

**The Moderation Effect of Conscientiousness on the Relationship Between Blended  
Working Arrangements and Organizational Attractiveness**

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Group 05

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**Abstract**

The implementation of blended working arrangements within companies has increased in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and despite the finalization of the pandemic these arrangements persist. This study investigates the relationship between blended working arrangements and organizational attractiveness as well as the moderating role of the personality trait conscientiousness on this relationship. 196 participants were administered a questionnaire regarding organizational attractiveness in relation to traditional and blended working arrangements, as well as conscientiousness in a one factor (blended working: present vs absent) within-subjects experimental design. Results were analyzed through a repeated-measures analysis of covariance (RM-ANCOVA). As hypothesized, blended working was found to be positively associated with organizational attractiveness, replicating the results of previous research on this relationship. Additionally, the moderation effect of conscientiousness was found to be significant on this relationship; however, contrary to our hypothesis it was found that low levels of conscientiousness were associated with higher organizational attractiveness for blended working arrangements. The present study's findings have theoretical and practical implications in the field of personnel psychology; a key implication for recruitment contexts is that individuals lower in conscientiousness will find an organization more attractive when blended working is offered. Additionally, future research may consider expanding knowledge on the effects of different personality traits on blended working arrangements and organizational attractiveness.

*Keywords:* blended working, organizational attractiveness, conscientiousness

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### **The Moderation Effect of Conscientiousness on the Relationship Between Blended Working Arrangements and Organizational Attractiveness**

The process of selecting and applying to work in an organization is heavily susceptible to one's perception of how attractive the organization is (Highhouse et al., 1999). Traditional recruitment strategies tend to focus on instrumental and organizational attributes, such as salary and location, as the main determinants of one's attraction to an organization (Schreurs et al., 2009). However, nowadays organizations recognize that individuals are attracted to employment opportunities that offer resources that help to fulfill both non-work and work-related demands (Thompson et al., 2015); flexible work arrangements, such as blended working, are ideal as they enable work-life balance.

In recent years, the implementation of flexible work arrangements has been crescent within organizations, specifically due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in many organizations having to forcibly transition from traditional working arrangements into flexible work arrangements (Kniffin et al., 2020). Research has found that flexible work arrangements significantly increase organizational attractiveness (Kröll et al., 2018). Thus, the transition from traditional to flexible work arrangements may have positive outcomes on organizations.

Additionally, there is growing awareness that symbolic attributes, specifically subjectively attractive attributes of an organization influenced by one's personality, is also a determinant of organizational attractiveness (Schreurs et al., 2009). This paper will investigate the relationship between a specific type of flexible work arrangement, namely blended working, and organizational attractiveness. Precisely, the main focus of this research is the moderating role of the personality trait conscientiousness on this relationship. This research will contribute to the field of personnel psychology as it will bring further knowledge into how blended working arrangements impact prospect employees' levels of

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attraction to an organization, as well as how the level of their conscientiousness trait moderates this effect. Investigating this relationship is important as when applied to an organizational setting this knowledge can be used to facilitate positive outcomes for both employers and employees. Specifically, this knowledge can enhance how organizations design work arrangements for their employees along with how organizations approach recruitment strategies. Additionally, it's advantageous for organizations to be perceived as attractive, as this aids in recruiting and retaining talented employees (Wörtler et al., 2020).

### **Blended Working**

Blended working is a form of flexible working arrangement which differs from traditional working arrangements in two areas: time and location. Blended working, as defined by Van Yperen et al. (2014), refers to “time-independent and location-independent working made possible through high tech information and communication technologies (ICTs) software, devices and infrastructure” (p. 1). Blended working aims to optimize desired organizational outcomes, such as employee motivation and productivity, and decrease unfavorable outcomes, such as absenteeism and time loss (Van Yperen et al., 2014). Previous research has highlighted that flexible work arrangements lead to better job performance and attitudes as this arrangement enables workers to improve productivity and efficiency (Beauregard et al., 2019). Arguably one of the main advantages of this arrangement is that since it gives employees control over work boundaries, they are better able to cope with stressors and decrease work-life conflicts (Thompson et al., 2015; Arquisola et al., 2022). However, research by Arquisola et al. (2022) found that there are disadvantages associated with this arrangement namely; lack of engagement and coordination amongst employees, increased workload and lack of supervision and performance monitoring.

