EMPLOYERS’ AND EMPLOYEES’ EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FLEXIBLE WORKING POLICIES

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Abstract
These years has witnessed a rapid change in staff’s working pattern. Flexible working arrangements are increasingly widespread in developed countries as well as developing countries. The adoption level of flexible working arrangements is predicted to keep increasing in the future. However, some obstacles will emerge when flexible working policies are carried out in companies. The results such as low participation of staff in flexible working arrangements may fail to live up organizations’ expectation. Accordingly, employers’ and employees’ evaluation of flexible working policies may be helpful to remove these obstacles and plays a vital role in improving the implementation of flexible working arrangements.

Considering that change of the implementation of flexible working policies will have direct impacts on employers and employees, these two groups of people are chosen as respondents to investigate. The respondents of this thesis are from foreign and multinational companies in China. Since documental data on flexible working policies are quite few, the researchers have collected both qualitative and quantitative data by doing interviews and a survey. The findings of the interviewees’ opinions and the survey data show both similarities and differences between employers’ and employees’ evaluations, which may pave the way for improvement of the implementation of flexible working arrangements.

The findings of this research show that the implementation of flexible working policies is affected by two categories, “the content of policies” and “the external factors influencing the implementation of policies” such as facilities provided by companies, trust and support from supervisors. Furthermore, employers and employees tend to hold similar or different opinions on the concepts included in these two categories related to their different positions in their companies. The findings of this research are regarding the current implementation of flexible working arrangements and limited types of flexible working arrangements. Other factors and improvements can be achieved in future practice.

Keywords: flexible working policies, implementation, foreign companies and multinationals in China
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Appendix
1. Introduction
In recent years, a traditional nine to five work schedule has been challenged by flexible working conditions worldwide. With the development of technology and modernization of society and business, managers are becoming more likely to provide employees with flexible working arrangements. Employees are allowed to choose their work time and work places by themselves. Since flexible working conditions give more freedom to both employers and employees, they are widely accepted by white-collar workers in different working fields, such as finance, insurance, IT, etc.

Garner et al. (2016) made a research with over 500 managerial level employees in medium and large UK companies, more than one-third of the respondents admitted that by 2014 flexible working condition was set as a norm of the organizations. Over half of these organizations would provide flexible working arrangements to employees by 2017. They also found that the adoption level (flexible working arrangements provided by organizations and executed by managers) is predicted to reach over 70 percent by 2020. It seems that flexible working conditions are gradually accepted by organizations.

As the prevalence of flexible working arrangements keep increasing in the world, governments also pay attention to these new work patterns. Some governments have made guides for companies to follow. On Australia government’s (2015) work and family websites, it mentions that a successful flexible working strategy should take both needs of employees and employers into consideration. The purpose of formal flexible working policies is to protect both employees’ and employers’ benefits. Thus, it is sensible to take both perspectives of employers and employees into consideration in order to improve flexible working policies.

The prevalent of using flexible working arrangements also spread in China. According to a survey made by China Youth Daily in 2016, 2000 Chinese young people were investigated. They expressed their willingness to accept free and flexible working patterns. Considering that flexible working arrangements in China are more often offered in foreign companies and multinationals. White-collar employees and employers of these companies will be the objects of this research.

This thesis is written in the following sequence. In the first chapter, with introduction of basic knowledge of flexible working policies and the current implementation in China, the research problem will be stated. In the second chapter, previous studies and flexible working policies used in other countries are found to guide this research. Since neither quantitative data nor qualitative data regarding the implementation of flexible working arrangements are rich enough, in the third step, the methodology chapter, a mixed research method is chosen. To be specific, semi-structured interviews and an online survey are conducted. The results and analysis of the empirical data are represented in the fourth chapter. Finally, the researchers make some discussion through comparing the findings of this investigation with articles found in the second chapter and give some suggestions of further study.

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Benefits and Drawbacks of Implementing Flexible Working Policies
Historically, the root of flexible working arrangements can be traced back to the 1930s. In that time, the W.K. Kellogg Company, one of the largest manufacturers of cereals, changed
the traditional work schedule and used the four six-hour shifts to boost company’s productivity (Kossek and Michel, 2011). Although it was developed from the interest of the employer, this kind of schedule was supported by many employees in the company because it gave them more free time.

With the development of flexible working conditions, it has become difficult to balance benefits of both employees and employers. On one hand, these kinds of work arrangements are of benefit to employees. Some researchers point out there is a strong positive relationship between flexible working arrangements and employees’ job satisfaction (Masuda et al., 2012; Rawashdeh et al., 2016). Employees with flexible working arrangements are happier and more willing to work. Moreover, Rawashdeh et al. (2016) find out that flexible working arrangements help employees achieve work-life balance. Employees have more time to take care of their family and enjoy their personal life better. They can have an elastic management of their time. According to Bhalla (2016), with less conflict between work and private life, employees can pay more attention to their work which is enhancing their performance as well. Furthermore, it is universally acknowledged that health is a pre-condition of all work. Flexibility also attributes to employee’s health. According to Jayasekara (2011), most studies on the effects of self-scheduling report that offering flexible working arrangements help to improve employees’ health condition, e.g. tiredness, mental health, sleep quality, sleep duration and systolic blood pressure.

On the other hand, flexibility can support high productivity for employers. Many studies show that flexible working arrangements increase the productivity of companies (Konrad and Mangel, 2000; Yang and Zheng, 2011; Bhalla, 2016). More importantly, flexible working can save tangible infrastructural costs by reducing the size of office building. It is claimed that shifting to flexible working arrangements can create a 20% reduction in property rents (Future of Work Institute, 2012). Furthermore, flexible working arrangements can be used to easier recruit talents and retain staff. With flexible working arrangements, young women who have children can balance their work and life, which will reduce employees’ turnover intentions (McNall, Masuda & Nicklin, 2009; Bhalla, 2016). High quality employees can be attracted by work-life programs as they need to manage their personal issues (Rawashdeh et al., 2016).

However, there are still some drawbacks when flexible working arrangements are implemented. Some companies use these arrangements to increase their own profits regardless of employees’ interests. For instance, employers hire part-time employees to cover all shifts because it is better for companies’ production (Kalleberg, 2000). The workers of these part-time jobs often have low status, such as waiters/waitresses and cleaners (ibid.). Furthermore, in Hirsh’s study (2005), part-time workers have lower wages and benefits than full-time workers. The statistics from Statistics Sweden (SCB, 2016) show that the average monthly salaries of part-time employees were paid about 10% lower than full-time employees from 2010 to 2015. Moreover, Howard (2016) finds that part-time employees have less access to legal protection, sick pay and pensions. In addition, employees, who work part-time jobs, lack career opportunities to high status jobs (Edwards, 2006).

Ashoush et al. (2015) say that there are negative impacts on managing, coordinating and employees loyalty when they are implementing flexible working arrangements. From an organizational view, it is not only difficult for managers to supervise employees’ performance and but also hard for employees to coordinate with their colleagues because of different work times and work places. Staying far away from work places and less interaction with colleagues may decrease employees loyalty as well. Another problem is that organizations
have difficulties in measuring the return of flexible working arrangements compared to its costs (ibid.).

Thus, it is interesting and meaningful to make some researches and find out possible solutions to keep benefits and avoid drawbacks of both employers and employees when implementing flexible working policies.

1.1.2. Flexible Working Arrangements from an Organizational Management Perspective

The survey conducted by Delaney and Huselid (1996) with 590 for-profit and non-profit national organizations indicates positive associations between practices of human resource management and organizational performance. From the 1990’s, companies in the world have been urged to introduce a variety of progressive human resource management strategies to improve their competitiveness. With the development of society, strategies of business will change to adapt to new market environments. So does human resource management. It is propelled by key societal and organizational changes. The contemporary changing environment emphasizes innovation, proactivity and multidisciplinary analysis, such as flexibility of work, employer-employee relationships, digitalization and international mobility of staff. Thus, labor management should be focused on these issues to strengthen the competitiveness of organizations in today’s market (ibid.).

Human resource management is a part of strategic workforce management and categorized in the area of business administration. The purpose of human resource management is to mobilize employees to work so that they become more valuable to organizations. The human resource department plays a critical role in establishing, measuring and monitoring relationships between managers and subordinates. O’Brien (2014) describes that maintaining a strong employer and employee relationship can be the key to success of an organization and an effective communication is a way to build a strong employer-employee relationship. This means that organizational management should adopt both parties’ opinions by making them aware of each other’s problems, respect mutual demands and address difficulties together.

