Management’s internal governance policies on flexible work practices and the mediating lens of work life enrichment – Outcome for employee work engagement and organizational attractiveness

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Abstract

Purpose – Using Pakistan’s public sector higher education institutions as the study site, this study aims to empirically substantiate, under the theoretical underpinnings of job enrichment theory (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) and Maslow’s (1943) theory of the hierarchy of needs, the impact of flexible work practices (FWPs), on employee work engagement and organizational attractiveness, with the mediating lens of work life enrichment.

Design/methodology/approach – Field data were collected at five higher education institutions located in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) of Pakistan, using the convenience sampling technique and analyzed under the quantitative research paradigm.

Findings – This study substantiates with an empirical evidence that flexible work practices (FWPs) have a significant positive impact on both employee work engagement and organizational attractiveness. Markedly, the study findings reveal that the said impact is significantly stronger than that of sabbaticals. Furthermore, the study reveals that the positive relationship is mediated by work life enrichment, signaling its significance in understanding FWP’s such impact on employee work engagement and organizational attractiveness.

Practical implications – The study findings provide significant implications for academia, practitioners, and policymakers, in evidence-based recommendations for higher education institutions to design and implement FWP’s that are effective in enhancing employee work engagement and organizational attractiveness, and, in turn, leading to improved organizational performance.

Originality/value – This research study provides a novel contribution to the existing literature by exploring the combined impact of flexible work practices on employee work engagement and organizational attractiveness in the peculiar context of Pakistan’s public sector higher education institutions. Additionally, the study’s focus on the mediating role of work life enrichment further adds to its novelty.

Keywords Internal governance, Flexible work practices, Sabbaticals, Organizational attractiveness, Work engagement and motivation, Work life enrichment

Paper type Research paper
1. Introduction
Enhancing employee efficiency and productivity is one of the most sought-after goal organizations pursue, and dexterously tailoring its internal governance policies and resources management practices can help contribute to the goal’s accomplishment. Business organizations usually confront the stringent challenge of sourcing and retaining suitably qualified and trained workforce. Furthermore, to put the existing workforce to its utmost efficient use in pursuit of the organization’s set goals confronts them with a unique set of challenges. Organizations’ internal workforce management practices have a significant impact on employee efficiency, motivation, and work engagement. The extant literature substantiates a positive contribution of employee supportive internal governance policies to enhanced employee creative and innovative contributions and higher organizational performance (Obeidat et al., 2016a, b, c, d; Papa et al., 2020a, b, c, d, e; Rofcanin et al., 2017a, b, c). The management’s optimal use of the resources, including human, organizational, and physical resources translates into a long-term competitive advantage for the organization (Fauzi et al., 2021a, b). Therefore, it is vital for the organizations to attract and retain highly motivated, efficient and productive employees (see Figures 1 and 2).

As Maslow (1943) puts it, employees, as human beings, have varying triggers, with different levels of priority, for motivation at work, and balancing work-family demands is a challenge they confront on a daily basis (see Idowu, 2020a, b, c). Employees on the higher level of Maslow’s needs hierarchy are interested in their higher-level motives for job such as challenging tasks, excellent career opportunities, cooperative collaboration, and competitive salaries that lead toward a good work-life balance (Deal et al., 2010). Few leading organizations in the world such as Google, Adidas, and Deloitte stood successful in attracting employees in this category (Minchington, 2011). To help accomplish this aim and enhance employees job performance, organizations tend to adapt their working conditions to better suit their contextual internal and external circumstances (Pamungkas et al., 2022). The tertiary education and research sectors, in this connection, have actively implemented a variety of flexible work practices (FWPs) such as flexible work schedules and sabbaticals (Fiksenbaum, 2014a, b; Kroll and Nuesch, 2017a).
Flexible work schedules for employees to perform their job in timings that suit their personal circumstances are now more common in contemporary business organizations (see, Bolino et al., 2021). However, how to put the employee work flexibility to the best use for optimal organizational benefit is a challenge and may depend on a variety of factors, including individual employees’ and organizations’ peculiar circumstances. Previous studies report that the flexible work practices (FWPs) positively influence organizational attractiveness and employee work engagement (Chen et al., 2016; Kroll et al., 2018; Azar et al., 2018a, b). Focusing on the hind side of FWPs, studies found that employees with a lower salary growth are less committed and that FWPs negatively influence their career success if used for personal life accommodation rather than increase in productivity (Kossek and Lee, 2005a, b, c; Leslie et al., 2012). Inconsistency in findings across different studies signify the existence of some moderating and/or mediating variables that would explain the impact of FWPs on the organizational attractiveness and work engagement. Extant literature shows that a good number of studies (see, e.g., Richman et al., 2008; Sardeshmukh et al., 2019; Brummelhuis et al., 2012; Panteli et al., 2019) have examined the relationship between FWPs and work engagement. These studies empirically tested varying aspects of FWPs while largely neglecting the underlying mechanism operative between FWPs and employee work engagement. Perhaps, inclusion of the peculiar characteristics of the study “site” in terms of the socioeconomic and geographical context (see Schatzki, 2002) and “transformational leadership” advocated in the literature (see, Kammerhoff et al., 2019a, b, c) would serve best to balance the positive and negative outcomes of such programs. Hence, this current study, resorting to the framework of job enrichment theory (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) and Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, aims to pursue empirical evidence-based answer to the following main research question:

RQ1. How organizational FWPs would translate into organizational attractiveness and employee work engagement through the mediating effect of work life enrichment?

