Application of Flexible Working Arrangements at Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad and its Implication to Employees' Well-Being

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Abstract

This paper presents a reflective account of a pilot implementation of Flexible Working Arrangements (FWAs) within the Shariah Department of Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad, a Shariah-compliant Islamic estate planning company in Malaysia. The organization manages more than 100,000 clients and employs a workforce largely made up of women and millennials. Increasing work demands, informal flexible practices, and post-pandemic pressures have contributed to burnout, mental strain, and work–life imbalance. To respond to these challenges, a single-cycle Participatory Action Research (PAR) project was conducted with 18 Shariah Department employees. The study combined surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs), and collaborative policy design to formalize FWAs that were previously applied in an ad hoc way, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The pilot documented the shift from unstructured work-from-home (WFH) practices to a structured FWA policy, and examined its implications for employee well-being, motivation, work–life balance, and perceptions of trust and empowerment. Findings indicate that structured FWAs, co-designed with employees and supported by leadership, can enhance morale, work–life integration, and perceived trust without compromising organizational objectives. The pilot provides a basis for possible organization-wide adoption and offers insights for other Shariah-compliant, service-based organizations in Southeast Asia seeking to align FWAs with ESG aspirations and cultural values.

Keywords: Flexible Working Arrangements (FWAs), Employee Well-Being, Participatory Action Research (PAR), Shariah-Compliant Organization, Millennial Workforce

Introduction

Case Background

Global adoption of flexible working arrangements (FWAs) accelerated during COVID-19, when Movement Control Orders (MCO) pushed organizations to implement remote and flexible practices with limited preparation. Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad, a Shariah-compliant Islamic

inheritance service provider with over 100,000 clients and a workforce largely made up of women, 79% of whom are millennials, relied on informal flexible hours to maintain operations. These ad hoc measures offered temporary relief but exposed gaps in structure and long-term sustainability. In August 2024, a pilot Participatory Action Research (PAR) project was conducted in the Shariah Department, involving 18 employees in evaluating, co-designing, and testing structured FWA strategies aligned with departmental culture, Shariah values, and ESG aspirations. The study aimed to assess perceptions of previous informal practices, examine their impact on well-being and performance, and identify preferred FWA options and implementation barriers. Findings demonstrate that employee-centered FWA design can enhance well-being and organizational adaptability.

Problem Statement

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad adopted ad hoc work-from-home (WFH) arrangements to ensure operational continuity and safeguard employee well-being. Over nearly four years, these unstructured practices shaped employees' working experiences in areas such as autonomy, work–life integration, and job satisfaction. However, the lack of clear guidelines and formal support also highlighted inconsistencies in implementation, reflecting wider findings that the effectiveness of flexible work arrangements is influenced by organizational readiness, job roles, and managerial practices (Allen et al., 2021; Galanti et al., 2021; Oakman et al., 2022). In response, a single-cycle Participatory Action Research (PAR) study was conducted between August 2024 and March 2025 within the Shariah Department, involving 18 employees as a pilot group. This PAR approach enabled collaborative reflection on past WFH experiences, and the co-creation of recommendations tailored to departmental needs and work culture. The study examined how the informal WFH practices affected employee well-being and explored employees' preferences for future flexible working arrangements. Findings from this pilot will support the development of more structured, organization-wide FWA policies that align with employee needs and long-term strategic objectives.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

Research Objective 1

To examine the effects of an ad hoc WFH policy (2020-2024) on the well-being of employees at Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad.

- **Research Question 1:** How has the implementation of an ad hoc WFH policy between 2020 and 2024 affected the well-being of employees at Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad?

Research Objective 2

To explore employees' preferences and perceptions regarding the design and implementation of structured FWAs suitable for Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad's organizational and cultural context.

- **Research Question 2:** What are employees' preferences and perceptions toward the future implementation of structured FWAs at Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad, and what factors do they identify as enablers or barriers?

Literature Review

Flexible working arrangements (FWAs) have gained substantial attention, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, for their documented benefits to employee well-being, work–life balance, and organizational outcomes. Research consistently shows that when FWAs are strategically implemented, they reduce work-family conflict and enhance psychological well-being by providing employees with greater autonomy over their schedules and work environments (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Irawanto et al., 2021). This autonomy has been associated with higher job satisfaction, stronger engagement, and improved retention, positioning FWAs as a valuable human resource strategy (B. Wang et al., 2021).

FWAs also contribute to diversity and inclusion, particularly benefiting women and employees with caregiving responsibilities by supporting more equitable workforce participation (Chung & van der Horst, 2020; Alsulami et al., 2023). Telecommuting, the most common form of FWA, offers notable advantages when supported by clear and formal policies (Allen et al., 2021).

However, current FWA literature is dominated by Western perspectives, with limited empirical work in Southeast Asia and Malaysia. Although the 2022 amendment to the Malaysian Employment Act formally recognized FWAs, most adoption has been reactive and lacked structured planning frameworks (Shaari & Amirul, 2023; S. K. Ali et al., 2021). Cultural and religious considerations further shape FWA implementation in Shariah-compliant organizations, yet research remains scarce (Yusof et al., 2023). This study addresses this gap by examining FWAs in Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad, offering culturally aligned insights for Malaysia's evolving workforce.

Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a single-cycle Participatory Action Research (PAR) design, selected for its collaborative and action-oriented approach, making it suitable for co-developing structured FWAs with employees. From 2020 to 2024, the company relied on informal WFH and flexible hour practices introduced during the pandemic, which lacked consistency and produced mixed outcomes for well-being and productivity. To address these issues, the PAR cycle began in August 2024 with a baseline survey on employees' experiences under the unstructured WFH model. In September 2024, two Focus Group Discussions with nine participants each were held to validate survey findings and jointly design improved FWA strategies.

During October and November 2024, the internal team consolidated insights and drafted the new FWA policies. These policies were implemented in the Shariah Department from December 2024 to March 2025, supported by ongoing HR engagement to ease the transition. A follow-up survey in March 2025 assessed employee responses to the implemented FWAs, and data analysis and report writing were completed in April 2025.

