

# Innovations

## Peripheral Work Arrangements and Labour Market Flexibility: Narrative of Managers

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**Abstract:** *This study sought to explore labour market flexibility attained by a case multinational firm in Zimbabwe, which utilize peripheral work arrangements. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from eleven research participants who had worked for the multinational firm in Zimbabwe for at least two years. The study found that the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe achieves labour market flexibility by utilizing peripheral work arrangements. A majority of the study's research participants indicated that the peripheral labour segment allows the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe to achieve numerical flexibility, wage flexibility and functional flexibility. Only a few research participants indicated that there are hidden costs that accompany labour market flexibility. These participants indicated that functional and numerical flexibility attained through utilizing peripheral work arrangements is offset by high training costs and labour turnover, respectively. Hence, as it is, the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe achieves the labour market flexibility that it desires by utilizing peripheral work arrangements. The current study recommends that the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe should be aware of the hidden costs that are linked to labour market flexibility. The study also recommends that managers at the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe should respect peripheral workers' rights to fair labour standards and device mechanisms to reduce costs, which are linked to labour market flexibility.*

**Keywords:** *functional flexibility, labour market flexibility, numerical flexibility, peripheral work arrangements, wage flexibility*

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### 1. Introduction

Organizations across many economies face an increasing threat of survival owing to economic globalization (Kazancoglu et al., 2024; Sikorskyi, 2024; Yaroshenko et al., 2024). Dejanović (2023) argues that the rise of economic globalization can be attributed to international trade, investment and finance, which have enhanced the

interconnectedness and interdependency of world economies. The current economic globalization has made it nearly impossible for organizations to function in rigid labour markets, characterized by traditional forms of work (Holland et al., 2024; Bista & Sawyer, 2023; Mallick, 2023). To meet the demands of economic globalization, companies are trying their level best to replace rigid labour markets with flexible ones (Sahnoun & Abdennadher, 2022; Eshun et al., 2023; Yaroshenko et al., 2024; O’Keeffe, 2024). Flexible labour markets are known to be one of the developments brought about by economic globalization, which allows organizations to cut labor costs and withstand global competition (Posner, 2021; Ikeije & Okpo, 2023; López-Tamayo et al., 2023). Konovalova et al. (2023) contend that many firms perceive labour market flexibility as an imposition that necessitates significant organizational restructuring and adoption of flexible forms of work. Peripheral work arrangements became one of the strategies that organizations use to respond to the demand of economic globalization to achieve labour market flexibility (Cowan et al., 2023; Twiname et al., 2021; Spreitzer et al., 2020). Liotti (2022) defines labour market flexibility as a shift from the job for life concept to flexible and non-standard work arrangements that meet the unique needs of organizations. Okpo (2023) posits that the rapidly rising labour costs and employment-related benefits associated with traditional kinds of work have forced firms to utilize flexible, disposable, and marginal workforces. Similarly, Kanovalova et al. (2023) claim that companies that manufacture intermediate goods utilize peripheral work arrangements in a bid to reduce labour costs and boost their global competitiveness. Additionally, Storey et al. (2022) argue that global corporations are also continually looking for new ways to attain labor market flexibility because of the frequent shifting of global market conditions. This phenomenon, as currently observed, is not restricted to developed countries, but is fast becoming a feature of labour markets in Zimbabwe (Mukwakwami, 2023). The Zimbabwean labour market is currently experiencing structural changes as a result global competitions, which force managers to fill permanent positions with non-standard workers in order to attain labour market flexibility and reduce employment costs (Hungwe, 2022, Mukwakwami, 2023). Therefore, it appears that the need to achieve labour market flexibility is promoting the growth of peripheral work arrangements, as seen in Zimbabwe. Most research on labour market flexibility has focused on organizations in developed nations, while less research has been conducted in developing nations like Zimbabwe. Hence, this study was conducted to ascertain if the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe would achieve the desired labour market flexibility by utilizing a peripheral workforce.