1.1.3. Flexible Working Arrangements in China

Flexible work arrangements are known as elastic work systems in China. According to the labor law of China, flexible working arrangements are categorized as non-standard work. Companies have to apply for the permission of the governmental labor bureau before offering flexible working arrangements (He, 2009). Li (2016) states that the work regulations are described as important means of labor management in the Labor Law of China, including the work policies of a company.

In China, foreign companies and multinationals offered flexible work arrangements at first, and some large Chinese companies are also following their way and offer flexible work arrangements (Liu, Zhang and Li, 2009). Flexible working arrangements are increasingly offered in Hong Kong, China’s special administrative region, which is an important economic city. According to a survey of more than 1000 employees in Hong Kong (Welford, 2008), many companies are now allowing more flexible work arrangements in 2008 than in 2004. The data also show that the main intention for these companies is to improve work life balance for the employees.
Parker (2014) investigated more than 20 US companies in China. The majority of those companies offer employees flextime, i.e. flexible start and ending time, allowances to work from home or a transition to part-time work. The types of flexible working arrangements are the same as the three most prevalent arrangements reported by World at Work and FlexJobs (2015), flextime, telecommuting and part-time schedule. Flextime and telecommuting are more common than part-time schedule in China. Moreover, a small but increasing number of companies provide more creative flexible working arrangements. For example, employees are given the opportunity to choose their working hours once a year from three options, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., 9:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m., or 10:00 a.m. - 6:30 p.m. Other companies encourage employees to telecommute one day per week. They are permitted to choose any day of the week and choose a different day each week.

Among the companies in China investigated by Parker (2014), though most of the companies provide employees with some kinds of flexible working arrangements, they rarely publicize flexible working policies within the organizations. Moreover, some companies only allow some groups of employees to use these arrangements, such as managers who are at the director level or above. A small number of companies give all employees right to apply for all three kinds of flexible working arrangements.

Anell and Hartmann (2007) supplement that Asian countries, including main land of China, South Korea, Indonesia etc., hold a stereotype that staff has to be present at the workplace. It is important to have “face time” with their colleagues and supervisors.

To sum up, there is an increasing amount of companies providing flexible working policies in China, inducing foreign companies and Chinese companies. The types of flexible working arrangements provided in China are similar to the world. However, Chinese culture emphasizes the importance of physical presence at the workplace, which may become obstacles of implementing flexible working policies in China.

1.1.4. Low Participation in Flexible Working Arrangements

If employees do not clearly understand these polices, they may not apply for these arrangements which results in low participation in flexible working arrangements. It is showed in the report by World at Work and FlexJobs (2015) that only 37 percent of 293 involved organizations have formal, written philosophies or policies to support employee flexibility options. In addition, 67 percent of the managers in these 293 organizations offer flexibility to all or most of their employees at their own discretion rather than following the organizations’ policies (ibid.).

1.2. Problem Statement

The above background shows that flexible working arrangements have become prevalent in the whole world and the use of flexible working arrangements is predicted to increase the next few years. The situation in China follows the same trends as the global changes.

However, problems occur in the current implementation of flexible working polices, such as employers’ and employees’ confusions of policies as well as low participation. If these problems occur for a long time, they will become obstacles for flexible working polices to continue. Thus, we are interested in collecting evaluations of these polices from both employers and employees to give possible solutions to the problems.
In China, the Chinese government does not have formal flexible working policies for companies to follow. In August 2015, China National Office published a document regarding advocating flexible working arrangements (Baike, 2015), but it is not an official guide for companies to follow. At present, most foreign companies and multinationals in China are using the flexible working policies in their headquarters and subsidiaries abroad. Since Chinese employers and employees may have a different culture background than foreign staff, their attitudes and opinions may also different.

1.3. Purpose and Research Question

This study aims to look for possible improvements of the implementation of flexible working policies through understanding and analyzing employers’ and employees’ evaluation. The objects will be white-collar employers and employees in foreign companies and multinationals located in China. The employers investigated in this research refer to the representatives of the employer interest of companies, such as senior managers and line managers. The employees investigated in this research are ordinary staff at front line, who are under supervision of employers.

The findings will show how respondents understand and evaluate policies of flexible working arrangement, which may help foreign companies and multinationals in China to improve their flexible working policies. The results may also work as a guide for Chinese companies to develop their flexible working polices.

This study will address three research questions:

1. How do employees perceive flexible working policies?
2. How do employers perceive flexible working policies?
3. How can the implementations of flexible working policies be improved?

1.4. Delimitations

This study focuses on how employing managers and employees of foreign companies and multinational companies in China evaluate their flexible working policies. These companies cannot represent all companies that provide flexible working arrangements in China.
2. Researches Review

2.1. Definition and Types of Flexible Working Arrangements

Georgetown Law (2006), the Georgetown University Law Center, published a public policy initiative called Workplace Flexibility 2010. Flexible work arrangement is defined as “work structure that alters the time and/or place when/where work gets done on a regular basis” (p. 1).

Georgetown Law (ibid.) says flexible work arrangements include:
1. Flexibility in the scheduling of hours worked, such as alternative work schedules
2. Flexibility in the amount of hours worked, such as part time work and job shares
3. Flexibility in the place of work, such as working at home or at a satellite location

World at Work, a nonprofit human resources association, cooperating with FlexJobs, an online career site, released a report called “Trends in Workplace Flexibility” in 2015. According to the report, it is found that the three most prevalent flexible working programs offered are telework on an ad-hoc basis, flex time and part-time schedule.

In the report, telework on an ad-hoc basis is defined as work that is performed only once and is usually driven by the situation, e.g., sick children or sick elder parents. Telework is the same as telecommuting and remote work. A worker who telecommutes is known as a "telecommuter," "teleworker," "home-sourced," or "work-at-home" employee. According to Alexander et al. (2010), with the help of technical ability of information and communication technologies, such as computers, laptops, smart phones, tablets and broadband connections, jobs are expected to become less tied with places.

Flextime is working on a flexible hour’s schedule that allows workers to alter start and ending times of workdays with fixed core hours, e.g. 10:00-16:00 (Gariety and Shaffer, 2001).

Part-time schedule is a kind of non-standard work. Non-standard work is another expression for flexible working conditions. Employees are present at the work place and work under employers’ direction, but they do not work for full-time. The figure for part-time schedule work hours can vary in different countries. In Australia, a part-time employee works less than 38 hours on average (Australia Government, 2010). In Canada, part-time employees usually work less than 30 hours per week (Statistics Canada, 2015). In United States, part-time work is less than 34 hours per week (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

Different types of flexible working arrangements are offered in different organizations, however, the prevalence of flexible work arrangement programs has showed a stable trend since 2013 (World at Work and FlexJobs, 2015).

2.2. Problems of the Content of Flexible Working Policies

Initially, flexible working policies are not in formal and written form. To guide employers and employees use flexible working arrangements, organizations tend to make flexible working policies. However, it is showed in the report by World at Work and FlexJobs (2015) that only 37 percent of 293 involved organizations have formal, written philosophies or policies to support employee flexibility options. According to Howington (2015), if companies do not have formal written policies in the workplace, there might be a risk of the failure of flexible working programs.
Another thorny issue which is considered vital to formal policy is inconsistency. According to the survey on Trends in Workplace Flexibility (WorldatWork and FlexJobs, 2015), almost half of the organizations vary their flex time arrangements between different departments and that means employees in different departments in a company will have different flexible working schedules (ibid.). The flextime that employees will get is linked to the characteristics of their job. 58% of financial employees have flexible schedules while the percentage of employees in management positions having flex time work is only 40% (Golden, 2001).

Lastly, flexibility working arrangements have changed the way people work - which means organizations have to change their way to measure employees’ productivity. However, only few (3%) organizations attempt to measure the ROI (return on investment) of their employee using the flexibility programs (WorldatWork and FlexJobs, 2015). That means few companies measure the benefits resulting from using the flexible working arrangement. Moreover, a survey shows that only 13% of managers think that they should change the way in which they measure the employee performance using flexible working arrangements (Institute for Workplace Innovation, 2010).

