

Flexible Work Arrangements, Decent Work and Employee Productivity in the Public Service: A Qualitative-Informed Scoping Review

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Abstract

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) have become increasingly relevant to public service organizations seeking to balance employee well-being, decent work, and organizational productivity. However, the implications of FWAs for productivity in the public sector remain complex, particularly because flexibility must be considered alongside employment quality, institutional requirements, and service delivery responsibilities. This study aims to map and synthesize existing literature on the relationships among FWAs, decent work, and employee productivity in public service settings. A scoping review approach was employed using literature retrieved from Scopus and Google Scholar. The search and screening process identified 28 studies for inclusion in the review. The findings indicate that FWAs may support employee productivity by improving work-life balance, autonomy, job satisfaction, and employees' capacity to manage work demands. Nevertheless, these potential benefits depend on organizational conditions, including managerial support, access to appropriate technology, workload distribution, performance evaluation practices, and the nature of public service tasks. The review also highlights the importance of decent work as a complementary analytical perspective, particularly in examining whether flexible arrangements are accompanied by fair working conditions, employee well-being, and adequate organizational support. The evidence suggests that flexibility should not be treated as an automatic determinant of higher productivity; rather, its outcomes are shaped by the interaction between employee needs and institutional arrangements. This review contributes to the discussion of human resource management in the public sector by bringing together flexibility, decent work, and productivity within a single analytical framework. It also identifies the need for further empirical research that distinguishes perceived productivity from measurable organizational and public service outcomes.

Keywords: Flexible Work Arrangements; Decent Work; Employee Productivity; Public Service; Scoping Review

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INTRODUCTION

Public service organisations are experiencing significant changes in how work is organised and managed in response to technological advancement, fiscal constraints, evolving service delivery demands, and employees' expectations regarding autonomy and work-life integration (Carroll & Conboy, 2020). In this context, flexible work arrangements (FWAs), including flexitime, remote and hybrid work, compressed workweeks, and job sharing, have gained prominence as human resource management (HRM) strategies intended to accommodate employee needs while maintaining organisational performance (Mas & Pallais, 2020; Mburu, 2025). In public service organisations, however, FWAs represent more than a change in work schedules or locations. They also challenge established bureaucratic practices characterised by fixed working hours, physical co-presence, hierarchical supervision, and conventional approaches to employee performance evaluation. Understanding FWAs in the public sector therefore requires attention to both their potential benefits for employees and the institutional conditions under which public services are delivered.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of FWAs across public sector organisations, transforming remote work from an exceptional crisis response into a more prominent component of work organisation (Vyas, 2022). Remote and hybrid arrangements helped sustain administrative continuity and public service delivery during periods of restricted mobility (Himawan, Helmi, & Fanggidae, 2022). Existing studies have associated flexible work practices with improved work-life balance, employee well-being, and reduced work-related stress (Oakman et al., 2020; Bakar, 2024). Nevertheless, the adoption of FWAs has also raised concerns about supervision, interdepartmental coordination, performance monitoring, and managerial accountability, particularly in public organisations operating under formal administrative procedures and public accountability requirements (Parker, 2020). These developments raise an important question: under what organisational and institutional conditions can flexibility support employee productivity without compromising the continuity, responsiveness, and accountability of public services?

From a human resource management perspective, FWAs should be examined as arrangements that influence work design, performance management, and employment relations rather than as temporary responses to external disruption. Their implications are also relevant to the concept of *decent work*, which emphasises productive employment, dignity, appropriate working conditions, and institutional support for workers' well-being (International Labour Organization, 2019). The relationship between flexibility and decent work, however, should not be assumed to be automatically positive. Flexible arrangements may provide employees with greater autonomy and opportunities to reconcile work and personal responsibilities, but their benefits may depend on workload allocation, access to adequate resources, managerial support, and the protection of employment conditions. Accordingly, decent work provides a complementary perspective for examining whether flexibility contributes not only to organisational performance but also to the quality and sustainability of employees' working lives.

