



From perk to policy: How organizational culture shapes talent retention in the post-pandemic era

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) on talent retention, moderated by organizational culture, specifically during the post-COVID-19 pandemic period, when the organizational atmosphere in Pakistan rapidly changed. The study's framework is underpinned by the Institutional and Social Exchange Theories. The study employed quantitative methods and a deductive approach, collecting cross-sectional data from employees of various firms, including textile and garment firms, using convenience and stratified random sampling. Finally, 367 valid responses were used to infer the conclusions. Using structural equation modeling (SEM) through the analysis of moment structures (AMOS) software, the findings unveil a positive effect of FWAs, perceived organizational support, and leadership support on talent retention. Furthermore, organizational culture positively affects talent retention. Finally, organizational culture moderates the relationships between FWAs, leadership support for flexibility, and talent retention. The study provides guidelines for policymakers and planners to build trust and communication through training leaders and engaging employees throughout such processes, which can reduce resistance to change and begin embedding flexibility into the organization's thought and practice. This study also helps develop a culture that values people and flexibility, attracting and retaining employees, boosting morale, and keeping organizations competitive in dynamically changing workplaces. Finally, the study deepens the domain literature by adding empirical evidence from a developing context.

Contribution/Originality: This research offers an empirical contribution to the literature on emerging economies by demonstrating how organizational culture enhances the impact of flexible work policies. It aims to provide practical insights for HR practitioners and policymakers to improve retention strategies in the post-pandemic environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The single most spectacular organizational transformation that has occurred globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has gradually modified the flexibility of work arrangements (FWAs) to conform to trends across the globe. Simply put, it has converted into a matter of choice, compulsory activities such as remote working, flexible work hours, compressed workweeks, hybrid models, etc. All these activities have now become essential actors in ensuring continuity of business as well as the well-being of employees. Preliminary investigations suggest that the perception of increased flexibility appears to enhance work-life balance, reduce stress, and increase retention by

granting workers more control over their time (Agarwal & Sajid, 2023; Butt, 2022). Especially among the younger generations, flexibility has gradually assumed almost an unprecedented importance in the very tenets of modern employment, more as a right than a privilege (Arasli, Arici, & Kozak, 2020). Moving forward, FWAs may be viewed as the quintessential tool of companies in the competition for attracting and retaining talent in an increasingly competitive world.

However, in this double-faced dilemma, one side concerns flexibility, while the other pertains to the general outlook for practice orientation consistency. Organizations display considerable differences in how FWAs are applied. Some may consider them temporary perks or administer them only to certain segments, leading to perceptions of inequality among employees and creating distrust (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009). Traditional downward communication in rigid hierarchical cultures reinforces an unwillingness to use certain flexible options, as employees might view this as disloyalty and fear it could harm their career prospects. These considerations suggest that flexibility alone does not guarantee retention; it must be supported by an inclusive and trusting organizational culture. Leadership and organizational culture are crucial in determining whether FWAs become meaningful, embedded practices or mere symbolic gestures.

Flexibility is widely acknowledged as beneficial, but studies in this area are mainly conducted in Western countries. There is, therefore, limited knowledge about how FWAs would be integrated into emerging economies in which cultural traditions and power distance diverge from those found in Western societies (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009). Also, there has not been much interest in exploring how organizational culture mediates between FWAs and employee retention (Ahmed, Rehman, & Imran, 2021). The other factors associated with the adoption of FWAs are leadership behavior and Perceived Organizational Support (POS). Employees with empathetic leaders will observe flexible conduct on the leader's part, thereby making the flexible work alternative stigma-free and more of a nontraditional norm of working. POS includes feelings of reciprocity and commitment as indicated in the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). However, only a few works have combined these factors. This study, therefore, seeks to fill those gaps by exploring how the organizational culture affects the FWAs and talent retention link in the context of a post-pandemic, non-Western country. The inclusion of leadership support and POS aims to spell out conditions under which flexibility really drives commitment and resilience as much as theory as practice for managing a sustainable workforce.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

With COVID-19 came a significant change in work conditions worldwide. It prompted organizations to reconsider their international employment strategies. What was once viewed as a right of the potential workforce rather than a necessity an evil of possible means became, simply put, a matter of survival and continuity. Recent empirical studies validate this positive shift; today, flexible work arrangements appear to be more than temporary trends. They are evolving from optional benefits into strategic policies focused on talent retention and employee wellbeing. As described by Yawson (2020), the change from allowances to integrated components is a sign that these consumers, particularly a younger generation client base, would demand flexibility within their jobs. Thus, the implementation of FWAs as an embedded component of high-performance systems, that is, since flexible arrangements could not find their application otherwise (Stirpe & Zárraga-Oberty, 2017). With this in mind, Chemei, Osodo, and Anyira (2025) contends that formalizing Flexible Work Arrangements in developing economies would further mitigate socio-economical and infrastructural deficits that usually contribute to a high turnover rate. Thus, Berkery, Peretz, Tiernan, and Morley (2025) argue that instead of giving one-off concessions to employees, organizations should be designing structured, transparent, and inclusive workplace flexibility policies. Hybrid schemes and programs have matured from an emergency response mindset into strategic, sustainable vehicles for promoting productivity and retention for the organizations. Thus, the studies inform that while the pandemic

accelerated flexibility from being an operational convenience to being a strategic necessity at the foundation of 21st-century HR systems (Agarwal & Sajid, 2023; Butt, 2022).

Accordingly, culture is the key element in creating trust, openness, and support, which in turn will help establish organizational flexibility in daily routines rather than treat them as exceptional incidents. A facilitative culture would make it easier to address issues related to work-life balance and retention, thereby making flexibility sustainable (Kar & Misra, 2013). More specifically, a flexible culture means how Generation Z employees are actually engaged (Dieguez & Loureiro, 2025). Higher commitment was seen among employees within an environment of strong organizational and cultural trust given that to a degree autonomy often with weak social connectedness characterizes the digital or hybridized working environments. Other studies also corroborated the fact that loyalty and retention are fruits of adaptability cultures and trust (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009; Malik & Kaur, 2022). Indeed, culture takes on the critical role of an active enabling condition, rather than a passive background variable, through which flexible work arrangements connect to actual retention or true retention tools as opposed to mere symbolic gestures.