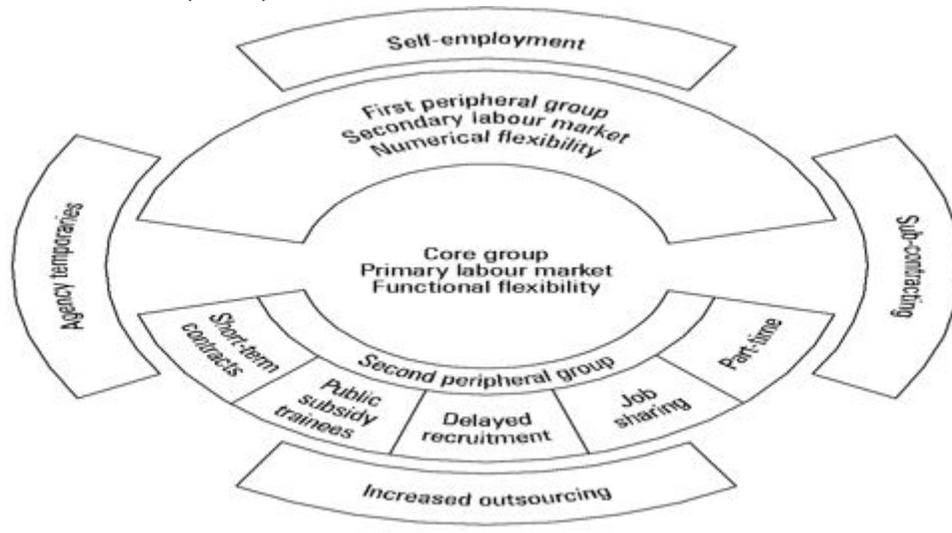
## 2. Literature Review

This section presents theories, which guided the study, as well as forms of labour market flexibility.

### 2.1. Atkinson's (1984) Flexible Firm Model

Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm model assists in segmenting and adjusting labour in response to environmental changes. The aforementioned means that the flexible firm model provides a situational framework to analyze and adjust to micro and macro environmental changes, especially those that relate to the product market (Zhao, 2020; Isidor et al., 2014). Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm model allows organizations to achieve labour market flexibility by utilizing different forms of work depending on the environmental conditions. The model, which segments workers into core and peripheral groupings, is shown in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: Atkinson's (1984) Flexible Firm Model**



Source: Atkinson's (1984)

Figure 1 above divides the workforce into core and peripheral labor segments. The model illustrates labour market flexibility that a firm attains by utilizing core and peripheral workers. Permanent workers who are well paid with vast work experience make up the core group. The core group provides the employer with functional flexibility, as shown by Figure 1 above. The peripheral labour category consists of people who conduct routine jobs and who are hired for short term periods of high operational demands (Atkinson, 1984). Employers adjust the number of working hours and work schedules of peripheral workers to obtain the right kind and quantity of workers for a particular period (Atkinson, 1984). The peripheral labour segment, as shown in Figure 1 above, allows the firm to enjoy numerical flexibility.

## **2.2. Labour Market Flexibility**

The influential work of Atkinson (1984) on flexibility gave rise to the notion of labour market flexibility. The concept of labor market flexibility is known to have multiple definitions and interpretations (Wickramasinghe et al., 2019; Addessi, 2014; Doellgast & Berg, 2018; Signoretti et al., 2022; Kizu et al., 2017). Similarly, Lind (2018) states that the definition of labour market flexibility varies according to who is defining it. Eamets et al. (2018) derived their definition of labour market flexibility from the equilibrium theory and linked it to the allocation of resources in a pareto-efficient way. Cazes and Nesporova (2019) define labour market flexibility as the extent to which the labour market adjusts working time and wages to economic changes. In brief, labor market flexibility measures how quickly the labor market adjusts to external shocks and how quickly it responds to shifting macroeconomic conditions (Addessi, 2014; Doellgast & Berg, 2018). Masso and Room (2018) assert that labour market flexibility can be achieved by adjusting employment schedules, work location, wages and hours of work.

## **2.3. Forms of Labour Market Flexibility**

Labour market flexibility allows organizations to respond to environment changes (Pfeifer, 2019). It is crucial to remember that a business can attain labour market flexibility by utilizing different forms of work. Some of the forms of labour market flexibility that organizations attain and, which utilize peripheral forms of work, are presented below.