Employee productivity in public service organisations also requires a broader conceptualisation than conventional measures of output or efficiency. Depending on the nature of the work, productivity may be reflected in service timeliness, responsiveness, coordination, procedural compliance, task completion, and the quality of administrative services (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). These dimensions are not necessarily interchangeable, and the indicators used to assess productivity may vary across institutions and occupational groups. In settings where direct supervision and physical presence are reduced, productivity assessment may increasingly depend on clearly defined work outcomes, digital infrastructure, communication practices, and trust-based management. Consequently, the relationship between FWAs and productivity cannot be evaluated solely by examining whether employees work remotely or follow flexible schedules. It also requires consideration of how productivity is defined, which indicators are used, and how institutional expectations shape employees' performance.

Evidence cited in the literature suggests that the outcomes of FWAs vary according to organisational and institutional contexts. Supervisory capacity, trust between managers and employees, performance management systems, digital infrastructure, and organisational culture may influence how flexible arrangements are implemented and experienced (Iskamto, 2023; Sunaryo et al., 2024). These conditions may help explain why similar arrangements produce different outcomes across public service organisations. For example, flexibility implemented alongside clear performance expectations and adequate technological support may operate differently from flexibility introduced without corresponding changes to workload management, coordination procedures, or evaluation practices. Such variation indicates the need to examine FWAs as organisational arrangements embedded in specific administrative and institutional environments rather than as uniform interventions with predictable productivity effects.

Despite growing scholarly interest in flexible work, the literature connecting FWAs, decent work, and employee productivity in public service organisations remains fragmented. Studies differ in their definitions of flexibility, the organisational settings examined, the indicators used to assess productivity, and the institutional factors considered relevant to implementation. Research conducted in private-sector settings may offer useful insights, but its findings cannot automatically be generalised to public service organisations, where service continuity, procedural compliance, and public accountability may shape the meaning and assessment of productivity. Furthermore, productivity outcomes reported in individual studies may reflect employee perceptions, managerial assessments, or measurable organisational outputs, which represent distinct forms of evidence. Without distinguishing these forms of evidence, it is difficult to establish what the literature demonstrates about the relationship between FWAs and public service productivity. The extent to which decent work is explicitly incorporated into this relationship also requires systematic examination.

A scoping review is appropriate for mapping the breadth and characteristics of a diverse body of literature, identifying how key concepts are defined and investigated, and locating areas requiring further research. Accordingly, this study adopts a qualitatively informed scoping review to map and synthesise literature concerning flexible work arrangements and employee productivity in public service organisations, while examining the relevance of decent work and the institutional conditions associated with productivity outcomes. Guided by the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR), the review seeks to clarify the forms of flexibility discussed in the literature, the ways productivity is conceptualised and assessed, and the organisational factors and evidence gaps that shape current understanding. Its contribution lies in bringing together work arrangements, employment quality, and productivity within a public service perspective, while distinguishing established findings from areas where the available evidence remains limited.

The review addresses the following research questions:

1. What forms of flexible work arrangements are most commonly discussed in research and policy literature concerning public service organisations?
2. How is employee productivity conceptualised and measured in public service contexts beyond narrow efficiency-based indicators?
3. What institutional and organisational factors, including supervision, trust, performance management, digital infrastructure, and organisational culture, are associated with productivity outcomes linked to flexible work arrangements in public service organisations?
4. What gaps remain in the research and policy literature on flexible work arrangements in public service organisations, particularly regarding decent work and the sustainable development of public service employment?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Flexible Work Arrangements in the Public Service

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) in the public service refer to institutionalised policies and management practices that grant employees discretion over when, where, and how work is performed, while maintaining service delivery standards, accountability, and public value



obligations (Mwiti, 2023). From an institutional perspective, FWAs signify a shift from rigid, presence-based bureaucratic models to more adaptive, results-oriented administrative systems (Liu & Zhu, 2021). Common forms include flexitime, remote and hybrid work, compressed workweeks, job sharing, and part-time arrangements, typically regulated by civil service rules to ensure equity, transparency, and continuity of operations (Mbau et al., 2025).

