# To Whom Is Blended Work Attractive? A Perspective on the Reflector Learning Style

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#### **Abstract**

Blended working arrangements provide employees with control on when and where they choose to work. Research shows that job seekers attribute greater attractiveness and preference to this type of work arrangement. However, this effect may be higher for those with certain characteristics. The present study investigates the role that the learning style reflector has on the relationship between blended working arrangements and organizational attractiveness. It analyses (1) how blended working arrangements can affect the perceived attractiveness of an organization and (2) whether this relationship is moderated by the learning style reflector. 196 students participated in an online 1 factorial design study where a manipulation of blended working arrangement was used. An RM-ANCOVA shows supporting evidence for hypothesis 1 where organizations were perceived to be more attractive to individuals when blended working arrangements are offered. Hypothesis 2 was also supported as results show that individuals who possess a higher score on the Reflector learning style rated organizations offering blended working arrangements to be more attractive compared to individuals with lower scores. Our study adds to the limited literature on the reflector learning style and potential suggestions for future research.

*Keywords:* blended working arrangements, organizational attractiveness, learning styles, reflector

#### To Whom Is Blended Work Attractive? A

# Perspective on The Reflector Learning Style

Increasingly, organizations have been moving from traditional working arrangements to more flexible working arrangements due to factors such as globalisation and the fast-paced development of technology (Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017). Non-traditional work arrangements allow employees to prioritize work and other aspects of their lives in an efficient way, allowing them to rearrange workload and private life matters in ways that traditional work previously did not. Organizations are currently facing external challenges when recruiting compatible and qualified individuals such as old age, family commitments, and language barriers (Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017; Wanye & Casper, 2016; Gorman et al., 2013). To overcome this, they are increasing their efforts in making their establishments more attractive to job seekers (Kröll et al., 2021).

Perceived organizational attractiveness is an important criterion because initial attraction tends to carry over into an individual's job choice (Chapman & Mayers, 2015). Thus, understanding how organizational attractiveness can be enhanced can help organizations reach their recruitment goals by attracting high-performing applicants who desire those particular organizational environments (Chapman et al., 2005). One way organizations are achieving this is through adopting new arrangement styles such as blended working arrangements (BWA). However, despite the benefits, these types of work arrangements may not be suitable for everyone. Individuals may prefer more traditional working styles due to individual differences such as life circumstances, personality types, and preferred learning styles. Indeed, some individuals may excel in this type of work arrangement.

The current research is concerned with investigating the role of the Reflector learning style (RLS) termed by Honey and Mumford (1986). Learning is a continuous process needed

to keep up with the complex and multifaceted nature of a job. There is no concrete way of learning and individuals may belong to different learning style categories that work better in different circumstances. Thus, it is beneficial for organizations to identify to whom BWAs are more attractive. In the present research, we pursue two aims. Our first aim is to replicate previous findings on the relationship between BWA and organizational attractiveness as a great deal of research has been conducted on these variables in the past. Secondly, we aim to investigate the moderating influence that RLS has on the relationship between BWA and organizational attractiveness.

# Blended Working Arrangement and Organizational Attractiveness

BWAs provide individuals with the freedom to choose when, where, and for how long they work (Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017). Employees are given the opportunity to conduct work tasks in non-traditional settings such as on trains, in cafes, and in between non-work demands such as cooking, cleaning, and caretaking. In line with the Conservation of Resources Theory, Hobfoll (1989) explains that people strive to obtain, retain, and protect their resources to avoid experiencing stress (Kröll et al., 2021). These resources include material objects (e.g., houses, clothing), energy resources (e.g., time, money, and knowledge), and personal characteristics (Bickerton & Miner, 2021; Kröll et al., 2021). From an organizational perspective, employees can suffer from stress if their energetic resources are depleted without appropriate compensation or if they cannot gain new resources through either personal or professional development (Kröll et al. 2021).