Therefore, leadership gets to mark and nurture that culture itself, which nourished flexible work with some exceptional culture. It is the leader who must demonstrate the principles of empathy, openness, and adaptability in the organization, thus creating an environment where people feel safe to exercise flexibility in all ways, with no stigma or penalty. Shinde (2025) seems to agree that the embedding of FWAs into strategy is highly determined by leadership commitment. The role of supportive leadership in satisfaction and retention is well established when flexibility is openly championed within the organization (Hasim, Mahbob, & Musa, 2024). According to Nguyen and Nguyen (2023), mentoring and awareness initiatives established with the active participation of leaders could be a way of reducing turnover intentions, especially of younger demographics of workers who regard flexibility as a right rather than a favor. "Work anytime, anywhere" is just one among many leadership initiatives meant to institutionalize flexible working from rhetoric to reality, reinforcing organizational attractiveness and engagement. This applies within the arguments presented by Arasli et al. (2020) and Shahzad and Naqvi (2021) in favor of empowering, inclusive leadership as well as in connecting between HR practices and culture paradigms. In general, research shows that the interplay between leadership and culture moderates joint efforts between FWAs and employee retention, as Berkery et al. (2025), Bindhu et al. (2024), and Dangaiso et al. (2024) confirm that culture-based sustainable human resource systems render lasting retention outcomes. However, gaps remain despite this increasingly voluminous evidence because it is not yet entirely understood how leadership and culture work together institutionally to promote FWAs, certainly in non-western contexts where socio-cultural norms and digital transitions are different. Hence, the study will bridge these gaps by investigating how organizational culture moderates the relationship between FWAs and talent retention while analyzing how leadership and POS will strengthen this relationship in the post-COVID context.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

This framework is designed holistically to develop an understanding of how FWAs can migrate from informal practice to formal policy within an organization with the hope that these policies may sustain retention and improvement of talent (see Figure 1). Here in the literature, FWAs are known as very short-term benefits, whereas, in fact, they can be understood as vital parts of strategic human resource management. According to the framework, when FWAs become part of the systems, values, and rituals of an organization, they convert into the perennial norms of the model vision of flexibility and balance. However, much depends on the surrounding cultures. These cultures are built upon trust, empathy, and care for employee well-being, thus enriching the worth of FWAs through psychological safety, engagement, and long-term commitment. Rigid or resistant to change cultures diminish these benefits and are bound to the outcome of limited impacts of FWAs on retention. With leadership being the biggest influencer of shaping and enforcing these cultural values, promoting flexibility, FWAs and also true indications of organizational care rather than privileged grants within conditionalities.

The theory provides an integral approach to institutional theory and social exchange theory development, capturing the dynamics at both organizational and individual levels. Institutional theory gives an explanation regarding the influence of external pressures from regulation, societal expectations, and competitive forces under which organizations are compelled to formalize flexible work into standard policy. However, to ensure their actual success, they will need an internal culture that will determine whether these practices are adopted or remain symbolic (Anning-Dorson, 2021; Khaskheli, Shah, Shah, & Ullah, 2025). Bringing a psychological dimension to this nexus is social exchange theory (Blau, 1964); that is, if FWAs are understood as genuine signs of organizational support, employees are more likely to exhibit loyalty and commitment as well as lower turnover intentions (Mensah, 2019; Winarno, Prasetyo, Luturlean, & Wardhani, 2022). The cumulative result of this argument is that a supportive culture with this level of commitment and backed by leadership will turn FWAs' simple HR initiatives into meaningful, trust-based systems for sustainable talent retention in post-pandemic workplaces.

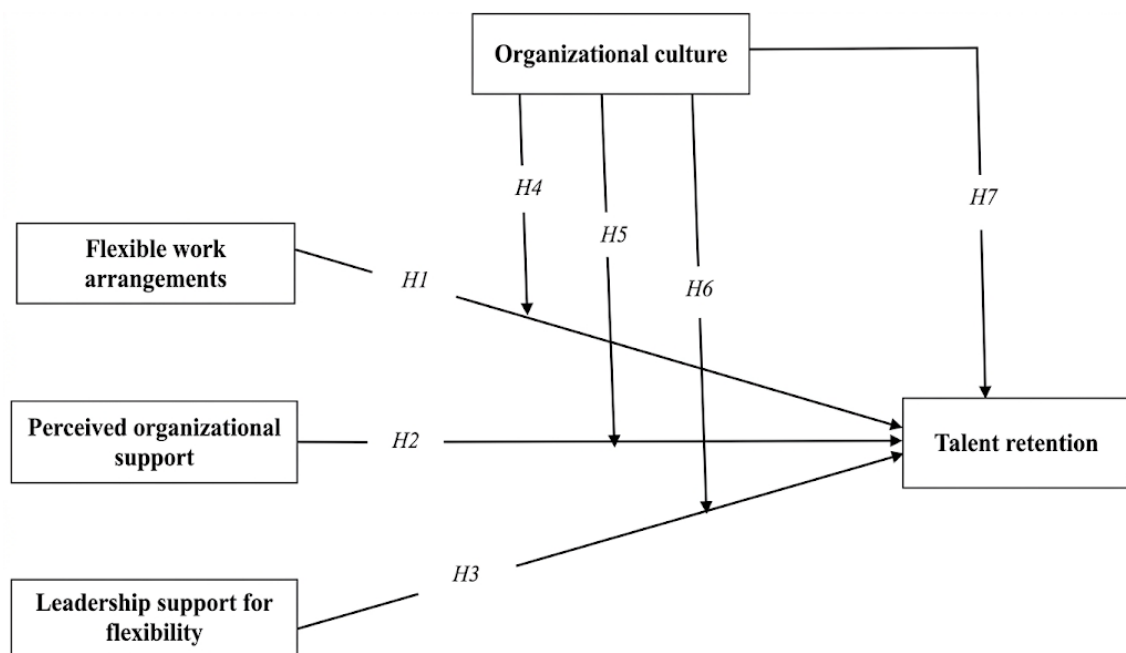


Figure 1. Theoretical model.