Unlike the private sector, where flexibility is largely market-driven, FWAs in the public service are shaped by hierarchical authority, rule-bound procedures, and heightened accountability requirements (Hoque & FCPA, 2021; Mujahidin & Kusuma, 2025). Their adoption must therefore align with formal performance management systems, supervisory mechanisms, and public employment regulations, which condition how flexibility is interpreted and implemented and whether it enhances productivity or generates coordination and monitoring challenges.

From a productivity standpoint, FWAs are expected to operate through mechanisms such as improved work-life balance, increased motivation, and more efficient use of human resources. However, their effectiveness depends on organisational capacity, particularly digital infrastructure, outcome-based supervision, and precise performance metrics (Purnamassari et al., 2025). In the absence of these supports, FWAs may undermine service timeliness, accountability, or output quality.

Within contemporary public management reforms, FWAs are increasingly framed as tools for workforce modernisation and digital governance to improve efficiency, resilience, and sustainable service delivery (Milakovich, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift by demonstrating the operational feasibility of remote and hybrid work in public institutions, challenging long-standing assumptions about the necessity of physical presence for productivity (Ezeilo & Green-Mckenzie, 2024).

Overall, FWAs in the public service require balancing employee autonomy with administrative control and flexibility with accountability. They are best understood not simply as alternative work schedules, but as governance instruments whose productivity effects are contingent on institutional design, managerial interpretation, and organisational capacity (Kusworo & Fauzi, 2022).

Decent Work and Sustainable Development

Decent work is a core pillar of sustainable development and is central to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8, which promotes productive employment, inclusive economic growth, and improved quality of work. Beyond job creation, decent work encompasses fair remuneration, employment security, safe working conditions, social protection, and respect for workers' rights (Brill, 2021). In the public service, it further includes transparent employment practices, equitable access to opportunities, professional development, and working conditions that sustain employee wellbeing and productivity (Mpunga, 2025).

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) contribute to SDG 8 by improving the quality of work and labour productivity. By increasing autonomy over work time and location, FWAs can enhance work-life balance, reduce stress, and improve job satisfaction, thereby strengthening motivation, commitment, and discretionary effort that support effective service delivery (Aruldoss et al., 2021). In this sense, FWAs function not only as employee welfare measures but as policy instruments for advancing productive employment in public organisations.

FWAs are also relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 16, which emphasises effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. Public institutions' capacity to deliver development outcomes depends on a productive and resilient workforce (Githui & Njuru, 2024). When embedded within robust performance management and accountability frameworks, FWAs can enhance institutional effectiveness by reducing absenteeism, improving workforce continuity, and sustaining service delivery during disruptions (Aruldoss, Kowalski & Parayitam, 2021).

However, FWAs' contribution to SDG 16 is conditional. While flexibility can promote inclusion, particularly for women, caregivers, and persons with disabilities, it also raises governance challenges related to supervision, coordination, and performance monitoring (Peña-

Casas et al., 2025). In accountability-driven public sector contexts, poorly designed FWAs may weaken transparency and control if not supported by clear expectations, digital capacity, and outcome-oriented evaluation systems.

The intersection of SDG 8 and SDG 16 is therefore most pronounced in the public service, where decent work conditions directly underpin institutional performance and public value creation (Massey, 2022). Integrating FWAs into public service management aligns with the sustainable development agenda by advancing decent work while strengthening effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. This underscores the need to assess FWAs not only in terms of employee well-being but also in terms of their broader implications for productivity, governance capacity, and institutional sustainability.

Employee Productivity as a Multi-Dimensional Construct

Employee productivity is a central yet contested concept in public administration, reflecting the fact that public sector organisations prioritise collective value creation rather than profit maximisation. Unlike private-sector productivity, which is commonly measured through output–input ratios linked to market performance, public-sector productivity encompasses broader concerns such as service quality, equity, accountability, and the achievement of public policy objectives (Camilleri, 2021). Accordingly, employee productivity in public service contexts is best understood as a multidimensional construct shaped by individual effort, organisational systems, and institutional conditions (Knies et al., 2024).

