

**Investigating if the Need for Relatedness Moderates the Relationship Between Blended
Working and Organizational Attractiveness**

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Abstract

Working arrangements have shifted massively over the past few years, encouraging research to examine the effect of blended working on organizations as well as on employees. The present study investigates the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness, whilst simultaneously taking into account the need for relatedness. 196 participants filled out a survey consisting of reporting responses on a likert-type scale. The study was conducted using a within-subject experimental design, having one factor with two levels which corresponded to either blended working being present or not present. A main as well as a moderation effect were investigated in order to draw conclusions that aim to further strengthen the relationship between employer and employee and enhance the overall quality of an organization. The results replicated the finding from previous research indicating a positive relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness, thus portraying a significant main effect. The moderating effect of the need for relatedness on the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness was found to be insignificant. Further research should be focused on other individual differences to aim for more understanding in the field of organizational psychology and blended working arrangements.

Key words: blended working, organizational attractiveness, need for relatedness, individual differences, work environment

Investigating if the Need for Relatedness moderates the Relationship between Blended Working and Organizational Attractiveness

The corona crisis resulted in many individuals having to face drastic changes in their work environments, which caused individuals to adapt their workplace by setting up a workspace at home as far as their job allowed it. These circumstances further introduced the idea of working at any time and at any location, which helped organizations to keep their employees working. This time- and location-independent approach is aimed to enhance the work-life balance, which is becoming more relevant nowadays (Lautsch & Kassek, 2011).

Blended working gives employees the freedom to choose the location they prefer to work at as well as the timeframe they want to work in (Van Yperen & Wörtler., 2017). The modern workplace has therefore established itself in a way that may become more satisfying for organizations and its employees. Organizations consider introducing such work arrangements as a form of freedom they can provide employees with, in order to enhance trust which contributes to an increase in productivity and motivation among employees (Van Yperen et al., 2014).

As follows, it is of high importance to consider which factors are essential for an employee to perceive an organization as appealing. Organizational attractiveness involves the increasing urge an employee has to work or remain working at a specific organization depending on how attractive their offers are perceived to be (Highhouse et al., 2003). Organizational attractiveness is crucial for both the organization as well as employees since it decides whether the outcome and quality of the organizations' functions will be sufficient and satisfying for everyone included (Highhouse et al., 2003). Looking out for employees and fulfilling their individual needs could therefore consequently contribute to a more beneficial working environment. Many organizations aim to offer different work styles such as blended working in order to prevent high turnover rates (Van Yperen et al., 2014). Thus, they might

aim to give employees the independence as well as put trust in them to fulfill their duties or tasks at work.

Earlier research introduced the person-environment fit theory, stating that one seeks work arrangements that fulfill individual needs (Van Vianen, 2018). Therefore, it should be taken into consideration what employees as well as organizations are seeking in order to provoke qualitative outcomes for both parties. Individual differences, such as the need for relatedness, could alter the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness, thus making it useful to investigate. Further investigating this could potentially enhance the quality of a work environment for both the organization as well as the employees themselves. The specific focus on the moderating effect of the need for relatedness might allow us to understand how individuals prefer organizations based on their offers and how they approach organizations that take individual needs into account.

This study aims to examine blended working and its direct relationship with organizational attractiveness, whilst accounting for the potential moderating effect of the need for relatedness.

Blended Working and Organizational Attractiveness

Being able to work from any location at any time, known as blended working, enables employees to set a focus on their individual work-life balance. The ability to choose the time and location of their work allows employees that might experience difficulties balancing work and personal life, such as having children, being older or suffering from any kind of physical disability, to avoid stress factors that would influence their job performance (Van Yperen & Wörtler., 2017). Offering such work methods results in higher job satisfaction among employees (Lautsch & Kassek, 2011); it is seen as an opportunity for organizations to work against an increase of turnover, which would prevent the likelihood of an overall enhancement of performance (Beauregard et al., 2019). Although blended working does not

necessarily work for every individual, an organization is capable of achieving its benefits if blended working is implemented successfully (Van Yperen et al., 2014). Therefore, when considering blended working, many benefits and positive outcomes are expected when applying it. One of which is organizational attractiveness.