Job enrichment theory (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) posits that employee work enrichment encompass the attributes such as motivation, satisfaction, commitment, involvement and performance quality, important contributors to organizational success (Pamungkas et al., 2022).
Little, if any, robust research has so far been conducted to empirically investigate the mediating role of work-life enrichment between FWPs and organizational attractiveness and work engagement. Hence, this current study is not only timely but relevant to fill this pertinent void in the literature. This study uses the framework of job enrichment theory to help us understand the impact of FWPs on organizational attractiveness and employee work engagement, with the mediating lens of work life enrichment in the specific context of the higher education institutions of Pakistan.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

The literature has linked contemporary organizations' better resources management practice of providing employees with flexible work options to knowledge dissemination within the organization and enhanced innovations (Papa et al., 2020a, b, c, d; Obeidat et al., 2016a, b, c, d). Overall, management’s internal governance policies, which ensures efficient utilization of organizational resources have been linked to better organizational performance as well as sustained competitive advantage (Fauzi et al., 2021a, b). Borrowing from Thibaut and Walker’s (1975) theory of self-interest, Lau (2015a, b) concludes that employees have basic goals that they pursue. These goals could be one or a combination of attractive pay package, opportunities for promotion, quality of feedback on their work, job security, and so on. Fulfilment of these goals would make employees sincere and loyal to the organization and put in their best skills to the job. Maslow’s (1943) theory endorses the correlation, placing people’s higher-level needs, such as “self-actualization need” toward the higher end of the need hierarchy. The theory’s primary stance is that different people are motivated with different rewards systems as they value and rate their needs differently. Some individuals get motivated with more financial incentives, such as pay rise, periodic bonuses, reimbursement of personal expenses, and so on, while others find appreciation, respect and recognition of their work by their supervisors, promotion, authority in making certain decisions highly rewarding. From the perspective of organizational success, these variations in people’s needs and wants carry high significance for the organizational internal governance policies, and when prudently managed, can prove highly beneficial in terms of organizational performance. The opposite is equally true as well.

Getting the management’s employee related internal governance policies adequately informed by Maslow’s (1943) stance on needs hierarchy and a suitable leadership style (see Kammerhoff et al., 2019a, b, c), and duly adapted to the peculiar “site” in which the organization operates, as advocated by Schatzki (2002) in the context of his “site of the social” theoretical construct, can help overcome FWPs’ possible negative aspects of compromising some employees’ efficiency and career growth (Kossek and Lee, 2005a, b, c; Leslie et al., 2012). Hence, the outcome will be of dual benefit – on one hand, the organizational resources will be put to the most efficient use, and, on the other hand, employees’ career prospects will improve due to the evasion of some employees’ intentional or unintentional misuse of the system. Proactively working, management can even influence employees’ attitude to job and motivation level through tailoring the organizational internal governance and resource management policies on FWPs and other rewards systems.

If employees feel satisfied with how they are managed and controlled, it could contribute to their attitude toward the organization, which could be accomplished by tailoring internal governance policies to positively influence employees’ attitude at work. Management cherishes such positive employee attitude to job and the organization benefits as a result. However, how to embed and inculcate this in employees depends largely on the senior management’s leadership style employed in the functioning of the organization (see, Kammerhoff et al., 2019a, b, c). The phenomenon is in line with the theoretical underpinnings of Maslow’s (1943) theory of the hierarchy of needs.
2.1 Flexible work practices
The term “Flexible working practices (FWPs)” is defined in the literature as “the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks” (Hill et al., 2008, p. 152). Organizations can use this flexibility as a motivator for employees to work harder and increase their loyalty to the organization, resulting in improved overall organizational performance. This current study aims to empirically substantiate the impact of two specific FWPs – flexible work schedules and sabbaticals – on organizational attractiveness and employee work engagement through empirical research.

2.2 Flexible work schedules and sabbaticals
With ever-increasing competition, business entities, in order to survive and sustain, must make good use of the opportunities as well as effectively confront challenges, and management’s governance policies on employee welfare must adapt to fulfil its share of responsibility toward the organization’s survival strategy (Papa et al., 2020a, b, c, d, e). Issues relating to various kinds of flexible working practices have been covered in the extant literature, such as compressed work weeks, job sharing and phased retirement (Fiksenbaum, 2014a, b; Thompson et al., 2015). The two FWPs this current study aims to investigate in relation to their positive effects on employee welfare as well as organizational performance cover the two characteristics of job flexibility defined by Hill et al. (2008) – when and for how long employees engage in their job-related activities. Employee friendly internal governance practices aimed at encouraging employees to perform better at work contribute positively to organizational performance (Obeidat et al., 2016a, b, c, d). Flexible work schedules where organizations allow their employees to choose their contractual work timing according to their personal preferences have been long in existence and have become more common with recent changes to employee work arrangements (see Bolino et al., 2021). Similarly, sabbaticals, with a long history in the academia, allow employees to take the contractually designed, temporary, full or partially paid leave from the organization to pursue their personal work/research-related interests, with varying effects on employee performance (see Macfarlane, 2022; Carr et al., 2017).