At a basic level, employee productivity refers to the efficient and effective use of resources to achieve organisational goals within a given timeframe (Dixit & Sharma, 2021). In public organisations, however, productivity extends beyond task completion to include service reliability, responsiveness, procedural compliance, and legal accountability (Velsberg et al., 2020). Narrow efficiency-based metrics are therefore insufficient for capturing the complex and value-laden nature of public service work.

Scholarly accounts commonly distinguish several interrelated dimensions of employee productivity. At the individual level, productivity relates to task accuracy, timeliness, responsiveness, and efficient use of resources, often assessed through supervisory evaluations and performance appraisals in contexts where outputs are difficult to quantify (Lascina, 2025). A qualitative dimension is equally central, as productivity in public service is closely linked to service quality, error reduction, and adherence to rules and procedures; high output volumes alone do not constitute effective performance (Camilleri, 2021).

Productivity also has a behavioural dimension, encompassing motivation, commitment, engagement, and discretionary effort. Public service motivation theory suggests that employees who identify with public values and perceive organisational support are more likely to demonstrate sustained performance (Knies et al., 2024). Flexible work arrangements may enhance this dimension by fostering autonomy and trust, though weak supervision or perceived inequities can undermine commitment and performance (Orishede & Ndudi, 2020; Gašić et al., 2024).

At the institutional level, employee productivity reflects how individual and team efforts translate into organisational outcomes, such as timely service delivery, reduced administrative backlogs, and operational continuity. Institutional productivity is shaped by performance management systems, accountability mechanisms, supervisory capacity, and access to digital infrastructure (Ajike, 2023). These structures are particularly salient in flexible work contexts, where autonomy must be balanced with effective coordination and control (Austin-Egole, 2020).

These dimensions are mutually reinforcing: individual efficiency supports service quality, behavioural commitment mediates the deployment of effort, and institutional arrangements condition sustainable performance. In developing-country public sectors, productivity assessment is further complicated by capacity constraints, weak monitoring systems, and limited data availability, underscoring the need to situate productivity within its broader institutional and political context (Kassaye, 2020).

For this study, employee productivity is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing individual task efficiency, service delivery quality, behavioural commitment, and institutional performance outcomes. This framework is particularly appropriate for analysing



flexible work arrangements, which may enhance motivation and work-life balance while simultaneously posing challenges for supervision, coordination, and accountability if not effectively managed.

Institutional and Interpretive Perspectives on Flexible Work Arrangements

Drawing on sociological institutionalism and interpretive (sensemaking) perspectives, flexible work arrangements (FWAs) are conceptualised as context-dependent governance practices rather than neutral managerial tools. Their effectiveness depends not only on formal design but on how organisational actors interpret, enact, and negotiate flexibility within existing rules, norms, shared meanings, and power relations (Stavrou & Anastassiadou, 2022). This perspective is particularly relevant to public sector organisations, where formal bureaucratic structures coexist with entrenched informal practices, producing variation in FWA outcomes across units and agencies.

From an institutional standpoint, supervision is a central mechanism through which FWAs shape employee productivity. Traditional public sector supervision relies heavily on physical presence and procedural compliance (Kusworo et al., 2022). Remote and hybrid work disrupts this model, requiring a shift towards output-oriented supervision. Interpretively, however, supervisors' beliefs about authority, trust, and control shape how this shift occurs. Where FWAs are interpreted as threats to managerial authority, supervisors may respond with intensified monitoring or informal sanctions, thereby constraining productivity gains (Wogboroma & Obara, 2021).

Trust functions as a key mediating mechanism linking FWAs to productivity. Institutional trust reflects organisational confidence in employees' responsible performance in the absence of constant oversight (Paschina, 2023). In public organisations, trust is closely associated with perceptions of fairness, consistency, and managerial support (Liu et al., 2022). When FWAs are interpreted as signals of trust, they can elicit reciprocal commitment and discretionary effort; conversely, in low-trust environments, flexibility may be viewed as an opportunity for opportunism, prompting restrictive controls that undermine performance (Tsen et al., 2022).