2.3. Problems of the Implementation of Flexible Working Policies

At first, both of employers and employees do not have a clear understanding of the content of flexible working policies. Copper and Baird (2015) interviewed 66 employees and line managers in two large organizations in Australia. Both organizations have publicized policies to their staff, but the majority of the staff poorly understand these policies. Employees are vague about their legal rights to apply for flexible working arrangements and what processes they should follow. As to most line managers, they argue that they have not got formal training on how to put these policies into practice. The line managers who have rich knowledge of these policies are often the advocates of flexible working arrangements in the organizations (ibid.).

What is worse, Copper and Baird (2015) found that few of the employees consulted the organizations’ HR departments about the policies, the majority of them tended to ask friends and family for advice.

Another issue presented by Cooper and Baird (2015) is that the outcomes of employees’ applications for flexible working arrangements are not formally recorded. Employees and their managers are not sure whether the request goes into effect. In most cases, they choose to “work around” or ignore flexible working arrangements. In this case, flexible working policies still do not get into implementation.

The last problem is that some managers do not have a positive attitude towards flexible working arrangements, which can be reflected in two angles. From behavioral aspect, some employees are indirectly discouraged by senior managers to use it. Managers can restrict the access to flex work in either implicit or explicit ways (Barnett et al., 2009). According to the report by World at Work and FlexJobs (2015) that 67 percent of the interviewed managers in 293 organizations offer flexibility to all or most of their employees at their own discretion rather than following the organizations’ policies (ibid.). From emotional aspect, some managers may not fully trust employees using flexible working arrangements. For example, as mentioned in the UK Employment Regulation (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2014), employers believed that some employees would make unreasonable requests to get flexible working arrangement and flextime workers were less aware of what is happening in the company, less engaged in the team.
2.4. Guides of Making Flexible Working Policies

Firstly, to make flexible working policies, employers might follow three principles. According to the guide done by Acas (2015), a UK government organization which is providing information for employers and employees to prevent and solve workplace problems, a flexible working policy should attract and encourage employees to use flexible working arrangements. Besides, it is vital to ensure that every employee is treated fairly under flexible working policies (ibid.). The last one guide is posed by Australia government (2015). The adoption level of flexible working arrangements should suit the organizations’ business, resources (e.g. cost and administrative support) and demographic characteristics.

Further to the specific content in flexible working policies, a policy should include the detailed types of flexible working arrangements, what is the eligibility and how to apply for flexible working arrangements and where to find more supporting information (Acas, 2015).

To have a further understanding of the content of policies, we compared a couple of UK organizations and companies’ flexible working policies on their websites (BBC, 2015; Translink, 2013; University of Edinburgh, 2016; Scotmid, 2015; Bristol City Council, 2015). The main content of these policies is the application procedure of flexible working arrangements and the norms of eligibility. They also include types of works but they are somewhat diverse in terms of the areas of these organizations and companies. On the website GOV.UK, built by the Government Digital Service on behalf of the British Crown, there is a general procedure of applying for flexible working arrangements. It is showed in the following flow chart.

![Flowchart of the process of making a request](image-url)

*Figure 1 - The process of making a request*
The procedure is helpful for employers and employees who do not have experience of applying for flexible working arrangements. For organizations and companies, they can make some changes to adapt to the characteristics of their own business. Some requirements can hardly be met. For instance, the employer is allowed to make a decision in the period of 3 months. The time may be too long for employees to wait and employees have their own reasonable period of time. The requirement of stating that the application is a statutory request seems to be too official to be met in general companies. Although it is specific to governmental organizations in UK, the procedure can be viewed as a format for reference when analyzing the procedure of applying.

2.5. Guides of Implementing Flexible Working Policies

Initially, companies might choose an appropriate way to publicize flexible working policies. According to Acas (2015), once flexible working policy is settled, employers should make their employees informed about their new policies so that employees will participate in flexible working arrangements.

The Equal Opportunity Commission of South Australia (2011) lists some ways to publicize policies in the workplace. They are publishing policies on company’s website or intranet, producing brochures for staff, emailing policies to staff, posting policies on notice boards, discussing them at staff meetings, giving introduction training to new staff and making someone responsible for updating and circulating policies regularly. Among these, giving introduction of flexible working policies to new staff is the most efficient way to publicize (Dragomiroiu and et al., 2014). As they explain, new staff gets the first impression on the company through introduction training, which may influence employees’ attitude and work performance.

Besides, employees’ family members play an important role when they decide whether apply for flexible working arrangements. Almer, Cohen and Single (2003) find that in general, easing work-family conflicts comes first when people think of using flexible working arrangements, which allows people to have more time with family and involvement in their children’s daily life. In the same time, Almer et al. (2003) think it is important for the applicants to get support from their spouse. If employees would like to adopt flexible working arrangements, they may need an agreement regarding how to assign family responsibilities.

At last, it is vital to make sure that employers and employees can trust each other when using flexible working arrangements. According to case studies made by Goudswaard et al. (2013), they find that trust is important not only between executives of a company, but also plays a crucial role at the level of the work floor, between employers and employees. Both parties should realize that each side has its own agenda and they can negotiate about their specific needs regarding working hours.

Dialogue is an effective way to facilitate the understanding of each other. Collective dialogue and individual dialogue are two common types of dialogue between employers and employees. At the collective level, employees and employers can have a dialogue regarding the policies of flexible working arrangements together. This kind of dialogue is similar to conferences for workers. Individual dialogue, called one-on-one dialogue as well, refers to a dialogue between an employee and his or her manager, discuss the daily working hours and workload (ibid.).
The implementation of flexible working policies not only concerns the way of publicizing, but also how to handle the relationships well, the relationship between employees and their family members as well as the relationship between employers and employees.

2.6. Summary of Research presented
The articles in this chapter help the researchers get a picture of flexible working policies. It starts with the definition and types of flexible working arrangements. Then it can be divided into two major parts, problems of policies and guides of policies. Both parts are reviewed from the content and the implementation. The dimensions are showed in Table 1.

Table 1 – Summary of Research Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Guides</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>• informal and not written</td>
<td>• attractive and encouraging</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• inconsistency</td>
<td>• fair to every employee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• without appraisal of flexible working performance</td>
<td>• suit organizations’ business</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• with clear statement of types of flexible working arrangements, eligibility to apply and application procedure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>• poor understanding of content</td>
<td>• effective ways to publicize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• without outcomes of applications</td>
<td>• deal well with relationships between employees and their family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• without employers’ support</td>
<td>• deal well with relationships between employees and employers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Methodology

3.1. Research Strategy

The purpose of this research is to find out possible improvements of the implementations of flexible working policies through understanding and analyzing employers’ and employees’ evaluation.

The research methods in this thesis are mixed methods. Johnson et al. (2007) give their definition of mixed methods research: “Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (p. 123). Both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis are used in this research. The importance of both research methods has equal weight. More specifically, the research will be conducted in two parts, an interview and a survey.

• Part1: A semi-structured interview comes first to collect detailed description and evaluation regarding flexible working policies.

• Part2: An online survey involves more participants to test the credibility of the results of the interviews and conclude possible improvements of implementation.

Firstly, detail of the content and the implementation of flexible working policies are required. This information is somewhat detailed. Given that qualitative research allows researchers to collect rich, detailed information of users’ personal experiences (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) and discover people’s personal experiences of a phenomenon Strauss and Corbin (1990). Qualitative research might be an appropriate choice to be conducted at first.

To be more specific, a semi-structured interview, where researchers have a list of questions covering different topics within the specific research area (Oates, 2006), will be conducted in this research. In this way, we are able to collect relevant data as well as not limiting the freedom of the interviewees to answer the questions in their own way.

After that, we would like to check whether the evaluations collected in the interviews can be supported by more people so that possible improvements of implementation make sense. Thus, a survey will be conducted involving more respondents to participate in. Since quantitative research works as statistical techniques, it determines whether the conclusions from large amounts of data are accidental or certain facts (Oates, 2006). Thus, quantitative research can be used in this part. An online survey will be conducted.

Sue and Ritter (2007) state that online survey requires respondents being familiar with the Internet. The respondents of this research are well educated white-collar workers. Office staff usually have a good command of surfing the Internet. Thus it is less possible for the respondents to face this problem.

