A Bibliometric Study of the Term Workplace Flexibility

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

This study presents a bibliometric analysis of academic literature related to the term "workplace flexibility" to uncover publication trends, thematic structures, and influential contributions within the field. Using data extracted from the Scopus database and analyzed through VOSviewer, the study maps co-authorship networks, international collaborations, keyword co-occurrence patterns, and temporal trends. The findings reveal a concentration of scholarly activity in Western countries, particularly the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, with significant collaboration among prominent authors such as Kossek E.E., Moen P., and Allen T.D. Keyword analysis identifies four major thematic clusters: employee well-being and satisfaction, labor equity and access, structural scheduling models, and digital/remote work. Temporal overlay mapping indicates a growing research focus on telecommuting, well-being, and productivity in the post-2018 period, reflecting the influence of global workplace transformations. While the field has matured over time, it remains fragmented in terminology and geographically skewed. The study highlights the need for broader global representation, clearer conceptual frameworks, and expanded inquiry into technological and organizational dimensions of workplace flexibility.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace flexibility has emerged as a transformative concept in contemporary labor discourse, driven by shifts in organizational structures, workforce demographics, and technological innovation. Traditionally associated with alternative work arrangements such as telecommuting, flexible scheduling, and compressed workweeks workplace flexibility now encompasses broader themes including autonomy, well-being, and work-life integration. The rise of knowledge-intensive industries and the growing importance of human capital have led employers to reconsider rigid, hierarchical models in favor of adaptive, employee-centered practices [1]. Flexibility is no longer viewed as merely a perk but as a strategic asset contributing to productivity, employee retention, and organizational resilience.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the global conversation on workplace flexibility. As businesses worldwide shifted to remote work out of necessity, perceptions regarding where,

when, and how work could be accomplished were fundamentally altered [2]. Organizations that had previously resisted remote or flexible arrangements began adopting such models to sustain operations and protect employee health. This abrupt transition highlighted both the potential benefits such as improved work-life balance and reduced commuting and the challenges, including disparities in digital access and managerial oversight. These rapid transformations underscored the urgency of understanding workplace flexibility not as a temporary fix, but as a key component of post-pandemic work design [3], [4].

Academic interest in workplace flexibility has grown in tandem with its practical applications, spanning multiple disciplines including management, organizational psychology, labor economics, and public policy. Scholars have explored a variety of dimensions, from individual perceptions of flexibility to its impacts on organizational performance, gender equality, and mental health outcomes [5]–[7]. The proliferation of terms and conceptual frameworks such as "agile work," "flexible working," and "remote work", reflects the dynamic and multifaceted nature of this field. As a result, synthesizing and mapping this growing body of research is vital to avoid fragmentation and to guide future scholarly inquiry.

Bibliometric analysis offers a powerful methodological lens through which to examine the structure and evolution of workplace flexibility literature. By employing tools such as co-authorship networks, co-citation patterns, and keyword co-occurrence, bibliometric techniques help identify influential authors, seminal publications, and emerging research themes. Previous bibliometric studies have analyzed flexibility within related topics, such as remote work or work-life balance, but few have focused explicitly on the term "workplace flexibility" itself. Considering its increasing prominence and application, a targeted bibliometric study is timely and necessary to illuminate how this term has been conceptualized, disseminated,

and evolved across academic discourse [5], [8].

Furthermore, workplace flexibility intersects with broader global trends such as digital transformation, demographic aging, sustainability, and labor market polarization. In this context, organizations are under pressure to redesign work models that not only improve efficiency but also align with values of inclusivity, employee empowerment, and social equity [3]. Governments and policymakers are likewise exploring legislative frameworks to promote flexible work as a means to stimulate economic participation, especially for women, caregivers, and people with disabilities. Mapping the academic terrain of workplace flexibility will support evidence-based decisions across policy and practice by identifying knowledge gaps and dominant narratives.