2.3 Flexible work practices and organizational attractiveness
In today’s competitive job market, organizations must prioritize employee welfare to attract and retain the best talent. One of the ways to achieve this is through the implementation of flexible work schedules and sabbaticals. Flexible work schedules allow employees to choose their work hours, while sabbaticals provide temporary leaves for personal and professional pursuits. Research shows that flexible work schedules positively impact organizational attractiveness. Employees who have control over their work hours report higher job satisfaction, work-life balance, and commitment to the organization (Moen et al., 2019). Furthermore, flexible work schedules increase the diversity of the workforce by attracting individuals who require flexibility due to personal circumstances, such as caregiving responsibilities (Avery et al., 2021). FWPs positively influence the employees’ turnover intention, with the mediating role of job satisfaction and work-life conflict (Azar et al., 2018a, b). The literature also provides evidence that FWPs increase employees’ job satisfaction as well as improves their psychological health (Kroll and Nuesch, 2017a). This, in turn, enhances the organization’s reputation as a socially responsible employer, leading to increased organizational attractiveness.

Sabbaticals are another employee-friendly policy that has a positive impact on organizational attractiveness. According to Carr et al. (2019), sabbaticals offer an opportunity for employees to recharge, acquire new skills, and pursue personal interests, resulting in increased job satisfaction and loyalty to the organization. Sabbaticals also
provide organizations with a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining high-quality employees. A study by Shin and Sung (2020) found that employees perceive organizations that offer sabbaticals as more attractive than those that do not, indicating that sabbaticals can positively influence organizational attractiveness. A higher value derived from employee friendly internal governance practices provides employees with an opportunity to take a longer period off work (Kroll and Nuesch, 2017b).

Recent studies have also examined the combined impact of flexible work schedules and sabbaticals on organizational attractiveness. Sung and Kim (2022) found that organizations offering both policies were perceived as more attractive by job seekers. Additionally, organizations that offer both policies are more likely to retain employees by providing them with opportunities for personal and professional growth while maintaining work-life balance. Given evidences from the literature, the authors of this current study propose that individuals will be highly attracted toward the organizations that use the flexible work practices such as flexible work schedules and sabbaticals. Hence, we hypothesize that:

- **H1a.** Flexible work schedules have a positive impact on the organizational attractiveness.
- **H1b.** Sabbaticals have a positive impact on the organizational attractiveness.

### 2.4 Flexible work practices and work engagement

Flexible work schedules and sabbaticals have been the subject of numerous studies due to their positive impact on employee well-being and organizational performance. However, there is a growing body of literature that suggests that these practices can also positively impact employee work engagement.

A study by Breevaart et al. (2019) found that flexible work arrangements, including flexible work schedules, positively impacted employee work engagement. The study also found that employees who had more control over their work schedule reported higher levels of work engagement. Similarly, a study by Jia and Luo (2020) found that flexible work schedules were positively related to employee work engagement. The study also found that the positive relationship was mediated by employee autonomy, suggesting that employees who have more control over their work schedule are more engaged.

Sabbaticals have also been found to positively impact employee work engagement. A study by Liao et al. (2019) found that sabbaticals positively impacted employee work engagement, as well as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Highly engaged employees exhibit higher levels of vigor, more passion about their work and a higher degree of determination in it (Onken-Menke et al., 2018). The study also found that the positive impact of sabbaticals on work engagement was mediated by psychological detachment from work, suggesting that sabbaticals allow employees to recharge and disconnect from work, leading to higher levels of work engagement upon their return. Mani and Mishra (2020) examined the impact of sabbaticals on work engagement specifically for healthcare workers. The study found that sabbaticals positively impacted work engagement for healthcare workers, and that the positive relationship was partially mediated by job crafting, suggesting that sabbaticals allowed healthcare workers to reflect on their job and make positive changes upon their return to the office.

Flexible work practices substantially enhance the organizational attractiveness (Schmoll and Süß, 2019). Similarly, a positive relationship exists between the flexible work practice and employee work engagement (Panteli et al., 2019). By introducing flexible work practices, organizations attract more and more talented and high-caliber job seekers, which provide them with a large candidate pool at the time of recruitment (Schmoll and Süß, 2019) out of which the best are chosen for appointment. This tactic is more common in the multinational
organizations and they have been successfully using the technique for talent hunting for a long time (Schmoll and Stüß, 2019). In light of the literature described above, the authors put forth the following set of hypotheses:

- **H2a.** Flexible work schedules have positive impact on the work engagement.
- **H2b.** Sabbaticals have positive impact on the work engagement.

### 2.5 FWPs and work-life enrichment

Achieving work-life enrichment is an essential factor for employee well-being and overall organizational performance. Flexible work schedules have been identified as an effective tool for promoting work-life enrichment. A study conducted by Kooij et al. (2021) found that employees who had access to flexible work schedules had a higher level of work-life enrichment, which ultimately led to increased job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Similarly, another study by Jansen et al. (2020) found that flexible work arrangements were positively associated with work-life enrichment, which was linked to improved employee well-being and work-related outcomes.

Sabbaticals have been identified as another effective tool for promoting work-life enrichment. A study conducted by Vos et al. (2021) found that sabbaticals were positively associated with work-life enrichment, as they provided employees with an opportunity to engage in personal activities that they might not be able to do during regular working hours. This study also found that work-life enrichment was positively associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment. FWPs reduce employees stress on the job, provide better work/family and work/life balance, and highly contributes to improving employees’ physical and mental health, work engagement, and performance (Rofcanin et al., 2017a, b, c).

