customer demand and fulfil business transactions (Cannon & Elford, 2017). It has been estimated that 75% of businesses worldwide have implemented FWA to enable staff to change their time and use the latest technology to operate remotely (TalentCorp, 2016).

FWA is also increasingly important due to the intensive use of technology and dramatically changing workplaces (TalentCorp, 2018). Demand for FWA is growing with technologies that make it possible to implement (Burgmann, 2012). Burgmann (2012) further added that there is also an increase in the availability and capabilities of smartphones, laptops and internet access for many employees. The provision of work technology in organizations gives employees more incredible flexibility in scheduling their work (Andrejic, 2017). CIPD (2012) states that an increasingly diverse workforce suggests that more people need and expect greater flexibility to help them maintain their lives at work and home. The employees need to handle different care roles and adjust to retirement, such as reducing hours or adjusting to how they work (CIPD, 2012, as cited in Dizaho, 2017). A recent seminal study by Amirul and Shaari (2021) has presented an overview of flexible working arrangement investigations that have been conducted over the past twenty years. Their (Amirul & Shaari, 2021) emphasized that the context of work is changing, and the most recent pandemic crisis of covid-19 are creating more challenges and opportunities. Taking into consideration the current state of the world, which is afflicted by the current COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of FWAs has been accelerated and expanded, as the government-enforced lockdown and movement restrictions have compelled almost all businesses to close their doors and evacuate their employees (Amirul & Shaari, 2021). This has brought up the question of how HR will play its role in managing FWAs during the pandemic, particularly when the HR has a limited experience in managing FWAs because their organization does not provide flexible work arrangements in the first place.

2.3 The benefits of FWAs

Previous studies have shown that FWA provides employees and organizations with many benefits (CIPD, 2014; Galinsky, Sakai, & Wigton, 2011; Lee & Hong, 2011; McMahon & Pocock, 2011; Ollo-lopez & Bayo-moriones, 2010). Galinsky et al. (2011) analyzed the associations between flexibility access and other factors such as job satisfaction, retention, employee engagement, and employee wellness. They found that flexibility was an overall advantage for both employers and employees. FWAs have consistently been shown to increase employee performance (Caillier, 2018; Coenen & Kok, 2014; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017; Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010). FWA could improve employee satisfaction (Barney & Elias, 2010; Hrobowski-Culbreath, 2010; Said, Alam, Mohamed, & Rafidi, 2017). The company has offered flexible work practises such as flex time, telecommuting, job sharing, and compressed workweek as management is

increasingly aware that those practices are necessary to help enhance overall job satisfaction (Rawashdeh, 2016). Implementing flexible work options tends to support whole organizations, not just those using such programmes (Jones et al., 2008).

Research has recently emerged showing the health benefits of employee work-life support (Kossek et al., 2010). FWAs are found to have a positive effect on the health and happiness of employees (Lee & Hong, 2011; Ollo-lopez & Bayo-moriones, 2010). According to Maxwell (2016), FWA increases the profile of fitness and wellbeing, and lets employees know that there is an investment in them. Furthermore, Galinsky et al. (2011) added that FWA helps workers maintain a healthy work-life balance. The work-life balance of employees was helped by FWA (Richardson & Mckenna, 2014). On the other hand, FWA may mitigate stress (Kossek et al., 2010). Adopting a flexible work routine means working differently, and guidance may help people transition with minimal disruption and stress (Anderson & Kelliher, 2009). An increased understanding of work-related stress and the potential of mitigating stress by encouraging workers to use a flex-time policy may support organizations very well (Barney & Elias, 2010). Research has also shown that cooperative and flexible work arrangements decrease the level of stress (Hrobowski-Culbreath, 2010; Said et al., 2017). Atkinson & Hall (2011) found that their respondents further indicated that flexible working gave rise to discretionary behaviour and other desirable performance outcomes in promoting happiness.