Hammersley (2002) proposes three approaches to mixed methods research: triangulation, facilitation and complementarity. Triangulation can be described as using one research method to confirm the findings of the other, for example using qualitative methods to prove
quantitative findings or vice versa. Facilitation is using one method to facilitate the other research to become easier. Complementarity occurs when both two methods are used in different aspects of the study to make the findings consistent.

In this research, triangulation and facilitation works. For triangulation, the result of the quantitative method is used to confirm the findings of the qualitative method. For facilitation, the content of the quantitative method is facilitated by the results of the qualitative method.

3.2. Research Process

The participants of both the interviews and the survey are chosen through snowball sampling method. The semi-constructed interviewing is conducted in two rounds. After analyzing and categorizing the results of the interview, an online survey is conducted on the results of the interviews.

3.2.1. Sampling Method

Snowball Sampling

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method. Non-probability sampling means that samples are gathered in a way that chances of being selected are not equal to all the individuals in the population and some of the individuals have a zero chance to be selected (Explorable.com, n.d.).

Snowball sampling is used when potential subjects are rare and hard to find. Researchers ask for initial subjects to invite additional subjects to gather enough samples (Research Methodology, n.d.).

Since, researchers cannot know the precise extent of the population through snowball sampling, it is difficult to create the sample frame.

In China, flexible working policies are usually exclusively published on companies’ intranets which are not accessible to the public. It is difficult to get direct contact with the interviewees whose companies implement flexible working policies. Thus, snowball sampling is chosen to ding respondents for this research. At the beginning, researchers used snowball sampling method to target on friends and relatives whose companies implement flexible working policies, and then asked these persons to introduce other potential interviewees and respondents of the survey, such as their business cooperate partners, colleagues, relatives and friends.

By using the snowball sampling method, the researchers collect potential participants’ WeChat accounts. WeChat is a free message and calling app, which is quite common among Chinese people. After introducing the purpose of our research and getting the permission to help with our research, they became our respondents. The interview is conducted through voice call on WeChat. As to the survey, all respondents are invited to a chat group. The link of the online survey is shard in the chat group and respondents complete it by themselves.

3.2.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

As Bryman and Bell (2011) describe, telephone interviewing and online interviewing are two alternatives for qualitative interviews, and the interviewing through WeChat is equal to telephone interviewing.

Interviews were conducted from January 21 to January 26 in 2017. Initially, only 5 people
agreed to accept the interview. But with their help, 2 more persons agreed to become interviewees. The interviewee sample was 7 at the end. All the interviews took place with both authors attending, with one of us asking questions and the other taking notes. All the interviews were recorded with the recording software on an iPhone 6.

The question guide of the interview is designed based on the materials presented in the Research Review Chapter, which is attached in appendix 1. The questions are around the content of policies and the implementation of policies. For the content part, the questions focus on interviewees’ evaluation regarding the methods of publicizing, the types of flexible working arrangements, and the content of flexible working policies. For the implementation part, the questions focus on interviewees’ description of their personal experience of using policies and the implementation situation in their whole companies. Most of the questions are set as open questions to make the interviewees answer the questions freely and deeply.

After the interviews, the first step was to compare all the collected empirical data. The conversations were transcribed and sorted so that differences and similarities among the interviews could be compared with each other. Even though the sample size is only 7 participants, there were various answers to the questions. In the second step, the researchers sorted out the key words mentioned by most of the interviewees in different questions categories. In order to saturate these categories, the researchers needed new data from the interviewees. Thus, these interviews were not conducted for only one time, but for several times if it was necessary. In the first round of interviews, researchers asked similar questions according to the question guide to all interviewees. In the following rounds, researchers adjusted the questions based on interviewees’ previous answers. Each interview lasted for thirty to forty minutes. In this way, the qualitative interviewing could gain more specific and related evaluations from employers and employees. Finally, the researchers developed three categories with several dimensions under each category. The credibility of these dimensions would be tested by the further online survey. The categories can be found in 3.3.1 Empirical Data of Semi-structured Interviews.

### 3.2.3. Online Survey

With the aim to make the questionnaire clear and easy for respondents to answer, it was mainly made up of closed questions and one open question.

Q1 to Q5 are basic information about respondents. Considering that the comparison between employers’ and employees’ evaluation will be done, it is necessary to set a question regarding respondents’ position, Q3 “Are you an employer or an employee?”. Q6 to Q9 are based on the first category of the interview results, the content of flexible working policies. For example, Q6 “To what degree would you rank the efficiency of the following methods of publicizing flexible working policies?” with six choices (company intranet, work regulations, company meeting, department meeting, emails and introduction training). These specific choices come from the results of the interviewees. Q10 is somewhat comprehensive. The choices of it are based on other two categories.

Furthermore, Q11 is open questions “Is there any other suggestion you would like to supplement towards the practice of flexible working policies?” informed us more innovative data to explore new ideas.

Before the actual distribution, a pre-test was done. The pre-tester matched the characteristics of the respondents that the questionnaire would be sent to later on. These pre-testers helped the researchers to improve the content of the questionnaire and correct mistakes.
The questionnaire was published on Questionnaire Star, a web survey platform, through both researchers’ WeChat accounts. It is a professional platform providing online questionnaire survey facilities and statistical assessment. The platform automatically produced a website link with the name of this research. The website link was shared to the respondents through WeChat chat group with 156 respondents. WeChat is the only channel we designed to collect data.

It is necessary to acknowledge that Q8 “To what degree would you rank the formality of following flexible working arrangements?” is not in an appropriate question type. The purpose of this question is to know the relationship between the formality level of application and the kind of arrangements. Thus, the researchers redesigned this question and sent it to the chat group in WeChat again. Compared to 156 respondents in the first round, 152 respondents helped to answer this question again. The complementary questionnaire is available in appendix 3. Also Q3 “Are you an employer or an employee?” was included in order to figure out the position of the respondents.

3.3. Data Analysis
Since the method of this research is mixed methods, two phases of analysis are required. It starts with categorizing the empirical data collected from the semi-structured interview. Then, with the help of software SPSS, comes testing the correlation between the variables from the online questionnaire.

3.3.1. Empirical Data of Semi-Structured Interviewing
The researchers analyzed the interview transcripts and sorted out three categories which are listed below:

- The content of flexible working policies
- The external factors influencing the implementation of flexible working policies
- The participation in flexible working arrangements

Since there are two kinds of respondents in this research, employers and employees, the similar and different descriptions and evaluations between them are compared. The results of comparison of the interviews are shown in 4.1 Results and Analysis of Interviews.

3.3.2. Statistical Data of Online Survey
In statistical analysis phase, the software SPSS was used. The quantitative data can be exported as an SAV file from the survey platform Questionnaire Star. This format of file can be directly imported into SPSS, which saves the time spent on inputting data as well as it avoids mistakes of inputting.

In addition, considering that the variables measuring the evaluation in the survey were nominal variables, the values such as 1, 2, and 3 are assigned to the attributes of variables. These numerical values just “name” the attributes separately. Furthermore, the mode is chosen as central value to indicate which alternative occurs most frequently in the distribution of answers. This is because most variables in the questionnaire are nominal, which could not be calculated.

To make it clear for readers to understand the similarities and differences between employers and employees in terms of different dimensions, cross tabulation analysis is chosen to show
the results.

3.4. Credibility
In this research, the dimensions are the common key words from the interviewees. Only the dimensions mentioned by most interviewees are viewed as credible one and categorized into the results. Otherwise, the dimensions is regarded as accidental factor and be abandoned.

In order to confirm the credibility of the interview results, the survey is conducted. These two researches are conducted in different times and different ways. The results of survey might prove the results of the interview to be accepted in a wide context.

3.5. Limitation
Owing to the snowball sampling method which is a non-probability method and cannot represent all employers and employees, the results will not be generalizable.

Snowball sampling may have researched on employees in limited companies. Most of the respondents of the survey were introduced by the interviewees so some of them came from the same company or the same industry and reduced the generalization of the findings.

The locations of invested companies are not wide enough. Although the researchers decided to investigate the companies in important economic cities in China, the respondents were only from Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong. And 106 out of 156 respondents’ companies were located in Shanghai. It may reduce the generalization of this research as well.

