National College of Ireland

THE EFFECTS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS ON LEADERSHIP STYLES IN THE BANKING SECTOR

RESEARCH PROJECT

Written by: Andre Luiz Puppin Romano

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to identify how flexible working arrangements within the banking sector have had a change over the leadership style. Flexible Working Arrangements are different as compared to the traditional mode of work which demands leaders to change their leadership styles in order to influence an adoptive change. Whereas, the banking sector also has various layers and is quite complex because of which it is important that the influence of flexible working arrangements over the banking sector be established. In order to create an understanding, a qualitative research design was adopted, carrying out interviews among 15 managers of the Bank of Ireland. As a result, it was concluded that no matter what, each sector of the banking industry required a leadership change when shifting towards a flexible working arrangement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

Advancements in technology have had various influences over industries and its working arrangements, dating back to the first era of industrialization where machinery gradually replaced labour (Khan, 2018). It has been observed that technology and flexible working arrangements; both, add to the creativity of employees where technology may aid their efforts and flexible working arrangements may boost their motivation. The application of a specific and standard working arrangement also applies to employees whereby having a flexible working arrangement has been known to aid job satisfaction more significantly (Hazak et al., 2016).

Flexibility in the course of work has been aimed to be provided from the start of time, where with the initial advancement of technology, working arrangements including telecommuting and flexitime had been provided (Lehdonvirta, 2018). In a more specific definition, flexible working arrangements has been described as,

"Flexible, non-standard or alternative work arrangements, as the case may be, are basically options that allow an employee to work outside the traditional confines of a standard organization of work with respect to such different modalities as amount, distribution of working time and place of work" (Austin-Egole et al., 2020).

Various types of flexible working arrangements have been offered within industries in the 21st century including that of weekend work, part time work, shift work, over time, fixed time contracts, casual work and job sharing etc. Each type is different on the basis of time, locality and distribution of tasks (Austin-Egole et al., 2020).

One of the core advantages that is accompanied by flexible working arrangements is the improvement in work-life balance. Meanwhile, flexibility also allows individuals to embed work into their personal priorities which otherwise proves to be a barrier in terms of work (Lehdonvirta, 2018). Austin-Egole et al. (2020) also mentioned flexible working arrangements to increase organizational performance as it boosts the productivity of its employees. Similarly, Wheatley (2017) mentioned that flexible working arrangements (FWA) has positive outcomes over men and women both within their jobs, while also boosting their job satisfaction.

However, men are more able to opt for flexible working arrangements instead of women whom are often offered reduced working hours. Men, on the other hand, are involved in flexi-time, part time and home working that allows them to carry out their job as well as cater household needs.

Leadership, meanwhile, is an important concept that fits into the change management process involving flexible working arrangements. Leadership has been defined by scholars as a process that allows an individual to inspire their followers to achieve a shared objective (Raffo & Clark, 2018). The process is quite different than that of managing people, since it involves change whereas management is limited towards order and stability (Bargau, 2015). Management, in order to become effective leaders, need to possess a number of skills and characteristics including empathy, strategic thinking, humility, adaptability, creativity, time management and change management etc. The number and quantity of skills mentioned within the study carried out by Traynor et al. (2019) clearly highlights that a leader is not limited by one characteristic only, which allows the individual to be successful at change management despite complications (Traynor et al., 2019).

There are a number of leadership styles depending upon its nature and outcome. Khajeh (2018) mentioned transformational, charismatic, democratic, transactional, autocratic and bureaucratic forms of leadership. The transformational leadership style is one of the most effective types of leadership that aims at inspiring individuals to accept change. Similarly, a charismatic approach also tends to inspire followers through charisma. Meanwhile, a democratic approach attempts at including the followers within the decision process. A transactional approach on the other hand only motivates followers through a reward system limiting the relation to monetary means. An autocratic leadership refers to a controlling approach towards followers whereas a bureaucratic approach use influence to motivate employees to follow the code of conduct. Hence, each style has a different approach and might be beneficial in different situations.

As mentioned earlier in the previous paragraph, the transformational form of leadership is one of the strongest leadership styles with the highest impact over individuals. Similarly, transformational leadership is one of the most commonly used approach during a change management process. A change management process has been defined as,

"using the best ways to effect change in stages in order to achieve organizational objectives identified by the responsibilities defined by the intended change" (Bilal, 2004).

This change can also be in the form of a transition towards a flexible working arrangement. Change already has been acknowledged as an important trait underlying the transformational leadership style. A significant change can only be adopted through a behaviour and attitude change as well, which can be done by leveraging a transformational approach. Both; transformational leadership and change management are positively associated with each other (Alqatawenh, 2018). A change in working arrangements also portrays a significant challenge to leadership since it is a change that needs to be supported by influence and inspiration to encourage employees to quickly adapt to the change. It has been noted that during a change in working arrangements, a subsequent change in leadership has also been noted. An appropriate form of leadership helps reduce the resistance towards change while also improving work life balance, which is the end objective of a flexible working arrangement schedule. A high-performance work environment commands higher burnout ratio which can easily be controlled through implementing a leadership approach that helps provide support to employees (Afshan et al., 2021). As mobile working arrangements increase, the physical interaction between the employee and the leader increases which can lead towards a negative physical and psychological impact over employees. In the absence of a physical interaction, the transformational leadership style has been known to have the most significant impact over reducing negative influence of mobile working (Brunelle, 2013).

The Banking Sector is quite complex in nature due to unique operations being carried out in different departments. The entire service system was quite diverse, inclusive of various departments within the process (Fatma & Rahman, 2016). Due to the recent advancement in technology, the banking sector has now launched their own digital banking channel which is also complex itself since it often gets confused between mobile and online banking. The main aim of digital banking is to incorporate new technologies from the market to provide an improved customer service to their customers. Conversely, taking a step towards digital banking is not easy since it involves business model, organizational culture, IT and innovation in order to leverage data to create an effective digital channel (Dasho et al., 2016).

In this respect, the Bank of Ireland aims at moving to a digital banking approach however, this requires less physical presence because of which various physical branches are facing a closure. This move towards digital presence of banks is also encouraging flexible working

arrangements (Bank of Ireland, n.d.). A number of central offices and remote locations have been opted from where employees can work remotely as per their flexibility. In 2020, a majority of employees at Bank of Ireland were already operating remotely which further got accelerated as post-Covid a number of employees preferred working remotely mainly. Hence, various hubs have been created that can be leveraged by employees to work remotely for the organization without making an actual visit to the office (O'Brien, 2021).

Conversely, there is a persistent lack of literature that directly relates leadership with flexible working arrangements, where mobile working has been discussed however not extensively. Moreover, there is a lack of literature concerned with the banking sector and the role that leadership may play in ensuring an effective process of adopting flexible working arrangements within the industry highlighting the need for research to help Bank of Ireland shift towards a remote working model.

1.2. Research Problem

Dynamic changes all over the world are influencing working culture to evolve, simultaneously (Narayanamurthy & Tortorella, 2021). Technology advancements have further encouraged industries to opt for more flexible working arrangements that help industries achieve their goals while also pursuing a work life balance amid the dynamic changes taking place within the economy (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). The Bank of Ireland, similarly, proposed a hybrid model that enables employees, currently part of the company, to opt to work from localities that are more convenient for them (Bank of Ireland, n.d.). Conversely, there are various departments within a bank, each of which plays a unique and essential role in ensuring that the operations of the bank run smoothly. This uniqueness implies that it is certainly complex to manage change within the banking industry (Obonyo & Kerongo, 2015). Leadership however, has been studied in detail in regards to change management reporting positive effects over application of change within the company (By et al., 2016). Transformational leadership is one of the styles that is known for its positive outcome over change management within the corporate industry irrespective of its complexities (Thomson III et al., 2016). Meanwhile, technological advancements have further encouraged reduced physical interactions, promoting virtual and remote leadership styles within the future (Terkamo-Moisio et al., 2022). The recognition of the influence of leadership styles over adapting change such as flexible working arrangements is therefore, necessary to be understood and then applied over the Bank of Ireland, aiming to help apply change within the industry.