Table of Study Timeline

By combining quantitative surveys with qualitative focus group insights, this single cycle PAR design enabled the process of reflection, action, and evaluation empowering employees as active co-researchers. The method also aligns with best practices in FWA interventions, which recommend integrating formal policy with participatory design to maximize employee well-

being and work strategies ((D'Innocenzo et al., 2021); (Persson et al., 2022)) tandfonline.com+1abacademies.org+1.

Instrument Validation

This pilot study used a rigorously validated survey to assess 18 Shariah Department employees' perceptions of the shift from an unstructured WFH policy (2020–2024) to a structured FWA introduced in December 2024. Administered anonymously online in August 2024, the instrument ensured content and construct validity through items grounded in Scopus-indexed literature and established models such as the E-Work Life Scale and telework engagement frameworks (Guoqiang & Bhaumik, 2024; Ingusci et al., 2021; Weber et al., 2023). It included Likert-scale and multiple-choice items measuring motivation, engagement, well-being, work-life balance, and trust. Designed for longitudinal use across two time points August 2024 (baseline) and March 2025 (post-intervention) the instrument applied consistent psychometric measures to enhance internal validity and detect change (Baruch, 2021; Gajendran & Joshi, 2012). These design choices reflect adherence to methodological standards in peer-reviewed, Scopus-indexed research.

Validation for Baseline Survey
Likert Scales Questions for Baseline Survey
A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was used to capture respondents' agreement levels, a common format for measuring attitudes and perceptions in organizational research.

Table 2
Likert scales questions for baseline survey.

Questions	Validation
After the implementation of the WFH policy, do you feel motivated and engaged in your work.	This construct captures employee motivation and engagement, which improves when flexible work offers autonomy and trust (Toscano & Zappala, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021).
How satisfied are you with your current job role and responsibilities post-implementation of the WFH policy?	To measure job satisfaction. Empirical evidence suggests that WFH can positively influence job satisfaction when role clarity, support, and a conducive work environment are maintained ((B. Wang et al., 2021); (Contreras et al., 2020)).
How effectively does your current work-life balance meet your needs after the WFH policy?	This construct examines work-life balance, which improves with remote work when employees control their time and boundaries (Allen et al., 2015; Chong et al., 2020).
After the WFH policy, do you feel trusted and empowered in your role without feeling micromanaged?	This construct measures psychological empowerment and trust in WFH, both shown to enhance well-being, commitment, and performance (Oliveira et al., 2023; Akter et al., 2021; Liu & Ren, 2022).

Reference: Ariffin and Mazuwin (2025)

Multiple-Choice Questions for Baseline Survey
Alongside the Likert-scale items, the questionnaire included multiple-choice questions to capture employees' preferences and perceptions of FWAs and organizational culture enablers. One such question was

Table 3
Multiple-choice questions for baseline survey

Questions	Validation
Please select the FWA that is most suitable to your current position.	Respondents could select multiple FWAs such as flexi hours, compressed workweeks, remote work, and job sharing, which have been shown to enhance satisfaction, productivity, and work-life balance (Putri & Amran, 2021; Badaruddin et al., 2024; Radic et al., 2020).
In order to implement FWA effectively, what would be your top 3 priorities as culture enablers?	Options included leadership tone, technology, incentives, communication, training, and engagement efforts. Research shows that strong, trust-based leadership and clear communication are critical for successful FWA adoption and employee well-being (Singh et al., 2024; Tawfik & Mahgoub, 2024; Bilderback & Kilpatrick, 2024).
How can you effectively monitor productivity while simultaneously fostering trust and confidence among employees?"	Respondents chose three options such as clear expectations, outcome-focused goals, feedback, communication, support, and trust-building. Research shows that clarity, feedback, and output-based management improve productivity and trust in flexible work settings, while supportive communication enhances well-being (Mabaso & Manuel, 2024; Eva et al., 2024).

Reference: Ariffin and Mazuwin (2025)

Validation for FGD Questions
Table 4
Validation for FGD questions

Questions	Validation
Q1: Motivation and engagement: "What factors helped you stay engaged, if any, despite working from home?"	This open-ended question explores intrinsic and extrinsic factors shaping motivation and engagement in remote work. Using neutral qualitative prompts, it encourages personal reflection and captures diverse experiences, supporting validity in PAR-based inquiry (Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Chong et al., 2020; Toscano et al., 2024).
Q2: Job Satisfaction & Roles: "What would have made you feel more satisfied or fulfilled?"	This open-ended question explores employees' satisfaction and fulfilment in flexible work. Neutral prompts reveal personal values and experiences (J. Lee et al., 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2021) and support shared reflection in PAR (Wong et al., 2020).
Q3: Work-Life Balance: "Could you describe how WFH affected your ability to manage work and personal life?"	This open-ended question examines how employees managed work-life boundaries during WFH. It enriches earlier findings, supports PAR through personal reflection, and aligns with views of work-life balance as a dynamic, shared process (Gale & Sidhu, 2019; Madsen et al., 2024; Zhang & Ma, 2020).
Q4: Closing: "Is there anything else about your experience during WFH that wasn't captured in the survey?"	This closing question invites any additional reflections, helping uncover insights not captured earlier (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In PAR, it promotes inclusion and ownership while supporting richer, more trustworthy data (Slapac et al., 2021; Nowell et al., 2022).

Reference: Ariffin and Mazuwin (2025)

Validation for Follow-Up Survey
A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was used for all items, providing nuanced responses and commonly measuring attitudes in organizational research.
Table 5
Validation for follow-up survey

Questions	Validation
After the implementation of structured FWA on 1st December 2024, do you feel more motivated and engaged with your work as compared to during the implementation of WFH only?	Designed to assess employees' perceived changes in motivation and engagement over time, this item compares the earlier unstructured WFH period with the new structured FWA. Its validity is supported by research linking FWAs to shifts in motivation and engagement (Ingusci et al., 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021).
After the implementation of structured FWA on 1st December 2024, are you more satisfied with your current job role and responsibilities as compared to just implementation of WFH policy?	Developed to assess changes in job satisfaction from unstructured WFH to a formal FWA, this comparative item aligns with longitudinal research practices. Its validity is supported by studies showing that structured FWAs enhance satisfaction through greater clarity, autonomy, and work-life balance (Galanti et al., 2021; Chanana, 2021).
After the implementation of structured FWA on 1st December 2024, do you feel that your current work-life balance meet more of your needs as compared to during the implementation of WFH policy only?	Developed to assess changes in employees' work-life balance perceptions over time, this item compares the earlier unstructured WFH period with the structured FWA introduced in December 2024. Its design aligns with studies showing that structured FWAs improve work-life balance (Allen et al., 2021; Ipsen et al., 2021).
After the implementation of structured FWA on 1st December 2024, do you feel more trusted and empowered in your role without feeling micromanaged as compared to during the implementation of WFH policy only?	Designed to assess perceived psychological empowerment and trust over time, this item compares unstructured WFH with the structured FWA. Research shows that clear flexible work policies strengthen autonomy and reduce micromanagement (Spivack & Milosevic, 2018; Bonet & Salvadora, 2017).