The number of respondents in each age group is not even distributed. 65 out of 156 respondents are in the age of 26-30 while 13 respondents are over 35. The research results may emphasis more on young people, which may not represent employers and employees in all age groups.
4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Results and Analysis of Interviews

There were 7 interviewees participating. They were all between the ages of 20~40 and the average age of the interviewees was slightly below 30 (29.8). There were 2 males and 5 females. They were working in different foreign companies and multinationals, and three of them were employers and four were employees. Basic information about these respondents are presented below.

Yu, a 23-years-old employee, has been a database developer in a foreign company for one year. Her company is located in Shanghai. The interviews with Yu took place on 21st and 24th of January.

Wu, a 30-years-old employee, has worked as a programming engineer in a foreign company for five years in Shanghai. The interviews with Wu took place on 21st and 24th of January.

Chu, 33, has been an employer of a multinational company in Beijing for two years. The interview with Chu took place on 24th of January.

Zhuang, a 40-years-old woman, has been an employer of a multinational company for 3 years. Her company is located in Hong Kong. The interview with Zhuang was conducted on 25th of January.

Luo, a 23-years-old employee, has been a software engineer in a foreign company for two and a half years. Her company is located in Shanghai. The interviews with Luo took place on 25th and 26th of January.

Gao, 26, has been a lawyer in a multinational company for four years. Her company is located in Shanghai. The interviews with Gao took place on 22ed and 25th of January.

Cheng, 34, has been an employer of a multinational company in Shanghai for seven years. The interviews with Cheng were conducted on 22ed and 25th of January.

As explained in the methodology chapter, the empirical data are analyzed and divided into the three following categories:

- the content of flexible working policies
- The external factors influencing the implementation of flexible working policies
- The participation in flexible working arrangements

4.1.1. The Content of Flexible Working Policies

Types of flexible working arrangements

Two kinds of flexible working arrangements are mentioned by the interviewees.

One is flextime, which allows employees to alter start and ending times of workdays with fixed core hours. Another is telework, which means working at home or at others places. It has two forms. Telework on ad-hoc basis is performed once because of urgent situation. Telework on long-term basis is performed from weeks to months depending on employees.
All the respondents’ companies provide flextime. Five of seven provide telework. Other types of flexible working arrangements are rarely used in their companies.

Chu mentions that different flexible working arrangements are provided to different departments according to the diverse nature of jobs. In his company, flextime is offered to all departments while telework is only provided to the sales department and the service department. He explains that their staff should be given more freedom to meet their vendors and clients. In his company, the entire staff understands that it is necessary to implement different flexible working policies in different departments.

**The methods of publicizing flexible working policies**

A total of six methods are mentioned by the interviewees, company intranet, work regulations, company meeting, department meeting, emails and introduction training.

The most prevalent method is uploading policies on the intranet of the company, every worker has access to the company website, which is mentioned by all interviewees. Introduction training is described as the best way to learn policies. One interview gives following explanation.

“In the introduction training, HR will distribute work regulations to new employees and explain the flexible working arrangements in detail. They will show you how to find flexible policies and application forms in the company intranet. This way is quite impressive. Besides, since it is a kind of face to face communication, we are welcomed to ask questions there. It avoids misunderstanding and confusion as well” (Wu, 2017-01-24)

In the interviewees’ companies, a combination of two to four methods tends to be used. Companies try to publicize flexible working polices in a comprehensive way.

**The eligibility of application**

Different companies have different requirements for employees’ rights to apply for flexible working arrangements. Three types of employees are mentioned by the interviewees.

Five interviewees state that all staff including formal staff, trial staff and internship are given right to make an application in their companies, except Cheng and Yu. Cheng’s company only gives the right to formal staff who has been in the company more than 2 years and Yu’s company only gives the right to formal staff who get good marks in performance appraisal of the last year respectively. According to them, their companies take two factors into consideration. Initially, interns and trial staff do not have good working techniques and lack working experience. Furthermore, it is important for new staff to develop a good working habit. If these two kinds of staff are allowed to use flexible working policies, there may be negative effects on the quality of work and personnel management.

**Ways to make application**

There are three ways to make application mentioned by the interviewees. The way of application is closely related to the type of flexible working arrangements.

As to flextime, nearly all respondents describe that they and their colleagues use it directly
without application. According to Gao, there is no need to make an application because flex-time is already included in her labor contact.

Regarding telework on an ad-hoc basis, most respondents make an oral application to their supervisor while a written application form is needed if staff applies for a long-term flextime.

In addition, two of five (Yu and Cheng) companies provide a uniform application form on intranet. After applying, employees can follow the process of their application on the company intranet as well. According to them, with the help of the procedure and a prepared template, it makes application an easy work and applicants are allowed to make full preparation for their application.

**The methods of appraising flexible working performance**

Most respondents describe that performance appraisal which is influenced by flexible working policies can be divided into two parts, attendance at work and quality of work.

As to attendance at work, the time of clocking in and clocking out are widened according to core working hours of flextime. The time of logging in to the intranet of the company is viewed as the attendance record of teleworkers. Among all the respondents, three of seven (Zhuang, Gao and Cheng) do not have a work attendance system. Zhuang states that staff fills in time sheets by themselves on the basis of the real situation and they are given full trust. It is not common to see people come late and leave early on purpose so this arrangement works quite well.

As to quality of work, most respondents state that supervisors have adjusted the assessment proportion of quality of work upward and that of attendance downward, which encourage staff to use flexible working arrangements. In the meantime, the concept of being punctual at work becomes weakened in their company philosophy. What is more important, most employee respondents agree that more emphasis should be put on quality of work rather than attendance.

“Employees who have a nine-to-five job and work on time are not necessarily good employees. The performance is the real basis for evaluating an employee. Our company has the clocking in and out system, but managers are not that strict. Especially for us, program designers, it is meaningless to impose a restriction on work time. Leaders put more attention to whether we can hit on a new idea, a different plan and gain research achievements. After all, profit is the most important stuff.” (Wu, 2017-01-24)

Turning to the frequency of performance appraisal, nearly all the companies present annual appraisals except Cheng’s, which is done twice a year at January and July separately. She also states that only at these two months, staff can make application of telework on long-term basis while the other companies do not impose a restriction on application time. However, it is common for respondents to mention that the results of performance appraisal directly influence the application within the next period. It means that if the quality of work does not meet standard, a further application of flexible working arrangements tends to be rejected by supervisors.
4.1.2. The External Factors Influencing the Implementation of Flexible working Policies

The external factors refer to the factors from outside environment, including companies, work teams, individuals, family members and others. These factors could not be written in flexible working polices but they do exert impacts on the implementation of flexible working policies.

Facilities of flexible working arrangements

According to the respondents, technical facilities are the foundation of supporting telework. Usually, companies provide personal laptops with VPN for teleworkers so they can get access to intranet to refer to internal documents and data. According to the respondents the quality of VPN should be improved. If companies can stabilize the intranet out of the workplace as good as it is in the workplace, it will increase teleworkers’ working efficiency.

Supervisors’ experience of practicing flexible working policies

Interviewees admit that a supervisor with telework working experience can keep staff to use these arrangements more efficiently. Initially, the experienced supervisors have a clear division of labor and responsibility so teleworkers gain a clear understanding of their workload. In addition, these supervisors will take teleworkers’ feelings into consideration. This means that supervisors show their trust and fairness to the teleworkers. In these ways, staff feels being encouraged to use flexible working arrangements because they not only receive direct support from supervisors but also have a sense of belongingness to their companies.

“Sometimes it’s hard to make a promise that I can finish the task on time. But an experienced supervisor will arrange fixed weekly meetings, asking us to hand in work reports and setting deadlines of small tasks. These will make teleworks more effective. Moreover, the leaders can treat everyone fairly. That is to say my assignment is no different from other colleagues, even if I work from home. I can feel a strong tie between the company and I.” (Chu, 2017-01-24)

From an employer’s perspective, Zhuang acknowledges that it is very necessary for leaders to get training on leading telework staff. To herself, she tends to set tasks for subordinates in advance and keeps herself available on the company office communication software. She also shares her experience like these to other employers.

Discussions with family members

Although the main subjects of flexible working policies were companies and staff, most respondents state that the main reason for using flexible working policies can be attributed to family affairs. Thus, they are more dependent on advisory opinions of family members. Luo explains, to some extent, the purpose of discussion with family members is to get support and understanding of family members.