Other than that, implementation of the FWA could minimise absenteeism (Barney & Elias, 2010; Coenen & Kok, 2014). Advances in technology and telecommunications innovations allow workers to spend fewer hours in the workplace and have significantly reduced absenteeism and other benefits, such as reducing stress and job satisfaction (Hrobowski-Culbreath, 2010). Women are more likely to agree that flexible work arrangements positively affect the balance between work and life and on employee recruitment, retention, productivity, and morale (Giannikis & Mihail, 2011). Flexibly working parents might see positive job outcomes such as retention of jobs, growth of career and skills, challenging and rewarding work, and appreciation for WLB (Andrejic, 2017). Dizaho (2017) further added that work-life balance is also advantageous to workers by increasing flexibility, increasing family and leisure time, childcare privileges, reducing conflict with work-life, reducing burnout. A recent study of Malaysian workers, on the other hand, found that work-life balance is the primary reason for staying with their employers (Hays, 2017). Hays (2017) further stated that most businesses offer work-life plans to boost workers' well-being, increase productivity and keep talent better.

FWA is essential in reduce turnover (Coenen & Kok, 2014; Lee & Hong, 2011) and improve employee retention (Idris, 2016; Maxwell, 2016; McMahon & Pocock, 2011). Furthermore, Maxwell (2016) added that the new arrangements often indicate to current and future workers that they are respected and treated well in the company. In terms of gender, managers should increase the recruitment of female workers and use their talent by offering them flexible working hours that suit their family and child-raising duties, which will increase the retention of employees and contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives (Cloutier, Felusiak, Hill, & Pemberton-Jones, 2015). Flexibility has significant potential to increase attraction and retention (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2014). Flexible work arrangements significantly correlate retention and engagement, and now it is time for business leaders and all other employees to create a community that promotes and acknowledges Flexi-work (Drishti, 2019). It should be remembered that employee turnover costs in an organization can be up to 200 per cent of the cost of hiring and retaining a qualified employee, so it is also desirable to minimize

turnover for efficiency and cost savings (Hebenstreit & Ph, 2008). In addition, since these workers' turnover can be very high, a lot of time and resources are spent on coaching new employees, which almost inevitably increases costs and decreases competitiveness (Thomas Wandera, 2013).

FWA improved the productivity and efficiency of businesses for employers, attracted well-trained candidates, strengthened the recruiting strategy of the company, and lowered operating costs, while workers took advantage of extra time to handle their family demands, increased work satisfaction, lower absenteeism and turnover, and higher productivity (Rawashdeh, 2016). FWAs improve the quality of life for workers and strengthen the productivity of organizations (Stavrou, 2005). Organizations benefit from FWAs by higher levels of employee engagement and satisfaction and their bottom line (TalentCorp, 2016). Overall business performance is also enhanced by FWA (Richardson & Mckenna, 2014).

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2.4 Human resource roles in FWA implementation

The roles of HR in managing FWA is prevalent as it revolves around managing people (S. M. Amirul, Amirul, Anwar Abu Bakar, Mail, & Dasan, 2019; Armstrong, 2006; Burgmann, 2012; Kossek et al., 2010; Stavrou-Costea, 2002; Timms et al., 2015). HR is involved in applying policies and practices in organizational design and development, learning and development, and the provision of services that provide improved employee well-being (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Scholars also classified the types of work-family policies as human resources policies aimed at eliminating work-family tensions and providing workers with flexibility (Allen, 2001; Arthur, 2003; Arthur and Cook, 2004; Gupta et al., 2009 as cited in Nelson, Brooks, Sahaym, & Cullen, 2017). Armstrong and Taylor (2014) added that policy development, such as providing flexible work, is one of the steps that can be taken to improve work-life balance (WLB). This is supported by Human Resource Management International Digest (2019) that one of the tools that can help manage WLB is the provision of FWA. HR policies can provide flexibility and increase the 'options' to resolve WLB issues (Chandra, 2012). Dousin (2017) further added that it is essential for HR practitioners to be aware of WLB issues for health workers whose well-being as employees can be disrupted and, in turn, affect organizational performance. The need for WLB as a measure to reduce employee stress is one of HRM's concerns (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2018). he study also found that when HR provides FWA to employees, worker well-being and firm performance will increase (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020). Employees' various complications may stem from issues outside of work; providing FWA can solve this problem (Timms et al., 2015). In pursuit of new technologies and socio-economic change, HR roles in managing people become more challenging as the quest for flexibility becomes more articulated (Global Talent Trends, 2018, 2019).