Reference: Ariffin and Mazuwin (2025)

Setting and Participants
This pilot study was conducted in the Shariah Department of Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad, a leading Shariah-compliant estate planning firm with 109 staff across 14 departments in 2024. Eighteen employees from the Shariah Department participated, making it an ideal setting to examine how Flexible Working Arrangements affect staff across different job levels.

Focusing on this department enabled examination of FWAs in a high-trust, religiously informed setting, a context seldom studied in Southeast Asia (Irawanto et al., 2021; Amirul & Shaari, 2023). The team's Shariah and civil law expertise enriched the cultural and ethical perspective. Using a PAR approach, employees helped identify issues, design interventions, and reflect on outcomes, supporting culturally sensitive and practical FWA development (Bradbury, 2022; D'Innocenzo et al., 2021).

Two anonymous surveys were conducted in August 2024 and April 2025 to encourage honest feedback and reduce response bias (Mishra et al., 2021). Two focus group discussions with nine participants each explored deeper views on FWAs, including their effects on well-being

and work-life balance. FGDs are valuable for uncovering concerns and shared workplace values that surveys may miss (Ching et al., 2021).

By limiting the first PAR cycle to a single department, the study was able to test the feasibility and cultural fit of FWA in a controlled setting. This step-by-step approach aligns with best practices in organizational PAR, where small-scale trials help build momentum for wider institutional change (Pettit et al., 2023).

Data Collection Method
This study used mixed-methods, single-cycle PAR design, collecting data from August 2024 to April 2025 on employee experiences with FWAs at Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad. The HR Manager briefed all 18 participants to build trust and encourage participation (Men et al., 2020). Clear instructions and deadlines helped improve response quality (Cai et al., 2016). The survey was administered anonymously through Google Forms to promote openness and reduce bias (Chawla & Guda, 2013).

Phase 1: Baseline Survey (August 2024)
The first phase used an anonymous Google Forms baseline survey in August 2024 with 18 participants. It assessed experiences with unstructured FWAs from 2020 to 2024, including effects on well-being, work-life balance, and performance, which research links to effective FWAs (Wang et al., 2021; Fan et al., 2022). The survey also examined preferred strategies and key enablers or barriers, aligning with evidence that support, autonomy, communication, and employee preferences are crucial for sustainable FWA design (Darouei & Pluut, 2021; Irawanto et al., 2021; Zhang & Ma, 2020).

Phase 2: Focus Group Discussions and Internal Analysis (September to November 2024)
After the baseline survey, two focus group discussions were held in September 2024 to deepen the findings and co-develop FWA strategies. Each group had nine participants, consistent with recommended small-group sizes for meaningful discussion (Dos Santos Marques et al., 2020). Moderated by the HR Manager, the sessions used a semi-structured guide to balance focus and openness, a common approach for capturing both expected and emerging themes (Geampana & Perrotta, 2024). Discussions were conducted confidentially, recorded with consent, and thematically analyzed to triangulate survey results and inform FWA policy design.

Phase 3: Implementation of Structured FWA (1st December 2024)
After the baseline survey, two FGDs were conducted in September 2024 to deepen understanding of the results and co-develop FWA strategies. Each group had nine participants, consistent with recommended small-group sizes for meaningful discussion (Dos Santos Marques et al., 2020). Moderated by the HR Manager, the sessions used a semi-structured guide to allow both focused inquiry and new insights (Geampana & Perrotta, 2024; Scheelbeek et al., 2020). Held confidentially and recorded with consent, the discussions were thematically analyzed to triangulate survey findings and inform FWA policy drafting.

Phase 4: Follow-Up Survey (April 2025)
After the structured FWA policy was introduced on 1 December 2024, a follow-up anonymous survey was conducted on 1 April 2025 using the same Google Form to allow pre- and post-

comparison. It assessed employee satisfaction with the new FWA strategies, changes in well-being, morale, and work-life balance, and any early challenges. Using a trusted intermediary and maintaining anonymity strengthened credibility and aligned with PAR principles by prioritizing employee voice and fostering ownership. Refer to Appendix 4.

Ethical Consideration
Ethical considerations were closely managed to ensure autonomy, confidentiality, and psychological safety in the PAR process. Participants were treated as equal partners, with attention to power dynamics (Bradbury et al., 2020; Brydon-Miller, 2022). Informed consent was emphasized through clear communication of the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and withdrawal rights (Hammersley, 2020). Confidentiality was protected through anonymous Google Forms data and secure handling by the HR Manager, a certified counselor (Haahr et al., 2020). The HR Manager also facilitated FGDs in a confidential, supportive setting to promote open and psychologically safe discussions (Cook et al., 2021). This study used a mixed-methods analysis aligned with its single-cycle PAR design. It combined quantitative analysis of pre- and post-surveys with qualitative thematic analysis of focus group data, providing a comprehensive understanding of employee perceptions and the impact of FWAs.

Intervention Design and Implementation
The intervention introduced structured FWAs at Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad to support employee well-being, operational needs, and ESG goals. Using a single-cycle PAR approach, employees and management co-designed the flexibility strategies, reflecting research that highlights the value of participatory change. The pilot focused on the Shariah Department and involved 18 employees through a survey and two FGDs, which provided insights into work patterns, flexibility needs, and operational issues. Leadership and HR supported the rollout with clear communication, training, and monitoring. The new FWAs were implemented in one phase for all participants.