### **Blended Working and Organizational Attractiveness**

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Organizational attractiveness is defined as the desirability and degree in which a future employee views an organization as a place they would like to be employed at, this is reflected in individuals' thoughts about the organization (Williams, 2013; Highhouse et al., 2003). Early impressions of an organization have been shown to influence a future employees' view of an organization as attractive (Highhouse et al., 2003). This implies that instrumental job characteristics, such as blended working arrangements, are major factors of organizational attractiveness as this is one of the primary attributes that prospect employees judge an organization on.

Blended working arrangements indicate to employees that the organization is considerate by giving them control and greater opportunities of fulfilling work and non-work demands (Thompson et al., 2015). The signaling theory proposes that prospect employees observe readily available information about the organization as signals of characteristics that are not observable (Thompson et al., 2015). Thus, we can theorize that blended working arrangements signal to prospect employees the power and ability to meet daily life demands and responsibilities, which in turn increases attraction to the organization.

The conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) combined with the resources and demands model (Voyandoff, 2005) gives further insight into why organizational attractiveness may increase as a consequence of blended working arrangements. Resources can be defined as anything valued by an individual that assists in goal achievement (Thompson et al., 2015); here blended working is viewed as a resource. According to the conservation of resources theory, individuals strive to maintain resources; the loss of such resources is a threat because, as proposed by the resources and demand model, if individuals believe that environmental demands exceed their resources, their well-being becomes threatened (Hobloff, 1989; Voyandoff, 2005).

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When combining the three aforementioned models we can theorize that for prospect employees, blended working arrangements indicate the ability to meet work and non-work demands, which would facilitate their daily lives. For this reason blended working can be viewed as a valuable resource that would make an organization more attractive. Finally, a 2017 Timewise survey found that 92% of millennials prioritize choosing jobs that offer flexibility (Arquisola et al., 2022). Accordingly, we hypothesize that blended working is positively associated with organizational attractiveness.

*H1.* Blended working is positively associated with organizational attractiveness.

In addition, organizational attractiveness is also dependent on trait inferences. Studies have found that prospect employees are more attracted to organizations that have similar traits to their personalities (Highhouse et al., 2003). This study will consider how the trait of conscientiousness, an individual difference variable, moderates the association between blended working arrangements and organization attractiveness.

### **Conscientiousness**

Personality can be defined as patterns of behavior, such as attitudes and characteristics, that are persistent across a variety of situations and are constant over an individual's lifetime (Behling, 1998). The Big Five personality framework was developed on the basis of research capturing the principal aspects of personality in five dimensions (Behling, 1998); it captures the most variance in personality, has proven to be robust, and is identified using different instruments and across different cultures (Schreurs et al., 2009), making it a widely accepted framework that will be applied to this research.

Conscientiousness, a trait distinguished in the big five personality framework, refers to a personality type described by characteristics such as being careful, organized, hardworking, achievement-oriented, persevering, responsible, self-disciplined, and thorough (Barrick and Mount., 1991; Behling, 1998). An implication of conscientiousness in the workplace would

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be that individuals high in conscientiousness are goal and accomplishment focused, as well as organized and responsible with their work obligations.

Previous studies have shown that the effect of organization characteristics, such as the size of an organization and salary, on organizational attractiveness perceptions is moderated by personality (Schreurs et al., 2009). Furthermore, research investigating flextime and telecommuting, two aspects of blended working, found that the people high in openness to experience found these arrangements more attractive (Gainey & Clenney, 2006), further emphasizing that the appeal of blended working arrangements varies amongst employees depending on their characteristics (Wörtler et al., 2020).