1.3. Research Questions

The following questions are aimed at directing the entire research study towards assessing the main motive of the study being carried out,

1.3.1. How do flexible working arrangements influence leadership styles within the banking industries?

a. What kind of flexible working arrangements demand change within leadership styles within the industry?

b. What type of leadership styles produce a beneficial outcome over adapting to flexible working arrangements within the industry?

c. How significant is the relationship between flexible working arrangements and leadership style within the banking industry?

d. How does the association between flexible working arrangements and leadership styles help adapting to change within the Bank of Ireland, specifically?

1.4. Research Objectives

Based on the research questions proposed above, the following objectives have been derived,

1.4.1. To identify the nature of influence that a shift towards flexible working arrangements has over leadership styles within the banking sector.

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the following objectives have been derived as subsets,

e. To recognize the influence that different types of flexible working arrangements has over leadership styles.

f. To find leadership styles having a positive influence over flexible working arrangements.

g. To classify the association between flexible working arrangements and leadership styles.

h. To understand the role of flexible working arrangements over leadership styles within the banking industry, specifically the Bank of Ireland.

1.5. Research Significance

The Banking Sector is quite complex in nature, owing to its unique departments that collectively contribute towards the operations of the industry (Obonyo & Kerongo, 2015). Adoption of technology within the banking industry is quite dynamic at present since one end of its operations is inclined towards customer dealing, whereas the other end is busy with dealing with technology that guides the entire banking system (Gupta & Khanna, 2015; Diniz

et al., 2018). Since, half of the banking operations are inclined towards customer dealing, the adoption of flexible working arrangements is quite hard and therefore, the change management process would also be quite complex, demanding a more critical and significant leadership style, that helps the banking industry adapt to the new change. A significant leadership style can help employees successfully adapt to a new working culture (By et al., 2016). Banks, are recently, trying to outbid physical interaction as a means of promoting digital banking through closing down various physical branches. Moreover, by doing so, banks also aim at improving the work-life balance in the lives of their employees (Ananda et al., 2020). Employees that have faced significant amount of challenges when adopting a new change have immediately felt at ease and supported by, in the form of a new leadership style. Conversely, a gap exists within present literature regarding the influence of flexible working arrangements over leadership styles within the banking industry, prompting the need of a study in order to aid the Bank of Ireland with its step to encourage flexible working arrangements through its hybrid model of work.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Flexible Working Arrangement

Flexibility is a term that is often described as the ability of people to easily change and modify, based on different situations (Finkel, 2011). In terms of the corporate culture, or the working arrangement, it has been defined as the ability of an individual to alter policies and practices enabling individuals to carry out work as they please. Subsequently, Flexible Working Arrangements (FWAs) allow individuals to alter the way they may carry out their work through which often the amount of work gets distributed in a number of modes, reducing the total work hours overtaken by the individual (Maxwell et al., 2007). Berkery et al. (2017) defined workplace flexibility as, "*alternative work options that allow work to be accomplished outside of the traditional temporal and/or spatial boundaries of a standard workday*" (p.6). Various other terms have also been adopted by organizations and scholars when addressing flexible working arrangements including flexible routine, flexible tasks or flexible schedules. A usual office may operate Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 pm, however, an organization opting for a flexible working arrangement may modify this arrangement as per their convenience and preference (Wheatley, 2017).

2.1.1. Benefits and Disadvantages of Flexible Working Arrangements

It has been observed that there are a number of benefits to Flexible Working Arrangements. These benefits have been visible in recruitment, employee retention and motivation, respectively. Moreover, flexible working arrangements have also been known to increase competitive advantage of a brand, within the service industry including the banking industry (Maxwell et al., 2007). From an employers' perspective, the benefits of flexible working arrangements include; content workforce, employee retention, increased employee productivity and knowledge sharing etc. From an employees' perspective on the other hand, flexible working arrangements have a plethora of benefits, firstly including work life balance, reduced work stress and also reduced consumption of fuel and energy because of traffic during peak hours. The most prominent benefits underlying FWAs and its insurgence within corporate culture is work life balance and increased job satisfaction (Wheatley, 2017). It has also been noted that reduced commuting time can result an increase in time spent with family further adding to the reduced work life conflict (Russell et al., 2009). The following table further illustrates over the impact of a few FWAs,

Table 1. FWA and Benefits (Russell et al., 2009; Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; Lutz, 2012; Epasinghe & Karunathilaka, 2021)

FWA	Benefits
Flexi-Time	Reduces both work pressure and work-life conflict, however may increase if work is carried over to another day
Part-Time	Reduces wok pressure, however, increases work life conflict for a few groups such as employees that are financially unstable, individuals that do not leave work at work
Job Sharing	Reduces work life conflict however if one individual does not do their share of work, may increase workload for others
Work from Home	Reduces work life conflict, however, burden from work may increase if workload is not adjusted

Conversely, where there are positive attributes, some negative attributes associated with the system also are prevalent for example miscommunication, isolation from each other, employees failing to adjust to the new system. Particularly, regarding small businesses, having shorter work shifts can also have a significant affect over the output of the company (Maxwell et al., 2007). Wheatley (2017) also mentions that men opting for FWAs implies a degree of freedom where women's choice of FWAs represents constraint, being bound towards household responsibilities. Moreover, men have an increased amount of responsibilities towards their household as well towards their job which often increases work life conflict, which has been known to be effectively reduced utilizing Flexible Working Arrangements. Considering the fact that employees taking flexible working arrangements can create resentment towards other colleagues since their workload increases, can have a negative impact over the organization moving forward (Teasdale, 2013).

2.2. Factors Encouraging Flexible Working Arrangements

Despite many scholars claiming that it was in fact advancement in technology that enabled organizations to work remotely, Maxwell et al. (2007) argued that flexible working arrangements were put in place to improvise work-life balance while also promoting employees' family friendly policies which are often overshadowed because of work demands. Similar to Maxwell's (2007) argument, Wheatley (2017) still argues that the invention of FWAs is particularly and specifically to cater work life balance among employees through changing their working conditions. Work Life Balance on the other hand, has been defined as, "*the ability of individuals, regardless of age or gender, to combine work and 2 household responsibilities successfully, or with minimum conflict*" (p.1-2). Even employers nowadays require functional and numerical flexibility that can be observed through various flexible working arrangements including agency, part time work, overtime and shifts etc. (Raess & Burgoon, 2013). The increasing share of old age workers and female workers within the corporate sector also commands a certain demand over the improvement in work life balance of employees (Berkery et al., 2017). The world already headed towards flexible working arrangements received a boost in the form the covid-19 pandemic which imposed a restriction over physical interaction between individuals prompting organizations to readily adopt remote working or working from home as an active solution (Angelucci et al., 2020).