### **2.3.1. External Numerical Flexibility**

The ability of a business to adjust the number of employees that it employs in response to changes in demand is referred to as external numerical flexibility (Wickramasinghe et al., 2019; Addessi, 2014). Similarly, Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso (2018) define external numerical flexibility as the capacity of employers to modify staffing levels in accordance with the needs of the business. In other words, numerical flexibility is the ease of recruiting and firing workers, which reflects itself in the mobility of workers between firms (Doellgast & Berg, 2018). Companies that utilize peripheral work arrangements, namely casual workers, part-time workers and subcontractors, attain external numerical flexibility (Signoretti et al., 2022; Kizu et al., 2017). Furthermore, Bücken and Peters (2019) state that external numerical flexibility can be attained by hiring dependent contractors and on call workers. Doellgast and Berg (2018) contend that external numerical flexibility makes it possible for firms to maintain a small core labour segment. As a result of the aforementioned, hiring peripheral workers during busy times and firing them during lean times is more affordable and simpler for businesses than hiring permanent employees (Doellgast & Berg, 2018). Furthermore, Wickramasinghe et

al. (2019) advances that a peripheral workforce is less costly and easier to dismiss than permanent employees. Conversely, Kizu et al. (2017) claim that firms that enjoy external numerical flexibility are likely to experience high labour turnover.

**2.3.2. Internal Numerical Flexibility**

The ability of employers to alter the quantity and distribution of working hours without affecting the total number of employees is known as internal numerical flexibility (Tirrel et al., 2021; Cañibano, 2019). Similarly, internal numerical flexibility is defined by Winnen (2021) as the employer's ability to change the total number of hours worked. Internal numerical flexibility, in short, is the capacity to modify the amount and time of work without hiring more workers (Tirrel et al., 2021). Internal numerical flexibility, sometimes referred to as working time flexibility or temporal flexibility, is reached by modifying the schedules or working hours of the company's employees (Úbeda-García et al., 2017). Additionally, Kaufmann and Winnen (2021) indicate that internal numerical flexibility is obtained by altering weekly hours, vacations and holidays. According to Zaragoza-Sáez (2017), internal numerical flexibility gives the employer the freedom to adjust shift work, overtime hours, and flexi time. Marco-Lajara and Zaragoza-Sáez (2017) posit that internal numerical flexibility is intended to lessen the requirement for companies to pay over time to cope with spikes in demand. Table 1 below summarizes the characteristics of internal and external numerical flexibility.

**Table 1: Decomposition of Characteristics of Numerical Flexibility**

<b>Type of Numerical Flexibility</b>	<b>Characteristics and intended use</b>
External numerical flexibility	Changing the number of workers in response to demand changes Ease of hiring and dismissing workers Use of peripheral contracts(casual workers, part-time workers & fixed time workers)
Internal numerical flexibility	Working time or temporal flexibility Adjusting working hours Adjusting workers' working schedules Adjusting weekly hours, overtime, shifts, leave and holidays

Source: Researchers' compilation, 2024

### **2.3.3. Functional Flexibility**

The ability of an employer to transfer workers across tasks or departments, or to alter the content of their job, is referred to as functional flexibility (Davidescu et al., 2020; Franco & Landini, 2022). Comparably, Yasir et al. (2023) define functional flexibility as the degree to which workers can be reassigned to various roles and responsibilities within the company. Functional flexibility, according to Azizi and Liang (2017), helps a business to maximize labor utilization by distributing employees among various jobs in response to variations in demand. The above definitions mean that functional flexibility enables the company to use generic job titles and broad job descriptions (Aziz & Liang., 2017). Casuneanu (2020) divides functional flexibility into internal and external flexibility. Internal functional flexibility refers to a company's capacity to enhance operating efficiency by altering job content in response to changes in technology (Sekhar et al., 2018). Conversely, external functional flexibility refers to a company's capacity to externalize or diversify its production by using subcontracting and vertical integration strategies (Nassani & Haffar., 2023). Yasir et al. (2023) state that multitasking, outsourcing, and multi-skilling are some of the means that firms use to achieve functional flexibility. In addition, Kalleberg et al. (2016) argue that an organization can reach functional flexibility by engaging peripheral workers to manage specialized, short-term and specific needs not available within the firm. Torka and Van Velzen (2017) claim that functional flexibility increases peripheral workers' employability. Franco and Landini (2022) state that a firm that seeks to attain functional flexibility should train its workforce to equip them with the required skills to respond rapidly to market fluctuations. It is also critical to consider that there are expenses that firms incur when they seek functional flexibility. Apostu and Paul (2020) postulate that high training and retraining expenses are correlated with functional flexibility. Similarly, Patwardhan and Vyas (2018) aver that if an organization provides extensive training and equip their employees with a variety of skills, and then there is a risk that some employees may leave for better jobs.