The person-environment fit theory (P-E fit theory) allows us to gain further insight into why individual differences impact whether people prefer blended working arrangements; it is based on the principle that individuals and work environments are compatible with one another when their characteristics match (Van Vianen., 2019; Wörtler et al., 2020). The fit between a person and their environment is a stronger predictor of individual outcomes than the person or environment individually, suggesting that individual outcomes are most favorable when personal attributes and environmental attributes are compatible (Van Vianen., 2019). Derived as a sub-theory of the P-E fit theory is the person-organization fit theory (P-O fit), which encompasses the idea of fit as “a match between the characteristics of individual personality and organizational climate” (Kristof, 1996, p 6). One aspect of personality is that it is construed in terms of individual needs, thus a high P-O fit would require the organizational environment to be compatible with an individual's needs (Kristof, 1996).

There is indication that people high in conscientiousness would have a high fit to blended working environments as the characteristics of blended working are compatible with those high in conscientiousness. An example of this compatibility can be illustrated through characteristics associated with conscientiousness such as being accomplishment focused and

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self-disciplined; blended working offers independence and superior opportunities for accomplishing both work and life demands. Hence, through the application of the fit theory to blended working arrangements we can theorize that employees high in conscientiousness would be compatible with blended working arrangements as they would have a high fit to this environment, which in turn would increase organizational attractiveness. For this reason, we will also investigate the moderating effect of conscientiousness on the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness.

*H2.* Conscientiousness will have a positive moderating effect on the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness, specifically high levels of conscientiousness will increase organizational attractiveness when a blended working arrangement is offered.

## Method

### Participants and Design

The original sample consisted of 219 participants with two quality control checks to ensure that the experiment was successful. The data of 23 participants were omitted either due to insufficient responses being deemed unusable for the study or due to incompleteness of the study. This resulted in the final sample of 196 participants. The sample consisted of first-year psychology students from 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 where an experimental survey study using a



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one-factorial (blended working arrangements: present vs. absent) within-subjects design was conducted and were compensated with course credit upon completion.

### **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 conscientiousness, followed by providing socio-demographic information specifically about their gender, age, living situation, occupation and native language. Lastly, they 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 Conscientiousness. The subscale measuring conscientiousness comprises 12 items and 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 recording reversed items. A higher score on the Likert scale indicates more pronounced conscientiousness. Our study results report good reliability for conscientiousness, with a Cronbach's alpha value of  $\alpha = 0.86$ . (Bland & Altman, 1997).

#### ***Blended Working Arrangements***

Blended working arrangements (present vs. absent) were manipulated using the vignette methodology: 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

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following the pandemic. Consistent with the one-factorial (blended working arrangements: present vs. absent) 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, through which contact with coworkers and employers was achieved via 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 would receive when working at the respective organization. The information and wording were 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 analyzed 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?". Additionally, self-evaluation questions were asked which analyzed the participants' honest evaluation of their own participation in the study. The questions included "I sometimes randomly selected a response option in this study" and "I was honest in all my responses".

### *Organizational Attractiveness*

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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”. The study results indicate good reliability (Bland & Altman, 1997) in measuring the individual perceived organizational attractiveness for both organizational descriptions. The Cronbach’s alpha reports  $\alpha = 0.928$  for traditional work and  $\alpha = 0.927$  for blended work. It can be concluded that the organizational attractiveness scale has good internal consistency in our study.

## Results

Table 1. highlights the descriptive statistics of the variables used in this research.

**Table 1.**

*Descriptive statistics of all study variables*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Traditional working and organizational attractiveness		3.09	.93
Blended working and organizational attractiveness		3.93	.80
Conscientiousness		3.40	.60
Valid N (listwise)	196		

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A repeated measures analysis of covariance (RM-ANCOVA) was carried out in SPSS, a statistical analysis software program, investigating both the main effect and the moderation effect hypothesized. The moderating variable conscientiousness was centered and analyzed as a covariate in order to interpret the effect of working arrangements whilst controlling for variability in conscientiousness.