3.1. The Institutionalization of FWAs and Talent Retention

In the post-COVID era, FWAs are now considered an important organizational practice rather than an optional extra within organizations. Thus, the institutionalization of FWAs is when they are organized into policy guidelines that make them available to all employees in the organization without regard to position or department. Institutionalization of FWAs rather than informal or selective application would enhance fairness, job autonomy, and organizational trust and sharpen the conditions for greater employee satisfaction and commitment – both of which are important precursors to talent retention (Sweet, Pitt-Catsoupes, Besen, & Golden, 2014; Yawson, 2020). One of the most common values in demand for retention is flexibility, which, invariably, characterizes knowledge-based industries.

Furthermore, formal flexibility also increases psychological safety, support for work-life balance, and responsiveness to specific and diverse employee needs such as working parents, younger professionals, or dispersed teams (Chemei et al., 2025). Stirpe and Zárraga-Oberty (2017) show that by embedding flexible practices in high-performance work systems, retention in feminized or very diverse workforces can be scaled up. Bindhu et al. (2024) and Van Luan (2025) argue similarly, noting that institutionalizing flexibility signals sustainable and adaptable HR practices toward increased employee loyalty. In today's workplace, the most common employee-centric values and expectations, talent will probably stay more where flexibility approaches an institution rather than a privilege. Hence,

organizations that integrate flexible work into their core architecture and strategy are most likely to experience reduced voluntary turnover and sustained long-term employee engagement. Thus, the researcher developed the following hypothesis:

H₁: The institutionalization of FWAs positively influences talent retention.

3.2. Perceived Organizational Support and Retention Talent

POS plays a pivotal role in binding the employees psychologically to the workplace. POS is the perception of the employees regarding their organization, defined globally as the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Well-developed belief in organizational support results in employee satisfaction, trust, and emotional security, reducing turnover intentions and retaining employees for the future (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019; Zhu, Wang, Xu, Ma, & Luo, 2023). Guided by the Organizational Support Theory, employees tend to show a commitment towards a reciprocal relationship where a company fulfils them with their personal and professional needs (Jiejing, Arshad, & Mengjiao, 2024). In talent-scarce or competitive industries such as technology and engineering firms or even healthcare organizations, tangible support, such as mentorship, recognition, and wellness initiatives, translates to businesses enjoying reduced voluntary turnover (Škerháková, Korba, Harničárová, & Taha, 2022).

Further, it has been well researched to correlate very well with job embeddedness, work engagement, and career satisfaction parameters, which are almost always associated with talent retention (Khoiroh & Soeling, 2025; Prysmakova & Lallatin, 2023). The post-pandemic era saw the emergence of hybrid and flexible work models, but POS now became the buffer to prevent burnout, disengagement, and job insecurity (Florek-Paszkowska & Hoyos-Vallejo, 2023; Zhu et al., 2023). Research shows that the younger generations, particularly Gen Z, stay with employers generally known for engaging in social responsibility plus enduring support (Fakhruddin & Ratnawati, 2025). The context of support is not only tangible, but it also creates a culture of inclusion and empathy. Hence, organizations putting strong institutionalized support systems are more likely to have a resilient, motivated and committed workforce valuing long-term association. Thus, the researcher developed the following hypothesis:

H₂: Perceiving organizational support positively affects retention talent.

3.3. Leadership Support for FWAs and Talent Retention

Leadership thus becomes the fulcrum around which FWAs gain entry, uptake, and application within organizations. Supportive leadership in which FWAs turn from merely policy basket statements into actual lived experiences that are enacted uniformly and equitably. Research presents evidence that whenever leaders advocate, model, and provide support for FWAs, employees feel respected and trusted, thus fostering commitment and weakening actual or intended turnover (Bontrager, Clinton, & Tyner, 2021; Shinde, 2025). In the post-COVID places of work, great relevance is attached to sustaining hybrid working and remote working options, while great leadership support determines whether flexibility is genuinely enshrined in culture or exists as symbolism (Itesa & Burchell, 2025).

Supportive leadership not just engages in logistical support and championing of FWAs but also acts as an emotional anchoring mechanism, reaffirming psychological contracts between employees and their organizations. The demonstrated leadership of FWAs bolsters employees' sense of autonomy, belonging, and work-life balance, factors that are crucial in employee retention, especially among younger generations and among knowledge workers (Hasim et al., 2024; Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024). In talent-scarce setups, leadership's endorsement of FWAs manifests flexibility and responsiveness, thereby enhancing employer branding and whetting the appetites of increasingly mobile and diversifying talent pools (Bristol-Alagbariya, Ayanponle, & Ogedengbe, 2024). Where leaders align FWAs to strategic HR initiatives and organizational values, these become far more effective in retaining employees.

Hence, leadership support moves flexible work from tactical to strategic in terms of talent retention. Thus, the researcher developed the following hypothesis:

H₁: Leadership support for FWAs positively influences talent retention.