“Sometimes the elders or children are ill and I need to take care of them. Sometimes there are happy events like birthday parties, I have to stay at home and do some preparation. Since I have responsibility for my job and I usually ask for work from home. I hope my family can understand and help me with the housework. Thus, it is necessary to have a discussion with family to make a plan in advance.” (Luo, 2017-01-25)
4.1.3. The Participation in Flexible Working Arrangements

Individual Participation

All the respondents have taken part in the practice of flextime for one to five years. Four of them (Chu, Zhuang, Gao and Cheng) have applied for telework on an ad-hoc basis in the recent 6 months but no respondent has applied for long-term telework since they were employed to their companies.

To all of them, flextime is the most realistic and practical flexible working arrangement. Yu explains that flextime is important for her because it helps her save time and energy spent on traveling to the workplace and avoids getting stuck in rush hours.

“The main benefits are escaping from rush hours and saving the transports cost. Because our company is located in the economic development zone and it is far away from the city center where I live. Sometimes, underground is so crowded that I have to wait for other one or two trains. I am very tired on my way to work and also in a bad mood when I get to the company.” (Yu, 2017-01-24)

Zhuang, as a mother, supplements that owing to flexible working arrangements, she can achieve a work-family balance. This aspect is also viewed as a vital point by other respondents (Chu and Cheng) who have become parents.

“My child has to go to school at 8:30 and the clock in is 9:00. There is not enough time for me to travel to company. So I have to ask for my mother to send my child to school but it cannot set my mind at ease. Now owing to flextime, I just need to arrive at company before 10:00. Besides my daughter is very happy because I can send her to school.” (Zhuang, 2017-01-25)

According to respondents, they apply for telework on ad-hoc basis at home if they have personal or family affairs. Chu states that he applied 4 times during the last half year and the major reason is that he has to prepare for his wedding. Gao and Cheng supplement that telework in other subsidiaries of their mother company is also viewed as telework. This is because these subsidiaries whose names are different from the name of their mother company and they pay taxes to the government in separate names. Employees had to apply for telework, even if they deal with collaborative projects in other subsidiaries. Chu, Gao and Cheng all agree that working in other places is a different experience because of changed working environment, but this shift does not bring change of their work feelings. Chu explains that to some extent, the workload is set in advance in case of missing a deadline, so he is still under working pressure also when teleworking at home.

All interviewees do not think that applying for long-term telework is a wise decision. Chu states that compared with working in the workplace, working at home is less effective. He is often distracted by his parents or wife so he cannot concentrate on his work. Chu believes this is one reason causing few staff to participate in long-term telework. This is agreed by other interviewees (Yu, Luo and Gao). Yu supplements that as a young employee, she feels much more motivated and energetic when working with colleagues so she prefers the workplace to home.

Entire participation

Firstly, flextime is widely used by employees and employers in all respondents’ companies.
The application for flextime is often skipped by employees and employers. Instead, they use it directly without making either oral or written application.

Furthermore, according to interviewees’ observations, the proportions of the whole staff who take part in telework on an ad-hoc basis vary in different companies but most of them cover 10%-20%. The frequency of application of ad-hoc telework keeps stable at two to three times per person per month. What is more, compared to individual participation, telework on long-term basis is rarely used among the whole staff in the respondents’ companies as well.

Cheng, as an employer, admits that actually this low participation of telework is anticipated by employers. She explains that the main purpose of telework is to deal with their personal emergency so staff can keep the balance between work and family. Thus, ad-hoc telework becomes the most feasible choice. From her personal perspective, to test the feasibility of telework on long-term basis, she will encourage employees to use it if they are willing to make an attempt on it.

4.2. Results and Analysis of the Online Survey

The number of distributed online questionnaires was 200 and 156 of them were recovered. Thus, the recovery rate of the survey is 78%. If there are empty or invalid answers in a questionnaire, it would be treated as an invalid one and be abandoned. Since there were no missing or invalid data in the questionnaires collected, all 156 questionnaires were valid.

4.2.1. Background Data of Respondents

Among all the respondents, the number of employees accounted for 79.5% while that of employers occupied 20.5%. Table 2 also shows that the amounts of male respondents and female respondents are close, 52.6% and 47.4% respectively. Among the male respondents, 19 are employers and 63 are employees. For the female respondents, 13 are employers and 61 are employees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within position</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within gender</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within position</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within gender</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within position</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As to age (Figure 2), the largest amount of respondents is staff aged 26-30, representing 41.7%. The figures for 20-25 and 31-35 were 34% and 16%, respectively. Only 8.3% was over 35 (Figure 2). The distribution of the location of the companies is showed in Figure 3. Beijing makes up 19.9% (31), Shanghai 67.9% (106) and Hong Kong 12.2% (19).

**Figure 2- Age group of the respondents (n=156)  Figure 3- Distribution of the companies’ location (n=156)**

**Q5: “Have you ever used a kind of flexible working arrangement? What is it?”**

To learn about the general review of respondents’ use of flexible working policies, Q5: “Have you ever used a kind of flexible working arrangement? What is it?” was designed. Only 21 of 156 respondents answer that they have not chosen to use any kind of flexible working arrangements. Among the respondents who use them, flextime consists of 71%, telework makes up of 6% and others types occupies 10% (Figure 4).

**Figure 4- General review of respondents’use of flexible working policies**
4.2.2. The Content and the Implementation of Flexible Working Policies

Q6: “To what degree would you rank the efficiency of the following methods of publicizing flexible working policies?”

Respondents rate the efficiency of six methods in a scale from 1 to 5 which means very low (1), low (2), average (3), high (4), very high (5). The mode of each method is counted in Table 3. The modes of introduction training (69) and work regulations (64) are both 5, which means the highest efficiency compared to the others.

Table 3- The Modes of methods of publicizing flexible working policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Company intranet</th>
<th>Work regulations</th>
<th>Company meeting</th>
<th>Department meeting</th>
<th>Emails</th>
<th>Introduction training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>4 (80)</td>
<td>5 (64)</td>
<td>3 (72)</td>
<td>3 (94)</td>
<td>3 (76)</td>
<td>5 (69)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The figures in the brackets refer to the frequency of the attributes.

In Table 4, we make a cross-tabulation table between the most efficient two methods and the positions. Analyzing the distribution of the employers and the employees, they tend to share similar opinions. Compared with the total number of employer (32) and that of employer (124), most employers and more than one-third employees regard introduction training as the best way to introduce flexible working policies.

Table 4-Crosstabulation between the modes of publicizing and position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work regulations</td>
<td>5 (19)</td>
<td>5 (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction training</td>
<td>5 (18)</td>
<td>5 (51)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The figures in the brackets refer to the frequency of the attributes.

Q7: “What kind of staff should be given right to apply for flexible working arrangements?”

The distribution of respondents’ answers is quiet equal. 56 of 156 respondents choose formal staff with requirements as good performance, 54 respondents choose all formal staff without requirements and 46 respondents choose all staff including formal staff, trial staff and internship.

Then, we make a cross-tabulation table between the eligibilities and the positions. In Table 5, three types of eligibility are assigned with numerical values, value 1 for staff with good performance, value 2 for all formal staff and value 3 for all staff.

According to the distribution of employers and employees, they tend to hold different views. The mode of employer respondents is value 1, with 23 out of total 32 employers. The mode of employee respondents is value 3, but the numbers of employee respondents choosing value 2 and value 3 are very close. Employees might think all staff should have the right to flexible working arrangements.
Table 5- Crosstabulation between the Modes of eligibility and position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (23)</td>
<td>1 (33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (7)</td>
<td>2 (44)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (2)</td>
<td>3 (47)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The figures in the brackets refer to the frequency of the attributes.

Q8: “What kind of application should be made to long-term flexible working arrangements and short-term flexible working arrangements?”

In this question, long-term arrangements refer to telework on long-term base while short-term arrangements refer to flextime and telework on ad-hoc base. Since this question is redesigned, the number of respondents is reduced to 152.

In table 6, the numerical values are assigned to the attributes: value 1 for formal means with uniform form, value 2 for semi-formal means any written application, value 3 for informal or oral application and value 4 for casual means without application. The mode of long-term arrangements is value 1 while that of short-term arrangements is value 3.