The descriptive statistics (see Table 1) highlight that the mean of organizational attractiveness in a blended working context is higher than the mean of organizational attractiveness in a traditional working context.

Prior to hypothesis testing the assumptions required for an RM-ANCOVA analysis namely; normality and linearity between the dependent variable and the covariate at all levels of the independent variable were checked. The sphericity assumption does not apply to this repeated measures analysis as it only has two levels, thus unequal pairwise variance is not possible. The normality assumption was visually checked with a Q-Q plot which displayed slight deviations from normality, nonetheless RM-ANCOVA is robust to violations of normality. Finally, the linearity assumption was visually checked with scatter plots, which highlighted a linear relationship between conscientiousness and organizational attractiveness in both levels of working arrangements.

### **Hypothesis Testing**

Concerning hypothesis one, which investigated the positive relationship between blended working arrangements and organizational attractiveness, results highlight a significant main effect ( $F(1, 194) = 89.77, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = 0.32$ ). Accordingly, we fail to reject hypothesis one.

Hypothesis two investigated the moderating effect of conscientiousness on the relationship between blended working arrangements and organizational attractiveness. Specifically, it was hypothesized that Conscientiousness will have a positive moderating

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effect on the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness, where high levels of conscientiousness will increase organizational attractiveness when a blended working arrangement is offered. The results highlight a significant moderation effect ( $F(1, 194) = 5.22, p = .023, \eta_p^2 = .026$ ).

In order to explore the direction of the moderation effect, an analysis of simple slopes using the MEMORE (mediation and moderation for repeated measures) (Montoya, 2018), a tool developed for SPSS, was performed. The results of the MEMORE highlight a significant model ( $F(1, 194) = 5.21, p = .023$ ).

Table 2. illustrates the results of MEMORE analysis.

**Table 2.**

*Conditional effect of working arrangements on organizational attractiveness at values of conscientiousness*

Conscientiousness	Effect	SE	t	p
-.60	1.04	.13	8.31	.00
.00	.84	.09	9.48	.00
.60	.63	.13	5.07	.00

*Note.* This table illustrates simple slopes conducted at different levels of conscientiousness.

The values of conscientiousness refer to; one standard deviation below the mean, mean level, and one standard deviation above the mean.

The series of simple regression slopes of organizational attractiveness on both traditional and blended working arrangements at different levels of conscientiousness assisted in further investigating the direction of the moderating effect (see Table 2). The results show that for low levels of conscientiousness the simple slope effect was greater than for high levels of conscientiousness highlighting a weakening moderation effect of conscientiousness

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on organizational attractiveness in both working arrangement conditions. Thus, people high in conscientiousness found organizations less attractive when a blended working arrangement was offered in comparison with people lower in conscientiousness, hence we reject hypothesis two.

### Discussion

In the present study we investigated the relationship between working arrangements, namely blended working relative to traditional working, on organizational attractiveness. Additionally, we investigated the moderation effect of conscientiousness on this relationship.

The study found significant results corroborative to hypothesis one, supporting a positive association between blended working arrangements and organizational attractiveness. These findings are consistent with previous research by Wörtler et al. (2020), which found that blended working arrangements enhance organizational attractiveness. Additionally, this relationship is further supported by Thompson et al. (2015) which concluded that organizations offering flexible work arrangements were more attractive to applicants.

Hypothesis two, investigating the moderation effect of conscientiousness, predicted that high levels of conscientiousness would increase organizational attractiveness when a blended working arrangement was offered. Despite the significant findings for this moderation effect, through the MEMORE analysis we were able to identify that the direction of the moderation effect was not consistent with hypothesis two. The results of this study present a weakening moderating effect of conscientiousness, such that people with lower levels of conscientiousness found organizations more attractive than people with higher levels of conscientiousness when a blended working arrangement was offered.