We believe that BWAs allow employees to reduce this potential stress because it enables them to control and conserve their existing energy resources by choosing appropriate times and locations to conduct work-related tasks that are suitable for them. Simultaneously, employees can gain new resources by pursuing self-fulfilling activities that occur during traditional work time. For example, an employee can partake in

recreational workshops or pick up their children from school during traditional working hours and can do so without serious consequences because they can complete work-related tasks at other times. Transferring this to job seekers, we expect that organizations that offer BWAs will increase perceived organizational attractiveness for an individual as they view this as an opportunity to conserve and control their resources in the work context. Previous research by Kröll et al. (2021), Wörtler et al. (2021), and Thompson et al. (2015) found that organizations that offer non-traditional work arrangements (flexible work practices and BWAs) significantly increased perceived organizational attractiveness. Based on the Conservation of Resources theory and these findings, we propose our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1. An organization offering BWA will display an increase in perceived organizational attractiveness.

# The Moderating Role of the Reflector Learning Style

Little research has been conducted on the role of learning styles in the topic of organizational psychology and BWA, however, findings have shown that learning styles have considerable utility within the workplace (Furnham et al. 1999; Jackson, 2002). The Person-Environment Fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998) proposes that individuals thrive when their personal attributes and environmental attributes are compatible (Vianen, 2018). In an organizational context, the person-organizational fit is demonstrated when an individual's personal values, characteristics, and competence line up with those of an organization. Therefore, a job seeker whose values and characteristics agree with BWA should find an organization offering this arrangement more attractive. Such characteristics can include an individual's preferred learning style, more specifically the reflector learning style (RLS). We theorize that Reflectors' values and characteristics complement a BWA environment, which results in a good organizational fit.

The term Reflectors was put forward by Honey and Mumford (1992) when creating a questionnaire based on Kolb's learning theory (1984). According to Honey and Mumford (1992), individuals have a preferred method of learning and can be categorized into four different styles: Activists, Reflectors, Theorists, and Pragmatists. Reflectors have a tendency to be thoughtful, careful, and thorough in nature. In a traditional work environment, these individuals often sit back, observe, and collect information quietly in meetings and would converse with their colleagues after to gain outside perspectives, which they would combine with their own to come to the best conclusion. Consistent with the Person-Environment Fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998), we believe that Reflectors can work more efficiently when placed in BWAs and therefore have natural gravitation to finding these types of organizations more attractive.

Additionally, Downing and Chim (2004) found that in traditional school settings, Reflectors felt there was little time to process information before entering group discussions and often felt that they could not fully contribute to sessions. However, when placed in blended environments, where Reflectors could engage through online platforms and materials were made available a week in advance, it was found that Reflectors behaved in a more active way as they contributed more in meetings. Reflectors felt like they had more opportunities to reflect on upcoming tasks and could engage in discussions through online bulletin boards. The term 'online extroverts' was then proposed to describe this behaviour. Extroverts are defined as confident, social, and active individuals who take action and value teamwork in the workplace (Blevins et al., 2021; Anderson, 2008). Combining this idea with the Person-Environment fit theory, we believe that the traits of Reflectors are compatible with the nature of BWAs which could potentially lead to better work performance and overall benefits to the organization. Because of the results found by Downing and Chim (2004) and the Person-Environment fit theory, we

propose our second hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 2.* Individuals who score higher on the Reflector learning style will find organizations offering blended working arrangements more attractive.

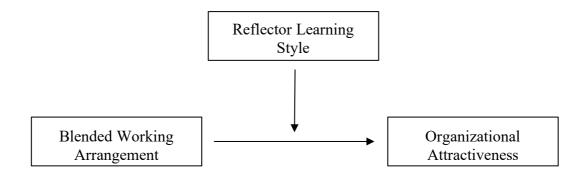


Figure 1. Conceptual research model

#### 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 incompletion 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 moderator variable RLS, 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**

# Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ)

To measure the 'Reflector' learning style, a total of 10 items selected from the Learning Style Questionnaire developed by Honey & Mumford (2000) were used. Example questions include: "I usually do more listening than talking" and "I like to consider all the alternatives before making my mind up" (See Appendix A). To make the scale applicable to our research, the response options were adapted from tick box questions to a Likert scale in order to measure the level of which one identifies as a Reflector. The Likert scale ranges from 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The item scores were averaged to create a scale score for each participant. A higher score indicates a more prominent Reflector. The items had a Cronbach's alpha value of  $\alpha = .784$ , demonstrating moderate 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 co-workers 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 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?". Additionally, self-evaluation questions were asked which analysed 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

A repeated measures analysis of covariate (RM-ANCOVA) was conducted to test our hypotheses using SPSS, a statistical analysis software. The moderating variable was included as a covariate in order to test for an interaction effect. We achieved this by centring the variable and using this, rather than the raw variables. Table 1. provides the descriptive statistics of the respective variables in an organizational attractiveness context.