Despite the conceptual importance and widespread implementation of workplace flexibility, there is currently a lack of systematic understanding of how the term has evolved within academic literature over time. The proliferation of related but distinct terminology such as flexible work arrangements, telework, hybrid work, and agile work has contributed to conceptual ambiguity, making it difficult to track research developments specific to "workplace flexibility." Without a clear bibliometric overview, scholars and practitioners may overlook seminal works, underestimate key contributors, or misidentify dominant themes and trends. This fragmentation poses challenges for building a coherent theoretical foundation and for advancing research agendas in this crucial field. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of academic literature that explicitly uses the term "workplace flexibility".

2. METHODS

This study adopts a bibliometric analysis approach to systematically map the intellectual landscape surrounding the term "workplace flexibility" in academic literature. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method

used to examine patterns of publication, authorship, collaboration, and thematic evolution within a specific body of scholarly work. This method enables the identification of influential authors, institutions, and sources, as well as thematic clusters and emerging trends [9]. To ensure methodological rigor and replicability, the analysis focuses solely on peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings indexed in the Scopus database, which offers high-quality and comprehensive bibliographic metadata suitable for bibliometric investigation.

The data collection process was carried out in June 2025 using the keyword "workplace flexibility" in article titles, abstracts, and keywords within the Scopus database. No restrictions were placed on publication year to allow for a longitudinal perspective on the evolution of the term. The search yielded a dataset of relevant documents, which were then exported in .ris and .csv formats for processing. Documents were screened to ensure relevance by excluding papers that mentioned the term only tangentially or as part of unrelated themes. The final dataset was prepared for analysis by standardizing author names, keywords, and institutional affiliations to reduce redundancy caused by inconsistent formatting.

For the analysis and visualization, the study employed VOSviewer (version 1.6.xx) a widely used software tool for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks. VOSviewer supports the creation of co-authorship, citation, and keyword co-occurrence maps, enabling both structural and thematic mapping of the research domain [10]. In this study, co-occurrence analysis of keywords was used to detect major thematic clusters within the literature, while co-authorship networks revealed collaboration patterns among authors and institutions. Temporal overlay visualizations were generated to track the emergence and evolution of keywords over time.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
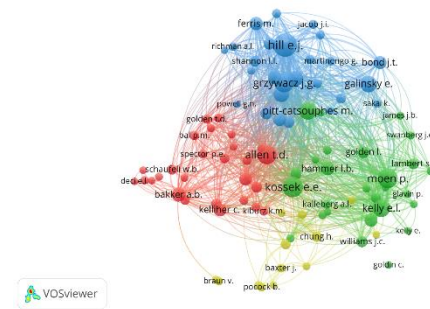
Co-Authorship Analysis

Figure 1. Author Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 1 presents a co-authorship network of influential authors in the field of workplace flexibility. The map is divided into distinct clusters (color-coded as blue, green, red, and yellow) each representing a group of scholars who frequently collaborate. In the blue cluster, prominent figures such as Hill E.J., Grzywacz J.G., and Pitt-Catsouphes M. suggest a concentration of research on family-supportive work environments and organizational policy impacts. The green cluster, anchored by Moen P., Kossek E.E., and Kelly E.L., appears to focus on organizational change, flexible scheduling interventions, and the sociological dimensions of work. The red cluster, with key authors like Allen T.D., Bakker A.B., and Schaufeli W.B., likely emphasizes psychological outcomes, employee well-being, and work engagement. The yellow cluster, though smaller, includes authors such as Braun V. and Pocock B., possibly representing niche or regional studies on gender and labor markets
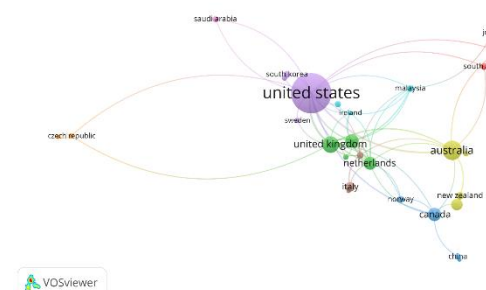