2.3. Types of Flexible Working Arrangements and their Work Layout

There are various types of FWAs namely, "*part-time work, job sharing, flexitime, working from home, time off in lieu, teleworking, term-time working, staggered, annualised or compressed hours, shift swapping, self-rostering, breaks from work, and flexible and cafeteria benefits*" (Maxwell et al., 2007, p.139). Meanwhile, Berkery et al. (2017) also mentioned weekend work, casual work and fixed-term contracts among types of flexible working arrangements. Chung and Lippe (2020) were also able to identify three prominent forms of FWAs, namely, flexi-time, working time autonomy and working hours fixed by employer. Working time autonomy has been described as the freedom gained by individuals to determine their own working time without any fixed schedules provided by their employees whereas working hours fixed by employer is where employees need to work according to a schedule provided by the employer. Chung and Van der Horst (2018) also mention schedule control and teleworking as distinguishable working arrangements where both are mainly adopted to enhance performance.

However, not all individuals are likely to adopt all forms of working arrangements as it depends on their flexibility, nature of work and convenience.

Using various resources, Wheatley (2017) has described a few FWAs, which have also been elaborated below,

2.3.1. Flexi-Time

Flexi time is an FWA, based on the arrangement of work time which allows individuals to set core standard working hours for themselves. Similarly, compressed hours enable employees to reduce their working hours however, extend the total length of duration for which they are required to work. Annualised hours on the other hand, are a fixed number of working hours that are needed to be catered by the employees during their entire working year, irrespective of how and when they complete them (Wheatley, 2017). Chung and Lippe (2020) described flexi time as the ability of an individual to determine their own working hours. Post-child birth, in terms of gender, it has been identified that flexi-time remains one of the most significant flexible working arrangements that allows women to maintain their careers despite catering responsibilities at home (Chung & Van der Horst, 2018). It has been identified that companies where there are more women and skilled workers, have a higher tendency to incorporate flexitime whereas in the case of size, larger companies may offer flexitime to a considerable number of employees however, smaller companies would hardly offer it to one employee. Similarly, service sector companies are more known to allow flexitime within the industry with no significant difference between private and public firms (Chung, 2014).

2.3.2. Part-Time

Part-time is the ability of an employee to work below 30 hours per week, based on the United Kingdom standard. Term time is also a relevant part time working arrangement where employees are only required to work during the term. Part time work is often visible among women due to their conflict of handling work and life together, increasing job satisfaction however, not clear regarding its impact over their life satisfaction (Wheatley, 2017). The quality of part time work is also not up to the mark whereas most of them only represent temporary employment due to a lack of employment opportunities within the market (Green & Livanos, 2015). Moreover, reduced hours also command a certain decrease in wages which can make employees financially unstable within their lives (Wheatley, 2017). Based on their motivation to work part time, Dunn (2018) categorized individuals into two categories; economic and noneconomic. Individuals in the economic category are involuntary workers

who find temporary part time positions in the absence of a full-time opportunity. Non-economic individuals on the other hand were voluntary workers that were not willing to work for 35 hours a week or do not have the time to consider a full-time opportunity yet.

2.3.3. Job Sharing

Job Sharing is not very well known and recognized since it often accompanies part time work or reduced work hours. As the name suggests within a Job-Sharing arrangement, one full time job is shared among two or more employees hence, the entire job is divided among multiple people that work together to complete the task. However, it is not a beneficial working arrangement since it can cause miscommunication, lack of competency and increase of workload over one individual. Hence, it is more often used in jobs that are simplistic in nature and follow a simple process that is easy to understand for all (Wheatley, 2017). In India, job sharing is used as a means of tapping into the educated women labour market that can help reduce work life conflict, allowing them to easily cater work needs as well as household needs. It has been defined in easy terms as, "*A voluntary arrangement where two or more employees share the responsibilities of one full-time role with each appointee performing the full range of duties on a part-time basis. Job sharing is a form of part-time work that might be viable when ordinary part-time work is not, such as when a job needs to be filled on a full-time basis, though not necessarily by one person. Partners may be interchangeable, with either any partner being able to continue performing the functions of the role when the other job-sharing partner is not on duty*" (Thakur et al., 2018, p. 4).

2.3.4. Homeworking

Similar to job sharing, homeworking as the name suggests, is work done through one's household. Since the job is catered from one's convenience of the household, the job easily removes the need to commute enabling the employees to work whenever and wherever they prefer. Since the employees gains a greater command and control over the job, it increases job satisfaction. In terms of the gender, women who prefer working from home are often constraint in terms of freedom since they prefer working from home in order to cater other household responsibilities as compared to a man who only needs to cater their job (Wheatley, 2017). Remote work is also an adaptation of home working whereby individuals tend to work remotely, from various locations as per their convenience. Modern technology has subsequently allowed organizations to adopt digital technologies that has enabled them to create seamless operations across geographical boundaries. The modern workspace is

increasingly mobile and not limited to a single locality whereby information systems are used among colleagues to interact with each other. In the United States various companies have already gone a 100% mobile, intendent of a central hub for all their operations (Flores, 2019).

2.4. Leadership

Leadership as per Kruse (2013) has been defined as a, "*process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal*" (p.3). Whereas the same process has also been defined as the ability with one individual to lead others towards a specific goal (Ayub et al., 2014). Leadership has therefore been acknowledged as a process instead of just being a concept that is based on the concept of social influence and not power or control over followers. Moreover, leadership requires the presence of followers since the leader requires individuals to inspire. There are various effective methods on achieving a significant and positive leadership approach towards a certain task depending upon the nature of the objective, initially. Meanwhile, the objective or goal needed to be achieved is a shared objective, not limited to either one of the individuals within a team (Kruse, 2013). It has been observed that with changes in human society and requirements, the definition of leadership also subsequently changes or adapts to align itself with the latest trend in managing members. Till date however, not one single definition has been collectively agreed upon when describing leadership due to its novel and adaptable nature (Ayub et al., 2014).

2.5. Leadership Styles

There are a number of leadership styles known to literature which have been elaborated on using the following table, based on a synthesis of findings gathered from different pieces of literature,

Table 2. Leadership Styles

Leadership Style	Approach
Democratic/Participative Leadership	Offers guidance through including followers within the decision-making process (Cherry, 2019)
Charismatic Leadership	Focuses both; on the needs of the employees and the needs of the objective (De Vries et al., 2010)

Delegative Leadership	Empowers followers by letting them take their own decisions regarding duties/tasks to be carried out in order to achieve objective (Cherry, 2019)
Transactional Leadership	Acts as a transaction where follower obeys the command given by the leader for a reward (Cherry, 2019)
Transformational Leadership	Supports each individual by identifying core strengths and weaknesses, in relevance to achieving the objective (Cherry, 2019)
Servant Leadership	Prioritizing the needs of the followers/employees over the needs of the organization (Eva et al., 2019)
Autocratic Leadership	Followers are guided through clearly defined tasks and roles (Cherry, 2019)
Authentic Leadership	Demands leaders to base their actions over ethics, morals and values (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019)

2.6. Leadership Styles during Change

It has been observed, that orienting a leadership or changing the leadership approach according to the change whether planned or unplanned has a direct, significant and positive influence over adaption towards change, highlighting the need for organizations to change their leadership approach when incorporating a significant change within the organization. Leadership on the other hand, has been known to curtail resistance towards new things since it helps motivate employees to accept new practices. Change is then subsequently introduced within the organization by the leaders themselves (Al-Ali et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the leader acts as a facilitator displaying strong commitment towards adaption to change (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014). Through supporting the needs of the employees, the employees feel more motivated and committed towards the change being demanded within the organizational culture (Al-Ali et al., 2017). The most significant leadership style in respect to change management

has been observed to be transformational leadership since it takes into account the separate strengths and weaknesses of each follower (Alqatawenh, 2018).

