

**Blended Working and Organizational
Attractiveness: What Is the Role of Openness
to Experience?**

Faye Huang

s4004507

Department of Psychology, University of

Groningen

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Supervisor: dr. Burkhard Wörtler

Second evaluator: dr. Miguel Garcia Pimenta

In collaboration with: Katharina Hiller, Gabriella Diaz,
Jessica Heiland, Priscilla Wolf, Awika Brough

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Abstract

Blended working arrangements (BWAs) offer workers to have flexibility in when and where they work. Not everyone is expected to thrive in such an environment as it includes working in virtual teams, it is not appealing to everyone. To deepen our understanding of the relationship between BWAs and organizational attractiveness and whether Openness to Experience moderates this relationship, we conducted an experimental vignette study among Psychology students. In this study we used a repeated measures design ($N = 196$) in which we distinguished and manipulated BWAs and traditional working arrangements with regard to organizational attractiveness. We then measured individual differences in the trait Openness to Experience. The findings revealed that BWAs enhance organizational attractiveness. Openness to Experience was not found to have a moderating effect in the association between BWAs and organizational attractiveness. This research presents evidence that BWAs add to organizational attractiveness. This could in turn aid organizations with a more successful recruitment process.

Blended Working and Organizational Attractiveness: What Is the Role of Openness to Experience?

Ever since the rise of technology, there have been novel ways to work due to the evolving equipment that has become readily available. Blended working has arisen as an option. It entails that the employee has the flexibility to decide when and where they would like to complete their work. (Van Yperen et al., 2016). This means that the employee can, for example, finish their work in a café or library, at any chosen time they wish. A large portion of blended working involves working from a remote location. The general aim of blended working for organizations includes improving organizational performance and expenses. For workers it can save time and provide more autonomy over their work (Van Yperen and Wörtler, 2017). This presents beneficial opportunities for both the organizations and the workers. The goal of this research is to investigate the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness.

Organizational attractiveness is based on the attitudinal thoughts of job seekers towards a particular company. It is defined as the general degree to which an individual desires to work for an organization. Research by Williams (2013) states that organizational attractiveness has an important role in successful recruitment. They also found that increasing organizational attractiveness would in turn increase success in the recruiting process. An applicant's attraction towards a company was positively related to having intentions in pursuing a job and also actually applying for a job (Highhouse et al., 2003), therefore it is of relevance to further investigate organizational attractiveness, especially in this time with rising staff shortages (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

While some aspects of a blended working arrangement (BWA) were found to have a positive relation with organizational attractiveness, other aspects were found to be insignificant in predicting organizational attractiveness. For example, the results of Kröll et al.

(2021) found that working remotely, as a part of BWAs, is only limited in its effect on organizational appeal. It indicates that the job seekers are aware of the drawbacks that come with telecommuting, when comparing it to traditional work arrangements. Thus, BWAs in comparison with traditional working arrangements are unlikely to be found appealing by every job seeker. In a recent review chapter by Beauregard et al. (2019), it was shown that certain personality traits were associated with more success in BWAs than others. The same review also revealed that BWAs would be most suitable for people that favour those flexible arrangements. This could be a reason why some people are more attracted to BWAs than others. This current research is conducted to further explore the effect that blended working has on organizational attractiveness, and how the Openness to Experience trait might affect this relationship.

Blended Working and Organizational Attractiveness

A BWA has benefits that could make an organization more attractive (Van Yperen and Wörtler, 2017). Some facets like flexible work schedules have a positive effect on organizational attractiveness (Kröll et al. 2021; Thompson et al., 2015). It was also found in the study of Thompson et al. (2015) that participants were most attracted to organizations that provide both flexibility in location and flexibility in time, than either one of the two.