### **2.3.4. Wage Flexibility**

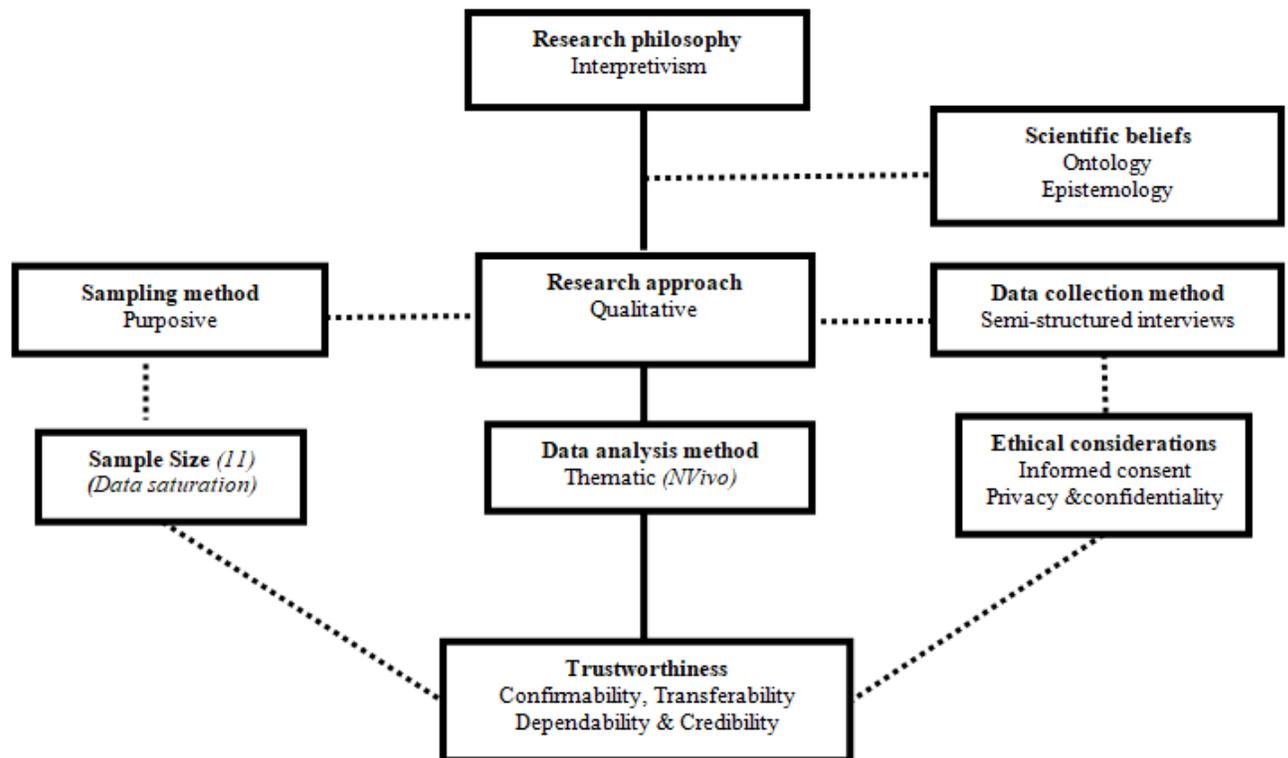
Wage flexibility is the ability of the firm to adjust pay in response to shifting labour market conditions (Reljic et al., 2023; George & Chattopadhyay, 2015). Similarly, Eichhorst and Marx (2015) describe wage flexibility as the ability to modify real wages to eliminate imbalances between supply and demand for labour. Wage flexibility, in short, is the unrestricted ability to change the price of labour. Reilly (2018) mentions that wage flexibility enable businesses to adjust incentives and wages in response to market changes. Lorquet et al. (2018) posit that wage or financial flexibility is realized when there is a significant wage disparity amongst employees and the price of labour is not collectively decided. Spoonley (2019)

asserts that the weakening of sectoral wage bargaining systems in favor of firm-level wage settlements indicates the trend towards reaching wage flexibility. Reljic et al. (2023) contend that wage flexibility can be achieved by utilizing the piece rate system, gain sharing, incentive pay plans, and pay cuts.