2.7. Flexible Working Arrangements and Leadership Style Change

Since the 20th century, the role of managers is being highlighted in terms of influencing change within the organization. It has been observed that women managers have been able to inspire employees to be involved in FWAs as compared to a lesser minority of male managers. It is also the managers that create an organizational culture that supports the needs of employees as well as supports the practice of flexible working arrangements. As work life balance is quite complex and different based on the perspective of each individual, an effective leadership is required to assess the demands of all employees, creating an appropriate working arrangement that accommodates these needs (Maxwell et al., 2007). Managers that are often sceptical instead of being supportive towards working from home, reduce opportunities of working from home due to employee concerns mainly regarding a lack of physical interaction, limited training and safety policy etc. (Wheatley, 2017). Similarly, Vroman (2020) argues that in order for FWAs to be successful, employees need to feel supported by their leaders. Meanwhile, leaders should themselves also support FWA policies in practice. The perception of employees regarding their leaders over how they act and behave in regards to FWA is what employees are most likely to follow and engage themselves in.

2.8. Banking Sector and Flexible Working Arrangements

Saeed et al. (2013) mentioned that firms that take into consideration the needs of its employees, curating a flexible work design are more likely to flourish, even within the Banking Industry. Flexible organizations that have a flexible workplace design are known to effectively compete with organizations that are not supportive of flexible workspaces. Moreover, many managers observing the benefits of arranging flexible working arrangements through including employee recommendations have noticed various benefits that are further pressurizing organizations to do so. In a variety of industries, including the Banking Sector, it has been identified that informal working arrangements are known to be more productive since they improve work life conflicts that are otherwise critical in formal arrangements, improving positive attitudes of the employees. Furthermore, formal working arrangements with flexible working hours were negatively associated with job performance despite having an increase in job satisfaction whereas remote working arrangements had a more positive impact despite being indirect over job satisfaction and performance (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017).

2.9. Bank of Ireland

In Ireland, the nature of employment has changed where women are increasingly becoming a part of the corporate organizations, increasing dual house earners. The increase in women workers have induced a subsequent increase in flexible working arrangements within Ireland, including part time jobs that only cater low level jobs such as clerk, sales and personal services. Moreover, recognizing the role of women in the corporate society has also increased awareness regarding the need to improve work life balance. Hence, various state policies within Ireland are supporting flexible working arrangements including parental and maternity leaves. However, the extant of these policies is yet undermined (Russell et al., 2009). Moreover, Fine-Davis (2016) mentioned that due to the changing gender roles within society, specifically catering the community of Ireland, women are now increasingly being involved in earning outside for the household which has subsequently increased the demand for flexible working arrangements which can help them look after their infants as well as their work without any conflict.

The Bank of Ireland, is the central bank of Ireland which was initiated in the year 1783, in Dublin. In 1922, the bank was given the official status of being the bank to the Irish Government. In between, the bank was also known as the National Bank of Ireland and the National Bank Ltd. Conversely, the bank is now termed as the Bank of Ireland (Bank of Ireland, n.d.). Due to the latest advancement in technology, the Bank of Ireland most recently sought out a plan to adopt a hybrid working model where a majority of the employees would be working out of office. 91% of the employees currently employed in Bank of Ireland and participated within the Ways of Working demanded flexibility in their work routine because of which the bank seeks to bring about flexibility in the traditional office space. A total of 11 remote working hubs have been created by the Bank which would be accessible by all employees and would be utilized as per their convenience and preference. Already in the start of 2020, a majority of the employees within Bank of Ireland were engaged in flexible working arrangements however the pandemic further accelerated this process, helping employees to cater both work and household needs together. The Bank has also showed remarkable leadership by supporting the needs of its employees in terms of infrastructure and technology at home (Bank of Ireland, n.d.).

2.11. Changing Leadership Styles accommodating Flexible Working Arrangements in the Banking Industry

As teams are further accelerating towards remote, virtual teams, owing to the advancement in technology, leaders are significantly facing challenges due to the lack of physical interaction. Moreover, a changed organizational structure has further pressurized leaders into changing their overall approach towards leadership practices and policies. Such a form of leadership that caters virtual teams is called as E-leadership where leaders adopt various electronic mediums to stay in contact with their teams. This approach would definitely not include the traditional leadership styles that are mainly focused over the physical interaction between the manager and the employee (Lilian, 2014). However, the concerning attribute of this entire study is that despite remote teams being a part of the future, there is a lack of literature that concerns itself with leadership of remote teams within the banking sector.

2.12. Research Gap

Pertaining to the literature, a research gap has been identified in relevance to the Banking Sector. Due to the increased awareness regarding digital banking, various physical branches are being closed which also enables the banking sector to adopt flexible working arrangements for its employees, working remotely. However, literature does not elaborate over the implications within the Banking Sector or the role that leadership can play in helping employees within the Banking Sector to adopt to change in the form of flexible working arrangements.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for the underlying research is based on the research onion model proposed by Saunders et al. (2015). Based on six layers of the Research Onion as elaborated by Melnikovas (2018), the research methodology has been described below,

3.1. Research Philosophy

Melnikovas (2018) highlighted four specific research philosophies that provide a basic foundation for the entire research study to be carried over. Positivism postulates that since events are based on social interactions, data can only be observed. Interpretivism, on the other hand, emphasizes over the role of social actor implying that it can only be understood through social incidents. Pragmatism meanwhile, emphasizes over both positivism and interpretivism. The research study however utilizes the critical realism theory which states that there are social actors and processes that together influence future events. The research philosophy is known to guide the entire data collection and analysis process in relevance to the research variables in consideration within the research study. Similarly, the research emphasizes over the fact that leadership styles along with changing workspace can help employees easily adapt to flexible working arrangements within the banking sector where leadership styles and processes act as a social process influencing future events. Hence, leadership is being studied as a social process that tends to influence how employees accept change in the form of flexible working arrangements within the complex banking sector specifically, the Bank of Ireland which has been kept in focus within the research.

3.2. Research Approach

There are three specific approaches towards research studies including abduction, deduction and induction. Abduction is a hint gained from observation, that often provides the way for the deductive approach. Due to its hint and guess based nature, it is not that often that a research is entirely based over the abductive approach however, tends to provide insights for the deductive or inductive approach to be carried out further. The deductive approach tends to base a theory observed in a general population to a specific sample. Observations made in general are then applied over a specific population. The inductive approach on the other hand, tends to base a theory observed in a specific sample over the general population. Observations made within a specific sample of individuals is proved and then applied over the general population to be studied (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018). The underlying research utilizes the inductive

approach as well, to study the research phenomenon within a specific sample to be applied over the general population i.e. the banking sector, in regards to flexible working arrangements within the banking sector utilizing an appropriate leadership style.

3.3. Research Method

There are two research methods that can be employed when carrying out a research study i.e. quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative research approach mainly deals with numbers and figures that describe a certain research phenomenon. Due to the nature of the research method, it enables researchers to employ a large sample size while reaching a sample beyond geographical boundaries. However, on the other hand, a qualitative research helps explaining those statistics in detail with reasoning and logic in the form of first hand perspectives form the sample. Since a qualitative research is more detailed, it only commands a small sample utilizing the probing technique to gain in-depth insights regarding the research phenomenon in detail (Taylor, 2005). The underlying study employs a qualitative approach as well to understand the accommodation of leadership styles to adapt to flexible working arrangements due to limited research present in existing literature. Through gaining first hand experiences of employees working within the Bank of Ireland, useful insights can be gained for the research study at hand helping other banking companies within the industry to arrange flexible working workspaces.