When looking for a job, job seekers are considering what it would be like to work for a certain company. According to the Job Demands-Recourses (JD-R) model, high job demands are related to more stress, and high job recourses are related to more motivation (Shaufeli & Taris, 2013). Based on this model, applicants are expected to be more attracted to organizations that offer more recourses than organizations that offer less recourses, because job resources help to deal with job demands. For example, in a blended working context, the flexibility in time and location could be seen as an anticipated resource to the job seekers, which would make an organization that offers such arrangements more attractive. Next to this,

autonomy is also seen as a job resource that makes BWAs attractive. (Thompson et al., 2015; Van Yperen, 2016). The flexibility that comes with blended working, could allow the workers to experience more freedom. This also allows the worker to be able to take care of responsibilities outside of work, more flexibly (Wörtler et al., 2020). For these reasons, it is expected that BWAs will positively affect organizational attractiveness. Therefore, the first hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Blended working arrangements have a positive effect on organizational attractiveness.

Aside from the benefits in a BWA, there are also downsides. Some of the downsides are discussed by Kröll et al. (2021) and Van Yperen and Wörtler (2017), namely that working remotely reduces face-to-face communication with co-workers, workers in a BWA might feel obligated to respond to colleagues, even when they are not working and they may experience blurred boundaries between home and work. The results of Kröll et al. (2021) indicate that applicants may also be aware of the drawbacks of a BWA, which in turn shows that some BWA characteristics are not attractive to everyone. Beauregard's et al. (2019) review mentions that a BWA is most suitable for workers that prefer flexible arrangements. The differences in preference could be explained by the person-environment fit theory (Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017).

Moderating Effect of Openness to Experience

According to person-environment fit theory, people have an inherent need to fit their environments and look for environments that match their personality. A person that perceives the work environment as an environment that 'fits' them, automatically feels more attracted to that work environment. Fit theory is based on three basic principles. Firstly, it proposes that fit is a better predictor of individual outcomes than either the person or the environment. Secondly, it claims that when personal characteristics and environmental characteristics are

compatible, the outcomes are most optimal. Lastly, when there is incompatibility between personal characteristics and environmental characteristics (misfit), it reduces the positive outcomes (Van Vianen, 2018). There are many different fit theories, but these basic principles are entailed in all of them.

The Big Five model distinguishes five personality traits. One of them is Openness to Experience. Those scoring high on the Openness scale are often seen as imaginative, creative, flexible, curious, independent and receptive to new ideas (Highhouse et al., 2001; Lowman, 2022). A BWA is known for offering flexible working arrangements and being non-conforming. It would also be an environment in which an individual would gain more autonomy. Individuals that are high in Openness would fit well in such an environment, as they are autonomous, flexible and also prefer non-conforming environments. Furthermore, research done by Judge and Cable (1997) shows that people who are high in Openness to Experience are less attracted to team-oriented cultures that limit individual autonomy and detailed-oriented cultures in which they are expected to adhere to rules and procedures. This could mean that according to person-environment fit, individuals that are high in Openness might be more likely to seek out an arrangement such as a BWA. To support this, it was also found that individuals that score high in Openness to Experience perceive remote work to be more attractive in prospect than individuals that do not score high on this trait (Anderson et al., 2014; Gainey & Clenney, 2004). Another study has revealed that individuals who are high in Openness to Experience are the only ones to prefer virtual teams compared to scoring high on other traits (Luse et al., 2013). When looking at the relationship between a BWA and organizational attractiveness, it is expected to be influenced by the trait Openness to Experience for the reasons above. Therefore the second hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Openness to Experience influences the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness.

Method

Participants and Design

The original sample consisted of 219 participants, however, two quality checks were used to ensure that the experiment was successful. Thus, the data of 23 participants were omitted either due to insufficient detail in their responses or due to them not completing the entire study. This resulted in the final sample of 196 participants. The sample consisted of first-year psychology students from both the international and Dutch tracks at the University of Groningen. The sample was largely female ($n = 154$), followed by males ($n = 40$), and lastly non-binary ($n = 2$). On average, participants were between the ages of 17 and 35 ($M = 19.74$, $SD = 2.165$) and were mainly native Dutch speakers ($n = 104$), native German speakers ($n = 30$), or had other native languages ($n = 62$). For the purpose of the study, participants were asked about their previous work experience; indicating that they either currently have a job ($n = 82$), have had a job in the past ($n = 80$), or have never had a job ($n = 34$). All participants completed a voluntary questionnaire in English and were compensated with course credit upon completion. An experimental survey study using a one-factorial (blended working arrangements: present vs. absent) within-subjects design was conducted.