FWA Interventions Implemented
Following the PAR cycle, several interventions were formalized and endorsed for implementation beginning 1 December 2024.

Work From Home
WFH emerged as the most preferred option. Its adoption aligns with global findings showing improvements in work-life balance, job satisfaction, and stress reduction when supported by clear guidelines and digital tools (Carillo et al., 2020; Ipsen et al., 2021).

Flexible Working Hours and Staggered Hours
Flexible Working Hours (FWH) were co-designed with the pilot group, incorporating staggered start times and flexible breaks. Core hours (10:00 AM–3:00 PM) were set to support coordination. The model promotes autonomy and well-being, particularly for women and millennials (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020), and reflects Shariah values of fairness and compassion.

Choices of Off Day
Employees were allowed to select a weekly or monthly day off within operational limits. Evidence shows this improves work–life balance and psychological well-being, especially in service roles (Kelly et al., 2014). The option was well received by the predominantly female, millennial workforce and aligns with Islamic principles of ihsan.

Leaving Early From Office
A policy allowing early departure under defined conditions was introduced to support personal responsibilities. Temporal flexibility is associated with lower stress and higher job satisfaction (Shockley & Allen, 2012), making this intervention particularly suitable for the pilot group.

Research Data Analysis
Data Analysis of Likert-Scales Baseline Survey and Follow-Up Survey
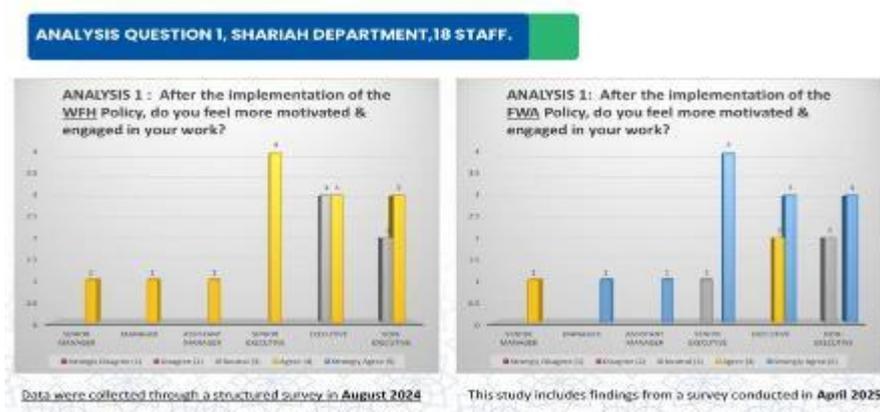

Figure 1. Analysis Question 1, Shariah Department, 18 Staff.

A comparative analysis of survey data from 18 Shariah Department staff shows a clear rise in motivation and engagement after moving from general WFH to a formal FWA policy. In August 2024, positive experiences under WFH were mainly reported by Senior Executives, Executives, and Non-Executives, while managerial staff saw few benefits.

By April 2025, after the structured FWA rollout, motivation improved across most job levels. Senior Executives reported higher agreement, and Executives and Non-Executives showed more consistent "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses. Managerial staff also recorded modest gains, indicating growing acceptance of the new system.

Overall, the findings suggest that formal, inclusive FWAs are more effective than unstructured WFH in improving engagement and motivation, especially at executive and operational levels. The participatory design of the FWA initiative likely contributed to these outcomes, aligning with research on employee-centred flexibility (Dhamija et al., 2021; Q. Wang et al., 2022).
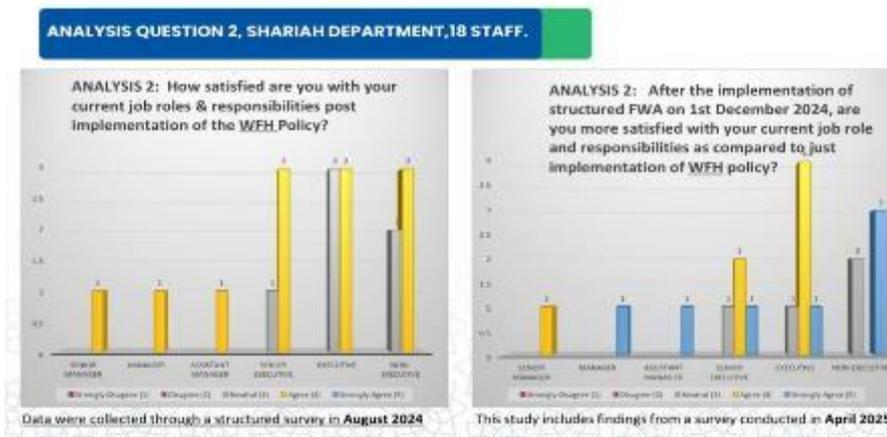
Figure 2. Analysis Question 2, Shariah Department, 18 Staff.

Structured survey data from the Shariah Department, collected in August 2024 and April 2025, provide comparative insights into employee satisfaction with job roles and responsibilities under two different flexibility models: the initial Work-From-Home (WFH) arrangement and the formalised Flexible Working Arrangement (FWA) policy.

Under the WFH model, satisfaction was moderate, with the highest positive responses observed among Senior Executives, Executives, and Non-Executives each recording three "Agree" (scale 4) responses alongside a mix of "Strongly Agree" and "Neutral" responses. Conversely, managerial staff (Senior Manager, Manager, Assistant Manager) demonstrated limited satisfaction, each reporting only one "Agree" or "Neutral" response, indicating a disconnect between leadership roles and the ad hoc nature of WFH flexibility.

Following the FWA implementation in December 2024, the April 2025 results show improved job satisfaction, particularly among Executives and Non-Executives. Executives reported more balanced positive responses, while non-executives showed higher satisfaction levels. Managerial staff also demonstrated slight progress, with responses shifting toward "Neutral," indicating gradual adaptation to the new framework.