### 3. Research Methodology

Research methodology, according to Henekom (2016), is a process that describes how a study is conducted. In a similar vein, Saunders et al. (2013) assert that research design and methodology incorporates the steps that a study should take. The researchers' guiding principles, methodology, design, sampling method, data collection instrument and data analysis method, are displayed below in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Outline of the Study's Research Methodology**



Source: Researchers' compilation, 2024

The research philosophy that the researchers used to explore labour market flexibility achieved by the case organization, which utilizes peripheral work arrangements, is depicted in Figure 2 above. The study's underlying scientific beliefs are also displayed in Figure 2 above. To complement the interpretivist research paradigm that this study used, the researchers opted for a qualitative

research approach. The study also utilized a qualitative research approach because it allows the researchers to obtain comprehensive insights into the subject matter. The sampling technique, sample size, and data collection instrument that the researchers used are also shown in Figure 2 above. With the aid of NVivo qualitative software, the researchers used the thematic data analysis technique to analyze the study's collected data. Measures of trustworthiness that the researchers used are shown in Figure 2 above.

**3.1. Demographic Data of the Research Participants**

The research respondents who participated in the study were identified by the letters 'LMF'. The research participants' demographic data is shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Demographic Data of the Research Participants**

No.	Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Work Experience	Qualification	Interview Length
1	LMF1	F	27	3years	Bachelor's degree	8minutes
2	LMF2	M	31	5years	Bachelor's degree	10minutes
3	LMF3	M	33	6years	Master's degree	9minutes
4	LMF4	M	37	8years	Bachelor's degree	11minutes
5	LMF5	F	43	10years	Master's degree	10minutes
6	LMF6	F	28	2years	Bachelor's degree	11minutes
7	LMF7	M	40	6years	Master's degree	9minutes
8	LMF8	M	39	4years	Bachelor's degree	10minutes
9	LMF9	M	35	3years	Master's degree	8minutes
10	LMF10	M	34	4years	Master's degree	14minutes
11	LMF11	F	37	5years	Bachelor's degree	15minutes

Source: Authors' fieldwork

#### 4. Findings

The study sought to explore labour market flexibility that the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe achieved whilst utilizing peripheral workers. The researchers classified the study's findings into themes and sub-themes, as shown by Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Emerging Themes and Sub-themes**

Themes	Sub-themes
Internal numerical flexibility	Ability to adjust working hours Ease of changing work schedules Free to adjust timing of work
External numerical flexibility	Ease of hiring and dismissing workers Ability to increase or decrease the number of workers Free to adjust labour intake
Wage flexibility	Ability to alter wages in response to environmental changes Freedom to adjust wages Allows the firm to change wages
Functional flexibility	Allows a small workforce to deal with a greater variety of tasks Ability to move workers from one task to another Freedom to change the content of employee's work

Source: Authors' fieldwork

#### 4.1. Data Frequency and Response Rate

The data frequency and response rate are shown in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Data Frequency and Response Rate**

Theme	Frequency (N=11)	
	Attained	Forfeited
External numerical flexibility	7	2
Internal numerical flexibility	9	-
Wage flexibility	8	-
Functional flexibility	6	3

Source: Authors' fieldwork

Table 4 above shows the labour market flexibility that the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe realized, using a peripheral workforce. Themes that emerged from the study and participants' transcript are presented below.

**4.2. Theme 1: External Numerical Flexibility**

External numerical flexibility was popular with seven of the eleven research participants. These participants indicated that the peripheral workforce allows the case organization to adjust the number of workers to the organization's needs. Table 5 below shows research participants' quotes in this regard.