3.4. Moderating Role of Organizational Culture

FWAs have become increasingly important in the post-pandemic world to attract and retain employees. The culture of an organization largely determines how effective FWAs will be. The culture, which consists of shared values, beliefs, and norms, is the framework for how employees view and use flexible policies (Anderson, Kelliher, & Holmes, 2023; Nguyen & Malik, 2022). When an organization's culture values trust, open communication, and work-life balance, FWAs are experienced as more than an optional extra; they become empowering (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013). Such cultures unleash enhanced job satisfaction, commitment, and retention (Wang, Liu, Qian, & Parker, 2021). On the other hand, a culture that is unsupportive and hierarchical makes FWAs unattractive, as employees would fear the negative career consequences of using them, leading to high turnover (Marescaux, De Winne, & Sels, 2012). This is a critical consideration, especially in hybrid and remote contexts, where leadership behavior and informal norms often fuel most of the perceptions around flexibility. In the most favorable environments for using FWAs as a retention strategy, a focus on psychological safety and inclusivity (Anderson et al., 2023).

The POS is employees' belief that their organization appreciates and cares for them and is another key factor influencing retention. With high POS, employees become more satisfied, motivated, and loyal (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). However, POS depends on culture. Industrial cultures reinforce feelings of trust and belonging, whereas rigid or bureaucratic cultures erode them (Niraula, Kharel, & Mainali, 2025). Those genuinely supported by the organization are likely to stay committed and perform beyond expectations (Marescaux et al., 2012).

In this regard, leadership impacts practically everything concerned with FWAs. Leaders' modeling empathy, openness, and flexibility empowers their employees to create work-life balance, a strong contributor of trust, and less turnover (Allen et al., 2013). In contrast, in cultures that are inflexible, inconsistent or insincere leadership actions become a source of frustration and disengagement. Most importantly, leadership and informal norms determine whether flexibility feels empowering or limiting, especially in hybrid environments (Wang et al., 2021). In cultures embracing agility, FWAs could be embedded into day-to-day practices with the strategic intent of talent retention. In this process, organizational culture will thus act as a moderator between the effects of FWAs, perceived support, and leadership on the retention of valued employees. Based on this premise, these hypotheses are put forth.

H₂: Organizational culture moderates the relationship between the institutionalization of FWAs and talent retention.

H₃: Organizational culture moderates the relationship between POS and talent retention.

H₄: Organizational culture moderates the relationship between leadership support for FWAs and talent retention.

3.5. Organizational Culture and Talent Retention

Culture in an organization is an essential determinant of how employees perceive, act, and remain committed to the organization. It is the embodiment of shared values, beliefs, and practices that guide these daily interactions and teamwork (Schein, 2010). A positive culture characterized by trust, openness, and recognition encourages an employee's sense of belonging, motivation, and job satisfaction, leading to strengthened retention (Maher, 2000). Employees engaged and aligned with organizational values are loyal to their workplace when given the opportunity to grow (Scott, 2001). Bad or misaligned cultures rewarding worse behaviors tend to frustrate these employees and heighten their disengagement, leading to high turnover levels.

The connection between culture and retention has been proven with more recent studies. Suherman and Vidákovich (2025) found that the commitment of younger tech employees was enhanced in cultures that are innovation-oriented and inclusive. Sylejmani and Mesko (2024) revealed cultures of transparency and collaboration to have been helpful in reducing turnover, while Abu Tayeh, Gerchman, and Azaizah (2024) affirmed the role of

shared values as a moderator in improving satisfaction and retention among public institutions. The resultant view of the modern world- hybrid work, flexible arrangements, and changing expectations- now sets a baseline for inclusive, adaptive, and purpose-driven cultures to become attractive and retainers of talent (Allen et al., 2013; Kwon & Kim, 2020). On this foundation, the above hypothesis is for further exploration.

H₂: Organizational culture has a significant positive effect on employee retention.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design and Survey Strategy

In this study, a cross-sectional quantitative design was used in the collection of data to empirically examine the relationships between FWAs, organizational culture, and retention of talent. The quantitative research was considered best for testing the theoretical models and possible directional relationship and strength among the constructs with the use of statistical methods (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019; Takona, 2024). Surveys were used as the main data collection instrument, considered appropriate for the gathering of standardized data from a diversified number of respondents and enhanced comparison and statistical analysis (Bryman, 2016).

4.2. Research Context, Respondents, and Data Collection Procedure

Pakistan's textile and garment industry has been a crucial pillar of its economy, contributing nearly 60% of its total exports and employing millions of people in urban and semi-urban regions (Khan & Ahmad, 2018; Qamar, Iftikhar, & Abbas, 2025). Affected by a variety of kinds of workforces, factory floor to corporate management, it faced challenges like increasing turnover rates and changed working conditions after the COVID-19 pandemic (Zahra, Elahi, Khan, Mehmood, & Sohail, 2025). This labor-intensive industry has recently begun to make real advances into FWAs, such as flexible shift timings, hybrid working structures for office staff, and adaptable scheduling practices. Such an environment offers an exciting context to examine the institutionalization of FWAs and their influence on talent retention in traditionally structured firms (Arif, Ejaz, & Yousaf, 2017).

Although the representatives of the target population were employees from textile and garment firms situated in the major industrial centers such as Faisalabad, Karachi, and Lahore, these include companies that comprise the widest range of organizational sizes and operational complexities that exist in the sector (Qamar et al., 2025). The respondents comprised frontline operational staff, supervisory personnel, human resource managers, and mid to senior-level management, thus offering a multi-level perspective of the organizational culture and leadership, as well as the implementation of FWAs. Their diverging respondent group helped capture the different experiences and attitudes toward FWAs and their effectiveness in enhancing employee retention (Jafree, 2023).

Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire used in combination with electronic dissemination and face-to-face interactions, thereby helping to overcome some challenges posed by the digital divide and illiteracy among factory workers (Khan, 2020). We collected the data between January 2025 and June 2025. By combining convenience and stratified random sampling methods, sampling managed to appear as representative on major demographic variables such as gender, age, educational level, job position, and work experience. Prior to full-scale deployment, the instrument was pilot-tested for validity and reliability. Ethical protocols, including informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly adhered to per institutional and national research standards (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009).