3.4. Research Strategy

There are three basic strategies most commonly utilized within research studies including causal, exploratory and descriptive research strategies. The exploratory research study helps investigate an entirely novel research phenomenon which has yet not been studied in detail. Hence, researchers employ the use of an exploratory research to investigate new phenomenon, of which is little is known by scholars. The causal research strategy on the other hand aims at understanding cause and effect relationships. It helps understand consequents and sub sequential factors within a specific relationship while understanding the effect that each variable has over the other. The third most common research strategy is descriptive which helps describe the phenomenon within the research sample (Sreejesh et al., 2014). The underlying research also employs the descriptive research strategy, aiming to understanding the use of leadership styles and processes to help employees adapt to flexible working arrangements within the banking sector. It is more commonly used to describe the what, who and how of a research phenomenon however, specific to the research sample considered. It would help study

the employees of the Bank of Ireland helping to understand their challenges when adopting flexible working arrangements within their company.

3.5. Sample

The research population in consideration is the entire Banking Industry of Ireland. However, due to limitation of time and geographical boundaries, the entire banking sector cannot be considered and not all are considering the adoption of flexible working arrangements within their company. Hence, the Bank of Ireland has been considered as the only sample in relevance to the research phenomenon due to its recent adoption of a hybrid working model, involving the facility of a flexible working arrangements. For this purpose, a total of 15 managers working within the Bank of Ireland would be employed within the study helping to understand their point of view in regards to changing leadership styles to accommodate flexible working arrangements within the Bank. Currently, the Bank of Ireland has 8,696 employees as of their annual financial reports which is a very large sample and cannot be considered within a short time span. Moreover, a sample of 15 is enough to gain sufficient insights regarding the research phenomenon while avoiding repetitive information (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

3.5.1. Sampling Technique

There are various sampling techniques characterized into probability and non-probability sampling techniques based on their chances of getting selected within the sample. Since the current nature of the research is quite complex due to the limited access to Bank of Ireland employees, the non-probability techniques have been considered within the underlying research since not all employees have a chance to be selected within the sample. Non probability sampling techniques include quota, purposive, self-selection and snowball sampling techniques. A quota sampling technique helps create specific quotas based on the population being studied and the requirement of the research study. Purposive sampling meanwhile, is judgemental sampling where the researcher based on his own opinion and criteria tends to create a sample for the research study. The snowball sampling technique helps create a sample through a referral system based on their relevance to the research phenomenon. Conversely, the self-selection sampling technique is based on the convenience and willingness of the sample in consideration (Sharma, 2017). The following figure helps provide an overview of the sampling techniques that can be leveraged by the study,
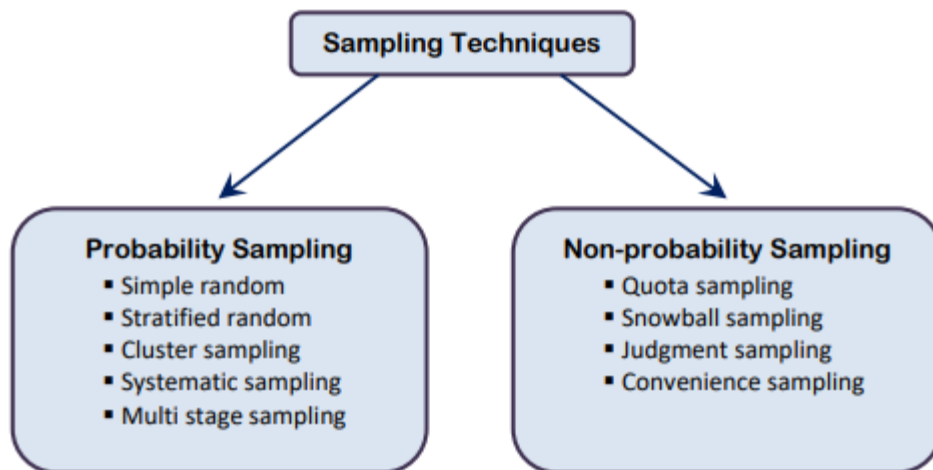
Figure 1. Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling technique has been utilized within the underlying research study due to the limited access to the employees of Bank of Ireland, therefore, whoever is accessible has been considered within the sample.

3.6. Time Horizon

Researchers consider two-time horizons for their researches including cross-sectional and longitudinal durations. A longitudinal time horizon is employed within researchers that need to compare differences between post and pre event of significance. Therefore, it considers two time durations where the sample is studied in relevance to the research phenomenon. A longitudinal study is useful when aiming to study differences in time in regards to a research phenomenon (Khoo et al., 2006). As opposed to the longitudinal time horizon, the cross-sectional time horizon considers the present or prevalent time instead of considering two or more separate tenures. It helps examine a research phenomenon only within that tenure helping to avoid any dynamics of the society that can alter results in the meantime (Olsen & St.George, 2004). The underlying research also adopts a cross-sectional approach towards the research phenomenon where the present year has been considered i.e. 2022, and therefore, employees that are currently employed within the Bank of Ireland have been included within the research sample. Since the hybrid working model has been employed recently and changes within the leadership style that is being studied within the research is in relevance to helping employees to adapt towards flexible working arrangements which can only be done initially and not later, therefore, a cross-sectional study is the most useful.

3.7. Data Collection

There are various data collection methods within a qualitative approach including focus groups, interviews and discussion groups etc. (Carter & Henderson, 2005). The following section helps elaborate over the data collection tactic employed within the underlying research study,

3.7.1. Data Collection Instrument

An interview is being utilized within the underlying research in order to collect data from the sample. The interview technique, being face to face, or having a direct interaction between the interviewee and interviewer helps to create a comfortable relationship that encourages the interviewee to speak their mind easily. Moreover, in the case of any ambiguity, the interviewee can easily inquire the misunderstanding directly from the interviewer. The interaction also allows the researcher to probe into the responses provided by the individuals while also allowing the interviewer to understand the emotions of the individuals from their expressions while giving their responses. Moreover, since the research has limited information within existing literature, an interview can help gain insights that are new and useful to the research phenomenon (Opdenakker, 2006). Hence, an interview has been utilized within the research consisting of 13 questions relevant to the research phenomenon being studied within the research study.

3.7.2. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure utilized within the research study includes identifying Bank of Ireland employees through contacting the Bank's HR department while also identifying employees of the Bank over LinkedIn. After the contacts have been made, each employee was sent a form, inviting them to participate within the underlying research study. After their displayed willingness, each individual was sent a consent form and only after their consent was received that they were invited for an interview based on their own convenience over two mediums; physical or video conferencing. Where 4 interviews were taken physically, the rest were carried out over Zoom, helping to record the data for further use however, the data was kept confidential based on the preferences of the sample study. On average, each interview ranged between 30 to 45 minutes depending upon the details provided by them.

3.7.3. Ethical Considerations

Two ethical considerations were prioritized during the entire research study where the first was to gain consent from the participants included within the sample in order to avoid any issues

going forward. Moreover, each individual was made aware of the fact that they had the right to leave the study at any time, when willing. Their names were also kept confidential in order to avoid any conflicts that they may face from their company on providing data that is sensitive to their role or the company itself. Moreover, they were also required their willingness regarding the interview to be recorded and to be used later, but only for academic purposes.

3.8. Data Analysis

A thematic data analysis technique has been utilized within the underlying research where specific themes have been identified in the responses given by the interviewees to respond to the research questions identified in the first chapter.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Sample Description

A total of 15 bank managers participated within the interview, voluntarily despite making efforts to gain a larger sample. The bank has a large number of employees, however, all of them could not be accessed or were not in the right position to be interviewed regarding flexible working arrangements and leadership change. A large number of the employees were retail bank managers i.e. 8 whereas the rest were commercial bank managers, operation manager, digital banking manager etc. It was mainly ensured that all employees voluntarily participating in the study were managers whether on an executive level or at the level of a commercial bank.