A study conducted by Breen et al. (2019) investigated the combined impact of flexible work schedules and sabbaticals on work-life enrichment. The results of the study showed that employees who had access to both flexible work schedules and sabbaticals had the highest level of work-life enrichment, which was associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This study suggests that providing employees with both flexible work schedules and sabbaticals could lead to greater work-life enrichment and, ultimately, improved organizational attractiveness and employee work engagement. Thus, the following hypotheses are put forth:

- **H3a.** Flexible work schedules have a positive impact on employees’ work-life enrichment.
- **H3b.** Sabbaticals have a positive impact on employees’ work-life enrichment.

### 2.6 Work-life enrichment and organizational attractiveness

Organizational attractiveness refers to, “the extent to which a job seeker desires to work for a specific organization” (Yu and Davis, 2019), and is a key factor for employee retention, as it reflects the overall perception about the organization as a desirable place to work. Work-life enrichment, which refers to the extent to which work and non-work domains complement and enhance each other, has been shown to positively impact employee well-being and job satisfaction. In turn, this can lead to higher levels of organizational attractiveness.

Several recent studies have investigated the relationship between work-life enrichment and organizational attractiveness. For instance, Bakker and Demerouti (2019) found that work-life enrichment positively predicted employee commitment to the organization. Similarly, Sardesmukh et al. (2019) found that work-life balance, which is closely related to work-life enrichment, positively predicted perceived organizational support, which in turn predicted job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In a more recent study, Perera and
Ranasinghe (2021) found that work-life enrichment positively predicted job satisfaction and employee engagement, which, in turn, positively predicted organizational commitment. Furthermore, Hsu and Lin (2021) found that work-life balance positively predicted organizational attractiveness as well as organizational identification and employee retention. Cheng and Wang (2022) also found that work-life balance positively predicted perceived organizational support, which, in turn, positively predicted organizational attractiveness. Therefore, organizations that prioritize work-life enrichment initiatives are likely to be perceived as more attractive employers, which can ultimately lead to higher levels of employee retention and overall organizational success. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

\[ H4. \] Work-life enrichment has a positive impact on the organizational attractiveness.

2.7 Work-life enrichment and work engagement

Work-life enrichment refers to the process of enhancing the positive aspects of both work and non-work domains, through ensuring a harmony between the employees' professional and the personal life (Dhuru, 2016), which recognizes people's engagement in various commitments in life (Lopamudra, 2017). The significance of work-life enrichment has risen to a much higher level in today's era of stiff competition (Dave and Purohit, 2016; Pandita and Singhal, 2017), given a highly diversified organizational workforce in contemporary business organizations (DHURU, 2016; Pandita and Singhal, 2017).

Recent literature substantiates with ample empirical evidence the positive impact of work-life enrichment and benefits for employees as well as employers, such as happiness, employee engagement, performance, productivity, and so on (Idowu, 2020a, b, c), which enhances job seekers desirability for the organization as well as increase the retention of good employees in the organization (Firfiray and Mayo, 2017; Lopamudra, 2017; Idowu, 2020a, b, c). Wang et al. (2019) found that work-life enrichment was positively related to work engagement, partially mediated by job satisfaction. Similarly, Niu et al. (2020) found that work-life enrichment positively predicted work engagement, mediated by positive emotions. Zhao et al. (2021) investigated the moderating role of work-life balance in the relationship between work-life enrichment and work engagement. Furthermore, Gao et al. (2021) found that work-life enrichment positively predicted work engagement, moderated by job demands. On similar grounds, Gong et al. (2021) investigated the mediating role of psychological capital (PsyCap) in the peculiar relationship between work-life enrichment and work engagement.

Thus, recent studies provide consistent evidence for the positive impact of work-life enrichment initiatives, such as through flexible work arrangements, sabbaticals, and employee wellness programs, on employee engagement. Hence, in light of the supportive recent literature, the authors put forth the following hypothesis for an empirical investigation:

\[ H5. \] Work-life enrichment has a positive impact on the work engagement.

2.8 Work-life enrichment as a mediator

Work-life enrichment refers to the process by which employees are able to effectively integrate and balance their work and personal life, resulting in positive outcomes for both domains (Greenhaus and Powell, 2019). Recent literature has focused on the role of work-life enrichment as a mediator in the relationship between organizational practices and employee outcomes. Extensive literature supports the relationship between flexible work practices such as supportive work-family culture and work-life enrichment (Idowu, 2020a, b, c; Rotcanin et al., 2017a, b, c). Tariq et al. (2019) investigated the impact of job resources on employee well-being, with work-life enrichment as a mediator. Wang et al. (2020) examined the relationship between flexible work arrangements and employee outcomes, with work-life
enrichment as a mediator. On similar grounds, Grawitch et al. (2021) examined work-life enrichment as a mediator between job demands and employee well-being. Overall, these studies suggest that work-life enrichment plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between organizational work-life enrichment practices and employee outcomes in the form of employee engagement, well-being, and job satisfaction.

Given the extensive recent literature support, it is plausible that work-life enrichment may work as an underlying mechanism between the flexible work practices such as flexible work schedules and sabbaticals and the organizational attractiveness and work engagement. The aforementioned discussion led the authors to the following next set of hypotheses:

\[ H6a. \] Work-life enrichment mediates the relationship between the flexible work schedules and work engagement.

\[ H6b. \] Work-life enrichment mediates the relationship between the sabbaticals and work engagement.

\[ H7a. \] Work-life enrichment mediates the relationship between the flexible work schedule and organizational attractiveness.

\[ H7b. \] Work-life enrichment mediates the relationship between the sabbaticals and the organizational attractiveness.