These findings suggest that while WFH offered basic flexibility, it fell short in supporting role clarity and alignment particularly at managerial levels. The structured FWA model, by contrast, appears to have facilitated clearer expectations and greater adaptability across roles, contributing to improved job satisfaction. These results align with existing research highlighting the importance of structured flexibility and clear communication in enhancing satisfaction and performance (Jin et al., 2025; Moin et al., 2021).
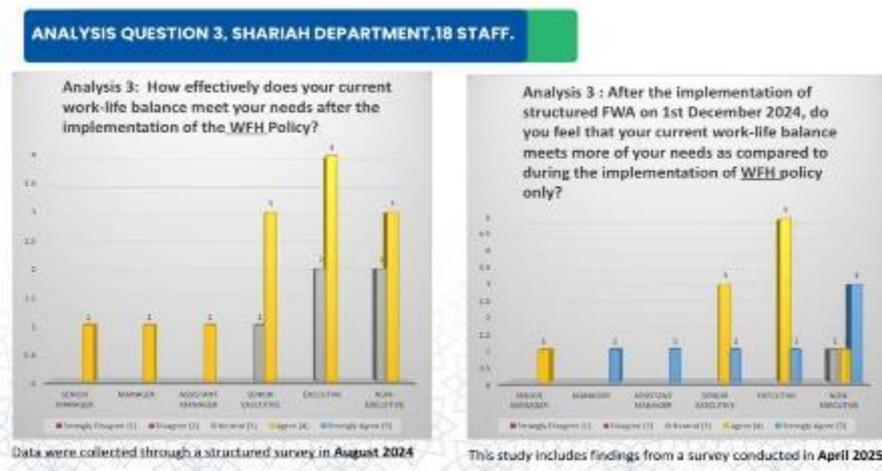
Figure 3. Analysis Question 3, Shariah Department, 18 Staff.

Survey data from the Shariah Department indicate a positive shift in employee perceptions of work-life balance following the transition from an unstructured Work-From-Home (WFH) model to a formally implemented Flexible Working Arrangement (FWA) policy, introduced on 1st December 2024.

Under the WFH arrangement, August 2024 data showed moderate satisfaction among Senior Executives and Executives, while managerial staff reported mostly "Disagree" or "Neutral" responses. This indicates that the unstructured WFH model did not sufficiently support the work-life balance needs of supervisory and middle-management employees.

In contrast, the April 2025 post-intervention data show improved satisfaction after the FWA policy was implemented. Executives reported higher agreement levels, and several non-executives selected "Strongly Agree." Senior Executives also showed increased satisfaction. Although managerial staff still recorded some "Disagree" responses, overall results indicate growing acceptance and perceived benefit of the structured FWA model.

These findings indicate that the formalized FWA policy was more effective than the earlier WFH model in supporting work-life balance, especially for non-managerial staff. The added structure and autonomy likely improved alignment between work and personal responsibilities, consistent with research on the benefits of organizational support and well-designed flexibility (Putri & Amran, 2021; Zhang & Ma, 2020).
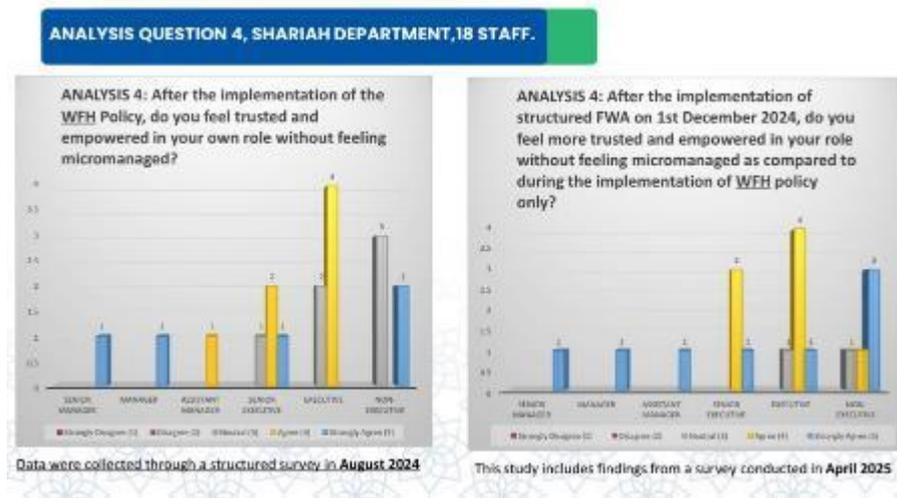
Figure 4. Analysis Question 4, Shariah Department, 18 Staff.

Survey data from the Shariah Department demonstrate a marked improvement in employee perceptions of trust and empowerment following the transition from an unstructured Work-From-Home (WFH) arrangement to a formally implemented Flexible Working Arrangement (FWA) policy, introduced on 1st December 2024.

Under the WFH model, data from August 2024 revealed moderate satisfaction, with Senior Executives and Executives primarily selecting "Agree," and one Senior Executive indicating "Strongly Agree." Some Executive and Non-Executive staff also selected "Neutral," indicating uncertainty. Interestingly, managerial-level responses (Senior Manager, Manager, Assistant Manager) were more positive, with all indicating "Agree" or "Strongly Agree."

Following the structured implementation of the FWA, the April 2025 data reflected a notable increase in satisfaction across all job levels. "Strongly Agree" responses rose from 5 to 8, while "Agree" responses increased slightly from 7 to 8. At the same time, "Neutral" responses decreased significantly from 5 to 2 signalling enhanced clarity, decisiveness, and satisfaction with the revised work model.

These findings show that the structured FWA policy enhanced perceptions of trust and empowerment by replacing the ambiguity of WFH with clearer expectations and consistent practices. Improvements across job levels suggest greater psychological safety, autonomy, and engagement (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Ipsen et al., 2021). The PAR-based, participatory design likely boosted employee commitment and fairness perceptions (Kira et al., 2020). Overall, the results align with evidence that well-structured and inclusive flexibility strengthens trust, satisfaction, and well-being (Giauque et al., 2022).

Data Analysis of Multiple-Choice Questions in Baseline Survey
The multiple-choice section allowed participants to select more than one option to capture a broader and more nuanced understanding of their preferences. Allowing multiple responses reduces forced-choice bias and is appropriate when options are not mutually exclusive, such as in studies on flexible work, motivation, and engagement (Ochoa & Revilla, 2022; Austin-Egole et al., 2020). This approach enhances data richness and supports frequency-based

analysis, with interpretation guided by context and triangulated with qualitative findings (de Leeuw et al., 2018; Meydan & Akkas, 2024).