Procedure

The study was conducted via an online SONA system where participants completed a questionnaire; their responses were recorded via Qualtrics, a web-based data collection tool. Participants gave their consent prior to completing the questionnaire. Subsequently, they were administered a scale measuring Openness to Experience followed by providing socio-demographic information specifically about their gender, age, living situation, occupation and native language, and lastly were administered an experimental manipulation of blended working arrangements. Following this manipulation, organizational attractiveness was measured.

Materials

The Next Big Five Inventory (BFI-2)

The second version of the Big-5 Personality Trait Inventory (BFI-2; Soto & John, 2017) was used to measure Openness to Experience. The subscale that measures Openness to Experience consists of 12 items. All items were measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The item scores were averaged after recoding reversed items. A higher score indicates a more pronounced Openness to Experience. Our study results report good reliability for Openness to Experience, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.77 ($\alpha = 0.77$).

Blended Working Arrangements

Blended working arrangements (present vs. absent) were manipulated using the vignette methodology. A vignette is a brief and carefully constructed description of a hypothetical situation (Anguinis & Bradley, 2014). First, the participants were instructed to imagine a situation in which they are searching for a job in their field of interest after having left university in a post-pandemic era. Consistent with the one-factorial within-subject experimental design, the participants were administered two vignettes, each of which described a hypothetical organization: one that offered a blended working arrangement and one that did not.

Blended working arrangements were described as one where employees worked on a flexible schedule in which they can choose when and from where they worked, whilst achieving contact with co-workers and employers mostly through online platforms. Absent blended working arrangements were described as conventional working arrangements. Specifically, the organization was described as one where employees work in an office on a fixed schedule from Monday to Friday, beginning at 9 am and ending at 5 pm. In addition to the working arrangement, both organizations included information about the employee's

salary and the benefits they receive when working at the respective organization. These were the same for both hypothetical organizations. The wording was kept as similar as possible to each other and the vignettes were shown to the participant in a randomized order. See Appendix for the complete vignettes.

Following each vignette, participants completed a measure of organizational attractiveness. At the end of the procedure, they were also asked to fill out attention-check questions regarding the manipulation, which analysed their perception of the vignettes, specifically whether they identified any differences between the organizations. The specific questions were “Did the organizations differ on whether the employees could decide where they could work?” and “Did the organizations differ on whether the employees could decide when they work?”.

Organizational Attractiveness

The organizational attractiveness questionnaire (Highhouse et al., 2003) was used to measure the perceived attractiveness of an organization. All items were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. To make the scale applicable to our research, the items were adapted to replace the word “company” with the word “organization” whilst maintaining the questions as similar as possible to the original scale. For example, “A job at this organization is very appealing to me” and “This organization is attractive to me as a place for employment”. We found a Cronbach’s alpha estimate of $\alpha = 0.93$ for these items, thus indicating good reliability (Bland & Altman, 1997). The alpha was computed for both organizational descriptions. It can be concluded that the organizational attractiveness scale has good internal consistency in our study.

Results

Statistical Analysis

A repeated measures analysis of covariance (RM-ANCOVA) was carried out using the statistical software SPSS. This research aims to conduct a moderating analysis of Hypothesis 1. The moderating variable was analysed as a covariate. To do this the mean of the moderating variable was centered before running the analysis. Next to this, the mean of organizational attractiveness and the working arrangement were calculated. After taking these steps, an RM-ANCOVA was carried out.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are depicted in Table 1. The data reveals the standard deviation and mean of the dependent, independent and moderator variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Dependent, Independent and Moderator variables

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Openness to Experience	196	3.82	.45
Organizational attractiveness TW		3.10	.94
Organizational attractiveness BW		3.93	.80

Note: Range Likert Scale: 1-5, TW = traditional working, BW = blended working

Assumptions

There was no independence of observations because an RM-ANCOVA was used. The sample was randomly selected from a pool of psychology students. To test whether the data is normally distributed, a Q-Q plot was carried out, using residuals. The detrended normal Q-Q plot showed some deviations from normal, ranging from -0.3 to 0.1, these are not extreme deviations so the assumption holds. To test linearity between the moderator and the outcome variable a residual plot was done. The plots show that linearity holds. Mauchly's test of sphericity was not applicable to this study since there was only one set of different scores and nothing to compare them to.