Accountability remains a defining institutional constraint in public sector organisations. Beyond managerial oversight, accountability encompasses legal, political, and societal obligations (Gherardi Linsalata et al., 2021). Institutionally, FWAs must therefore be embedded within clear performance management and reporting systems. Interpretively, employees' understanding of accountability expectations shapes behaviour under flexible work conditions. Where standards and reporting requirements are explicit, accountability can be maintained without reliance on physical presence, sustaining productivity in remote and hybrid settings (Massum & Parker, 2024).

Organisational culture provides the broader context within which supervision, trust, and accountability are enacted. Public sector cultures are often hierarchical and risk-averse, shaping how FWAs are interpreted and legitimised (Prinsloo & Hofmeyr, 2022). FWAs are more likely to enhance productivity in cultures that value autonomy, learning, and results-oriented management, whereas rigid compliance-driven cultures may constrain both adoption and performance outcomes (Hodgins, 2025).

Overall, institutional and interpretive perspectives highlight that FWAs do not automatically enhance productivity in public organisations. Their effects depend on how flexibility is supervised, trusted, and embedded within accountability systems and organisational culture. This lens provides a critical analytical foundation for understanding employee productivity under FWAs in public sector contexts characterised by strong bureaucratic traditions and complex governance demands.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite increasing scholarly attention to flexible work arrangements (FWAs), research remains fragmented, particularly within public service contexts. Most empirical studies in Nigeria and comparable settings focus on the private sector and individual-level outcomes, leaving a limited understanding of how FWAs interact with public sector accountability, supervision, and

bureaucratic control. Productivity is often measured through subjective self-reports, with insufficient attention to institutional indicators such as service efficiency, output quality, and organisational capacity.

More critically, the institutional conditions that mediate the productivity effects of FWAs, including trust-based supervision, performance management systems, and digital capacity, are under-theorised in public administration and governance scholarship. Subnational public services, such as state-level bureaucracies, remain under-researched, and FWAs are rarely examined as formalised, sustainable policy instruments rather than ad hoc managerial responses. Moreover, the post-COVID transition from emergency remote work to institutionalised flexibility has received limited systematic analysis, particularly in resource-constrained public sector settings.

In response, this study undertakes a qualitative-informed scoping review to synthesise fragmented evidence, reconceptualise productivity as a multidimensional institutional construct, and advance understanding of how FWAs can support decent work and sustainable public service performance, with implications for SDG 8 and SDG 16.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative-informed scoping review design to systematically map and synthesise existing literature on flexible work arrangements (FWAs) and employee productivity in public service organisations. The review is guided by the framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), refined by Levac et al. (2010), and reported in accordance with the PRISMA-ScR guidelines.

A scoping review is appropriate given the conceptual diversity, methodological heterogeneity, and evolving nature of research on FWAs in public service contexts. The review is qualitative-informed in that it prioritises interpretive synthesis of qualitative evidence, such as organisational practices and governance logics, while descriptively integrating quantitative findings on productivity to enhance contextual understanding rather than causal inference.

Information Sources

The review draws on peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and relevant grey literature to capture both academic and practitioner perspectives. Electronic searches were conducted in Scopus and Google Scholar, complemented by targeted searches of publications from international organisations, government agencies, and professional bodies concerned with public sector management, decent work, and workforce reform. Reference lists of included studies were also screened to identify additional relevant sources.

Search Strategy

A systematic search strategy was developed using combinations of keywords and Boolean operators related to *flexible work arrangements*, *remote or hybrid work*, *employee productivity*, *decent work*, and *public service*. Searches were limited to English-language studies published between 2020 and 2025, reflecting the growing institutionalisation of FWAs and the acceleration of this process during the COVID-19 pandemic. An illustrative search string included: "flexible work arrangements" OR "remote work" OR "hybrid work" AND "employee productivity" AND "public sector" OR "public service".

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were included if they:

1. Focused on public sector or public service organisations;
2. Examined at least one form of flexible work arrangement (e.g., flexitime, remote work, hybrid work, compressed workweeks);
3. Addressed productivity or performance-related outcomes, broadly defined.
4. Studies that focused exclusively on private-sector contexts or were unrelated to work organisation were excluded.