Only 5 of the employees that were interviewed, had been working with the Bank for a longer time period i.e. 10 years as compared to the rest of the sample. 2 of the employees were relatively recently hired, working for 2 years within the company. Whereas the rest had a duration of 3 to 5 years with the Bank. The following table provides a descriptive overview of the sample considered within the underlying research study.

4.2. Thematic Analysis

Based on a considerate and detailed analysis of the interviews gathered from 15 of the bank employees, the following themes have been derived that help respond to the research questions derived, effectively.

Managing Change in Organizational Processes

The first theme that was recognized from the entire sample was managing change within organizational processes within the banking sector. Most of the employees mentioned that the change management process in the organization was quite relevant to the change management theory presented within literature. The banking sector also acquires the same route when integrating change within their banking processes. Two of the respondents mentioned,

"Change management irrespective of the department, is quite similar as other organizations within the economy"

"When carrying out a change within the organization...it is important that you first realize the magnitude of change being asked to be adopted and then to adapt HR policies and other initiatives accordingly. Change management is a critical process that needs to be carried down from the top to bottom and this is exactly how we did it. Top management

communicated the vision earlier to employees where various policies and code of conduct were created in order to help support this change."

Existing literature elaborates on the fact that a change management process involves communicating the change before implementing it within the organization. HR policies and programs were initiated to help support employees to adapt to this change whereas it helped when the entire organization collectively accepted the change within their organizational processes.

The Banking Sector's Work Layout

A workplace routine and layout can easily be described as the work schedule or orientation during the day for an employee. The mangers from the Bank were also inquired regarding their workplace routine to which one participant mentioned that the routine was quite mundane and involved doing a monotonous duty daily;

"*The routine is quite mundane, you know how a banking organization is like, the routine is fixed and we got to perform the same duties all day however at times we do quite depend on each other in case of compliance and emergencies*"

The banking sector has various departments, and each department has a specific set of duties that are carried out in a similar pattern each day. The Bank of Ireland, conversely, realizing that work can be carried out at home, introduced a hybrid working model which was described by one of the participants as;

"*The Bank of Ireland is quite special in this regard where remote working during the past years, during the. Pandemic, has been turned into a hybrid mix of office and home-based work which seems to me to be the future of work since you don't need to be there physically at all times when you can work from home right.*"

Therefore, the work is consistently carried out over a cloud solution for the bank without depending on any physical interactions.

Flexible Working Arrangements

Each organization has a different work layout that depends on the nature of operations being carried under the company. On inquiring the participants regarding how their work processes were designed, the following responses were retrieved,

"All our jobs are task oriented so we do not have any vagueness regarding our duties, or the need to actually perform otherwise. At times it seems that the work would get too much but it's on us since after the hybrid working announcement, it is on us on how we manage our work going further"

"The banking sector is quite critical and highly regulated. I mean the bank needs to provide accurate information otherwise it may be charged for fraud. In other cases, the bank also needs to assess the risk associated with giving out loans or managing risk for the bank. Digitization of the entire system however made it all easier, everything has become so easy and immediate that you do not need to step out of your home for work. The Bank already has reduced the number of employees over the years considering this change where entire banking records are present over the system that has been digitized"

"Thanks to technology, the bank has seen a visible reduction in the workload. Employee well-being and a work life balance is now prioritized"

Hence, it can be understood through the above provided responses that the banking sector has specific jobs with limited ambiguity. However, the nature of work is quite critical due to the strict regulation and compliance system in place, within the industry. The use of technology within the sector has however, significantly reduced the workload from the banking sector employees.

The Bank of Ireland has recently introduced a hybrid working model within the organization citing reasons such as reduced cost in commuting etc. The participants were encouraged to describe the mode of work being followed at the bank to which they mentioned the following,

"Whatever work we can do at home, we do it whereas for the rest we need to get by to the office. The Bank has created some sort of remote hubs near to our households so instead of going to the central office whenever we need to access the internal network we can easily run down to this hub and carry out our tasks"

"The bank follows a remote working model post pandemic which is based on the hybrid work model; half remote, half at work. Digital technologies have already been invested in since the pandemic whereby things have been made easier to access work at home"

Hence, the company follows a hybrid working model that incorporates remote work. Different remote hubs have been created by the company to accommodate individuals that would still desire to work at a physical location other than their households. Moreover, the company has

invested quite a lot in digital technology to help assist their employees in shifting towards the remote working model of work.

Based on the findings gained from existing literature, there were several conditions put in place by companies when offering the chance towards a flexible working arrangement. Mostly women were found in part time work, who also faced a reduction in the average wage provided for this position. However, in the Bank of Ireland, no disparity or condition is attached to the hybrid working model. All employees that can work remotely have been encouraged to work remotely, while having the same work package. The following responses were gained from the employees regarding conditions associated with flexible working arrangements,

"Coming to conditions, well there are no such conditions that have been emphasized upon. The only reason that the bank has encouraged a flexible working model is as people became comfortable with the model during the pandemic"

"No conditions, it benefits us. We can now perform work at home without stepping out during rush hours wasting our time as well as energy"

Hence, no conditions have been imposed by the bank of Ireland, citing beneficial advantages to the bank which has prompted this shift towards a hybrid mode of work.

Corporate Sector vs Banking Sector

Existing literature has emphasized over the fact that the operations of the banking sector are quite complex and have evolved to become even more complicated due to increased services and personalization. As a result, to gain more understanding regarding the nature of the banking sector, the same question was also posed to the participants of the sample who responded by the following,

"I would stay it's the fast-paced environment that differentiates us from other sector of the economy. We need to be on toes during each transaction otherwise we can land in jail, that's how regulated the banking industry is."

"Comparatively I would say the banking sector is quite complex. Over the years, the banking sector has accommodated various modes of services be it ATMs, digital banking or even our retail branches. We interact with the customer on a daily basis and the entire world depends on us, daily. In case our system goes down we are prone towards the scrutiny of the entire

world. Regulations and taxes have further increased this complexness I say, maybe compliance is what differs the banking sector"

Challenges adopting Flexibility in the Banking Sector

As per the insights gathered from the sample chosen within the study, a number of challenges were found regarding the banking sector when it comes to flexible working arrangements. The most common challenges found in almost all of the responses given by the respondent include; nature of organization, trust, security, face to face customer interaction, regulations, client technology and technology etc.

One of the participants mentioned,

"*I think the foremost challenge that we faced was from becoming a front-end sector to a back-end zone. I mean we were all on a face to face interaction with customers, but as the branches were reduced, we were involved in back end operations*"

The participant mentioned that the first challenge that the employees within the banking sector faced was a shift towards digital banking instead of a physical interaction with customers because of which employees pose resistance.

Two of the other participants emphasized over the nature of the organization being the major challenge in the banking sector;

"*The size of the organization and how the bank would eventually shape the entire working arrangement is still the biggest challenge. I mean having a hybrid working model reduces this risk but a single flexible working arrangement may not suit the needs of all employees*"

"*It is generally harder for the compliance department during this hybrid working arrangement since despite the communication being in real time, the employees are several feet apart*"

In the case of the compliance department, therefore, the banking sector needs an effective regulatory and security system when imposing flexible working arrangements.