The effect of blended working on organizational attractiveness enables the identification of how offering an independent workstyle can affect an organization in regards to being more attractive for potential employees. Organizational attractiveness indicates how likely an individual desires to be employed at a certain organization depending on its offers (Highhouse et al., 2003); it is assumed that organizational attractiveness can easily be influenced by the form of recruitment or other organization-related factors. Research has shown that organizations who offer independent workstyles, such as blended working, are noticeably more attractive for employees (Wörtler et al., 2021). As an organization it is of importance to provide the employee with feelings of trust when offering flexible work arrangements, with previous studies indicating organizations that provide their employees with visible trust are considered more attractive than others (Thompson et al., 2015).

Based on the research discussed above, a positive main effect of blended working on organizational attractiveness is hypothesized.

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness is positive, thus a significant main effect is expected.

Moderating Effect of the Need for Relatedness

In order to provide an employee with a soothing work environment that can enhance overall satisfaction as well as motivation, organizations not only have to offer flexibility or independence, but need to take into account that many individuals may prefer environments in which they feel safe and understood. The person-environment fit theory by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) assumes that people seek jobs that fulfill their personal values and needs. This theory proposes a strong foundation for individuals to have a higher tendency to reach satisfaction in their job when it matches their

qualifications and the fulfillment of personal needs (Van Vianen, 2018). As such, this study further proposes that the success of blended working could be potentially altered by individual differences, such as the need for relatedness. Individual differences are important to consider, since nowadays people demand that jobs not only be well-paid, but that the organization also cares about the employees themselves (Kröll et al., 2018). Therefore, it can be assumed that individuals will find organizations more appealing when they provide a comforting working environment for individuals.

Additionally, the self-determination theory states that individuals have three fundamental needs necessary for well-being and social development; the need for autonomy, the need for competence and the need for relatedness. Although individuals rely on all three of these needs, the intensity at which they rely on each of them may differ (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For this reason we can imply that organizations that aim to fulfill fundamental needs may be perceived as more attractive than others. According to Van den Broeck et al. (2010), need for relatedness is fulfilled when one feels connected to others; it is expected that individuals scoring higher on the need for relatedness will find organizations that offer blended working less attractive due to a potential feeling of disconnection when working off-site.

Earlier research by Van Yperen et al. (2014), has also argued that blended working does not necessarily solve alterations at work for every individual and it is known that an organization itself has to implement blended working in a successful way in order to achieve its benefits. An individual who scores higher on need for relatedness tends to prefer not working under blended working arrangements as they perceive it as ineffective, providing evidence to how it may weaken the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness (Van Yperen et al., 2014). It is expected that organizational attractiveness will decrease for individuals with high scores in need for relatedness.

Therefore, the following study hypothesizes that need for relatedness moderates the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness; namely being high in need for relatedness will decrease organizational attractiveness when a blended working arrangement is offered.

H2: The need for relatedness influences the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness negatively if one is high in the need for relatedness.

Methods

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 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 the need for relatedness, 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

Need For Relatedness

The moderating variable ‘Need for Relatedness’ was measured by assessing 4 items from Van Yperen, Rietzschel, & De Jonge (2014), using a 7-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (to an extremely large extent). The questionnaire is applied to investigate the extent of three needs among individuals that form the Self-Determination Theory. The three fundamental needs are need for competence, need for autonomy and need for relatedness. Therefore, the items assessed for measuring the need for relatedness were used and applied in the study. The items had a Cronbach’s alpha value of $\alpha = 0.87$, demonstrating good reliability, according to 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 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, whilst achieving contact with coworkers and employers mainly 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 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

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

To test the relationship between organizational attractiveness and blended working and how need for relatedness moderates this relationship, a repeated measures analysis of covariance (RM-ANCOVA) had to be performed. This was done using the statistical analysis software program SPSS. An RM-ANCOVA is designed to investigate the presence of a main as well as moderating effect within the study, thus the moderating variable was analyzed as a covariate.

Table 1 provides information on the descriptive statistics that were derived from the data including the means, standard deviation as well as sample size of each variable. The output indicated that participants scored moderately high on the need for relatedness and that participants tended to perceive organizations as more attractive when blended working arrangements were offered in comparison to when traditional working arrangements were offered.