4.3. Common Method Bias (CMB)

We conducted Harman's single-factor test to handle the potential CMB issue. We followed the recommendations of Harman (1976), which were also adopted by renowned scholars such as Podsakoff and Organ (1986) and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003). To conduct this test, we used the scale items in an unrotated exploratory factor analysis to determine whether a single factor would emerge or whether a general factor would account for the

majority of the variance. In the study, the results showed that the first factor accounted for 0.39, which is less than 50% of the total variance. Thus, these values demonstrate that no single factor dominated the data. In this way, these values are in line with Podsakoff et al. (2003), which ensured that no CMB exists in the present study.

4.4. Measures

The survey contains measurement scales adapted from validated instruments measuring five constructs. These constructs are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, consistent with standard survey design practices. Specifically, FWA explains the extent to which flexible work practices are incorporated into institutional policy and are consistently practiced. This construct is measured on four items adopted from Allen, Golden, and Shockley (2015). The POS entails employees' perceptions of how much their organization values their inputs and is concerned about their welfare. The researchers measured POS on eight items adopted from Eisenberger et al. (1986). LSF articulates the extent to which supervisors and organizational leaders support and facilitate flexible work arrangements. The researchers adopted five items from Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, and Rhoades (2002) and Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, and Hanson (2009) to measure LSF. Besides, ORC refers to the shared values, beliefs, and norms that drive behavior in the organization. This factor is assessed on six items adopted from Cameron and Sine (1999). Finally, TAR typically measured as turnover intention, measuring employees' intent to stay or leave the organization. To measure this factor, the researchers adopted five items from Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth (1978) (See details in Table 1).

Table 1. Measurement scales.

Construct/Variables	No. of items	Item description	Adopted from
Flexible work arrangements (FWAs)	4	FWAs1: My organization has formal policies supporting flexible work arrangements.	Allen et al. (2015)
		FWAs2: Flexible work options are clearly communicated as standard practice.	
		FWAs3: Flexible work policies are consistently enforced.	
		FWAs4: Flexible work is integrated into core HR policies.	
Perceived organizational support (POS)	8	POS1: My organization values my contributions to its well-being.	Eisenberger et al. (1986)
		POS2: My organization strongly considers my goals and values.	
		POS3: Help is available from my organization when I have a problem.	
		POS4: My organization cares about my opinions	
		POS5: My organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work.	
		POS6: My organization shows very little concern for me. (Reverse-coded)	
		POS7: If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me. (Reverse-coded).	
		POS8: My organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor	
Leadership support for flexibility (LSF)	5	LSF1: My supervisor is flexible when I need to adjust my work schedule.	Eisenberger et al. (2002) and Hammer et al. (2009)
		LSF2: Leadership actively promotes a culture that supports flexible working.	
		LSF3: My manager trusts me to manage my workload with flexible hours.	
		LSF4: I feel comfortable discussing flexible work needs with my supervisor.	
		LSF5: Leaders in this organization model flexible work behaviors.	
Organizational culture (ORC)	6	ORC1: Collaboration and teamwork are highly valued in this organization. (Clan)	Cameron and Sine (1999)
		ORC2: Creativity and innovation are encouraged and rewarded. (Adhocracy)	
		ORC3: Our organization focuses on achieving measurable results. (Market)	
		ORC4: Rules and procedures guide our work environment. (Hierarchy)	
		ORC5: Employee development and support are priorities here. (Clan)	

Construct/Variables	No. of items	Item description	Adopted from
Talent retention (TAR)	5	ORC6: We take calculated risks to grow and improve. (Adhocracy)	Mobley et al. (1978)
		TAR1: I am actively searching for other job opportunities.	
		TAR2: I would recommend this organization as a good place to work. (Reverse-coded)	
		TAR3: I see myself working here one year from now. (Reverse-coded)	
		TAR4: Leaving this organization is a possibility I seriously consider.	
		TAR5: I feel loyal to this organization. (Reverse-coded)	

Source: Adopted from the literature.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Demographic Results

Overall assessment of the respondents of cases 367 showed that there is equal representation of male 58.6% and female 41.4% (see Table 2). This male-female representation is close to the workforce composition of the industry, in which an equal number of men and women do very different types of operational work. The age distribution shows that this industry has mainly young and middle-aged workers, with most (74.9%) being between 20 and 40 years of age; thus, relatively young labour in this sector is vital for acceptance and adoption of the FWAs.

In terms of education, most respondents have at least a diploma or bachelor's degree, indicating a moderately skilled labour force that can engage with new HR practices like institutionalized flexible work policies. Position-wise, half of the respondents are operators or workers, while supervisors and managers are also adequately included in the sample so that a variety of thoughts from different levels of the organization are covered in the study. Concerning work experience, it varies greatly, but an impressive 68.1% of respondents have between 1 and 10 years of experience in the industry, indicating that they have had sufficient exposure to organizational practices but may still be receptive to change.

Overall, this demographic profile provides a strong basis for analyzing the relationships that exist between institutionalized FWAs, organizational culture, leadership, perceived support, and talent retention in Pakistan's textile and garment sector.

Table 2. Respondents' demographic characteristics.

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	215	58.6
	Female	152	41.4
Age (Years)	20–30	140	38.1
	31–40	135	36.8
	41–50	65	17.7
	>50	27	7.4
Educational level	High school or less	102	27.8
	Diploma/Associate degree	85	23.2
	Bachelor's degree	120	32.7
	Master's degree or above	60	16.3
Job position	Operator/Worker	170	46.3
	Supervisor	95	25.9
	Manager	60	16.3
	Executive/Other	42	11.4
Work experience (Years)	< 1	35	9.5
	1–5	140	38.1
	6–10	110	30.0
	> 10	82	22.3

5.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The average mean values (between 3.44 and 3.46) suggest that respondents had a generally positive orientation toward the five constructs: institution of FWAs, organizational culture, leadership support, perceived organizational support, and talent retention (see Table 3). Although the respondents held varied opinions, their moderation of the standard deviations suggests that those opinions were quite consistent throughout the sample.