Prior to hypothesis testing, the assumptions of normality and linearity between organizational attractiveness and the RLS were checked at all levels of BWAs. Firstly, a Q-Q plot was conducted to visually check assumption of normality which showed slight deviations in normality. Nevertheless, ANCOVAs are relatively robust from violations of normality therefore it still appears to hold. Secondly, a scatterplot was conducted to visually

**Table 1** *Means and Standard deviations of the variables BWA, TWA, and RLS in regards to organizational attractiveness.* 

					Std.
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Deviation
Traditional working and		1.00	5.00	3.09	.93
organizational attractiveness					
Blended working and		1.40	5.00	3.93	.80
organizational attractiveness					
Reflector Learning Style		2.00	5.00	3.66	.57
Valid N (listwise)	196				

check the assumption of linearity which confirmed the existence of a linear relationship between the RLS and organizational attractiveness at both levels of working arrangements.

#### **Hypothesis testing**

In *Hypothesis 1*, we proposed that blended work arrangements would have a positive effect on organizational attractiveness. Indeed, participants rated an organization more attractive if it offered blended work compared to traditional work (See Table 1.). The RM-ANCOVA results supported a positive effect of blended work on organizational attractiveness, F(1,194) = 89.412, p < .001,  $\eta p^2 = 0.31$ . It can be concluded that participants perceived the organization offering BWA to be more attractive than the organization offering traditional working arrangements.

In *Hypothesis 2*, we predicted that the level of reflector learning style has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between blended work and organizational

attractiveness. The RM-ANCOVA indicated that there is a significant interaction effect, F(1,194) = 4.424, p < 0.037,  $\eta p^2 = 0.02$ . To investigate this moderating relationship further, a series of regression analyses were conducted using MEMORE, a mediation and moderation for repeated measures tool (Montoya, 2018). MEMORE is an SPSS macro allowing the test of interaction effects in a two-instance within-subjects/repeated measures design, computing the effect of BWA on organizational attractiveness at various levels of RLS. An RLS level at one standard deviation below the mean is estimated to have an effect of 0.65, t(194) = 5.19, p < .001. An RLS level at the mean is estimated to have an effect of 0.84, t(194) = 9.46, p < .001, and an RLS level at one standard deviation above the mean is estimated to have an effect of 1.02, t(194) = 8.17, p < .001. These results are consistent with the second hypothesis as the effect seems to increase as RLS scores increase. It can be concluded that organizational attractiveness scores increase when an individual scores high on RLS.

#### **Discussion**

Organizations offering BWAs provide employees with more control over their work-life in terms of when and where they can complete their work tasks. In line with the literature on the effects of non-traditional work arrangements on organizational attractiveness (Wörtler et al., 2021; Kröll et al., 2021; Thomson et al., 2015), the current study investigated whether organizations that offer BWAs, compared to traditional working arrangements, are perceived as more attractive to potential job seekers. Moreover, the study builds on previous research done on learning styles in the organizational context (Downing & Chim, 2004; Furnham et al., 1999). In line with the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the Person-Environment Fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998) we theorized that individuals will have better control over their resources and that they will experience less stress and thrive better if their characteristics and values are matched by an

organization that offers BWA.

The results obtained in this study showed supporting evidence for both hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2. It was found that BWAs, as compared to traditional working arrangements, do indeed increase perceived organizational attractiveness in potential job seekers. Additionally, it was found that individuals who score high as Reflectors showed higher perceived organizational attractiveness for BWAs. This finding is in line with prior research that shows individuals who belong to the RLS prefer flexible arrangements over traditional ones (Downing & Chim, 2004).