Main analysis

Hypothesis 1

The relationship between working arrangements (IV) and organizational attractiveness (DV) was investigated using an RM-ANCOVA. The RM-ANCOVA showed that there was a significant difference between the levels of the working arrangements with regard to organizational attractiveness $F(1,194) = 88.1, p < 0,001$ with $\alpha = 0.05$ when excluding Openness to Experience. Thus, supporting the claim of our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2

The moderator effect of Openness to Experience (M) regarding the association between blended working (IV) and organizational attractiveness (DV) was tested using the same method. The interaction effect between Openness to Experience and Organizational Attractiveness in respect to the two levels of working arrangements was found to be insignificant, so there is no moderation effect $F(1,194) = 1.53, p = 0.22$ with $\alpha = 0.05$.

Discussion

In this research we studied the influence of BWAs on organizational attractiveness. Next to this we also examined whether the trait Openness to Experience affects this relationship. The results that were obtained in this research show that there is evidence to support Hypothesis 1, the main effect, namely that BWAs have a significant positive effect on organizational attractiveness. This means that offering BWAs will positively influence the organization's appeal, these findings are in line with current literature (Kröll et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2014; Wörtler et al., 2020; van Yperen & Wörtler., 2017). Our results replicate the main effect those studies have found, namely that BWAs significantly positively affect organizational attractiveness. It is of importance that our study has replicated the same results found by existing research, because a single significant result can not be accepted as valid (Schmidt, 2017). Our results for the main effect add confidence in the reliability of

existing research. Increasing organizational attractiveness will increase success in the recruiting process (Williams, 2013). Future studies could attempt to distinguish the different components of what makes BWAs more attractive to optimize the recruiting process.

Our results reported insignificant results for the moderation effect of Openness to Experience with regards to blended working and organizational attractiveness. This means that in our study, scoring high on the Openness to Experience trait, did not influence the attractiveness of an organization when offering BWAs compared to traditional working arrangements. It is interesting to have found insignificant results, as previous studies have found significant results for this effect (Anderson et al., 2014; Luse et al., 2013). A reason for our insignificant results could be due to our specific participant pool. Our participants consist mostly of first year students, that do not have experience in working with BWAs. Whereas Anderson et al. (2014) used a participant pool that consisted of employees that have previously had experience with working remotely. Without the experience, it is more difficult to grasp the idea of what it is like working with BWAs, while also being aware of the benefits and drawbacks. The difference might have been crucial for the results. For future research it could be useful to have a more diverse participant pool. It would be most useful to use a participant pool in which the participants already have experience with BWAs.

Another explanation for our insignificant results could be that some participants may have a more negative association with virtual teams. During the COVID-19 pandemic all students were forced to follow their education online, without the freedom to choose whether to follow it at home or in real life. Being forced to learn online had a negative impact on a lot of students. It even left students with poorer mental health (Di Malta et al., 2022). Some participants in our sample may have a negative attitude towards virtual teams because of this. Instead of perceiving it as an opportunity to gain more freedom and autonomy, they may view it as a restriction. Depending on how each individual has experienced the pandemic, it may

have shifted attitudes towards virtual teams, regardless of personality traits. Both Anderson et al. (2014) and Luse et al. (2013) carried out their studies before the pandemic. Perhaps attitudes towards virtual teams have changed for students in such a way after the pandemic that it has affected the results of our study. For future studies it would be recommended that the notions of a BWA are perceived clearly by the participants. Another recommendation is to further investigate the attitudes towards remote working before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Organizations in the Netherlands are continuing to struggle with staff shortages (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022). They may need to find ways to increase organizational attractiveness in order to have more success in the recruitment process (Williams, 2013) in order to deal with these shortages. Our findings add to this knowledge in a major way, as it shows that BWAs add to organizational attractiveness, when compared to traditional working arrangements. Organizations can implement these findings by starting to offer BWAs as a way to attract more future employees.