Despite no previous research investigating the moderating role of conscientiousness in this relationship, results were not coherent to what was theorized using the person-

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environment fit theory and person-organization fit theory. Perhaps disadvantages of blended working arrangements have greater impacts on people high in conscientiousness, consequently decreasing their fit to a blended working environment, which was not extensively considered in this research.

### **Implications and Limitations**

The findings of this study contribute to the field of personnel psychology as they augment knowledge of the effects of blended working on organizational attractiveness and bring novel insight on the influence of conscientiousness.

A broad implication of this study is that employees high in conscientiousness would not be suitable for blended working arrangements, thus organizations should not impose blended working arrangements on all employees. Furthermore, as suggested by Beauregard et al. “Attitudes toward telework are unlikely to be positive if telework has been imposed on rather than chosen by employees, and negative attitudes are more likely to produce negative outcomes” (p. 40). Thus, imposing blended working arrangements on employees high in conscientiousness may provoke negative organizational outcomes.

A second implication of this study is that organizations should consider individual employee characteristics, such as personality traits, when designing and developing work arrangements. As highlighted by Beauregard et al. (2019), previous research has linked personality traits to the success of non-traditional work arrangements, suggesting that personality traits also influence attraction to such work arrangement. Furthermore, the application of accounting for employees personality in an organizational context may lead to improved employee well-being and working conditions.

Finally, the results of this research highlight that conscientiousness moderates organizational attractiveness when blended working arrangements are offered. This implies that personality traits impact individuals’ perceptions of organizational attractiveness. This

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knowledge can be applied to optimize recruitment strategies within organizations. To achieve organizational success it is important to attract high-performing and competent applicants during recruitment (Chapman et al., 2005). Thus, organizations may consider modifying the information presented in recruitment publications to attract employees with the specific traits the organization anticipates.

However, this study had multiple limitations which should be taken into consideration when interpreting these results. Specifically, most of the limitations have stemmed from the sample of participants used to conduct this research. The sample of participants is comprised of first-year psychology students from the University of Groningen, weakening the external validity as the sample is limited and not representative of the population. Furthermore, this study focuses on working arrangements and how they influence the attractiveness of an organization, of the sampled participants only 41.8% had a job at the time of participation. This further limits the external validity of results obtained as the sample has limited work experience. Consequently, participants may have found blended working arrangements attractive without fully grasping all components that come along with this arrangement, fabricating a biased perception of attractiveness. Additionally, the sample's age ranged from 19 years to 35 years, which is not representative of the working population which further limits the application of results to the working population in an organizational context.

### **Future Research**

For future research, it would be valuable to further investigate the moderating effect of conscientiousness on the relationship between blended working arrangements and organizational attractiveness, notably because there are no studies investigating this moderation effect. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for future research to be conducted on a sample of participants with work experience and representative of the working population as this would increase the external validity of the findings. Future research should consider



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accounting for the effects of different personality traits on this relationship, enhancing knowledge of the effects of individual characteristics on blended working arrangements.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the present study provides evidence for the positive relationship between blended working arrangements and organizational attractiveness, corroborating findings of previous research. Furthermore, this study expands the knowledge and understanding of this relationship as it provides evidence for the moderating effect of conscientiousness, contributing to literature in the field of personnel psychology.

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**Appendix****Working Arrangement Vignettes**

## Organization DCE

## Salary:

- A competitive salary is offered, with opportunities for bonuses based on performance

## Benefits package:

- A work phone and a laptop are provided for work and private use
- 30 vacation days per year

## Work arrangement:

- 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

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements below, with regard to organization DCE.

## Organization JIK

## Salary:

- A competitive salary is offered, with opportunities for bonuses based on performance

## BLENDED WORKING

### Benefits package:

- A work phone and a laptop are provided for work and private use
- 30 vacation days per year

### Work arrangement:

- 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

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements below, with regard to organization JIK.