Question 1: "What are the types of FWA suitable to your position."
Table 6
Question 1: "What are the types of FWA suitable to your position.".

Type of FWAs	Number of participants
Flexible working hours and staggered hours	15
Work from home	18
Compressed work week	2
Employee's choice day off	13
Job sharing	5
Modified role	3
Reduced work	1
Seasonal work	3
Leaving early from office	12
Total responses from all 18 participants with 3 choices of answers	72

Reference: Ariffin and Mazuwin (2025)

Multiple-choice responses show strong employee support for flexible working arrangements. Work From Home (100%) was the top choice, followed by Flexible Working Hours and Staggered Hours (83%), reflecting a clear preference for schedule autonomy linked to better work-life balance (Allen et al., 2021). The Employee's Choice Day Off (72%) and Leaving Early (67%) were also popular, highlighting the value of personal time and flexibility. Less common options such as Job Sharing (28%), Modified Roles (17%), Seasonal Work (17%), and Compressed Work Week (11%) saw limited interest, and Reduced Work was least preferred (6%), suggesting employees favour flexibility without loss of income (Wang et al., 2021).

Question 2: "What are the top 3 cultures that enables the FWA?"
Table 7
Question 2: "What are the top 3 cultures that enables the FWA?".

Enablers of FWAs	Number of participants
Tone from the top	6
Technology and tools	18
Incentives, compensation and benefits	11
Development and training	13
Formal communication	7
Employee network	3
Engagement network	1
Feedback gathered and acted upon	3
Visible signals from leaders	10
Total responses from all 18 participants with 3 choices of answers	72

Reference: Ariffin and Mazuwin (2025)

From 18 participants providing 72 responses, key enablers of successful FWAs emerged. Technology and Tools were the top enabler (100%), underscoring the importance of strong

digital infrastructure for remote work (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Development and Training (13 responses) highlighted the need for upskilling in digital tools, time management, and trust-based leadership (Carillo et al., 2020). Incentives, Compensation, and Benefits (11 responses) reflected the value of support such as internet allowances or remote setup resources, consistent with research showing that tangible benefits improve satisfaction and signal organizational commitment (Ipsen et al., 2021).

Question 3: "How can you effectively monitor productivity while simultaneously fostering trust and confidence among employees."
Table 8
Question 3: "How can you effectively monitor productivity while simultaneously fostering trust and confidence among employees."

Enablers	Number of participants
Build a culture of trust	17
Set clear expectations	16
Promote work-life balance	11
Focus on outcomes not processes	10
Encourage open communication	8
Acknowledge; rewards and incentives	4
Offer support and resources	2
Provide regular feedback	3
Utilize technologies	1
Total responses from all 18 participants with 3 choices of answers	72

Reference: Ariffin and Mazuwin (2025)

At Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad, the top enabler of successful FWAs is a culture of trust, selected by 17 of 18 participants. Trust supports autonomy, reduces micromanagement, and enhances teamwork and satisfaction (Contreras et al., 2020; Klindzic & Marić, 2019). Clear expectations ranked second (16 responses), reflecting employees' need for defined roles and goals to support performance in flexible settings (Wang et al., 2021). Promoting work-life balance ranked third (11 responses), emphasizing the importance of preventing burnout and sustaining engagement, consistent with both organizational needs and Wasiyyah's Islamic principle of mizan, or balance (Darouei & Pluut, 2021; Allen et al., 2021).

Data Analysis of FGD Semi-Structured Questions
At Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad, the top enabler of successful FWAs is a culture of trust, selected by 17 of 18 participants. Trust supports autonomy, reduces micromanagement, and enhances teamwork and satisfaction (Contreras et al., 2020; Klindzic & Marić, 2019). Clear expectations ranked second (16 responses), reflecting employees' need for defined roles and goals to support performance in flexible settings (Wang et al., 2021). Promoting work-life balance ranked third (11 responses), emphasizing the importance of preventing burnout and sustaining engagement, consistent with both organizational needs and Wasiyyah's Islamic principle of Mizan, or balance (Darouei & Pluut, 2021; Allen et al., 2021).

Question 1: "What factors helped you stay engaged, if any, despite working from home?"
Participant responses highlighted several key engagement enablers during WFH. Clear communication and managerial support were the most frequently cited, with 16 participants emphasizing the value of structured guidance and timely feedback, though only 10 felt this

support was consistently available (Contreras et al., 2020). Digital tools were also critical, identified by 17 participants, but satisfaction was mixed, with only nine reporting adequate infrastructure (Wang et al., 2021). Adapted job expectations helped improve engagement, as 10 participants noted clearer roles and KPIs, though only eight said such adjustments were implemented (Kelliher & de Menezes, 2021). Recognition and outcome-based assessments were important to 12 participants, with 11 observing a shift toward results-oriented evaluation (Ogbonnaya et al., 2023). Finally, all 18 participants valued WFH for supporting personal and spiritual needs, reinforcing the importance of meaningful work-life integration (Allen et al., 2021).

Question 2: "What would have you feel more satisfied of fulfilled?
Responses identified several areas for improving fulfilment under WFH. Fifteen participants wanted clearer career progression, and all 18 emphasized recognition and rewards aligned with updated JDs and KPIs. Eleven desired more flexibility for spiritual and personal reflection. Leadership support was another key theme: 16 sought more supportive leadership, though 10 noted positive examples, indicating mixed experiences. Ten also highlighted the need for stronger team cohesion. Positively, all 18 trusted the Performance Management System for its fairness. Overall, participants valued WFH for balance but sought clearer career paths, better recognition, consistent leadership, and alignment with personal values.

Question 3: "Could you describe how WFH affected your ability to manage work and personal life?"
Thematic analysis showed that WFH had largely positive effects on work-life balance. All 18 participants reported improvements, with many appreciating more family time and reduced fatigue from eliminated commutes (Allen et al., 2021). However, 16 participants struggled to disconnect from work, reflecting blurred boundaries common in remote settings (Wang et al., 2021). Twelve also faced distractions due to limited home workspace. Despite these challenges, all participants noted better mental and emotional well-being, and 17 emphasized the importance of reliable digital tools for productivity (B. Wang et al., 2021). Overall, WFH improved well-being and family engagement but highlighted the need for clearer boundaries, better workspaces, and stronger digital support.