As presented in Table 3, there was found to be a positive and statistically significant association among all the study variables. Institutionalization of FWAs had meaningful positive associations with culture of organization ($r = 0.28^{**}$; $p < 0.01$), leadership support ($r = 0.30^{**}$; $p < 0.01$), and retention of talent ($r = 0.41^{**}$; $p < 0.01$). Thus, institutionalizing flexible work arrangements into organizational systems is likely to strengthen the culture of the organization, effective leadership, and retention of employees. Leadership support had a significant association with organizational culture ($r = 0.26^{**}$; $p < 0.01$), perceived organizational support ($r = 0.27^{**}$; $p < 0.01$), and retention of talent ($r = 0.44^{**}$; $p < 0.01$) in emphasizing its most prominent role in the creation of both a culture and retention practice. In addition, POS had a highly significant correlation with retention of talents ($r = 0.43^{**}$; $p < 0.01$), closely related to the understanding that supported employees are likely to remain in their organizations. Laid-back retention had positive relations with all antecedents, mainly concerning leadership support ($r = 0.44^{**}$; $p < 0.01$) and POS ($r = 0.43^{**}$; $p < 0.01$). It thus bolsters the theoretical proposition that formalized FWAs, along with supportive leadership and cultural context, provide a synergistic space that nurtures employee retention. These interdependent relationships among the variables signify strengthening the culture, leadership, and flexible work policies simultaneously to improve retention outcomes.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Flexible work arrangements	3.54	0.61	1				
2. Organizational culture	3.47	0.57	0.28**	1			
3. Leadership support	3.45	0.56	0.30**	0.26**	1		
4. Perceived organizational support	3.46	0.55	0.24**	0.30**	0.27**	1	
5. Talent retention	3.44	0.53	0.41**	0.30**	0.44**	0.43**	1

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5.3. Measurement Model

The refined measurement model almost demonstrates strong psychometric properties after the exclusion of underperforming POS3, POS7, ORC4, and LSF5 items based on low loading scores and conceptual overlap among themselves. All items taken into consideration across the constructs FWA, perceived organizational support, leadership support for flexibility, organizational culture, and talent retention have exhibited a standardized factor loading above the generally accepted threshold of 0.70 (see Table 4); hence, an argument of strong item reliability may be made (Hair et al., 2019). Composite Reliability (CR) values are in the range of 0.88 to 0.92, indicating values above the 0.70 cut-off, reinforcing the argument for internal consistency (Raykov, 1997). Meanwhile, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values between 0.59 to 0.72 would also meet the minimum standard of 0.50, hence satisfying the requirements for acceptable convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Further, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs ranged between 0.82 and 0.9, far exceeding the 0.70 benchmark, further affirming the reliability of the measurement scales (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Those findings authenticate the soundness of the measurement model and ensure correctly specified constructs for structural analysis. In other words, strategically eliminating weak items contributed to great construct clarity and empirical robustness in line with the theoretical model that looks at the institutionalization of FWAs and their subsequent influence on talent retention, especially moderated by organizational culture. Nevertheless, all in all, the strong measurement properties create a solid basis for structural modeling, with the required analytical strengths for actual theory testing and its ensuing implications.

Table 4. Measurement model.

Construct	Number of items	Factor loadings (Range)	CR	AVE	α
Flexible work arrangements (FWAs)	4	0.831–0.867	0.928	0.721	0.903
Perceived organizational support (POS)	6	0.724–0.825	0.922	0.596	0.892
Leadership support for flexibility (LSF)	4	0.733–0.847	0.896	0.633	0.854
Organizational culture (ORC)	5	0.756–0.817	0.911	0.630	0.882
Talent retention (TAR)	5	0.730–0.810	0.881	0.597	0.829

Note: CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted; α = Cronbach's alpha.

5.4. Discriminant Validity

Table 5 describes results indicating acceptable discriminant validity for the five constructs based on the Fornell–Larcker criterion. That is, the corresponding inter-construct correlations located in the off-diagonal positions are less than the square root of the AVE for each construct shown on the diagonal. For instance, the square root of AVE for FWAs (0.849) exceeds its correlations with POS (0.238), leadership support for flexibility (0.3), organizational culture (0.283), and talent retention (0.414), confirming that FWA is empirically distinct from the other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The same pattern of evidence is present for all other constructs, each of which demonstrated higher internal shared variance than external shared variance, thus establishing discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019). The results imply that the latent variables are sufficiently distinct to include them as separate constructs in the structural model. This adequately maintains the theoretical rigor of the model, ensuring that the institutionalization of FWAs, moderated by organizational culture and supported by leadership, can reliably intervene in talent retention.

Table 5. Discriminant validity.

Constructs	FWAs	POS	LSF	ORC	TAR
FWAs	0.849				
POS	0.238	0.772			
LSF	0.300	0.274	0.795		
ORC	0.283	0.300	0.26	0.794	
TAR	0.414	0.432	0.439	0.302	0.773

Note: FWAs=Flexible work arrangements; POS=Perceived organizational support; LSF=Leadership support for flexibility; ORC=Organizational culture; TAR=Talent retention.

5.5. Structural Model

The model suggests that it excels in fitting the data, and it empirically and theoretically justifies the framework. Chi-square-to-degree-of-freedom ratio ($\chi^2/\text{df}=2.15$) (see Table 6) exceeded the acceptable value of ≤ 3.0 . The difference between the observed covariance and that predicted by the model is, therefore, quite marginal, with overfitting not really becoming serious (Hair et al., 2019). GFI value (0.923) and that of AGFI (0.905) are both above the generally accepted threshold of 0.90, thus validating the proposition that quite a fair part of the variance observed must have been captured by the model (Byrne, 2013). The other complementary indexes, CFI (0.951) and NFI (0.936), have also confirmed that the model fits, all exceeding the threshold value set as 0.90 and pointing to good evidence for the relational structure assumed. Finally, the RMSEA is worth mentioning (0.046), well under the cut point of 0.6, which means minimal approximation error and strong parsimony of model specification (Kock, 2018). All the above indicate support for the hypothesized structural model, thus validating its applicability to study the interrelation of flexible work arrangement, perceived organizational support, leadership support, organizational culture, and talent retention.