Countering Challenges with Flexibility in the Banking Sector

Since there are a number of challenges prevalent in the banking sector when it comes towards flexible working arrangements within the banking sector, it is also important to understand any contradictory measures that can help resolve these difficulties. As Bank of Ireland adopted

flexible working arrangements, they too faced challenges which as per the experience of managers was resolved through support, gradual adoption, HR policies, organizational culture and digital technology. Two of the participants provided the following responses,

"A hybrid working model for now, I believe has been a beneficial solution since it helps the employees gradually accept the changing organizational design instead of just hopping on the train quite suddenly"

"Investing in technology, initiating HR policies, introducing organizational programs and workshops that provide support to employees when assisting this work place change I believe has been the most crucial during this challenge. I mean it provided support in almost all aspects of work"

The responses emphasized over changing organizational policies in order to support the needs of the employees and to adopt change gradually instead of introducing sudden changes which has also helped the employees of Bank of Ireland to adopt this change. Moreover, the employees were already familiar with the concept of remote work since they had been investing in remote work since before the pandemic.

Foundation of Flexible Working Arrangement

As mentioned earlier, there are a number of challenges facing flexibility within the working space out of which organizational size and nature are also crucial since all working arrangements cannot be applied to almost all sizes and shapes of organizations. Hence, there are a number of factors that influence organizations decision regarding design flexible working arrangements within their industry. The following responses were gained from the participants on inquiring regarding the foundation of all flexible working,

"Each flexible working arrangement in my opinion is designed on the basis of the tasks being carried out or the nature of the organization itself. Each organization is bound to adopt such arrangements that optimize its operations"

The first participant emphasized over the fact that the nature of the organization plays an important role in creating a flexible working arrangement such as the hybrid working model opted by the Bank of Ireland.

"Employees are the core of the organization and considering the decision of the employees is important when designing a working arrangement as done in the banking sector as well"

Moreover, the Bank of Ireland also emphasized over including the feedback of the employees when deciding flexible working arrangements as well. The other participant also emphasized over prioritizing the decision of the employees when designing a flexible working arrangement for the organization.

On inquiring the reason behind their shift towards remote working in the bank, the following responses were gained,

"Before the pandemic, almost half of our office was gradually shifting towards remote work because there was not much work left that needed the safety of the office"

"I believe the pandemic accelerated this shift towards remote work since it helped encourage employees to do the same work, they do at the office from their households without wasting money and energy in commute, lunches etc. I believe this convenience is what further encouraged remote work"

"The entire world has shifted towards digital banking; it was about time that the working staff would have also adopted remote working options"

Since the Bank was already supporting some of its employees in the form of remote work before the pandemic, it was likely that after the boost provided by the pandemic towards remote work, the bank completely promoted the remote working model among its employees. Moreover, the main two contributing factors are saving costs and time over commute as well as the shift of the consumers towards digital banking that has reduced the need of physical interactions among the customers as well as the employees.

Since these reasons to shift towards a remote working model treaded upon the lines of benefits being provided by flexible working arrangements. The participants within the study were inquired regarding which benefits were associated with this shift towards flexible working arrangements within the bank, to which two of the respondents mentioned,

"A number of benefits are present; we have more work life balance, after I deliver my task, I take a break from work and look towards my family which has improved my mental well-being as well I believe, I am happier and less stressed out. I am also saving cost on a few areas and I also get a handful of sleep"

"It mainly empowers and motivates employees to reorient and carry out their tasks on their own accord"

Gaining an understanding through the responses, it was clear that the main aim of the Bank was to improve work life balance where time was saved on promoting further well-being of its employees having more time to spend on themselves, rather than spending their time over driving, during rush hours. Hence, having more time to themselves helped improve their wellbeing as well as work life balance. Moreover, it also helped them save cost over commute and other expenses such as buying lunches, hailing a ride etc. Meanwhile, the trust and empowerment granted to the employees by the bank also increased their motivation and commitment towards the company.

Changing Leadership Approach to meet Flexibility

When accommodating change within an organization it is also to adjust the leadership approach accordingly as well. It has become clearer through the response of one of the participants of the study which is as following,

"Each and every change whatsoever demands a leadership change"

"I believe I had to change my leadership role when approaching flexibility in the workspace since a lot of my subordinates or team members were not near physically and therefore, to access them virtually, and interact with them was quite different than the normal role that a leader would adopt yeah."

"As flexibility is the future of working, every other person needs to adopt a new approach towards leadership which is more flexible in nature to accommodate this change"

The leadership approach had to be changed since there were no physical presence anymore instead people were being interacted with, through virtual technology. Moreover, since flexible working arrangements demand flexibility, the leader also needs to be flexible towards all kinds of support that the employees might need, at any time of the day.

Moreover, further on inquiring whether any of the managers that were interviewed had to change their own leadership approach, many claimed that due to the nature of remote work, all of them had to practically change their approach towards their employees and members. The following responses were gained from two of the participants,

"My leadership change has naturally been towards trust and empowerment. I have started giving responsibilities to my team members to be carried out themselves, where they are their

own decision makers which I believe has assisted them in gradually making decisions for themselves, remotely. In other aspects, I believe it has also motivated them to a limit"

"*Dynamism is the key towards leadership in a remote setting, I had to be available and accessible by all my team members in order to assist them through this change despite being virtual*"

Hence, traits like trust, freedom, support, motivation and dynamism were adopted by leaders when supporting their colleagues through this change.

Furthermore, leadership has a profound effect over the organizational performance of various sectors when employing any kind of change within their processes or operations. A similar reaction was also observed within the banking sector in regards to flexible working arrangements and the influence of a leadership approach. One of the participants, realized this concept by stating,

"*As common as the theory that states leadership improves organizational performance, an effective leadership approach may assist and support employees through a huge change such as flexible working arrangements in a sector which was previously based on a face to face interaction with customers*"

The Banking Sector, is on the of the sectors that heavily relies over a physical interaction with their customers therefore, shifting from a physical to a virtual working space can cause resistance among employees which can be catered through adopting a more dynamic leadership approach. Moreover, another participant mentioned,

"*Leadership helps provide support to employees so that they can accommodate these changes within their lives*"

Almost all of the participants provided a united front when supporting the role of leadership in promoting or supporting the change towards flexible working arrangements within the Banking Industry or specifically the Bank of Ireland.

Out of all situations, there are a few situations where a specific leadership style may be adopted towards all. However, in the case of the banking sector, most of the managers claimed that each department should adopt their own specific leadership style based on their tasks. The following responses were gained from the participant on inquiring whether a specific leadership style is appropriate,

"I do not know whether all leadership styles or one leadership style may be adopted towards all employees but pertaining to the nature of the banking sector which is quite complex on its own, I think it is best that each department or each manager adopts a leadership style that helps them gain the maximum results"

"A leadership approach with this change needs to be more participative where feedback is gained from the employees on a regular basis to ascertain their individual weaknesses and challenges. Empathy and a shared goal are another trait of a remote team"

On the basis of the above provided responses, it becomes clear that a number of traits need to be acquired by employees in order to become a good leader during remote work. It becomes clear that during a hybrid working model as adopted by the Bank of Ireland, a number of leadership styles altogether can be used for the employees instead of choosing a specific leadership style. The participants also mentioned specific traits instead of mentioning specific leadership styles to aid the employees during flexible working arrangements.

Moreover, the stance was further made clear by the response of one of the participants as following,

"No, one leadership style can never fit all situations even all individuals. You need to find the most suitable style by yourself"

The stance emphasizes over each department recognizing a specific leadership style or skill that aids their collective goal instead of adopting a one for all strategy within the organization.