Question 4: "Is there anything else about your experience during WFH that wasn't captured in the survey?"
Responses to the open-ended question revealed concerns not captured in the structured survey. Fifteen participants reported feelings of isolation due to limited informal interaction, consistent with research on social strain in remote work (Wang et al., 2021). Ten questioned workload fairness, noting reduced task visibility in WFH settings (Ipsen et al., 2021). All 18 stressed the importance of having a voice in shaping future FWA policies, reflecting a desire for participatory decision-making (Contreras et al., 2020). A gender-specific issue also emerged, with all nine female staff highlighting the double burden of caregiving and work, aligning with evidence of greater pressures on women in remote environments (Chung & van der Horst, 2020). Overall, participants called for policies that address emotional well-being, workload transparency, and gender-sensitive flexibility.

Results

Interpretation of Findings

The findings show that FWAs work best when tailored to context, co-designed with employees, and supported by leadership. Participants strongly preferred flexibility, with all choosing working from home, most selecting flexible or staggered hours, and many valuing a personal day off. These preferences indicate a shift toward autonomy, trust, and work-life balance, and participants reported improved self-management and life satisfaction over time.

The success of FWAs depended less on technology and more on behavioural and cultural factors. Trust, clear expectations, and visible leadership support were the strongest enablers, highlighting the importance of transparency, communication, and psychological safety. Impacts varied across job levels. Executives adapted easily, while middle managers showed more mixed responses due to differences in autonomy, role clarity, and digital readiness. Managers also faced the challenge of using outcome-based performance models while maintaining team cohesion, showing the need for leadership training and effective digital communication.

Employees emphasised that motivation was strongest when management was structured yet human centred, and when peer interaction supplemented autonomy. They also valued FWAs because they aligned with Islamic principles such as balance, trust, and compassion. Overall, FWAs at Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad show strong potential to enhance well-being, productivity, and cultural alignment when built on trust, leadership support, and Islamic values. Their effectiveness depends on intentional design, employee participation, and continuous improvement, consistent with the Participatory Action Research approach.

Limitation of Study

This study has several limitations. It used a single-cycle PAR design with one department and a small sample of 18 participants, which limits the generalisability of the findings despite providing rich contextual insights (Méndez & Farias, 2021). The absence of a longitudinal approach also means long-term effects of flexible working hours on well-being and productivity could not be assessed, even though such outcomes change over time (Molino et al., 2020).

The intervention took place in a single Islamic trust company in Malaysia, where cultural and religious values may have shaped employee perceptions, limiting applicability to other contexts (Wang & Tran, 2021). Although anonymity was maintained, reliance on self-reported data raises the risk of social desirability bias, especially in collectivist cultures (Giorgi et al., 2020). Lastly, the study focused on subjective experiences without including objective productivity or financial performance measures, reducing the ability to evaluate FWAs' broader organisational impact (Kelliher & de Menezes, 2021).

Implication of the Study

Theoretical Implication

This study offers important theoretical contributions. It extends Self-Determination Theory by showing that autonomy and flexibility, especially in values-based environments, enhance psychological well-being and motivation (Van den Broeck et al., 2021). It also contributes to Organizational Support Theory by demonstrating that FWAs are perceived as organisational

support, strengthening trust and emotional commitment during change (Panisoara et al., 2020).

The study also contributes to literature on Islamic work ethics and leadership by showing that FWAs are more effective when guided by values such as amanah (trust), tawadhu' (humility), and maslahah (public good), supporting calls for culturally grounded leadership in Shariah-compliant settings (A. D. Ali et al., 2023). Through its Participatory Action Research approach, the study further demonstrates the value of collaborative, employee-centred methods in organisational change (Méndez & Farias, 2021). Overall, the findings deepen understanding of FWAs as tools for well-being, ethical leadership, and inclusive practice in non-Western workplaces.

Academic Implication
This study makes several academic contributions. It provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of FWAs in a non-Western, Muslim-majority context, helping extend theories such as Self-Determination Theory and Organizational Support Theory to culturally and religiously grounded settings. By using a Participatory Action Research approach, it also shows the value of employee-driven, collaborative methods in shaping workplace policies.

The findings strengthen understanding of values-based leadership by showing that Islamic principles such as amanah, tawadhu', and maslahah can enhance employee engagement with FWAs. The study also notes that executives adapted more easily than middle managers, suggesting the need for further research on organisational structure and leadership readiness in flexible work environments. Overall, it helps bridge Western work theories with local cultural contexts and supports a more inclusive understanding of FWAs.

Practical Implication
This study offers several practical insights for implementing FWAs in values-based settings. Strong support for FWAs, especially among executives, shows that structured flexibility grounded in trust and clear expectations can enhance well-being and motivation. Organisations should therefore formalise FWAs with clear policies, performance indicators, and digital tools (Wang et al., 2021).

The challenges faced by middle managers highlight the need for targeted training in outcome-based management, digital collaboration, and emotionally intelligent leadership to help them support flexible teams (Contreras et al., 2020). The study also shows the value of involving employees in policy design, as participatory approaches increase relevance and engagement (Méndez & Farias, 2021). Integrating Islamic values such as tawadhu', amanah, and maslahah further demonstrates the importance of culturally grounded leadership in Shariah-compliant organisations. Overall, the study confirms that FWAs are most effective when implemented inclusively, supported by leadership, and aligned with organisational culture.

Recommendation for Future Research
This study suggests several directions for future research. Larger, cross-departmental or multi-organizational samples are needed to improve generalizability, and comparisons across sectors such as finance, education, and healthcare may reveal industry-specific FWA dynamics (Wang et al., 2021). Future work could also use longitudinal or multi-cycle PAR

designs to examine the long-term sustainability of FWAs (Méndez & Farias, 2021). In addition, incorporating objective performance indicators alongside self-reported well-being would provide a more comprehensive assessment of FWA effectiveness (Oakman et al., 2020).