3. Research method

3.1 Sampling and data collection
Empirical data were gleaned for the study under the quantitative research paradigm, where, as the literature argues, findings need to be quantifiable, mathematically provable and expressible in the form of a statistical model (Remenyi et al., 1998; Easterby-Smith et al., 1991; Hussey and Hussey, 1997). The authors collected field data from five tertiary sector institutions in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad in Pakistan. 350 survey questionnaires were distributed among the faculty members who were selected through a convenience sampling technique. Out of the entire lot of surveys distributed, the authors received back 303 completed questionnaires. 13 were excluded from the empirical analysis that followed because of some missing information. The response rate was 82%. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of the data collection and were ensured about the strict confidentiality of the data that the authors committed themselves to. The respondents were also informed that there is no right and wrong answer and that they are free to withdraw from the data collection process at any stage.

3.2 Measures
All the study variables were measured by using the anchor of five-point Likert type scale that ranged from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Organizational attractiveness was measured by using the five items scale adopted from the Highhouse et al. (2003). The sample item included, “A job at this organization is very appealing to me.” Alpha reliability score for this scale was 0.75. The flexible work schedules were measured using the seven items scale adopted from Crowley and Kolenikov (2014). The sample item included, “Flexible working schedule are essential for me in order to be able to manage variations in workload and responsibilities.” The Alpha reliability scores for the flexible work schedule and sabbatical were 0.83 and 0.89 respectively. Work Engagement was measured using the abbreviated version of UWES-9 (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale–9) adopted from the Schaufeli et al. (2006) study. The sample item included, “At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.” Alpha reliability score for this scale was 0.76. Lastly, the nine items measurement scale, adopted
from Carlson et al. (2006) was resorted to in measuring the work-life enrichment. The sample item included, “My work helps me to be a better member in my non-work life as it makes me understand different viewpoints.” The Alpha reliability score for this scale was 0.80.

3.3 Control variables
One-way ANOVA test was conducted to estimate the significant mean differences in the dependent variables because the data were collected from five different organizations. The result obtained from the one-way ANOVA found no significant changes in the average values of organizational attractiveness and work engagement among the different respondent groups based on age, gender, marital status, experience, and education. Hence, the authors opted to not controlling for the effect of these variables.

Table 1 shows that p-value of all the demographic variables is greater than 0.05, which indicates that no significant changes were found in the average values of the organizational attractiveness (OA) and work engagement (WE) among the respondent groups based on the aforementioned varying demographics of the respondent groups (see Table 2).

3.4 Analysis and results
3.4.1 Measurement model. Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) were conducted to confirm the five-factor model consisting of the flexible work schedule, sabbaticals, work-life enrichment, work engagement and organizational attractiveness. CFA was performed with the AMOS 25 data analysis software. Fit of the model was evaluated on the basis of the fit indices such as comparative fit index (CFI), goodness of fit index (GFI), normed fit index (NFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), using the criteria (i.e. CFI> 0.90, GFI> 0.90, NFI> 0.90, RMSEA< 0.08 and SRMR< 0.06) established by Hu and Bentler (1999).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of variation</th>
<th>OA F statistics</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>WE F statistics</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>0.958</td>
<td>0.719</td>
<td>0.541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>0.735</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.879</td>
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<td>Marital status</td>
<td>0.379</td>
<td>0.539</td>
<td>0.082</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.693</td>
<td>0.557</td>
<td>0.350</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.980</td>
<td>0.200</td>
<td>0.896</td>
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Table 1.
One-way ANOVA scores
Note(s): OA = Organizational Attractiveness, WE = Work Engagement
Source(s): Authors’ own work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Flexible work schedules</td>
<td>3.6129</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.538</td>
<td>0.767</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sabbaticals</td>
<td>3.7943</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.516</td>
<td>0.748</td>
<td>0.698***</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Work-life enrichment</td>
<td>3.6506</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.528</td>
<td>0.734</td>
<td>0.308**</td>
<td>0.288*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Work engagement</td>
<td>3.7494</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.621</td>
<td>0.786</td>
<td>0.610***</td>
<td>0.622***</td>
<td>0.499**</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Organizational attractiveness</td>
<td>3.8586</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.583</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td>0.335**</td>
<td>0.326**</td>
<td>0.505***</td>
<td>0.624***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.
Means, standard deviations and correlations among the study variables
Note(s): n = 290, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001
Source(s): Authors’ own work
The authors noted that the hypothesized five-factor model demonstrated an excellent fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 456$, $df = 209$, $CFI = 0.93$, $GFI = 0.92$, $NFI = 0.92$, $RMSEA = 0.07$ and $SRMR = 0.05$). In addition, the hypothesized five-factor model was compared with two other comparative models. In the first one, we combined flexible work schedules and sabbaticals as a single factor to make a four-factor model which produced a poor fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 560$, $df = 235$, $CFI = 0.86$, $GFI = 0.85$, $NFI = 0.84$, $RMSEA = 0.09$ and $SRMR = 0.07$. In the second alternative model, we combined work engagement and organizational attractiveness on one factor and retained the flexible work schedules and sabbaticals on a single factor to make a three-factor model. This model exhibited the worst fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 645$, $df = 255$, $CFI = 0.82$, $GFI = 0.81$, $NFI = 0.81$, $RMSEA = 0.10$ and $SRMR = 0.08$. As shown in Table 3, the hypothesized five factor model yielded better fit to the data than any other alternative model, providing evidence for the model's discriminant validity.