A few of the participants on the same question mentioned,

"I do not about a specific leadership style that can help accommodate employees but I believe the leadership approach where the manager provides a collective goal to the employees, working together towards it, supporting in each step of the process would be more fruitful. In fact, has actually been more beneficial."

"Keeping the needs of the employees above all has been the most important so the leadership style also needs to prioritize the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals, gradually supporting them towards a shared goal"

Hence, it is important to inspire employees and work collectively towards making things easier for employees to adjust to the change. Therefore, all leadership approaches should prioritize the needs of the employees.

There are a number of benefits of using an optimum leadership style during flexible working arrangements including working towards a shared collective goal while ensuring that the goal is unanimous among both the parties. Moreover, continuous support is provided to the employees through a consistent leadership approach as mentioned as following,

"As communicated previously, a leadership can help create a shared goal among all workers of the organization who then feel more united and motivated towards the cause, gradually accepting the workplace change"

"A significant change as flexible working arrangements, can cause resistance among employees. It is not common for them to just work at home having either limited to no facilities to work at home and this is where leadership comes in, providing all kinds of support, emotional, mental and physical because of which the person feels more empowered and capable"

However, the banking sector being complex requires a more complex leadership approach as mentioned by one of the participants,

"Leadership in the banking sector can be quite complex due to its nature, whereby one leadership style cannot fit all aspects of the working arrangement however, it is useful"

5. DISCUSSION

An in-depth data analysis provided significant insight regarding the influence of leadership over adopting flexible working arrangements within the banking sector, specifically, the Bank of Ireland. According to the interview analysis, majority of the managers working for the Bank of Ireland claimed in unison that leadership had a great influence over how their employees became accustomed to the idea of flexible working arrangements which was otherwise not possible in a short time. Therefore, change either way command a strong change within the leadership style utilized by managers of the domain as well. Managers have long previously been known to lead change among their employees. Managers have to create an inspiring and accommodating culture within the organization that informs employees regarding the changes that need to be brought about collectively. Through effective leadership skills it is ensured that the needs of the employees are also met (Maxwell et al., 2007). Vroman (2020) also supported the stance posed by the managers interviewed within the study that in order for employees to accept change within the organization it is important that managers adopt a supportive leadership style towards their needs. Moreover, the perception that employees hold regarding the supportiveness and facilitating nature of their managers also plays a crucial role when they need to adopt a change within their daily routine. Hence, the banking sector, as proved through existing literature and the current study, needs a prompt leadership change to ensure that flexible working arrangements are readily accepted by the employees.

There are a number of flexible working arrangements currently utilized by a large number of industries which include and are not limited to; "*part-time work, job sharing, flexitime, working from home, time off in lieu, teleworking, term-time working, staggered, annualised or compressed hours, shift swapping, self-rostering, breaks from work, and flexible and cafeteria benefits*" (Maxwell et al., 2007, p.139). Pertaining to the interview collected from the managers of the Bank of Ireland, it was ascertained that a hybrid working model is being followed at the bank. A hybrid working model allows employees to work both remotely as well as physically at the central office. Even managers of the Bank of Ireland, mentioned that to adopt flexible working arrangements within the company it was necessary to adopt a leadership change that accounts remote work. Employees were not physically available and therefore a more virtual leadership approach would be more useful to be adopted. Most of the managers also mentioned that they had to adopt a different leadership approach when they applied flexible working arrangements since remote work required assistance over virtual technology. A leadership

approach in the perspective of managers helped the employees through empowering them with more responsibilities, providing them with freedom to do more and motivate them to do even better on their tasks. Moreover, remote work demands dynamism because of which it is a necessity to adopt a different leadership approach.

There are a number of leadership styles that are known towards organization that are collectively adopted from time to time in order to cater their employees. The most common leadership styles include democratic, authoritative, transformative and participative. As per literature, transformative leadership style is one of the styles that is used to command or control change within the organization. Conversely, all leadership styles have been known to assist change (Al-Ali et al., 2017). In regards to the current sample, no specific leadership style was mentioned however the managers did mention particular traits attached to the leadership style such as empowerment, dynamic assistance and support that managers need to adopt and provide to their employees in order to help them adopt a flexible working routine within their daily tasks as well. Al-Ali et al. (2017) mentioned that leadership helps curtail resistance to change when applied within the organization, making employees ready to accept significant amount of change within their daily routine. The leader moreover is responsible themselves to introduce and facilitate the change within the organization (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014).

There is no concrete proof regarding flexible working arrangements having a significant influence over leadership styles. However, pertaining to existing literature and the sample interviewed, it has been found out that adopting a significant change as flexible working arrangements within the daily routine tasks of an employee also needs a subsequent change within the leadership approach to help facilitate this change.

6. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of the research study was to identify whether leadership styles have a significant influence over the adoption of flexible working arrangements within the banking sector. In response various sub questions were also derived in order to appropriately answer the main research question of the study. Through the responses of the sample, it was understood and concluded that all types of flexible working arrangements demand a leadership change since it requires more dynamic assistance and support due to the flexibility of the job. Managers working for the Bank of Ireland also felt the need to change their leadership approach to accommodate the changing needs of the employees working under them. Meanwhile, there is also not conclusive and single leadership style known to have a positive and significant influence over flexible working arrangements within the banking sector. It is essential to take into account various traits including that of empowerment, assistance, support, empathy etc. that need to be adopted by leaders to help employees adjust towards flexible working arrangements. In terms of significance of the association between flexible working arrangements and leadership style, it is quite essential that to adopt flexible working arrangements within the industry, a dynamic leadership approach should also be adopted. Hence, the relationship within the banking sector, specifically, the Bank of Ireland is also quite important as elaborated by the managers working for the Bank as well.

7. FUTURE RECOMMENDATION

The research study has various implications to both academic practice as well as the banking industry, in general. In terms of the academic practice, the study informs that no specific leadership style helps bring about a change within the corporate culture. It is essential for managers to adopt a number of traits in accordance with the need of the change to ensure that employees successfully implement change within the industry. It also helps inform that flexible working arrangement is a change that requires leadership change similar to other changes within the industry. Conversely, the present study has a certain limitation in terms of academic practice which is to ascertain the relationship within a larger sample and utilize quantitative methods to validate the theory identified within the current study.

On the other hand, it helps inform the banking industry that in order to go digital, adopting remote working conditions, it is important to adopt a leadership approach that helps accommodate this change. To further help this theory, future studies can also consider a variety of industries to ensure the generalization of the results.

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9. Appendix 1. Interview Guide

Sample – Among managers of Danske Bank, Bank of Ireland (total 15)

1. What is your role at the designated Bank? How long have you been working with the Bank?

2. How do you tend to manage change, if any, in your organizational processes?

3. What is your workspace layout and routine like? How has your organization designed jobs, working hours and work load?

4. Are there any forms of flexible working arrangements offered within the organization such as part time, flexitime, job sharing and remote work? If yes, under what conditions?

5. How would you differentiate a normal corporate organization from the banking industry?

6. Do you think there would be any change or challenges when adopting flexibility in the banking sector?

7. How would you counter these challenges or already have within the workspace?

8. How is each flexible working arrangement designed? Why are you opting to take this step and remodel the traditional office space? Are there any associated benefits?

9. In respect to flexibility at the workspace have you felt the need to change your leadership approach? If yes, why and how?

10. What role does leadership play in respect to Flexibility in Working Arrangements?

11. Do you believe that each working arrangement may require a different leadership approach? Or one can fit all?

12. Which leadership style do you adopt or believe to have the highest influence over the workspace in terms of flexibility among employees?

13. How does leadership help employees adapt to flexibility within the banking sector? Is it beneficial or limited to the corporate organizations?