# **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Our study results add to the existing literature and provide additional support for the research on non-traditional working arrangements as it replicates and reaffirms results from previous studies (Wörtler et al., 2021; Kröll et al., 2021; Thomson et al., 2015). Replication in research studies is a crucial part of science as it ensures reproducibility and objectivity (Derksen & Morawski, 2022). In line with Wörtler et al. (2021), we find that individual differences do indeed play a role in forming attitudes towards working for a particular organization. Because we find that BWAs do not always induce positive responses, future research can thus aim to articulate the reasons why and adapt BWAs to also accommodate for individuals whose characteristics and preferences would otherwise conflict with this type of work arrangement. This is important as BWAs have been increasingly adopted globally in organizations due to the outbreak and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Wörtler et al., 2021).

The current findings also add to the limited literature concerning the role of learning styles. Whereas Downing and Chim (2004) focused on the student Reflectors' learning style in an educational context, our study focused on the student Reflectors' learning style in an organizational context, specifically students' inclinations towards working for an

organization offering a blended environment. Because of this, our study was able to generalize the existence of the observed effect: that Reflectors have a preference for blended environments in an organizational context. An explanation for this could be that blended environments give Reflectors the opportunity to converse with their colleagues immediately (if meetings were held online) in order to gain outside perspectives, and help them come to a conclusion faster than in traditional settings. This may help Reflectors gain more confidence to overcome their tendency to hold back and to avoid the feeling of being beaten to the comment as they often report that their colleagues have already stated what they planned to say. Our findings combined with Downing and Chims' (2004) raise merit for future research on Reflectors.

Additionally, Furnham et al. (1999) found that Reflectors, in comparison to the other learning styles, were significant predictors of poor performance among telesales employees. In contrast to the current study and that of Downing and Chims (2004), the study of Furnham et al. (1999) was conducted under a traditional working arrangement. Because BWAs have been shown to improve well-being, and in turn, increase work performance (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; Salgado & Moscoso, 2022), future research could seek to identify whether the effect found by Furnham et al. (1999) is replicated under a BWA. Identifying this is likely to promote favourable outcomes for organizations that seek to adopt this type of working arrangement. Additionally, this can aid organizations in the recruitment context as organizations can utilize this information to identify potential employees' suitability in terms of individual differences.

Lastly, by finding an effect that the individual difference RLS has on organizational attractiveness and BWAs, our study contributes to the literature on Person-Environment Fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998). It seems that Reflectors recognise that BWAs align with their own personal characteristics and values, which in turn increases their perception of an

organization's attractiveness.

# **Strengths and Limitations**

A strength of the current study is that it was an experimental design conducted using the vignette methodology. This method allowed us to manipulate and control our independent variable as well as enhance experimental realism. Not only does this methodology generate high levels of internal validity, because of the nature of experimental studies, it also generates greater external validity compared to classic lab experiments as it imitates real-world situations. Additionally, using an experimental design allowed us to draw causal inferences. This is favourable and adds to current knowledge of the topic as conclusions previously made in the BWA domain mostly resulted from non-experimental designs (Wörtler et al., 2021).

A second strength of our study is the utilization of a within-subjects design. When using this type of design, each participant is able to draw conclusions from the same set of vignettes. This is favourable as comparisons between the vignettes can be made within the same individual which allows us to draw conclusions about their personal judgements and shows whether an effect resulting from a manipulation is present. Additionally, because multiple participants are reading and responding to the same vignettes, comparisons can be made across respondents to draw conclusions about hypothesized research aims (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014).

Despite its contribution, the current paper has its limitations. The first notable limitation concerns the sample. The current sample consists of university students who are currently enrolled in a psychology programme. Because it is often a requirement for students to participate in experiments to aid more advanced students in their research (i.e. final Bachelor years, Masters, PhD), it is more likely that psychology students can notice cues in surveys that might indicate the aim of the study which substantially increases bias.

These previous experiences could potentially impact our participants' responses, and in turn influence our findings. Additionally, samples consisting of students are unlikely to have serious responsibilities such as children and caring for older family members (Kröll et al., 2021) making it difficult to generalize our findings to the older working population. To address this matter, future research can aim to recruit not only students but a wider range of respondents with different ages and backgrounds to increase generalizability.