HRM encompasses recruiting and selection, training and development, compensation and benefits, retention and motivation, as well as employee performance management (Haider et al., 2015). While flexible work is one of the criteria of high-performance culture (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014), the HR department can offer flexible work packages as an essential strategy to attract the best candidates and keep the employees valued

(Anderson & Kelliher, 2009). In addition to HR roles in managing FWAs, Anderson and Kelliher (2009) stated that recruitment and retention of talented individuals is a significant challenge for many organizations and offering flexible work packages is seen as an essential part of the strategy used by the HR department to attract the best candidates and to look after valued employees. Therefore, HRM has a vital role in ensuring that the implementation of FWA is implemented effectively and efficiently so that it motivates employees and improves the performance of the organization (Amirul et al., 2019). HR pressure regarding this stigma is even in line with other scholars (Bell, Sae-Won, & Yeung, 2006), who stated that financial and non-financial perceptual performance indicators would strengthen HR roles. A recent study by Amirul et al. (2019) emphasized that HR is more focused on effectiveness in employee management. They felt more committed and loyal to their employers because flexible working allowed their individual needs to be accommodated (Anderson & Kelliher, 2009). Besides, this enhances employee morale and commitment by creating a sense of work commitment, work involvement and loyalty among employees by instilling a meaningful work ethic, such as offering discretionary benefits, which are social exchanges. In contrast, social deals involve discretionary benefits bestowed upon employees by the organization to incentivize employees or create a sense of obligation, making employees behave consistent with the organization's goals (Caillier, 2018).

Flexible management requires specific skills, which can only be learned through experience (Richardson, 2010). HR needs to have expertise in enabling FWA to be utilized and applied, including technology and related training on managing flexibility for line managers and organizational leaders (Society for Human Resource Management, 2016). Ab Wahab and Tatoglu (2020) suggest that HR can experiment with FWA for multiple employees and record the employees' performance. Adjustments can be made after evaluation so that FWAs are more suited to employees' needs and, in turn, will produce significant benefits that are beneficial to employees and organizations (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020). FWA managers should be provided with unique learning and growth opportunities to enhance strong communication skills, track performance and use technology for flexible work (Australian Government, 2014).
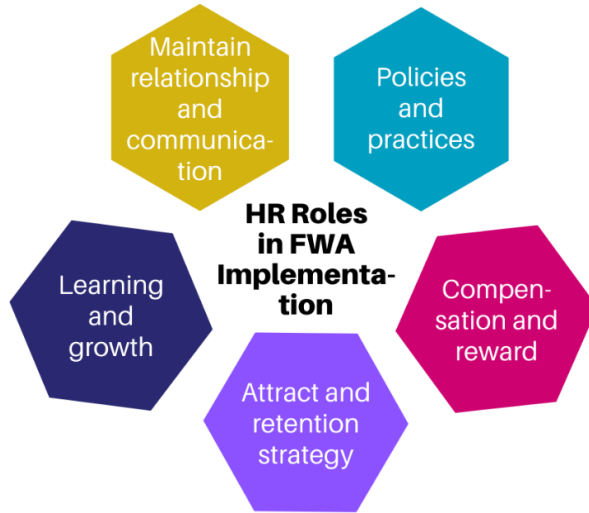
Face-to-face meetings are reduced when FWA is implemented, and communication via communication tools is less satisfactory (Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008, as cited in Raghuram & Fang, 2014). According to Richardson (2010), due to the limited face-to-face interaction, management must make a concerted effort to use other forms of communication. Communication is essential for successful task planning and management (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011). Capnary et al. (2018) added that communication is critical for working flexibly and being informed about important notifications. The previous study suggests that managers can arrange informal meetings and gatherings in or outside the office to prevent employees from feeling isolated to the point of negatively impacting job performance (Richardson, 2010). Managers can also organize social events to increase employee cohesion (Raghuram & Fang, 2014). HR manager can play its role to maintain the relationship and communication with FWA workers since it is critical to balance autonomy and the constant need for communication and understanding (Richardson, 2010).