**Table 5: Participants' Quotes on External Numerical Flexibility**

Pseudonym	Quotes
LMF2	<i>'Yes, we achieve the external flexibility we desire as an organization. Remember, peripheral workforce allows the organization to freely adjust the number of workers depending on its needs'.</i>
LMF3	<i>'Peripheral workforce make hiring and firing of employees easier compared to full-time workers'.</i>
LMF4	<i>'Yes, peripheral work arrangements give the firm the flexibility to alter the quantity of labour needed by the firm'.</i>
LMF5	<i>'The organization achieves external numerical flexibility by utilizing peripheral workforce'.</i>
LMF7	<i>'The firm achieves labour market flexibility, which allows the organization to increase or decrease the number of peripheral workers they need, depending on the needs of the firm'.</i>
LMF8	<i>'You attain numerical flexibility by utilizing peripheral workforce'.</i>
LMF11	<i>'Peripheral workforce allows the organization to reduce the number of workers when demand of our products decreases and vice versa'.</i>

Source: Authors' fieldwork

Other research participants indicated that the case organization does not enjoy external numerical flexibility by utilizing peripheral workers; rather, they experience a high labour turnover of peripheral workers. Hence, LMF1 said:

*"My brother, I don't think the organization enjoys external numerical flexibility it desires because of high labour turnover of peripheral workers".*

Similarly, LMF6 submitted:

*"You cannot talk of enjoying external numerical flexibility by utilizing peripheral workforce on one hand and on the other hand you are faced with high labour turnover of the same workers. My two cents reasoning will conclude that the case organization is not enjoying external numerical flexibility by utilizing peripheral workforce".*

### 4.3. Theme 2: Internal Numerical Flexibility

Nine of the eleven research participants indicated that utilizing a peripheral workforce enabled the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe to attain internal numerical flexibility. The above sentiments mean that peripheral work arrangements allow the case organization to adjust its existing peripheral workers' working hours and work schedules. Their related responses are presented below.

- *'Peripheral work arrangements give the organization freedom to adjust working hours of workers depending on the demand of our products' (LMF1).*
- *'The employer is able to change working schedules of peripheral workers depending on the needs of the firm as compared to permanent workers' (LMF2).*
- *'Peripheral workforce allows the organization to achieve working time flexibility' (LMF3).*
- *'Yes, the organization derives temporal flexibility from peripheral workforce' (LMF5).*
- *'Peripheral or non-standard workers allows the organization to alter the number of working hours without changing the number of employees' (LMF6).*
- *'Employers achieve labour market flexibility they desire because peripheral workforce allows them to adjust the timing of work' (LMF8).*
- *'Once you utilize contingent or peripheral workers, you a(re) guaranteed of enjoying working time flexibility' (LMF9).*
- *'You can easily adjust number of hours each atypical worker can work, depending on the needs of the firm' (LMF10).*
- *'Peripheral workers allow the organization to adjust number of hours to be worked' (LMF11).*

### 4.4. Theme 3: Wage Flexibility

Apart from internal and external numerical flexibility, some research participants indicated that the case organization achieves wage flexibility by utilizing peripheral workers. In this regard, LMF2stated:

*'Peripheral workers allow the organization to change wages, depending on the changes in the market'.*

Similarly, LMF3mentioned:

*'Peripheral workers make it possible to adjust real wages to eliminate imbalances between supply and demand'.*

In addition, LMF4 said:

*'Peripheral work arrangements give the organization the freedom to increase or decrease wages of peripheral workers when need arises'.*

LMF5 concurred, saying:

*'Utilizing peripheral workers means that you enjoy wage flexibility'.*

This trend continued amongst LMF6, LMF7, LMF9 and LMF11. It is noteworthy that LMF11 claimed:

*'Peripheral workers allow the organization to do wage cuts, when necessary.'*

#### **4.5. Theme 4: Functional Flexibility**

The study's findings show that six of the eleven research participants indicated that peripheral workforce allows the case organization to achieve functional flexibility. Their related quotes are presented below.

*"An organization can easily move peripheral workers from one task to another" (LMF1).*

*"Yaa, they achieve functional flexibility by utilizing peripheral workers" (LMF4).*

*"The benefit of using peripheral workers is functional flexibility" (LMF6).*

*'Peripheral workers are easy to move from one department to the other" (LMF7).*

*"It's easy to change the content of peripheral worker's work" (LMF8).*

*"Peripheral forms of work allow the organization to make variations to the content of peripheral workers" (LMF10).*

Contrarily, some research participants reported that it is difficult for a firm, which utilizes peripheral work arrangements, to achieve functional flexibility because of high training and retraining costs. In this regard, LMF3 stated:

*"I don't think the company achieves functional flexibility because they don't even train peripheral workers, citing high costs of training".*

Similarly, LMF9 said:

*"Functional flexibility comes with high training and retraining costs and from my experience with peripheral workers is that once you train them, they leave the organization".*

LMF11 concurred with the above views and stated:

*"I do not think the organization achieves functional flexibility."*

### **5. Discussion of the Study's Findings**

The themes that emerged from the study are discussed below.