Once the model fit was established, the results from hypothesis testing further validated the relationships proposed. Of the various influences discussed, FWAs were found to be the strongest determinant of talent retention ($\beta = 0.315$; $p < 0.001$), highlighting the fact that flexibility in work enhances employee satisfaction and commitment while lowering intention to leave (see Table 7 and Figure 2). POS ($\beta = 0.278$; $p < 0.001$) and leadership support ($\beta =$

0.243; $p < 0.001$) also emerged as significant predicting factors, suggesting that workers feeling valued and supported by leadership keep a stronger attachment to their organizations. Besides these direct effects, organizational culture exerted independent as well as moderating influences. Its direct effect on retention ($\beta = 0.171$; $p < 0.001$) suggests that culturally inclusive and adaptive environments are pivotal, while its significant moderating effect on FWA ($\beta = 0.198$; $p < 0.001$), POS ($\beta = 0.172$; $p < 0.001$), and LSF ($\beta = 0.185$; $p < 0.001$) suggest that supportive cultural environments significantly enhance the positive effects of flexibility, organizational support, and leadership (see Table 7 and Figure 2). Overall, this raises the status of organizational culture not only as a strategic resource in its own regard but also as a crucial moderator that further ignites the effectiveness of key retention drivers in rapidly changing workplaces.

Table 6. Structural model fit.

Model fit parameters	Appeared values	Cut-off values	Fit ($\checkmark$ = Yes / X = No)
χ^2/df	2.15	≤ 3	$\checkmark$
GFI	0.923	≥ 0.90	$\checkmark$
AGFI	0.905	≥ 0.90	$\checkmark$
CFI	0.951	≥ 0.90	$\checkmark$
NFI	0.936	≥ 0.90	$\checkmark$
RMSEA	0.046	≤ 0.08	$\checkmark$

Note: χ^2/df = chi-square/degrees of freedom; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; AGFI = Adjusted goodness-of-fit index; CFI = Comparative fit index; NFI = Normed fit index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation.

Table 7. Hypotheses results.

H. No.	Relationships (With Moderation)	Unstandardized estimate β	Standardized estimate β	SE	CR (t-value)	p-value	Decision
H1	FWAs $\rightarrow$ TAR	0.412	0.315	0.048	6.563	<0.01	$\checkmark$
H2	POS $\rightarrow$ TAR	0.367	0.278	0.052	5.346	<0.01	$\checkmark$
H3	LSF $\rightarrow$ TAR	0.298	0.243	0.047	5.17	<0.01	$\checkmark$
H4	ORC $\times$ FWAs $\rightarrow$ TAR (Moderation)	0.221	0.198	0.039	5.077	<0.01	$\checkmark$
H5	ORC $\times$ POS $\rightarrow$ TAR (Moderation)	0.196	0.172	0.042	4.095	<0.01	$\checkmark$
H6	ORC $\times$ LSF $\rightarrow$ TAR (Moderation)	0.209	0.185	0.041	4.512	<0.01	$\checkmark$
H7	ORC $\rightarrow$ TAR	0.183	0.171	0.037	3.419	<0.01	$\checkmark$

Note: SE=Standard error; CR=Critical ratio; $p < 0.01$; FWAs=Flexible Work Arrangements; POS=Perceived Organizational Support; LSF=Leadership support for flexibility; ORC=Organizational culture; TAR=Talent retention $\checkmark$ =Accepted.

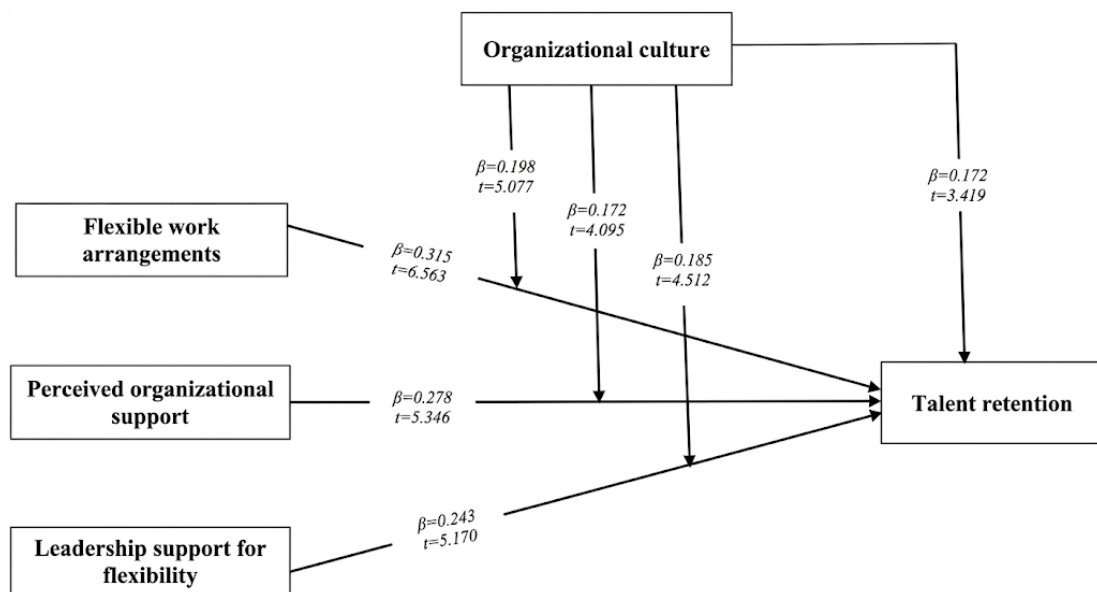


Figure 2. Structural path model.