Stage 4: Data Charting

Data were charted using a structured extraction framework consistent with PRISMA-ScR guidance. Extracted information included publication details, study context, research design,



forms of FWAs examined, conceptualisations of productivity, analytical approaches, and key findings. Data charting was iterative, allowing refinement of categories as familiarity with the literature increased.

Stage 5: Results

Database Search

The study selection process followed the PRISMA-ScR framework to ensure transparency and methodological rigour in mapping the evidence base on flexible work arrangements (FWAs) and employee productivity in the public service.

Identification: Database searches conducted in Google Scholar and Scopus yielded markedly different volumes of literature. A structured Google Scholar search using predefined keywords and filters (English language, 2020–2025) produced 3,260 records, reflecting the platform's broad coverage of journal articles, conference papers, working papers, and grey literature. In contrast, a targeted Scopus search over the same period yielded 5 peer-reviewed records, reflecting the database's stricter indexing criteria and narrower journal coverage in this research area. No additional records were identified through other sources.

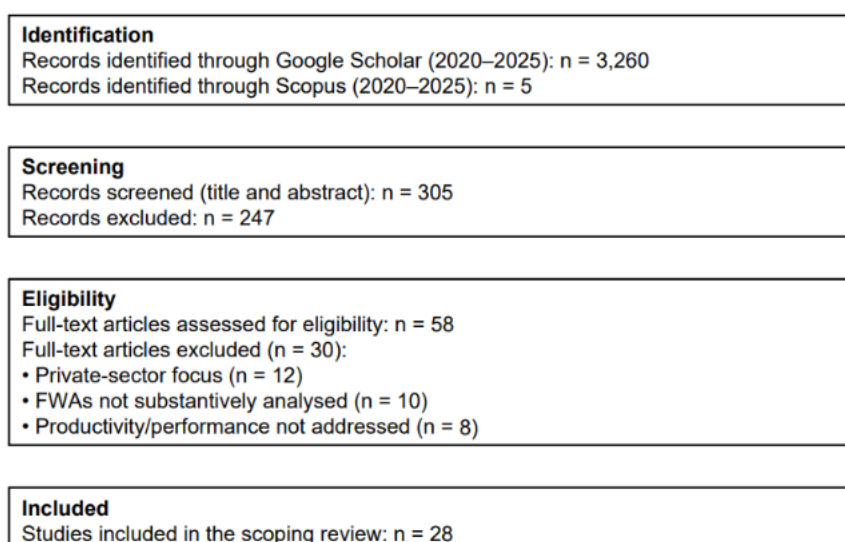
Screening: Due to the massive volume of Google Scholar results, an initial relevance screening was conducted based on title and abstract review, limiting consideration to the first 300 records, consistent with established scoping review practice for high-yield databases. Following this step and the inclusion of the 5 Scopus records, a total of 305 records were screened. Of these, 247 records were excluded because they focused on private-sector contexts, non-productivity outcomes, or non-public service settings.

Eligibility: Full-text assessment was conducted for 58 articles deemed potentially relevant after screening. At this stage, 30 studies were excluded because flexible work arrangements were only mentioned marginally, productivity or performance outcomes were not substantively addressed, or the organisational context did not involve public service institutions.

Inclusion: A total of 28 studies met all inclusion criteria and were retained for qualitative-informed synthesis in the scoping review.

Identification of studies via databases and registers

Figure 1: PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram of Study Selection



RESULTS

Distribution and Characteristics of Studies Reviewed

The literature review indicates a growing, yet uneven, body of scholarship on flexible work arrangements (FWAs) in public service organisations. Empirical studies are disproportionately

concentrated in Europe, North America, and parts of East Asia, where public-sector reform agendas and digital infrastructure have supported early adoption of flexible work practices. By contrast, evidence from developing and emerging economies, particularly Africa and parts of Asia, remains limited, often exploratory, and embedded in broader human resource management reform studies rather than explicitly focused on FWAs.