#### **5.1. External Numerical Flexibility**

External numerical flexibility emerged from the study as labour market flexibility that the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe achieved, using a peripheral workforce. In this regard, research participants indicated that peripheral work arrangements allow the case organization to adjust its number of workers to the organization's needs. Presented below are some of the participants' responses in this regard.

*'Yes, we achieve the external numerical flexibility we desire as an organization. Remember, peripheral workforce allows the organization to freely adjust the number of workers, depending on its needs' (LMF2).*

*'External numerical flexibility allows the organization to increase or decrease the number of workers they need, depending on the needs of the firm' (LMF7).*

*'Peripheral workforce allows the organization to reduce the number of workers when demand of our products decreases and vice versa' (LMF11).*

The study's findings are consistent with Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm model, which the study used. The flexible firm model provides that attainment of numerical flexibility correlates with the presence of a peripheral workforce. In addition, Atkinson (1984) argues that peripheral workers allow employers to adjust the number of employees that it employs in response to changes in demand. Gramano (2019) supports the above viewpoints, positing that using peripheral workers allow employers to modify staffing levels according to the needs of the business. Likewise, Kizu et al. (2017) state that companies that use peripheral contracts, namely casual workers, part-time workers, and subcontractors, reach external numerical flexibility.

Conversely, a few research participants indicated that the case organization does not enjoy external numerical flexibility by utilizing peripheral workers. In this regard, LMF1 stated:

*"My brother, I don't think the organization enjoys external numerical flexibility it desires because of high labour turnover of peripheral workers".*

Kizu et al. (2017) support the above, claiming that a firm that enjoys external numerical flexibility is likely to experience high labour turnover. In a similar vein, Wickramasinghe et al. (2019) mention that the higher the numerical flexibility, the higher the labour turnover of non-standard workers.

## **5.2. Internal Numerical Flexibility**

Nine of the eleven research participants indicated that the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe attained internal numerical flexibility by utilizing peripheral workers. LMF1 reported: *'Peripheral contracts give the organization freedom to adjust working hours of workers, depending on the demand of our products'*. Similarly, LMF2 said: *"The employer is able to change working schedules of peripheral workers, depending on the needs of the firm as compared to permanent workers'*. Additionally, LMF3 argued that: *'Peripheral workforce allows the organization to enjoy working time flexibility'*.

Tirrel et al. (2021), who contend that a peripheral workforce allows businesses to adjust the number and distribution of working hours without affecting the number of required employees, support the study's findings. Ubeda-Garcia (2017) concurs, asserting that peripheral workers permit the firm to alter the work schedules and

working hours of employees that the company hires. Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm model also supports the study's findings. According to Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm model, firms can alter employees' work schedules and working hours to ensure that they receive the exact number of hours that they need at any given time. This is made possible by utilizing a peripheral workforce (Atkinson, 1984).

### 5.3. Wage Flexibility

The third theme that emerged from the study is wage flexibility. The research participants indicated that the case organization achieved wage flexibility by using a peripheral workforce. In this regard, LMF2 said:

*'Peripheral workers allow the organization to change wages, depending on the changes in the markets'*

Similarly, LMF3 mentioned:

*'Peripheral workers make it possible to adjust real wages to eliminate imbalances between supply and demand'*,

In addition, LMF4 stated:

*'Peripheral forms of work give the organization the freedom to increase or decrease wages of peripheral workers when need arises'*.

The wage differential theory complements the study's findings. The wage differential theory provides that a peripheral workforce allows an organization to adjust wages in response to shifting labor market conditions. Reilly (2018) shares the same sentiments and states that non-standard forms of work allow an organization to adjust incentives and wages in response to market changes.

### 5.4. Functional Flexibility

Six of the eleven research participants indicated that the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe achieved functional flexibility by utilizing peripheral workers. LMF4 remarked: "Yaa, they achieve functional flexibility by utilizing peripheral workers". LMF7 agreed and said: *'Peripheral workers are easy to move from one department to the other'*.