Future research should also explore how leadership style, digital readiness, and organizational culture mediate or moderate the success of FWA implementation, especially in religious or values-based settings. The differing responses between executives and managers highlight the need to study leadership development and change management as key factors in FWA outcomes (Contreras et al., 2020). In addition, the integration of Islamic work ethics in modern HR practices remains an emerging field. Further studies are encouraged to examine how Islamic values shape employee attitudes, leadership behavior, and policy adoption in FWA contexts, particularly in Muslim-majority countries where cultural and religious alignment may influence results (Ali et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This study highlights several avenues for future research. Larger, cross-departmental or multi-organisation samples are needed to improve generalisability, and sector comparisons may reveal industry-specific FWA patterns (B. Wang et al., 2021). Future work should also consider multi-cycle or longitudinal PAR designs and include objective performance measures to assess long-term FWA effects more comprehensively (Méndez & Farias, 2021; Oakman et al., 2020).

Further research should examine how leadership style, digital readiness, and organisational culture shape FWA implementation, especially in values-driven or religious settings. The differing responses between executives and middle managers here suggest the importance of leadership development and change management (Contreras et al., 2020). Finally, the integration of Islamic work ethics into HR practices remains underexplored. Scholars are encouraged to investigate how Islamic values influence attitudes, leadership behaviour, and FWA adoption in Muslim-majority contexts (A. D. Ali et al., 2023).

Summary of Key Takeaways

This Participatory Action Research (PAR) pilot identified key factors enabling successful change in a millennial- and female-majority Shariah Department. Employee participation through surveys and focus groups built trust, ownership, and alignment with actual needs, supporting evidence that involvement enhances engagement and adaptability (Alfadhli & Drury, 2020). Millennials responded positively to flexible, meaningful engagement, consistent with research showing their preference for autonomy, collaboration, and growth (Yok-Yong Lee & Goh, 2023).

Visible and transparent leadership from senior management was essential, reinforcing trust and readiness for change in hybrid or digital environments (Contreras et al., 2020). The rapid eight-month rollout demonstrated that fast, yet sustainable change is possible when supported by trust, digital skills, and clear communication (Sutarto et al., 2022). Continuous HR support helped maintain momentum and accountability, which millennials particularly value (Putri & Amran, 2021).

The initiative also aligned with ESG goals by improving well-being, reducing commuting, and supporting work-life balance (Wijethilake et al., 2023). Strong top-management commitment reduced resistance and signalled that employee well-being is a strategic priority, echoing research on inclusive and values-driven leadership (Khajeh, 2018).

Significance of the Experiential Findings

This study contributes to the growing research on FWAs in Southeast Asia by examining a Shariah-compliant Malaysian organisation. Using a single-cycle PAR approach at Wasiyyah Shoppe Berhad, it shows that FWAs can be implemented quickly and effectively when aligned with organisational values, employee needs, and workforce demographics (Widyanti et al., 2021). Direct employee involvement in identifying challenges and co-creating solutions strengthened trust, relevance, and ownership (Alfadhli & Drury, 2020).

The approach was particularly effective for a millennial- and female-majority workforce, who value autonomy, engagement, and work-life balance (Lartey & Randall, 2021). Visible leadership, trust, and clear communication further enabled agile change (Contreras et al., 2020). The FWA strategies also aligned with ESG goals, including reduced commuting and enhanced gender inclusivity (Wijethilake et al., 2023).

By conducting insider research in a Shariah-compliant setting, the study offers a culturally relevant model for similar organisations and advances understanding of participatory, demographic-aware change in real contexts.

Suggestion for Future Studies and Follow-up Actions

This PAR project on FWAs in a Shariah-compliant organisation identifies several directions for future research. Long-term studies are needed to assess sustained effects of FWAs on productivity, retention, and well-being (Bansal et al., 2022). Comparative research between Shariah-compliant and conventional organisations could show how Islamic principles such as shura and rahmah shape FWA outcomes (Wijethilake et al., 2023). FWAs should also be examined in other Islamic institutions, including zakat bodies, waqf foundations, Islamic finance, and takaful providers.

Further work could explore how FWAs support women and millennials in balancing career, family, and religious practices (Lartey & Randall, 2021). Research on digital tools and Islamic values such as amanah and ihsan may clarify how remote work can remain both efficient and ethical (Contreras et al., 2020). Studies on leadership traits like tawadhu' and amanah could deepen understanding of Islamic leadership in flexible work settings.

There is also potential to develop frameworks that integrate ESG goals with Islamic ethics, including Islamic value-based KPIs for assessing FWA impact. Finally, future research could examine how FWAs support spiritual well-being by facilitating prayer, fasting, and other religious obligations.

Recommendations
Practical Recommendations for Similar Organizations
This PAR project provides key recommendations for Shariah-compliant service organisations. Leadership should adopt Islamic principles such as shura (consultation), tawadhu' (humility), and amanah (trust) to strengthen ethical and inclusive decision-making. FWAs should align

with Maqasid al-Shariah, especially the protection of intellect, family, and life, to support well-being and productivity.

Building trust through compassion and respect is essential for employee engagement, while continuous learning and open feedback support organisational adaptability. Leaders should act as stewards of people and values, and collaborative approaches like PAR should be integrated to ensure employee ownership.

Flexible policies must also support women, millennials, and caregivers to promote workplace justice. Overall, Islamic values should be viewed as strategic strengths that enhance identity, morale, and stakeholder trust in implementing FWAs.

Practical or HR Guidance for Structured FWAs
To implement FWAs sustainably in Shariah-compliant service organisations, HR should begin with inclusive needs assessments using surveys, interviews, and focus groups to understand caregiving, age, and gender needs. Policies must be clearly written and guided by Islamic values such as justice, consultation, and compassion to ensure fairness and alignment with organisational identity.

A gradual pilot supported by regular feedback will help build trust and allow employees to shape the process. Managers need training in emotional intelligence and trust-based leadership, and performance should be evaluated by outcomes rather than physical presence.

FWAs should be part of the employer value proposition and supported by secure digital infrastructure with attention to fairness between remote and office staff. Aligning FWAs with Maqasid al-Shariah, especially the protection of life, intellect, dignity, and family, ensures cultural and ethical relevance. Continuous monitoring of well-being, productivity, and trust will help sustain long-term success.

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