Remote working has been a growing trend for a while now (Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016), but especially since the COVID-19 pandemic it has gotten increasingly more attention (Mark et al., 2022). This is something organizations and employees must adapt to. Our findings are relevant in the way that it shows that BWAs are perceived as more attractive than traditional working arrangements in general, not taken into account individual differences. Possibly, it is time to shift the focus away from individual differences and start more research on how organizations can integrate BWAs for everyone, regardless of personality. That is because organizations are forced to conform to the increasing trend of remote work. Future studies are recommended to examine how to assimilate BWAs to everyone.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of our study is the use of an experimental vignette study. Having used this method, it allowed us to carry our study out in a controlled manner. In a real-life scenario it would not have been possible to isolate for the confounding factors that tend to be present in such a study, whereas in our experimental study we were able to control for those factors. Another strength of the current research is the use of a within-subjects design. This design allowed for us to efficiently reveal differences within an individual in the two conditions that were present, namely one with BWAs and another with traditional working arrangements. Such a study is less susceptible to errors because variation between individuals is eliminated.

Inevitably, our results also have their limitations. A downside to our experimental design is that it is harder to extend to real-world situations, which makes it less generalizable. The vignettes only create a hypothetical situation on paper, which is different from a real-life situation in which someone would be actually seeking for a job. To try and counter this, we also informed the participants about salary and a benefits package, which are important facets when job seeking. By doing this, we give the participants relevant context that they would also encounter in a real-life situation. The consequence of this is that we allow the participants to make a more realistic observation and determine whether they would be attracted to the organizations that were mentioned in the vignettes (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Having said this, it can not be guaranteed that our findings are generalizable to real-life settings. Another way to counter this, would be to create a real-life simulation of the job-seeking process, like Kröll et al. (2021) have done, so that realism is improved.

Another limitation of the vignette methodology is that it shows outcomes that could possibly take place, but do not undoubtedly take place besides the experimental setting (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Meaning that behaviour and attitudes are not always aligned. Therefore, we can not predict the participant's behaviour with our findings, we can simply make statements about the participant's attitudes towards organizations offering BWAs

during our experiment. These attitudes are good predictors of behaviour, but will not say anything about actual behaviour (Highhouse et al., 2003). Finding an organization attractive, does not necessarily mean that an individual will pursue to apply to work at such an organization, so in that way our results are limited. It'd be interesting to examine the attitudes towards an organization that offers BWAs, after employees have started working there. A longitudinal study design would be relevant to carry this out.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study substantiates previous findings that BWAs increase organizational appeal. Our findings could offer organizations a way to increase their organizational appeal and in turn improve the recruitment process. It may be necessary to move the focus away from the effect of individual differences in the BWAs domain, because an increasing amount of organizations must conform to the rising trend of BWAs. Research that could be enriching to the BWA domain can be more focused on how organizations can best implement BWAs for everyone, regardless of personality traits. A BWA is a broad term to describe many kinds of time- and location independent working arrangements, and therefore it can be altered, depending on each person's needs. Research on how to do this most effectively could be of great importance to organizational practice, as acceptance of BWAs become progressively more common.

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Appendix

Vignettes

Organization DCE	Organization JIK
<p>Salary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A competitive salary is offered, with opportunities for bonuses based on performance <p>Benefits package:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A work phone and a laptop are provided for work and private use • 30 vacation days per year <p>Work arrangement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees can choose when they do their work provided that they get it done, and they may, at any time, determine their work location, for example work from home, in a café, or in the office • This work arrangement implies that meetings, collaborations, and general contact with coworkers and supervisors will frequently be achieved through information and communication technology/ online platforms 	<p>Salary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A competitive salary is offered, with opportunities for bonuses based on performance <p>Benefits package:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A work phone and a laptop are provided for work and private use • 30 vacation days per year <p>Work arrangement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees work a fixed / regular schedule from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and they are required to work at their office in the organization • This work arrangement implies that meetings, collaborations, and general contact with coworkers and supervisors will usually be in person at the organization's site