Figure 2. Country Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 2 displays a country co-authorship network in the domain of workplace flexibility research, highlighting

international collaboration patterns. The United States dominates the map, indicated by its large node size and central position, signifying its substantial publication output and strong collaborative ties with multiple countries. The United Kingdom, Australia, and the Netherlands also emerge as major contributors with dense linkages, suggesting they are active nodes in global academic partnerships. Regional clusters show collaborations between India, Jordan, and South Africa (red cluster), and between Canada, China, and New Zealand (blue cluster), pointing to geographically and culturally aligned research networks. Countries like Czech Republic and Saudi Arabia have fewer connections, indicating either emerging involvement or more isolated research activity.

Citation Analysis

Table 1. Top Cited Literature

Citation	Author	Title
610	[8]	Work-Family Conflict and Flexible Work Arrangements: Deconstructing Flexibility
328	[5]	Defining and conceptualizing workplace flexibility
241	[3]	Examining the tensions in workplace flexibility and exploring options for new directions
190	[11]	The relationship of perceived flexibility, supportive work-life policies, and use of formal flexible arrangements and occasional flexibility to employee engagement and expected retention
176	[12]	Workplace flexibility and new product development performance: The role of telework and flexible work schedules
159	[13]	Workplace Flexibility, Work Hours, and Work-Life Conflict: Finding an Extra Day or Two
157	[14]	Schedule flexibility and stress: Linking formal flexible arrangements and perceived flexibility to employee health
150	[15]	Exploring the relationship of workplace flexibility, gender, and life stage to family-to-work conflict, and stress and burnout
144	[16]	Is precarious employment more damaging to women's health than men's?
127	[17]	Schedule flexibility in hourly jobs: Unanticipated consequences and promising directions

Source: Scopus Database
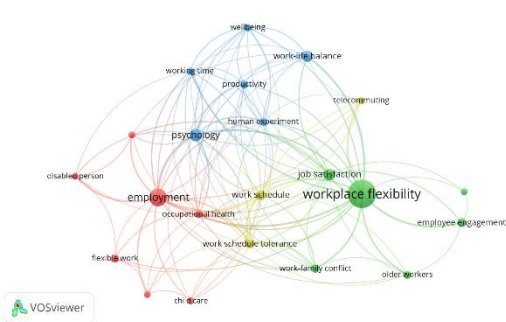
Keyword Co-Occurrence Network

Figure 3. Network Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

The map in Figure 1 above visualizes the co-occurrence of keywords related to the term "workplace flexibility", revealing thematic clusters that shape the discourse in this field. At the center of the map is the term "workplace flexibility", marked by a large green node, reflecting its central role and frequent association with multiple keywords across disciplines. This centrality underscores the term's conceptual richness and multidimensional nature, linking it not only to employment practices but also to psychological, organizational, and policy-

related themes. The visualization helps identify four primary clusters represented by different colors, each signifying a thematic focus within the literature.

The green cluster, tightly linked to "workplace flexibility", includes terms such as job satisfaction, employee engagement, work-family conflict, and older workers. This cluster suggests a strong research focus on the employee-centered outcomes of flexibility, such as increased engagement and improved work-life balance. These themes often reflect organizational behavior studies that explore how flexible arrangements affect motivation, well-being, and career sustainability, especially among aging employees or those balancing multiple roles. The links between "job satisfaction" and "work-family conflict" imply that much of the discourse revolves around how flexibility helps mitigate role strain and supports diverse workforce needs.

The red cluster gravitates around the term employment and includes keywords such as disabled person, childcare, occupational health, and flexible work. This grouping emphasizes the inclusivity and accessibility dimensions of workplace flexibility, highlighting how flexible policies can support marginalized groups or those with caregiving responsibilities. Research in this area likely examines the structural and legal frameworks that enable equitable participation in the workforce, especially for populations facing employment barriers. The presence of terms like "disabled person" and "childcare" further indicates a concern with social policy and labor rights, reinforcing the relevance of flexibility as a tool for promoting labor market equity.