Methodologically, the literature is dominated by quantitative, cross-sectional survey studies examining associations between FWAs and outcomes such as job satisfaction, self-reported productivity, absenteeism, and work-life balance. While these studies offer generalisable insights, their designs constrain causal inference and limit understanding of longer-term institutional effects. Qualitative studies, though fewer in number, provide deeper insights into managerial discretion, organisational culture, supervision practices, and employee experiences under flexible work regimes. A small number of mixed-methods studies attempt to integrate these perspectives, although such approaches remain underutilised, particularly in low- and middle-income contexts.

In terms of organisational coverage, most studies focus on central government ministries, public agencies, and local authorities, with comparatively limited attention to frontline service institutions, such as health and education, as well as regulatory bodies. Temporally, the COVID-19 pandemic represents a clear inflexion point: pre-pandemic studies typically frame FWAs as discretionary or experimental, whereas post-pandemic research increasingly treats them as institutionalised or semi-permanent features of public-sector work. Overall, the literature exhibits considerable variation in scope, analytical depth, and conceptual clarity, resulting in fragmented and occasionally contradictory findings.

Types of Flexible Work Arrangements Identified

The literature identifies several forms of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) within public service organisations. Remote work, particularly working from home, is the most frequently examined, emerging initially as a COVID-19 crisis response and subsequently evolving into hybrid models that combine on-site and off-site work. Hybrid arrangements are increasingly regarded as more compatible with public service requirements for coordination, supervision, and service continuity.

Flexible working hours (flexitime) constitute another widely adopted arrangement, allowing employees to vary start and end times within prescribed limits while maintaining core hours for coordination. Owing to its limited disruption to bureaucratic routines, flexitime is often more readily accepted within public sector settings.

Less prevalent arrangements include compressed workweeks, job sharing, and part-time work, typically applied selectively based on task characteristics, legal frameworks, and civil service regulations. Across studies, FWAs are rarely implemented in isolation. However, they are embedded within broader reforms related to digitalisation, workforce modernisation, and performance management, underscoring their role as institutionally grounded governance tools rather than standalone scheduling options.

Patterns in Productivity Outcomes

The literature reports mixed but patterned relationships between flexible work arrangements (FWAs) and employee productivity. Many studies identify positive associations at the individual level, linking FWAs to improved work-life balance, reduced commuting time, higher job satisfaction, and increased motivation, which are reflected in enhanced self-reported efficiency, concentration, and task completion.

However, productivity effects are conditional and uneven. While some employees perform better under flexible arrangements, others encounter challenges related to coordination, workload management, and blurred work-home boundaries. At the organisational level, productivity gains are often modest or inconsistent, particularly where FWAs are implemented without corresponding adaptations in supervision and performance management systems.

Public sector studies emphasise qualitative dimensions of productivity, including service quality, responsiveness, and compliance with administrative standards, rather than solely



quantitative outputs. Evidence suggests that FWAs support these outcomes when underpinned by clear performance expectations, effective communication, and adequate digital infrastructure. Conversely, weak monitoring frameworks and ambiguous accountability arrangements are associated with delays, uneven performance, and perceptions of reduced control.

Overall, the literature indicates that FWAs neither inherently enhance nor diminish productivity; their effects are contingent on institutional design, managerial practices, and organisational culture.

Institutional Conditions Influencing Outcomes

Across the reviewed studies, institutional conditions consistently shape the productivity effects of flexible work arrangements (FWAs). Supervision is central. Traditional input-based supervision, reliant on physical presence, is poorly aligned with flexible work, whereas output-oriented supervision focused on deliverables and performance indicators is associated with improved productivity.

Trust functions as a key mediating mechanism. When FWAs are interpreted as signals of organisational trust, employees often reciprocate by increasing their commitment and effort. In contrast, low-trust environments generate managerial resistance, excessive monitoring, and uneven implementation, undermining potential productivity gains.

Accountability mechanisms further condition outcomes. The literature emphasises the need for clear performance expectations, transparent reporting, and regular feedback to sustain performance under flexible arrangements. Where such systems are weak or ambiguous, FWAs are often perceived as incompatible with public-sector accountability requirements.