6. DISCUSSIONS

Results have robustly confirmed the hypothesized direct positive relationships between FWAs (H1), POS (H2), and leadership support for flexibility (H3) on talent retention as outlined in Table 7 and Figure 2 from our empirical study. H1 was supported in that FWAs directly improve retention by providing for these post-pandemic expectations of employees, namely autonomy in their work and work-life balance, consistent with Social Exchange Theory stressing reciprocal obligations (Allen et al., 2013; Blau, 1964; Kossek, Perrigino, & Lautsch, 2023). Likewise, H2 was validated; here, POS establishes emotional bonds through which employees feel corporate value and are thus motivated to stay, which is well established in organizational support *modus operandi* (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Javed & Malik, 2025; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In the active front support toward flexibility by leadership (H3), the author sees that a climate of trust and empowerment is built, nurtured along Transformational Leadership theory, and helps to enforce employee commitment, thus limiting turnover, supported by recent empirical evidence (Almerri, 2023; Mohammad, Menhat, Zaideen, & Saadon, 2023).

In turn, very strong evidence supported the moderating effects of organizational culture on these relationships in H4, H5, and H6. While H4 proves that culture significantly enhances the effect of FWAs on retention when cultural values emphasize adaptability, trust, and employee-centeredness, this is in line with the Contingency Theory and the organizational culture model by Schein (2010) and Anning-Dorson (2021). H5 demonstrates that cultures perceived as supportive enhance the positive effects of POS on retention, and this finding conforms to the Culture-Climate Fit Model postulated by Denison, Haaland, and Goelzer (2003) and further evidence provided by Ehrhart and Kuenzi (2017). H6 substantiates that leadership support for flexibility is most effective in cultures that encourage collaboration and empowerment, confirming Interactional Psychology Theory's suggestions regarding the situational interpretation of leadership behaviors (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). Leadership, culture, and flexible working practices must be integrated to rapidly achieve talent retention in contemporary organizations. Most importantly, H7 has demonstrated a positive, statistically significant relationship between organizational culture and talent retention. This indicates that an appreciative and well-aligned culture can increase employees' intention to stay. This finding supports earlier studies showing that organizational culture is a major factor influencing employee commitment and turnover intent (Cameron & Sine, 1999; Suherman & Vidákovich, 2025). High-performing talent draws meaning more strategically over time in sustaining a culture of inclusivity, transparency, and growth in today's competitive labor markets and economy.

7. CONCLUSION

As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, this study aims to go beyond the exploration of FWAs as optional benefits and to examine institutionalized policies within organizations dedicated to improving talent retention.

Findings assert that employees' sense of commitment to the organization increases significantly when flexibility calls are legitimized by higher leadership in an atmosphere of genuine organizational care. For this change to succeed, culture is necessary: flexible, trusting, open, empathetic, and concerned about employee well-being. Such cultures would guarantee long-term retention benefits from flexible policies and supportive leadership. The research theoretically integrates Institutional and Social Exchange Theory, illustrating how FWAs are institutionalized within organizational frameworks and how they reciprocate through loyalty and engagement. Practically, it provides organizations, particularly in Pakistan's textile and garment industry, with much-needed insights into the retention process, which is already compromised due to changing employee expectations. The more flexibility is embedded into the culture and leadership approach of the institution, the better it will be able to retain talent in a competitive, fast-paced world.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

8.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The research very interestingly exposes several novel elements of how FWAs integrate themselves into the core systems of an organization and how the organizational culture, in turn, impresses itself on the retentiveness of such arrangements. By integrating Institutional Theory with Social Exchange Theory, it interlinks the grand forces driving changes in the organization with the down-to-earth experiences and attitudes of its employees. Institutional Theory essentially describes such external as well as internal norms that bear the pressure on organizations to institutionalize flexibility as one of the formal structures therein, making it part of the durable structures. The Social Exchange Theory brings out the fact that it is quite often that every employee reciprocates with allegiance and commitment even at times when he/she feels that the state of trust and support enjoyed by him/her from the organization is quite limited. The research goes on to point out that culture, in such an enabling atmosphere, is not merely a backdrop but a tangible setting wherein the FWAs either truly come into being or remain mere tokenism. Therefore, it is shown that practically organizations should issue forth to mainstream FWAs into a more elevated formal policy that encompasses the culture of the workplace and accommodates its employee needs. Opening avenues for building trust and communication through training both leaders and engaging employees throughout such processes can reduce resistance to change and begin embedding flexibility into the thought and practice of the organization. In the long run, a culture that values people and flexibility would attract and retain employees' morale as well as keep the organizations in competition within dynamically changing workplaces.

9. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The research provides substantial insight into how FWAs and organizational culture can either foster or hinder talent retention. However, the study has its limitations. First, the cross-sectional design entails an inability to appropriately interpret causality; longitudinal studies should underpin future research by providing observations on how such relationships evolve over time. Furthermore, the results may be restricted in their generalization to other industries or cultures because of the apparent focus on the textile and garment industry in Pakistan. Respondents to questionnaires may self-report data for various reasons. Thus, some self-report bias likely remains despite attempts, described earlier, to minimize its effect. Key factors, such as leadership styles, digital infrastructure, or economic conditions, which might significantly influence the outcome, were not accounted for within the study. Future research should consider longitudinal or mixed-method approaches, include a range of industries and cultures, and account for variables such as employee resilience, digital readiness, and demographic factors to expand the knowledge base. Ideally, the findings should also be triangulated against objective data and measures obtained from organizational sources to reinforce the findings and provide a more comprehensive account of how FWAs enact sustainable talent retention.

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Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

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