In order to test the hypotheses, an assumption check has been performed. The assumptions that had to be taken into consideration were normality, sphericity and linearity. To test if the assumption for normality was met, a Quantile-Quantile Plot was designed, which indicated a distribution where normality seemed to be rather inconsistent. However, due to these alterations being minor, it was still reasonable to proceed with the conduction of the RM-ANCOVA. Testing for sphericity was not applicable in the analysis, since the study made exclusive use of one pairwise variance, thus comparisons could not be made. Linearity was tested by using a scatter plot that was designed in order to evaluate the relationship between the need for relatedness and organizational attractiveness; a linear relationship was found between the need for relatedness and organizational attractiveness for both traditional

as well as blended working arrangements. Thus, all assumptions were met and the repeated measures analysis of covariance (RM-ANCOVA) was carried out.

Table 1

Descriptives of the Need for Relatedness, Organizational Attractiveness, Blended/Traditional Working Arrangements

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------|-----|---------|---------|--------|-------------------|
| Need for Relatedness | | 1.00 | 7.00 | 4.5089 | 1.29530 |
| Traditional | | | | 3.0918 | .93531 |
| Working/Organizational | | | | | |
| Attractiveness | | | | | |
| Blended | | | | 3.9265 | .80403 |
| Working/Organizational | | | | | |
| Attractiveness | | | | | |
| Valid N (listwise) | 196 | | | | |

Note. (Descriptives include Sample Size (N), Min/Max, Mean, Standard Deviation)

Hypothesis Testing

The first hypothesis explored whether there was a main effect of blended working on organizational attractiveness. It was hypothesized that the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness would be positive and therefore a significant main effect would be found. The results in this study present both a positive relationship and significant effect between blended working and organizational attractiveness ($F(1,194) = 88.313$), $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .313$) (see Table 2).

In addition, the second hypothesis tested how the need for relatedness influences the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness. It was hypothesized

that the moderating variable would negatively influence the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness if one scores high on the need for relatedness and positively influence the relationship if one scores low on the need for relatedness. The RM-ANCOVA found a non-significant moderating effect ($F(1,194) = 1.981, p = .161, \eta^2 = .010$) (see Table 2). Thus, no further conclusions about the moderating variable and its non-significant effect on the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness can be made.

Table 2

Test of Within-Subjects Effects

| Source | df | F | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|--------------------------|-----|--------|-------|---------------------|
| Work Arrangement | 1 | 88.313 | <.001 | .313 |
| Work Arrangement | 1 | 1.981 | .161 | .010 |
| * Need for Relatedness | | | | |
| Error (Work Arrangement) | 194 | | | |

Note. (a. Computed using alpha = .05)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness as well as whether the need for relatedness can influence the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness. The results of the present study support the first hypothesis, that the

relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness is positive; a significant main effect was found. It can be concluded that organizations are perceived as more attractive when blended working is offered. The second hypothesis assumed a significant moderating effect of the need for relatedness on the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness; a non-significant moderating effect was found. Therefore, no conclusions can be made regarding if being high or low in need for relatedness affects perceptions of organizational attractiveness when a blended working arrangement is offered, as the second hypothesis was not supported by the results.

Study Results

The results obtained for the first hypothesis are consistent with previous findings that found a positive relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness, such as the study performed by Wörtler et al. (2021), which argued for and found a positive relationship between the two variables. The present findings align with the findings by Wörtler et al. (2021), indicating that people observe blended working to be more attractive, potentially due to increased flexibility and the commitment that an organization shows when being determined to create a healthy work-life balance for their employees. Therefore, the present study replicates the findings of previous research confirming that one perceives an organization to be more attractive when blended working arrangements are provided.

Additionally, one interpretation of these findings is that individuals feel more independent and more trusted by an organization when provided with the opportunity to work time and location independently. This would lead to employees having the opportunity to combine things such as traveling with working remotely, as well as helping and encouraging individuals that might be at a disadvantage due to having children, being physically disabled or being incapable of attending work on site (Van Yperen et al., 2014). Applying such work arrangements enables organizations to take a closer look at what a healthy work-life balance

should look like and to adjust their offers in order to be perceived as more attractive. Previous research that discussed potential benefits of blended working arrangements extends our findings by assuming that individuals favor flexibility and independence (Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017).