Organisational culture provides the broader enabling or constraining context. Cultures that prioritise learning, innovation, and results-oriented management are more likely to integrate FWAs effectively. In contrast, rigid, hierarchical, or risk-averse cultures tend to resist flexibility, thereby limiting their productivity gains.

Emergent Themes and Typologies

The reviewed literature reveals several recurring themes and typologies in the implementation of flexible work arrangements (FWAs). A key distinction is between formal and informal flexibility. Formal FWAs are embedded in official policies and regulations, while informal arrangements depend on managerial discretion; the former are more consistently associated with equity, transparency, and sustainability.

A second typology contrasts control-oriented and trust-based implementation models. Control-oriented approaches emphasise monitoring and compliance, often constraining the potential productivity benefits of FWAs. In contrast, trust-based models prioritise autonomy and results and are more frequently linked to positive performance outcomes.

The literature also differentiates FWAs by implementation maturity, distinguishing experimental, transitional, and institutionalised arrangements. Experimental FWAs tend to yield uneven outcomes, whereas institutionalised models, supported by digital infrastructure and performance management systems, are more likely to produce stable productivity gains.

Finally, FWAs are increasingly conceptualised as instruments of institutional reform rather than isolated HR practices. This framing situates FWAs within broader debates on decent work, public sector productivity, and sustainable development, particularly in relation to SDG 8 and SDG 16.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined the relationship between flexible work arrangements (FWAs) and employee productivity in the public service, with particular emphasis on institutional mediators, including supervision, trust, accountability, and organisational culture. The findings demonstrate that FWAs can enhance productivity, but their effects are strongly context-dependent and shaped by public-sector governance structures rather than being automatic outcomes of flexibility.

The review indicates that FWAs are consistently associated with improved work-life balance, employee well-being, and job satisfaction, which support higher motivation and individual-level efficiency. However, productivity gains are more evident at the individual level than at the institutional level. This reinforces the view that public sector productivity extends beyond individual effort to encompass service quality, timeliness, coordination, and compliance with administrative procedures.

Productivity emerges as a multidimensional construct comprising task performance, output quality, behavioural commitment, and institutional effectiveness. While FWAs may enhance focus and morale, they can also generate coordination challenges and service inconsistencies if not supported by appropriate managerial and institutional arrangements. This finding aligns with institutional theory, which emphasises that organisational rules, norms, and control systems condition how individual performance translates into collective outcomes.

Supervision is a central mediating factor. Traditional presence-based supervision is poorly aligned with flexible work, whereas output-oriented supervision, supported by clear performance targets and digital monitoring tools, is associated with more positive productivity outcomes. Where supervisory practices failed to adapt, concerns about loss of control and uneven performance constrained the benefits of FWAs.

Trust and accountability further condition effectiveness. In high-trust environments, FWAs signal organisational confidence and elicit greater commitment and discretionary effort. In contrast, low-trust contexts are characterised by managerial resistance, intensified controls, and inconsistent implementation, limiting productivity gains. Accountability concerns are particularly salient in the public service; FWAs are most effective when embedded within clear performance management, reporting, and feedback systems.

Organisational culture provides the broader interpretive context. Hierarchical and rule-bound cultures tend to constrain flexibility, while adaptive, results-oriented cultures facilitate its productive use. The findings also indicate that many public organisations remain in a transitional phase, shifting from pandemic-induced flexibility to institutionalised FWAs, often with mixed outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that flexible work arrangements (FWAs) can enhance employee productivity in the public service by supporting work-life balance, motivation, and job satisfaction. However, productivity gains depend on how effectively flexibility is embedded in existing institutional and governance frameworks. In public organisations, productivity is inherently multidimensional, encompassing task performance, service quality, timeliness, coordination, and behavioural commitment.

The findings underscore the centrality of output-oriented supervision, clear performance expectations, and robust accountability mechanisms in sustaining productivity under flexible work arrangements. Where supervisory practices, monitoring systems, or organisational support structures are weak, the potential benefits of flexibility are significantly constrained. Trust-based managerial relationships and supportive organisational cultures further shape how FWAs are interpreted, implemented, and translated into performance outcomes.

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