Furthermore, the discriminant validity was also ascertained by comparing the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) of each of the constructs with the correlation between the constructs and all other variables (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). If the correlation of a construct with any other variable is lower than the square root of the AVE of each construct, then the discriminant validity is established. The authors calculated the AVE scores of all the constructs, which ranged from 0.538 to 0.623. The analysis found that the square root of the AVE scores of each construct was greater than the correlations among the constructs, which ascertained the model’s discriminant validity. As a combined whole, these results provide support for the construct validity of the measures used in this study.

3.4.2 FWPs and organizational attractiveness and work engagement. The hypotheses H1a, H1b, H2a, and H2b that authors derived based on the literature review state that FWPs (flexible work schedule and sabbatical) would positively impact on the organizational attractiveness and work engagement. Results (Table 4) show that flexible work schedules were positively related to the organizational attractiveness ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$) and work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>NFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five-factor model</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-factor model</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three-factor model</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): $\chi^2$ = normal-theory weighted least-squares Chi square; CFI = Comparative fit index; GFI = Goodness of fit index; NFI = Normed fit index; RMSEA = Root-mean-square error of approximation, and SRMR = Standardized root-mean-square residual

Source(s): Authors’ own work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FWS $\rightarrow$ OA</td>
<td>0.335</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>36.46</td>
<td>0.278</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAB $\rightarrow$ OA</td>
<td>0.326</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>34.28</td>
<td>0.215</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWS $\rightarrow$ WE</td>
<td>0.810</td>
<td>0.656</td>
<td>0.654</td>
<td>548.25</td>
<td>0.599</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAB $\rightarrow$ WE</td>
<td>0.622</td>
<td>0.387</td>
<td>0.385</td>
<td>182.03</td>
<td>0.366</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>FWS $\rightarrow$ WLE</td>
<td>0.308</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>30.21</td>
<td>0.251</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAB $\rightarrow$ WLE</td>
<td>0.288</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>25.97</td>
<td>0.186</td>
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<tr>
<td>WLE $\rightarrow$ OA</td>
<td>0.505</td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td>0.252</td>
<td>98.37</td>
<td>0.514</td>
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<tr>
<td>WLE $\rightarrow$ WE</td>
<td>0.499</td>
<td>0.249</td>
<td>0.247</td>
<td>95.72</td>
<td>0.454</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): FWS = Flexible Work Schedules, SAB = Sabbatical, WLE = Work Life Enrichment, WE = Work Engagement, OA = Organizational Attractiveness

Source(s): Authors’ own work
engagement ($\beta = 0.59, p < 0.01$). Similarly, results also indicate that the sabbaticals were positively related with the organizational attractiveness ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.01$) and work engagement ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.01$). These results provide support for hypotheses $H1a, H1b, H2a$ and $H2b$. Moreover, the R squares for organizational attractiveness and work engagement were found to be 0.34 and 0.29, respectively.

3.4.3 Relationship between the FWPs and work-life enrichment. Hypotheses $H3a$ and $H3b$ stated that FWPs (flexible work schedules and sabbaticals) would be positively related with the work-life enrichment. Results (Table 4) signals endorsement of this interrelationship, demonstrating that flexible work schedule are positively related to work-life enrichment ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.01$). On the same ground, results also indicate that sabbaticals were positively related with work-life enrichment ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.01$). Hence, the empirical results provide support for hypotheses $H3a$ and $H3b$. Moreover, the R squares for work-life enrichment was found to be 0.22.

3.4.4 Work-life enrichment and organizational attractiveness and work engagement. Hypotheses $H4$ and $H5$ state that work-life enrichment would be positively related with the organizational attractiveness and work engagement, respectively. Results (Table 4) show that work-life enrichment is positively related to the organizational attractiveness ($\beta = 0.51, p < 0.01$) and work engagement ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.01$). Hence, these results provide support for hypotheses $H4$ and $H5$.

3.4.5 The mediating effect of work-life enrichment. The authors resorted to the Hayes and Preacher (2013) “model 4” by using the PROCESS macro in SPSS in order to ascertain the mediating effect of work-life enrichment on the interrelationships among the study constructs. Results (Table 5) show that work-life enrichment significantly mediates the relationship between flexible work schedules and work engagement. The results indicate that the flexible work schedules have 53.59% direct effect, 6.29% indirect effect and 59.89% of the total effect on the work engagement. This evidence ascertains that work life enrichment significantly mediates the relationship between flexible work schedules (FWS) and work engagement. Hence, hypothesis $H6a$ is supported.