The blue cluster is led by the keyword psychology and includes terms like well-being, productivity, working time, and work-life balance. This group reflects the psychosocial and cognitive aspects of workplace flexibility, exploring how different forms of work arrangement affect mental health, personal productivity, and subjective well-being. It connects with empirical and experimental studies investigating behavioral outcomes and individual responses to flexible

schedules. The interlinkages between "working time," "well-being," and "productivity" point to research that evaluates how autonomy in scheduling contributes to both employee satisfaction and organizational efficiency.

Lastly, a smaller yellow cluster connects terms such as telecommuting and human experiment, suggesting a growing body of research centered on remote work and digital workplace transformations. This likely includes studies conducted during or after the COVID-19 pandemic, where remote work became widespread and offered unique opportunities to observe changes in employee behavior and organizational processes in real time. The linkage to "human experiment" implies that recent shifts in workplace norms have provided quasi-experimental settings for studying flexibility in practice, potentially offering new insights into behavioral adaptation, digital infrastructure needs, and virtual collaboration dynamics.
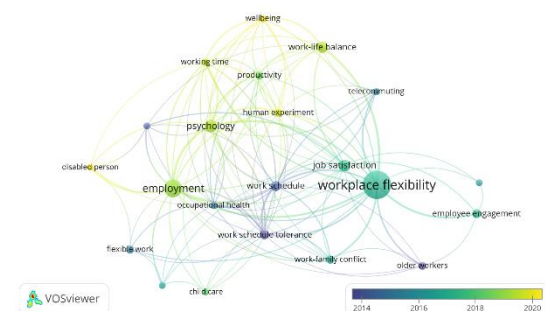

Figure 4. Overlay Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

The overlay visualization in figure 4 illustrates the temporal evolution of keyword usage in scholarly literature on workplace flexibility from 2014 to 2020. The color gradient from purple (older) to yellow (newer) allows insight into how research focus has shifted over time. Central themes such as "workplace flexibility," "job satisfaction," and "work schedule" are shown in green, suggesting these have been consistently studied across the timeline. In contrast, terms like "work-life balance," "wellbeing," and "productivity" appear in yellow tones, indicating these have gained prominence in more recent years, especially post-2018. This shift reflects a growing

interest in employee-centered outcomes and the psychosocial impacts of flexible work arrangements in the context of evolving work environments.

Older terms such as "flexible work," "childcare," and "older workers" are depicted in shades of blue and purple, signifying that earlier discussions on flexibility were more concerned with accessibility, demographic-specific needs, and labor inclusion. These topics were foundational in early literature, laying the groundwork for discussions around equity and policy reform. However, the declining frequency of these terms in recent studies may indicate a pivot away from structural access issues toward broader conceptualizations of workplace well-being and individual performance. Likewise, keywords like "occupational health" and "disabled person" also fall into the earlier spectrum, representing the initial framing of workplace flexibility within labor rights and health contexts. Newer keywords like "telecommuting," "wellbeing," and "human experiment" suggest a research response to technological shifts and pandemic-driven remote work adoption. These terms signal an emerging interest in how digital infrastructure, autonomy, and flexible scheduling affect employee behavior and organizational performance. The appearance of "human experiment" hints at the treatment of the pandemic-era remote work shift as a natural experiment in workplace dynamics.
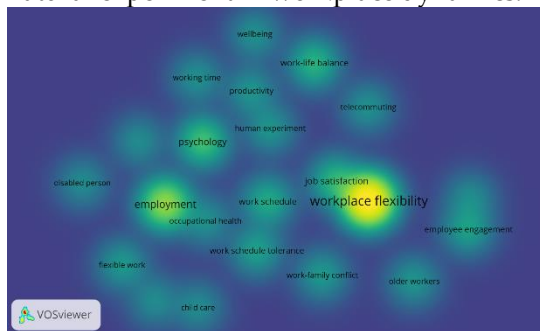