Another angle of HR roles in managing FWAs is compensation and rewards (S. R. Amirul et al., 2020). The implementation of flexible working poses challenges for employees' rewards. In the past, if full-time employees worked more than their contracted hours in a week (working more than 40 hours in a week), they would be paid overtime.

However, flexibility is no longer just about the number of hours someone works. Instead, organizations need to consider the nature of flexible working – when, where, and how the work is done, what work is done and who performs it (Global Talent Trends, 2020).

3. CONCEPTUALISING THE ROLES OF HR IN MANAGING FWAs

Based on the discussion of HR roles presented in the previous section, this study has conceptualised the roles of HR in managing FWAs as illustrated in Figure 1 and its descriptions in Table 1.

Figure 1: HR roles in FWA implementation.

Table 1: HR roles in managing FWA.

HR Role Dimension	Descriptions
Policies and Practices	Armstrong and Taylor (2014) asserted that HR practices are the activities carried out in executing HR policies and services, including resources, learning and growth, management of success and incentives, relationships with employees and administration. The policies should aim to increase employee engagement, to ensure that HR decisions are strategically relevant and that HR policies should also be incorporated into the business strategy (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Organizations have the primary responsibility for enforcing strategies and procedures. The successful use of flexible strategies is primarily dependent on the capacity of human resource professionals to tackle these challenges. Therefore, business desperately requires formal policy in implementing FWA because an unstructured and informal policy makes it difficult to track and regulate how certain workers use it (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011). To ensure the success of FWAs, HR is responsible for ensuring that clear policies complement the implementation of FWAs and strategic operations of FWAs are practised prudently.

Table 1 – continued.

HR Role Dimension	Descriptions
Attract and retention strategy	The contribution of human capital to success makes internal FWAs an essential source of competitive advantage to recruit and maintain relevant skills (Amirul et al., 2020; Panayotopoulou et al., 2003; MacDermid, 2005; Thompson and Aspinwall, 2009; Maxwell et al., 2007, as cited in Kotey, 2017). In the implementation of FWAs, the role of HR in forming a talent pool for organizations is inseparable. It is crucial for HR to ensure that the implementation of FWAs brings benefits to organizations, such as attracting more skilful talent, and organizations can reduce turnover and attrition and ensure employee engagement.
Learning and growth	Learning and growth are often called training and development to improve group and individual performance by increasing and honing skills and knowledge (HRZone, 2021). When organizations decide to offer FWAs, HR needs to ensure that employees are prepared for change and consider employees' skills and knowledge to continue maximizing performance in flexible working hours. On a practical level, HR is accountable for talent development, and HR must identify suitable training for employees, particularly when adapting to a new way of working like FWAs.
Maintain relationship and communication	Scholars (Groen et al., 2018) added that HR played a vital role in FWAs to monitor, maintain relationships, and elicit performance from telecommuting subordinates, although they are invisible. Richardson (2010) further explained that there is a need to make a concerted effort to maintain the right level of communication for flex-work workers (Richardson, 2010). The main concern is that these workers have less physical contact with the employer, so an employer needs to make sure that the employee is accessible. Therefore, HR must play its roles in communication to have more transparent FWAs work processes and work towards a common goal—effective communication upsurges productivity and performance, which will benefit employees and the organization.
Compensation and reward	Armstrong and Taylor (2014) stated that reasonable incentive practices and procedures, both financial and non-financial, can help create and strengthen employee engagement. Given the change in working hours from regular working hours to more flexible, some changes need to be considered by HR, especially in terms of wages must comply with employment laws and the rewards offered can motivate employees.

4. CONCLUSION

To summarise, there are five prominent roles of HR in managing FWAs highlighted in this study. HR roles include policies and practices; attract and retention strategy; learning and growth; maintain relationship and communication; and compensation and reward. HR roles are undeniable since they involve people and the change of work design. However, this study concluded that to ensure the success of FWAs implementation, HR should at least plays all five essential roles and responsibilities when managing FWAs. HR plays a vital role in fostering FWAs initiatives and ensuring that FWAs can be implemented in an effective way that benefits both employees and employers or organizations. This study has provided an important insight by conceptualizing and generating operational definitions for essential HR roles in managing FWAs. The conceptual model of this study provides a better platform for future studies to investigate more in-depth HR roles in managing FWAs.

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