Table 6- The modes of application form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Application Form</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>N Valid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long-term flexible working arrangements</td>
<td>1 (96)</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term flexible working arrangements</td>
<td>1 (14)</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The figures in the brackets refer to the frequency of the attributes.

A cross-tabulation between the methods of making flexible working application and the positions is created as Table 7. According to the distribution of employers and employees, they tend to show similar opinions formal application for long-term arrangement and oral application for short-term ones.

Table 7- Crosstabulation between the modes of application form and position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Application Form</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long-term flexible working arrangements</td>
<td>1 (26)</td>
<td>1 (70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term flexible working arrangements</td>
<td>3 (23)</td>
<td>3 (70)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The figures in the brackets refer to the frequency of the attributes.

Q9: “What is the most reasonable way to appraise performance of staff?”

91 of 156 respondents chose the option “quality of work should overweight attendance at work” and 49 respondents think that these two criteria should be of the same importance. The other 16 respondents suggest that other appraisal systems should be used as well. No respondents prefer that attendance should overtake quality of work.

A cross-tabulation table between methods of appraising and the positions is showed in Table 8. The attributes are assigned with numerical values: value 1 for attendance overweighs quality, value 2 for quality overweighs attendance, value 3 for equal importance and value 4 for introducing other appraisal methods.
According to the distribution of employers and employees, they might have different views. The mode of employer respondents is value 3, equal importance, about two-thirds of total employer respondents chose value 3. The mode of the employee respondents is value 2, quality overweighs attendance, with 77 out of 124 employee respondents.

Table 8- Crosstabulation between the Modes of appraisal method and position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>3 (22)</td>
<td>2 (77)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The figures in the brackets refer to the frequency of the attributes.

Q10: “Please rank the following in order of importance to you when you think of applying a flexible working arrangement”.

The average ranking for each choice of the ranking question is calculated according to the following formula. W means the weight of ranked position. This question has 7 choices, choice A to choice G. If one respondent ranks in the order “B-C-E-G-D-A-F”, then choice B weights 7, choice C weights 6, choice E weights 5 and choice F weights 1. X means the response count for the choice of answer. If 3 respondents rank choice B at first, then X_B is 3. Total refers to the number of the respondents filling in the questionnaire. It is 156 in this survey.

\[
\text{Average ranking} = \frac{X_A W_A + X_B W_B + \cdots + X_G W_G}{Total}
\]

The choice of answer with the largest average ranking is the most preferred choice. The average ranking is presented in table 9.

Table 9- The average ranking of importance when thinking of apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Average mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C. whether it saves my time and energy spent traveling to workplace</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. whether my company provides facilities for me, such as laptop, VPN...</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. supervisors’ trust and support</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. family members’ needs and understanding</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. whether the application procedure is easy or complex</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. the participation of other staff</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. the self-discipline of accomplishing goal of work</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest three choices are time and energy spent on traveling, flexible working facilities and supervisors’ trust and support. This analysis combine employers’ and employees’ ranking together. In the interviews, G, family members’ needs and understanding is viewed as an important factor motivates employers and employees to use arrangements. In the survey, it ranks
the forth which is slightly inconsistent with the results of the interviews.

Q11: “Is there anything else you would like to suggest about the practice of flexible working policies?”

It is an elective question and 17 respondents have answered it. 9 of them mention that it is necessary to provide training for either employers or employees, or both. They put emphasis on the training of telework, for instance, how to manage personal task and time and how to cooperate with colleagues, etc.

According to the answers, a small portion of the respondents (5 respondents) described flexible working policies as a good way to attract young graduates who attach more importance to their freedom.

4.2.3. Answering the First Two Questions

The first two research questions are:
- How do employees perceive flexible working policies?
- How do employers perceive flexible working policies?

First of all, we find that employer and employee might perceive flexible working policies from similar dimensions. Respondents also describe the details they concern about of these dimensions. We organize them in Table 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The content of flexible working policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Types of Arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flextime; telework on an ad-hoc base;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telework on long-term base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Publicizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>company intranet; work regulations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>company meeting; department meeting;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emails; introduction training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Eligibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formal staff with good performance;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ordinary formal staff; all staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Ways to apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without application; oral application;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>written application with or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without uniform application form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Methods of Appraising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attendance at work; quality of work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The implementation of flexible working policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal laptop; VPN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Supervisors’ support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of workload; Emotional Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Family’s need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing urgent family issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Personal Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time and energy spent on traveling; Work-life balance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, employers and employees might hold similar and different opinions on certain dimensions. These similarities and differences are consistent in the results of the interviews and the survey. We list them in Table 11.
Table 11 - Similarities and differences between employees’ and employers’ evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Employers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility</td>
<td>All staff, including formal staff, trial staff and internship</td>
<td>Formal staff with good performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal</td>
<td>quality of work more important than attendance at work</td>
<td>attendance at work as important as quality of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application methods</td>
<td>oral application for short-term arrangements</td>
<td>formal application with uniform form for long-term arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicizing</td>
<td>the most efficient two ways: introduction training and work regulations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Discussion

5.1. Answering the Third Research Question
Combing the results of the research with guides presented in Research Review Chapter, we try to answer the third research question:

- How can the implementation of flexible working policies be improved?

The answer to the research question is divided into ten dimensions. They are possible improvements for companies to take:

1) Types of Flexible working arrangements: staring with prevalent types such as flextime and telework
2) Eligibility: providing all formal staff with equal right to make applications
3) Application method: including all kinds of application methods into policies; preparing a uniform application form
4) Appraisal: making quality of work overweight attendance at work
5) Publicizing: using introduction training and working regulations to publicize policies
6) Time and energy spent on traveling: making flexible working hours stagger rush hours
7) Facilities and Technologies: prepare facilities and technologies well before implementing policies; maintaining and updating them regularly
8) Employers’ trust and support: holding dialogues between employers and employees to build trust and support
9) Training: providing managements skills and communication skills of flexible working tasks to both employers and employees; holding seminars to share experience and skills
10) Job attractiveness: including flexible working policies into information of job recruitment

Following is the detailed discussion of how we conclude to these answers.

5.1.1. The Content of Flexible Working Policies

Types of Flexible Working Arrangements
Flextime and telework are the most two common types used by the respondents in our research, which is in line with the results of Parker’s (2014) investigation. We also find that flextime is adopted by more employers and employees than telework. Compared to traditional work, flextime just changes start and ending time of work, which is more similar to traditional work patters and easier for employers and employees to adapt to.

Thus, we suggest that if companies that have no experience before would like to introduce flexible working arrangements, they can choose flextime and telework to start with.

The eligibility
Employees have to work for the same employers for at least 26 weeks to get the right to make application (GOV. UK, 2016). The situation is different in China. Companies can set the standard of the eligibility by themselves.

Employer respondents tend to set formal staff with excellent performance as the eligibility. The possible reason is employers believe in these employees’ working ability. Employers are
concerned about poor-quality of work results if all staff use flexible working arrangements. Employers often view flexible working arrangements as a reward for good employees. However, employee respondents express that although they can understand employers, they still insist that all formal staff should be given equal rights. Fairness is included in the guide of making flexible working policies by Acas (2015).

As far as we concern, all formal staff is a somewhat reasonable eligibility. Firstly, it ensures the equality of opportunities. Also, it guarantees work quality because formal staff is more reliable than trial staff and internship.

**The application methods**
Both employer and employee respondents state that various methods are used to apply for different types of flexible working arrangements. However, different types of application are not written on flexible working policies. This may cause confusion between principles and practice. Thus, we suggest that companies should write in their policies that what kind of application method is used for what kind of arrangements, even if it is an oral application.

In addition, it would be better if companies would like to prepare uniform application forms for employee. With uniform forms, it is easier to sort out applications and keep them on file for reference, which prevents the problem raised by Cooper and Baird (2015) that the outcomes of employees’ applications are not formally recorded and they are not sure when to start their flexible working arrangements.

**Appraisal**
The ways of measuring flexible worker performance, attendance at work and quality of work, have not been changed much. This is also supported by the survey made by Institute for Workplace Innovation (2010) that only 13% of managers argue that it is necessary to change the way to appraise employees’ performance.

Employers and employees tend to have different opinions on appraisal. The results of the interviews and the survey show that employers think that both attendance at work and quality of work should be criteria of measurement while employees hold the view that quality of work should overweight attendance at work.