Figure 5. Density Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 5 above presents the density of keyword co-occurrence within the literature on workplace flexibility. The color gradient, ranging from blue (low density) to yellow (high density) indicates the frequency and intensity of co-occurrence relationships between keywords. At the center of the map, "workplace flexibility" appears as the most dominant term, highlighted in bright yellow, showing it as the focal point around which the scholarly discourse revolves. Closely surrounding it are highly relevant terms such as "job satisfaction," "work schedule," and "work-family conflict," all of which form a dense thematic core. This suggests that much of the literature investigates how flexible work arrangements influence employee experience and satisfaction. A second concentration of research activity is found around the term "employment," also indicated with high density in green to yellow hues. Keywords such as "occupational health," "disabled person," and "child care" cluster in this area, reflecting a strand of research that frames workplace flexibility as a tool for labor market inclusion and improved employee welfare. These themes likely draw attention to the structural and policy-based applications of flexibility, highlighting how it supports diverse worker needs, particularly for caregivers, older workers, and persons with disabilities. The presence of "flexible work" and "psychology" in proximity to this cluster further indicates interdisciplinary connections that bridge employment policy with psychological outcomes.

Peripheral yet emerging areas, such as "telecommuting," "employee engagement," "wellbeing," and "work-life balance" are represented in lower-density zones (green to blue), indicating their growing but still relatively less centralized presence in the literature. These keywords suggest recent or specialized subfields of inquiry, especially in the context of post-pandemic transformations in work culture. While not as saturated as the central clusters, these topics reflect an evolving interest in digital work arrangements, remote productivity, and mental health, all key considerations in contemporary workplace flexibility debates.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this bibliometric study provide a comprehensive overview of the intellectual landscape, thematic structure,

and evolution of research surrounding the term "workplace flexibility." Through co-authorship mapping, country collaboration analysis, keyword co-occurrence networks, and temporal overlays, we uncover the major contributors, conceptual clusters, and emerging directions that define this multidisciplinary field. The insights drawn from this study not only highlight the academic maturity of the workplace flexibility literature but also reveal knowledge gaps and opportunities for future research.

One of the most prominent findings is the high degree of collaboration among key scholars, as reflected in the co-authorship network. Scholars such as Kossek E.E., Moen P., Allen T.D., and Hill E.J. form the intellectual backbone of this field, often occupying central nodes in the visualization and connecting multiple co-authorship clusters. Their research explores the psychological, organizational, and sociological dimensions of workplace flexibility, such as job satisfaction, employee engagement, and structural work design. The clustering of these scholars into cohesive subgroups also points to the emergence of research communities with distinct orientations: organizational behavior, work-life balance, and labor policy. This confirms previous claims in the literature that workplace flexibility is both multidisciplinary and conceptually pluralistic [11], [12], [14].

The country co-authorship map reveals that the United States, followed by the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Netherlands, are the leading contributors to global research on workplace flexibility. The dominance of the United States is unsurprising given its early experimentation with flexible work models and the prevalence of large, diversified labor markets. Additionally, English-speaking countries often lead in HRM (Human Resource Management) and labor relations research, which may explain their prominence in the field. Interestingly, newer collaborations are emerging from India, Jordan, South Africa, and Malaysia, indicating that the discourse is becoming increasingly globalized. These

patterns suggest a growing recognition of workplace flexibility as a cross-cultural and policy-relevant concept, influenced by local labor laws, digital infrastructure, and demographic pressures.

Keyword co-occurrence analysis reveals four major thematic clusters: (1) psychological and well-being outcomes, (2) employment and accessibility issues, (3) structural work arrangements, and (4) remote work and digital flexibility. The centrality of keywords like "job satisfaction," "work-family conflict," and "employee engagement" suggests that scholars frequently investigate how flexibility influences individual work outcomes and organizational commitment. This aligns with a broader trend in HRM literature that positions flexibility as a mechanism for increasing productivity while preserving employee well-being [15]. The connection between workplace flexibility and "older workers" also reflects growing interest in extending workforce participation through adaptive work structures—a key consideration in aging societies.