The research participants' responses are supported by Kalleberg et al. (2016), who state that organizations enjoy functional flexibility by utilizing peripheral workers who are hired to manage specialized, short-term and specific needs that are otherwise not available in the firm. Franco and Landini (2022) concur and posit that functional flexibility that is realized through utilizing peripheral work arrangements allows the employer to transfer workers across tasks or departments or to alter the content of their job. In addition, Azizi and Liang (2017) contend that a peripheral workforce helps a firm to maximize labor utilization by assigning non-standard workers various jobs in response to variations in demand. Contrarily, the study's findings contradict the assumptions of Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm model. Hence,

Atkinson (1984) avers that an organisation that utilizes a core labour segment, reaches functional flexibility. A core labour segment, according to Atkinson (1984), comprises workers who are employed on a full-time basis, have career prospects, and pay systems that are designed to reward skills acquisition.

Conversely, some research participants indicated that functional flexibility includes high training costs. In this regard, LMF3 stated:

*“I don’t think the company enjoys functional flexibility because they don’t even train peripheral workers, citing costs of training”.*

Similarly, LMF9 said:

*“Functional flexibility comes with high training costs and from my experience with non-standard workers is that once you train them, they leave the organization”.*

The above responses from LMF3 and LMF9 are similar to the views of Franco and Landini (2022), who claim that a firm that wants functional flexibility should train its workforce so that they are equipped with the required skills to respond promptly to market fluctuations. Similar sentiments are derived from Atkinson’s (1984) flexible firm model, which provides that functional flexibility is achieved by organizations that use a core labour segment. In addition, Apostu and Paul (2020) posit that high functional flexibility, which occurs by using a peripheral labour segment, is offset by high training and retraining expenses.

## **6. Contribution of the Study**

The human resources management discipline has benefited conceptually, methodologically, and practically from this study. Extant literature and studies on peripheral workforces and labour market flexibility have been conducted in the global north. Hence, from the perspective of the global south, the current study is unique and has contributed distinctively to theory, as well as new themes and concepts on peripheral work and labour market flexibility. From a methodological standpoint, it seems that quantitative research methods have been used in most of the studies on labour market flexibility. This study's qualitative research approach makes methodological contributions by providing an in-depth exploration of labour market flexibility that organizations that utilize peripheral work arrangements achieved. Practically, this study offers fresh data on peripheral workforces and labour market flexibility, which can be used by workers, managers and policymakers. This study is useful for human resource professionals because they become aware of forms of labour market flexibility that organizations reach, whilst utilizing a peripheral workforce. This study is also useful for potential workers as it would help them to choose the right organization, allowing them to meet their desired work flexibility and career goals. Researchers in the subject area should also conduct similar and longitudinal research in Zimbabwe with other organizations that were not included in this study.

## **7. Limitations**

It is crucial to note that a small sample size of eleven research participants were used for this study, making it challenging to extrapolate the study's findings to other organizations. Had a bigger sample size been used, the study's findings might have been different. The fact that this study was limited to a single multinational firm in Zimbabwe makes it difficult to generalize the findings. It is also important to remember that the researchers' qualitative study methodology had certain restrictions. The aforementioned restrictions might have been reduced by using a mixed research method. Future researchers should consider a comparative study of two or more multinational firms in Zimbabwe. It is suggested that a study like this should also be conducted in Zimbabwe's informal sector, where a noticeable number of the workers are in the peripheral segment of the internal labour market.

## **8. Conclusion**

The study's findings show that the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe achieves labour market flexibility by utilizing a peripheral labour segment. Most of the research participants indicated that its peripheral labour segment allowed the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe to attain numerical flexibility, wage flexibility, and functional flexibility. Only a few research participants indicated that there are hidden costs that accompany labour market flexibility. These participants indicated that functional and numerical flexibility, attained by using a peripheral workforce, is offset by high training costs and labour turnover, respectively. Hence, as it is, the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe attains the labour market flexibility that it desires by utilizing a peripheral labour segment. The current study recommends that the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe should be aware of the hidden costs that accompany labour market flexibility. The study also recommends that managers at the case multinational firm in Zimbabwe should respect peripheral workers' rights to fair labour standards and devise mechanisms to reduce costs, which occur with labour market flexibility.

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## **Author's Contributions**

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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## **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

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