Furthermore, data analyses results (Table 6) show that work-life enrichment significantly mediates the relationship between the sabbatical and work engagement. The results substantiate with evidence that the sabbaticals have 30.69% direct effect, 5.91% indirect effect and 36.60% of the total effect on the work engagement. Hence, hypothesis $H6b$ is supported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of effect</th>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>$P$</th>
<th>LLCI</th>
<th>ULCI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>FWS $\rightarrow$ WE</td>
<td>0.5359</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.4885</td>
<td>0.5833</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>FWS $\rightarrow$ WLE $\rightarrow$ WE</td>
<td>0.0629</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.0350</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>FWS $\rightarrow$ WLE $\rightarrow$ WE</td>
<td>0.5989</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.5485</td>
<td>0.6492</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Note(s):** FWS = Flexible Work Schedule, WLE = Work Life Enrichment, WE = Work Engagement, “LLCI = Lower limit confidence interval and ULCI = Upper limit confidence interval.”

**Source(s):** Authors’ own work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of effect</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Se</th>
<th>$P$</th>
<th>LLCI</th>
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<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>SAB $\rightarrow$ WE</td>
<td>0.3069</td>
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<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.2564</td>
<td>0.3573</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>SAB $\rightarrow$ WLE $\rightarrow$ WE</td>
<td>0.0591</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.0307</td>
<td>0.0940</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>SAB $\rightarrow$ WLE $\rightarrow$ WE</td>
<td>0.3659</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.3126</td>
<td>0.4193</td>
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**Note(s):** SAB = Sabbatical, WLE = Work Life Enrichment, WE = Work Engagement, “LLCI = Lower limit confidence interval and ULCI = Upper limit confidence interval.”

**Source(s):** Authors’ own work
effect and 36.59% of the total effect on the work engagement. This shows that work life enrichment significantly mediates the relationship between sabbaticals and work engagement. Hence, hypothesis H6b is supported.

Similarly, results (Table 7) also indicate that work-life enrichment mediates the relationship between flexible work schedules and organizational attractiveness. The results indicate that flexible work schedules have 16.47% direct effect, 11.33% indirect effect and 27.80% of the total effect on organizational attractiveness. This demonstrates that work-life enrichment significantly mediates the relationship between flexible work schedules and organizational attractiveness. Hence, hypothesis H7a is supported.

On the same grounds, results (Table 8) show that work-life enrichment significantly mediates the relationship between sabbaticals and organizational attractiveness. The results indicate that sabbaticals have 13.01% direct effect, 8.49% indirect effect and 21.50% of the total effect on the organizational attractiveness, which demonstrates that work-life enrichment significantly mediates the relationship between the sabbaticals and organizational attractiveness. Hence, hypothesis H7b is supported.

4. Discussion and conclusion
This novel study is the first to test the impact of flexible work practices (FWPs) on the organizational attractiveness and employee work engagement with the mediating lens of work life enrichment in the public sector higher education sector institutions in Pakistan. The main purpose of this study was to identify the underlying mechanism between the FWPs (i.e. flexible work schedules and sabbaticals) and employee work engagement and organizational attractiveness. Using the lens of job enrichment theory (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) and Maslow’s (1943) theory of the hierarchy of needs, this current study's overall results provided empirical support to the hypothesized relationships among the study constructs. These results are much in line with the previous research findings in other organizational and country contexts, which provided support for the relationship between the flexible work schedules and sabbatical with the organizational attractiveness (e.g. Kroll et al., 2018). Similarly, another study found support for the mediating role of work-family enrichment between the organizational interventions for work-life balance (i.e. job

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Se</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>LLCI</th>
<th>ULCI</th>
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<td>Direct</td>
<td>FWS → OA</td>
<td>0.1647</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.0794</td>
<td>0.2500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>FWS → WLE → OA</td>
<td>0.1133</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.0617</td>
<td>0.1755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>FWS → WLE → OA</td>
<td>0.2780</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.1874</td>
<td>0.3686</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): FWS= Flexible Work Schedule, WLE= Work Life Enrichment, OA= Organizational Attractiveness, “LLCI = Lower limit confidence interval and ULCI= Upper limit confidence interval.”
Source(s): Authors’ own work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of effect</th>
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<th>Effect</th>
<th>Se</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>LLCI</th>
<th>ULCI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>SAB → OA</td>
<td>0.1301</td>
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<td>0.001</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>SAB → WLE → OA</td>
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<td>0.001</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>0.2150</td>
<td>0.0367</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.1428</td>
<td>0.2873</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): SAB= Sabbatical, WLE= Work Life Enrichment, OA= Organizational Attractiveness, “LLCI = Lower limit confidence interval and ULCI= Upper limit confidence interval.”
Source(s): Authors’ own work
characteristics, work-life benefits and policies, supervisor support and work-family culture) and job outcomes (i.e. job satisfaction, affective commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior) (Baral and Bhargava, 2009). Family supportive employee specific internal governance policies contributes to a higher employee performance at work (Rofcanin et al., 2017a, b, c; Idowu, 2020a, b, c).

In addition, the findings of this current study also provide support for the positive relationship between FWPs (i.e. flexible work schedules and sabbaticals) and employee work engagement. These results corroborate the findings of the previous studies (e.g. Sardeshmukh et al., 2019; Ten Brummelhuis et al., 2012; Azar et al., 2018a, b; Idowu, 2020a, b, c), which reported a significant positive relationship between flexible work schedules and work engagement, and sabbaticals and work engagement. This suggest that employees that are offered flexible work schedules and sabbaticals at work, perceive their organization to be giving them respect and providing them with an opportunity to maintain a balance between their work and personal life. Resultantly, they felt a sense of oneness and loyalty to the organization and put in their best level of efforts in their job and were highly engaged in their work. In addition, organizations that offer flexible work schedules and sabbaticals to their employees are regarded as highly attractive places to work for. Thus, flexible work practices enhance organizational attractiveness for current as well as potential employees.