In parallel, the employment-related cluster, which includes keywords such as "disabled person," "occupational health," and "childcare," reflects a strong equity and inclusion discourse. These findings indicate that workplace flexibility is not only a business strategy but also a social policy tool that supports labor market participation among marginalized or underrepresented groups. This aspect aligns with studies highlighting how flexible work arrangements can bridge structural gaps in employment for women, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities [16], [17]. The cluster also reinforces the idea that flexibility contributes to broader socioeconomic resilience by reducing work-related stress and improving work-life integration.

The overlay visualization, which shows the temporal evolution of keywords, illustrates how the discourse on workplace flexibility has evolved over time. Earlier terms like "flexible work," "older workers," and "occupational health" were prevalent in the literature prior to 2016, reflecting

foundational concerns with accessibility, demographic shifts, and labor policy. In contrast, newer terms such as "well-being," "productivity," and "telecommuting" became more prominent after 2018—likely accelerated by global shifts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The appearance of "human experiment" as a recent keyword is particularly telling, as it reflects the pandemic-induced transition to remote work as a natural experiment in flexible work adoption, offering scholars unprecedented opportunities to examine outcomes in real-time [18].

The density visualization reinforces the centrality of the term "workplace flexibility," surrounded by high-frequency keywords like "job satisfaction," "employment," and "work schedule." The concentration of activity in this core area suggests that the literature remains anchored in classic HRM constructs, with continued interest in how flexibility intersects with labor force participation, managerial practices, and employee outcomes. Meanwhile, lower-density areas such as "telecommuting," "work-life balance," and "employee engagement" point to newer or niche areas that are growing in relevance. This distribution indicates a mature but expanding field, where central debates remain robust while new directions continue to emerge.

Despite the richness of the field, several research gaps emerge from the bibliometric analysis. First, there is limited representation from low- and middle-income countries, which restricts the generalizability of findings. Much of the current research reflects Global North perspectives, and more studies are needed to examine how workplace flexibility is conceptualized, implemented, and experienced in diverse economic and cultural contexts. Second, while the literature engages deeply with individual-level outcomes such as job satisfaction and well-being, less attention has been paid to organizational and societal-level impacts, such as productivity metrics, cost-efficiency, and macroeconomic implications of flexibility.

Additionally, the fragmentation in terminology—evidenced by the variety of overlapping terms such as "flexible work," "telecommuting," "work schedule tolerance," and "hybrid work"—suggests a need for greater conceptual clarity and integration. This lack of standardization may hinder cumulative knowledge building and lead to measurement inconsistencies across studies. Future research could benefit from a theoretical synthesis that categorizes types of flexibility (e.g., temporal, spatial, structural) and links them to distinct outcomes, thereby advancing both theory and practice in a more coherent direction.

Another important frontier is the integration of technology-driven flexibility into mainstream discourse. While "telecommuting" and "digital work" have gained traction in recent years, there remains significant room to explore how AI, digital monitoring tools, virtual collaboration platforms, and asynchronous work systems are reshaping the notion of flexibility. The accelerated digitization of work offers both opportunities and challenges, particularly regarding privacy, trust, and work autonomy. Thus, future research must address how digital infrastructure and algorithmic management intersect with flexible work policies and employee agency.

4. CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study provides a comprehensive overview of the scholarly landscape surrounding the term "workplace flexibility", revealing its multidimensional nature, evolving research trends, and collaborative academic networks. The analysis shows that the literature is largely shaped by researchers from the United States, United Kingdom, and other Western countries, with thematic focuses ranging from employee well-being and job satisfaction to labor market accessibility and digital transformation. Central keywords such as job satisfaction, work-family conflict, and telecommuting underscore the diverse yet interconnected topics within this field. The temporal and density visualizations further

highlight a shift toward employee-centered outcomes and remote work models, especially in response to global disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. While the field is robust and growing, it remains fragmented in terminology and underexplored in non-Western contexts. Therefore, future research should aim to enhance conceptual clarity, broaden geographic representation, and deepen the exploration of organizational and societal-level impacts to strengthen the theoretical and practical foundations of workplace flexibility.

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