Whereas past research by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005), has claimed that individuals seek working arrangements that fit their personal needs, the present study showed a non-significant moderating effect which inhibits conclusions to be drawn. Thus, we can only assume that individual differences, such as the need for relatedness, influence the relationship between organizational attractiveness and blended working, using fundamental theories such as the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) as well as the person-environment fit theory (Van Vianen, 2018). These theories allow us to expect that individuals seek working arrangements that are applicable to their needs and are leaning more towards organizations that put effort into satisfying the individual rather than the crowd. The present findings however, do not support the second hypothesis, which inhibits further conclusions to be made.

Implications

Various implications can be derived from the present study that would allow organizations to improve their employees' working environment and enhance overall satisfaction. Since the theories used in this study are fundamental theoretical approaches that contribute to our understanding on how individuals differ from a psychological perspective, one is able to apply such general perception in the working environment. Hence, improvement of the overall atmosphere within the workplace can be made by providing employees with clear communication as well as support that goes beyond working on site. Additionally, organizations can encourage employees to balance work and personal life in order to express

their interest in their employees' well-being. This will lead to employees acknowledging that their individual needs are being valued and cared for.

The present findings contribute to the field of organizational and personnel psychology and enable organizations to further improve their relationships with employees based on individual differences. The conducted research allows organizations to be more aware of potential challenges or difficulties individuals face in their daily life and can therefore construct interventions that would prevent negative outcomes as well as improve overall performance. As presented, blended working arrangements do tend to make organizations appeal as more attractive, thus, organizations could adapt their working environment and give employees the opportunity to work remotely. Although the study does not present significant results for the moderating effect of the need for relatedness on the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness, the focus on individual differences should be applied to further research in order to clarify possible outcomes in the workplace and to work for an overall comforting and secure working environment.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength that the present study displayed was the use of vignettes that enabled the study to eliminate potential influences such as giving biased answers and eliminating beliefs that could influence the participant when filling out the survey. This technique helped us to measure organizational attractiveness without the influence of external factors.

There are at least two potential limitations concerning the results of this study. A first limitation concerns the design of the research, specifically the sample of participants. Due to the use of first-year psychology students as participants, one can assume that the majority has not had enough experience within the working environment and thus, have a lack of understanding of potential challenges or principles that occur in the workplace. A second potential limitation would be the sample's large age range between 19 and 35 years of age.

This makes it difficult to generalize findings and apply them to the working population, due to the potential lack of participants with fundamental experience in the workplace. Concerning the non-significant findings, the insignificant moderating effect, for the second hypothesis, it is worth noting that the design of the present study as well as the sample should further be investigated, in order to determine what should be adapted. One could argue that the moderating effect might have been found to be insignificant, due to sample being first-year psychology students, that have not had enough experience in the workplace and therefore might not take individual differences, such as the need for relatedness, into account when thinking about an organization, or blended working.

Suggestions for future research

The present study allowed us to get a closer insight into the relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness. Organizations can now be more aware of what employees seem to find appealing and adapt their working techniques accordingly. The individual difference variable, the need for relatedness, allowed us to shed light onto a field of exploring individual differences within the workplace. However, it was solely based on arguments supporting a significant moderating effect, but no confirmation nor a significant moderating effect was found. Thus, in terms of future research, it would be useful to extend the current findings by explicitly focusing on samples that better represent the working population in order to be able to find indications that display how individuals differ as well as what they feel most motivated with.

Future research should further examine how the need for relatedness influences the relationship between organizational attractiveness and blended working. Furthermore, future research should investigate how to comfort and support individuals that are either high or low in need for relatedness, in order to prevent miscommunication that could lead to possible increase in turnover.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our study does replicate the finding of the positive relationship between blended working and organizational attractiveness which was already found in the study by Wörtler et al. (2021). Although this paper aimed to go beyond the relationship between organizational attractiveness and blended working and taking individual differences that might alter or change this relationship into account, so far no significant moderating effect could be demonstrated. The findings however contribute to the field of industrial organizational psychology and allow us to further explore the relationship between employee and organization, where the aim lies in better communication and understanding how individuals work.

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Appendix A

Vignette 'Blended Working'

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

Vignette 'Traditional Working'

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 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