Compared with western culture, it is impossible for Chinese employers to disregard attendance at work because Chinese culture views the working process as a vital criterion to judge one’s performance, which can be witnessed in the whole society from state-owned organizations to private companies. With the integration of global culture, the employee respondents in investigated foreign companies and multinationals would like to weaken the concept of attendance at work and strengthen that of quality of work.

Thus, companies are suggested to adjust the weight of attendance and quality. Attaching more important to quality of work may motivate employees.

**Publicizing**
Introduction training and work regulations are chosen to be the most efficient two ways to publicize flexible working policies. Employers and employees show similar opinions on them.

Introduction training is a quick and easy way for new employees to get familiar with the
organization (Dragomiroiu and et al., 2014). We also find that introduction training is a reinforce way to learn policies. Employees can ask questions about policies and HR department or employers will give employees answers at once.

Work regulations are also a powerful tool of labor management (Li, 2016). In China, employers regularly post work regulations on companies’ notice boards. These notice boards are often near company entrances or elevators. Once policies are posted, employees can find them easily.

Thus, introduction training and working regulations are recommended to publicize flexible working policies to attract employees’ attention.

5.1.2. The External Factors Influencing the Implementation of Policies

Time and energy spent on traveling
In China, commuter often gets struck in rush hours on their way to work. In our research, respondents express that they feel exhausted and have a bad mood because of traffic jams. If they use flextime, then they can arrive at companies later and avoid peak hours. If they use telework, then they can work at home without spending time on travel to the workplace.

As far as we concern, employers and employees may view flexible working arrangements as a way to save time and energy spent on traveling to the workplace. Thus, we suggest that company could make flexible working hours stagger peak hours.

Facilities and technologies
These are the foundation for teleworkers to perform remote work (Alexander et al., 2010). If staff do not have access to the company intranet, then it is difficult to contact team members and partners as well as download and upload documents.

Therefore, we advise companies to make full preparation of flexible working facilities and technologies before the implementation of telework arrangement. What is more important, companies have to be responsible for the maintenance and upgrade of these facilities and technologies regularly.

Supervisors’ trust and support
There is a mindset in Chinese culture that staff has to be present in the office. Otherwise, he or she is not a good employee (Anell and Hartmann, 2007). We think this mindset is an obstacle for Chinese employers to support flexible working arrangements. If this conservative opinion could be ease, more subordinates may feel encouraged to use flexible working policies, which accelerated the success of flexible working policies (Goudswaard et al., 2013).

Thus, it is suggested that supervisors could have an open dialogue with their subordinates about flexible working policies. Dialogue is an effective way to understand each other and build trust (Goudswaard et al., 2013). If two parties have different concerns regarding flexible working policies, they can negotiate to remove concerns and win trust and support from each other.

Training
Some respondents state that certain kinds of training, such as task managing skills and
communication skills for employers as well as employees, will positively contribute to the practice of flexible working arrangements.

Cooper and Baird (2015) have arisen a problem that line managers often lack experience and knowledge of flexible working polices. They are poor at managing employees in flexible working situations. Training may help employers and employees adapt to flexible working arrangements quickly.

Thus, we suggest HR departments to provide skill training according to employers and employees’ demands. Besides, holding a seminar for employers and employees to address common problems and share experience may be another form of training.

**Job Attractiveness**
Some respondents state that flexible working policies can be used to attract more young graduates. This may be closely interrelated to an increasing number of young people in China preferring free and flexible working pattern (China Youth Daily, 2016). Besides, flexible working policies are not only viewed as modern working arrangements, but also extra benefits to attract new talents and retain old staff, which is different from European and North American countries.

Thus, we suggest that flexible working arrangements could be included in the information of companies’ recruitment in order to attract more candidates.

**5.2. Further Research**
The further research could focus on specific types of flexible working arrangements and test whether they can increase the participation level for staff in foreign companies and multinationals in China, also Chinese companies. Telework might be a good choice. Because telework is far less attractive than flextime, deeper investigate may find obstacles.

Secondly, with the use of flexible working arrangements, employers and employees already have had personal positive understandings and feelings of flexible working policies. Thus, to extend this research, either further works could examine how flexible working policies affect staff work awareness and behavior, or how these policies affect company philosophy. It could explore what changes will occur on staff and companies after the implementation of flexible working arrangements has been established.

Another limitation of this research is regarding the kind of industry. Staff in different kinds of industry may put importance to different aspects of the implementation of flexible working policies. Other research could examine the similarities and differences of employers’ and employees’ evaluation of flexible working policies in different kinds of industries.
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Appendix

Appendix 1

The question guide of the first round interview:

Part 1 Basic Information

Gender:
Age:
Employer or Employee:
The company location:
The occupation:
How long has he/she been in this position:
The date:
The start time:
The end time:

Part 2 Interview

1. How does your company publish the flexible working policies?
2. What do you think of the flexible working policies of your company?
3. What is the main content of the flexible working policies of your company?
4. Do you have a clear understanding of the policies? If yes, how do you get to know about it? If not, what is the problem preventing you from doing it?
5. What kinds of flexible working arrangements are mostly used in your company? And could you describe the current use of them?
6. Is there any actions or behavior taken by companies, employers or employees have cause positive or negative effects on the practice of the policies? Or, what kind of actions and behavior will have positive or negative effects on the practice of the policies?
Hello, we are two Chinese exchange students study business administration students, from Borås University, researching how to improve the practice of flexible working policies. This is being done for our bachelor thesis. This survey should only take 4-5 minutes to complete. All answers you provide will be kept in the strictest confidentiality. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey!

1. How old are you?
   A. 20 - 25   B. 26 - 30   C. 31 - 35   D. over 36

2. What is your gender?
   A. Male   B. Female

3. Are you an employer or an employee?
   A. Employer   B. Employee

4. Where is your company located in?
   A. Beijing   B. Shanghai   C. Hong Kong

5. Have you ever used a kind of flexible working arrangement? What is it?
   A. Yes, it is ________   B. No

6. To what degree would you rank the efficiency of the following methods of publicizing flexible working policies? Measured in a scale with the categories (very low, low, average, high and very high).

   1) Company intranet
   2) Work regulations
   3) Company meeting
   4) Department meeting
   5) Emails
   6) Induction training

7. What kind of staff should be given right to apply for flexible working arrangements?
   A. Formal staff with special requirements, such as who have worked for 2 years, who achieved good working performance last year, etc.
   B. Ordinary formal staff without special requirements
   C. All staff, including formal staff, trial staff and internships
8. To what degree would you rank the formality of following flexible working arrangements? Measured in a scale with the categories (formal - a written application with a uniform form; semi-formal - a written application with any form; informal - with an oral application; casual - without any application).

Long-term flexible working arrangements

Short-term flexible working arrangements

9. What is the most reasonable way to appraise performance of staff?

A. Attendance overweighs quality of work

B. Quality of work overweighs attendance

C. Attendance is the same important to quality of work

D. Other kinds of appraise system should be introduced

10. Please rank the following in order of importance to you when you think of applying a flexible working arrangement.

A. whether the application procedure is easy or complex

B. whether my company provides facilities for me, such as laptop, VPN……

C. whether it saves my time and energy spent traveling to workplace

D. the participation of other staff

E. supervisors’ trust and support

F. the self-discipline of accomplishing goal of work

G. family members’ needs and understanding

11. Is there any other suggestion you would like to supplement towards the practice of flexible working policies?

__________________________________________
Appendix 3

Questionnaire

Hello, we are very sorry to bother you again. It is our fault that designing Q8 about the way of making flexible working arrangements in an inappropriate method. We sincerely hope that you will help with filling it again. Thank you for your time and participation!

1. Are you an employer or an employee?
   A. Employer    B. Employee

2. What kind of application should be made to long-term flexible working arrangements and short-term flexible working arrangements?

   1) Long-term flexible working arrangements:
      A. formal applications, e.g. a written application with a uniform form
      B. semi-formal applications, e.g. a written application with any form, even email
      C. informal applications, e.g. an oral application
      D. casual applications, without any application

   2) Short-term flexible working arrangements:
      A. formal applications, e.g. a written application with a uniform form
      B. semi-formal applications, e.g. a written application with any form, even email
      C. informal applications, e.g. an oral application
      D. casual applications, without any application