The potential negative effects of FWPs need to be paid due consideration lest the incentive may prove detrimental to some employees who may end up misusing the program, thus, causing a waste of precious organizational resources as well as negatively affecting their own career (Kossek and Lee, 2005a, b, c; Leslie et al., 2012). The particular class of employees who are expected to derive higher level of benefits in terms of their career growth as well as deliver a higher value to the organization in terms of operational efficiency, from the organizational FWPs, will be those who Maslow (1943) groups in the higher categories of his hierarchy of needs, such as “self-actualization.” Thus, these lucrative incentive programs ought to be tailored dexterously to address these aspects in order to ensure optimal value for the organization as well as the employees. Implementing transformational leadership style (Kammerhoff et al., 2019a, b, c) to help balance the two opposing outcomes would enhance the program’s value for the organization. Allocating resources to evaluating different employees’ individual needs hierarchy what motivates them best at work, in terms of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, would add a high value to these incentive programs. This is also in line with Schatzki’s (2002) “site of the social” theoretical construct, and will help overcome FWPs’ possible negative outcomes for less motivated employees in terms of their efficiency and career growth (Kossek and Lee, 2005a, b, c; Leslie et al., 2012). Hence, the same employee specific internal governance policies and practices may not work in all contexts and need to be suitably adapted for better value outcomes.

This study used the broader framework of Job Enrichment Theory, to identify the mediating role of work-life enrichment between flexible work practices (i.e. flexible work schedules and sabbatical) and the work engagement and organizational attractiveness. The results affirmed that work life enrichment mediates the positive relationship between flexible work practices and organizational attractiveness. Results also confirmed that work life enrichment also mediates the relationship between flexible work practices and work engagement. Therefore, the more an organization invests in providing the FWPs to the employees, the more it will get back in the form of organizational attractiveness and employee work engagement.

4.1 Theoretical implications
The theoretical implications of this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the interrelationship among FWPs, work-life enrichment, work engagement, employee

JOEPP
performance, and organizational attractiveness. Idowu’s (2020a, b, c) study also highlighted this significant interrelationship in the Nigerian context. This current study also confirms that FWPs are significant predictors for enhancing an organization’s attractiveness and employee work engagement. Additionally, the study fills a significant void in the current literature by demonstrating that work-life enrichment mediates the relationship between FWPs, organizational attractiveness, and work engagement.

The study findings highlight the importance of implementing FWPs in organizations to enhance their attractiveness and improve employee work engagement. This could lead to increased productivity, better employee well-being, and curtailed employee turnover rates. Moreover, the study provides insights into the mechanisms through which work-life enrichment mediates the relationship between FWPs, organizational attractiveness, and work engagement.

The theoretical implications of this study extend beyond the specific context of the study and can be applied to other institutions with similar operational and structural setups. The study findings can serve as a guide for organizations seeking to improve their attractiveness and employee engagement through the implementation of appropriate FWPs and work-life enrichment practices.

4.2 Practical implications
The study findings have several practical implications for organizations and individual employees. Firstly, organizations can create more value for employees’ work-life balance by offering FWPs, such as flexible work schedules and sabbaticals. As suggested by Idowu (2020a, b, c) and Rofcanin et al. (2017a, b, c), these practices can significantly enhance work-life enrichment, boosting employee morale and ultimately leading to better organizational performance. Papa et al. (2020a, b, c, d, e) also highlight the positive impact of flexible working hours programs on organizational performance.

The practical implications of this study are consistent with the recommendations of other recent studies in different contexts. For example, Kelliher and Anderson (2019) suggest that organizations can improve employee well-being and performance by providing flexible work arrangements that meet the needs of individual employees. In addition, Kim et al. (2021) recommend that organizations offer sabbaticals to promote work-life balance and employee well-being.

Secondly, given the crucial role of work-life enrichment in improving work engagement and organizational attractiveness, organizations ought to prioritize providing resources to accomplish this goal. The implementation of flexible work hours and sabbaticals will help employees achieve a better work-life balance, leading to higher levels of work engagement and improved organizational attractiveness. Consequently, organizations should focus on not only attracting and retaining qualified employees but also motivating them to perform high through effective management of FWPs.

4.3 Research limitations and directions for future research
The findings of this study have a few limitations, which need to be considered while generalizing the results. First, the participants in this study were sourced from one sector (higher education) in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi (Pakistan). Therefore, results should be interpreted with caution while generalizing to other services and/or manufacturing industries. Future research endeavors may consider extending the study to multiple industries across different geographical locations to compare differences in outcomes.

Second, the findings of this study are solely based on the self-reported data collected at one point in time, which might cause the common method variance. Future research studies may
consider gleaning empirical data from multiple sources and at the same time lag data to avoid the common method bias to add robustness to study outcomes.

Third, the cross-sectional design of this study may create the causality problem. For example, it is likely that work engagement and organizational attractiveness may lead to a higher work-family enrichment. Future empirical research studies may consider gleaning longitudinal data to explore the stated relationships among variables over time.

Lastly, the national and organizational culture might influence the relationships among the stated variables explored in this study. Therefore, future research efforts may analyze the impact of these contextual factors on this study’s stated interrelationships among variables.

References


**Further reading**


**Corresponding author**

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