The second limitation in this study concerns the use of the vignette methodology. Although this method provides benefits to the internal and external validity of this study, its generalizability to real-life situations is limited. Certain limitations in the use of hypothetical job descriptions may raise concern about its real-life application. Hypothetical vignettes do not provide the same amount of information that would normally be available to job seekers. Generally, when job seekers engage in job-searches they have access to more information through sources such as informative websites and recruitment agencies which is naturally more than what vignettes can provide (Wörtler et al., 2021). Additionally, a job seeker's perception of organizational attractiveness is most likely based on research from those sources and comparing the organizations' policies and values with their own. To overcome this limitation, we adopted a technique used in Wörtler et al.'s (2021) study and included only decision-making criteria such as salaries, benefits, and job expectations in order to help participants make a realistic judgement on whether these criteria meet their expectations when looking for a job.

Third, our study focused on one singular learning style whereas Honey and Mumford (1986) proposed three other types. Because of the founded effects in the current research, we encourage future researchers to investigate the role that BWAs have on the attitudes of each learning style in order to identify differences in personal preference. By administering the LSQ (Honey & Mumford, 2000), organizations can use this information

to help ease the transition of their current employees if they choose to adopt this type of work arrangement.

Lastly, this study uses self-reporting surveys which have a reputation for producing bias as participants can either intentionally or subconsciously alter their responses due to reasons such as poorly worded questions and social desirability. Additionally, because our respondents' answers were based on stated-preferences, definitive statements about whether their responses are consistent with their true attitudes cannot be made. Because attitudes can change over time, especially after being employed at an organization for some time due to added experience and newly gained information, our findings can only conclude participants' initial attitudes formed from reading the vignettes (see also discussion by Wörtler et al., 2021).

#### **Conclusions**

Taken together, the current research not only supports previous findings that show time and location independent working (i.e. blended working arrangements) to have a positive influence on perceived organizational attractiveness in job seekers. It also adds to the limited literature on the effect of learning styles in the organizational context, more specifically Reflectors, advancing knowledge in the learning style domain. Given this, our findings can help facilitate a better understanding of this specific learning style. This helps individuals recognize their personal traits and seek out opportunities that best complement them to further advance both their personal lives and careers. Additionally, by having this information, organizations can recruit individuals whose traits and attitudes align with BWAs which could in turn make BWAs more effective.

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#### Appendix A

#### **Measures**

# The Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = neutral
- 4 = agree
- 5 = strongly agree
  - 1. I take great care in working things out. I don't like jumping to conclusions.
  - 2. I like to make decisions very carefully and preferably after weighing up all the other possibilities first.
  - 3. I prefer to think things through before coming to a conclusion.
  - 4. I prefer to have as many bits of information about a subject as possible, the more I have to sift through the better.
  - 5. I can't make a decision just because something feels right. I have to think about all the facts.
  - 6. I prefer to look at problems from as many different angles as I can before starting on them.
  - 7. If I have to write a formal letter I prefer to try out several rough workings before writing out the final version.
  - 8. I like to consider all the alternatives before making my mind up.
  - 9. "It is best to look before you leap".
  - 10. I usually do more listening than talking.

### Organizational Attractiveness Scale

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

- 1 =strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = neither agree or disagree
- 4 = agree
- 5 = strongly agree
  - 1. A job at this organization is very appealing to me.
  - 2. For me, this organization would be a good place to work.

- 3. I would not be interested in this organization except as a last resort.
- 4. This organization is attractive to me as a place for employment.
- 5. I am interested in learning more about this organization.

# Appendix B

# Vignette

Organization DCE	Organization JIK				
Salary:  • A competitive salary is offered, with opportunities for bonuses based on performance	Salary:  • A competitive salary is offered, with opportunities for bonuses based on performance				
Benefits package:  • A work phone and a laptop are	Benefits package:				
provided for work and private use  • 30 vacation days per year	<ul> <li>A work phone and a laptop are provided for work and private use</li> <li>30 vacation days per year</li> </ul>				
Work arrangement:					
<ul> <li>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</li> <li>This work arrangement implies that meetings, collaborations, and general contact with co-workers and supervisors will frequently be achieved through information and communication technology/ online platforms</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>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</li> <li>This work arrangement implies that meetings, collaborations, and general contact with co-workers and supervisors will usually be in person at the organization's site</li> </ul>				