

**Does Ambiguity Tolerance Moderate the Effect of Blended Working on Perceived
Organizational Attractiveness?**

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Abstract

Flexibility in the work context will likely become more prevalent in the future, since many employees experienced it during the corona pandemic. In blended working arrangements employees can decide where and when they work. Past research already found several favorable outcomes to be associated with blended working as for example increased organizational attractiveness. Consequently, it is important to find out for whom blended working is most beneficial and for whom it is not. In the current study we hypothesize that blended working has a positive effect on perceived organizational attractiveness. Additionally, we examined whether ambiguity tolerance is a possible moderator on this relationship, with low levels diminishing the positive effect of blended working on perceived organizational attractiveness. The present study used a one factorial within-subject repeated measures design. By using vignettes, we manipulated the factor variable blended working so that we presented a blended working arrangement and a traditional working arrangement. Our final sample consisted of 126 participants. The results showed a significant positive effect of blended working on perceived organizational attractiveness. However, ambiguity tolerance did not moderate this relationship. Taken together, the present study was able to demonstrate the positive effect of blended working on perceived organizational attractiveness. This is an important implication for employers, who could implement blended working to enhance their organizational attractiveness.

Keywords: blended working, organizational attractiveness, ambiguity tolerance

Does Ambiguity Tolerance Moderate the Effect of Blended Working on Perceived Organizational Attractiveness?

During the corona pandemic, many countries experienced a rapid rise in people working from home. According to Eurostat (2021), the number of people usually working from home increased from 5.5% in 2019 to 12.4% in 2020 in the European Union. Nowadays numerous people have experienced *blended working*, which includes a mix between on-site and off-site work and employees can choose when, where and how long they want to work (Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017). According to a report by Eurofound (2020), many employees would prefer to work from home several times a week and the concept may gain even more importance. Employers from different countries seem to be open to continue offering working from home after the pandemic, as indicated by several surveys (Ker et al., 2021). While some people might appreciate the benefits of blended working like being able to work from anywhere, other employees may prefer a more traditional working arrangement. Therefore, the first aim is to investigate whether blended working has an effect on organizational attractiveness.

The present study defines *organizational attractiveness* as involving the thoughts an individual has about a company when considering it as a possible future for employment (Highhouse et al., 2003). A common issue is that past research often did not include individual difference variables while studying the effect of blended working and its related concepts (Beauregard et al., 2019; Grelle & Popp, 2021). The present study addresses this by investigating the potential moderating role of ambiguity tolerance, which has not been studied before in this context. According to McLain et al. (2015), *ambiguity tolerance* is about how people react to multifaceted, unknown, unspecified, vague problems and situations, ranging from disliking to liking it. Employees may perceive blended working as more ambiguous compared to a traditional working arrangement because there is not a

specified time and place for work. As such, this may affect how people rate the attractiveness of companies that offer blended working and whether they accept blended working.

Therefore, the second aim is to find out whether ambiguity tolerance moderates this relationship.

Blended Working and Organizational Attractiveness

Employers may offer flexible place and flexible time working arrangements to enhance the attractiveness of their company (Taskin & Edwards, 2007). However, as reported by Gomes and Neves (2011) organizational attractiveness can have some consequences which affect companies and individuals. They reported that it influences how successful companies are in attracting potential employees. Furthermore, for individuals, organizational attractiveness mediates the relationship between the attributes of a company and the intention to apply to the company.

Individuals may appreciate the possible benefits that come with blended working and thus rate an organization as more attractive. Van Yperen and Wörtler (2017) summarize some benefits of blended working, these include: saving time due to less time spent driving to work, less mid-work interruptions from colleagues and more autonomy. Nevertheless, there are also some potential drawbacks of blended working as for example: isolation from colleagues, interruptions from the family and more responsibility in terms of structuring their work. As a result, it seems unclear whether the potential benefits of blended working can outweigh the potential drawbacks. However, as stated by Van Vianen (2018), when evaluating a job offer, people tend to concentrate more on the positive aspects they like and not the negative aspects they dislike. Therefore, job seekers may still prefer blended working despite the potential drawbacks.

Past research reported mixed results about the relationship between blended working and its related concepts with organizational attractiveness. For example, as illustrated by

Kröll et al. (2021), who performed two studies, where they investigated the effect of time independent and place independent work arrangements. Their first study found both to be positively associated to perceived organizational attractiveness. However, the second study only found time independent work arrangements to be positively associated to perceived organizational attractiveness. A different study by Thompson et al. (2015) showed that flexible place and flexible time work arrangements had a positive effect on anticipated organizational attractiveness; however, not when taken together. The research by Wörtler et al. (2021) included the concept of blended working and they established that blended working had a positive effect on anticipated organizational attractiveness. Nevertheless, the results generally indicate that more flexibility in the workplace leads to higher organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 1: Blended working has a positive effect on perceived organizational attractiveness.

The Moderating Effect of Ambiguity Tolerance

Previous studies often did not investigate the role of individual difference variables on the effect of blended working and its related concepts (Beauregard et al., 2019; Grelle & Popp, 2021). However, the studies by Thompson et al. (2015) and Wörtler et al. (2021) included several variables which they assumed to have an influence on the relationship of blended working and its related concepts and their outcome variable. Thompson et al. (2015) reported that people who preferred to combine work and home life positively moderated the relationship. Whereas Wörtler et al. (2021) showed that high need for autonomy strengthened the relationship, and preference for segmentation weakened the relationship. The rationale for including an individual difference variable can be explained with the ideas of the person-environment fit theory. According to Van Vianen (2018), any individual can experience a fit or misfit in their environment, which depends on whether the environment and the individual

match. Important to the present research is that the person-environment fit theory postulates that having a fit between an individual variable and an environmental variable will predict an outcome variable stronger than either individual variable or environmental variable alone.

The present research considers ambiguity tolerance as a possible moderator in the relationship between blended working and perceived organizational attractiveness. According to McLain et al. (2015), people differ in their tolerance to ambiguity in the way they react to situations or problems that are ambiguous. As mentioned before, blended working could be perceived as more ambiguous compared to a traditional working arrangement because it does not include having a fixed time and place while working. Another domain where employees may experience ambiguity is in their role fulfillment. Van Yperen and Wörtler (2017) state that employees may exhibit role confusion due to the combination of home and work. Indeed, Sardeshmukh et al. (2012) found that shifting between working from home and the office was positively related to role ambiguity. According to them, this caused employees to feel uncertain about what their role requires them to do. Therefore, due to combining work and home life, employees may be uncertain, whether they have to perform the role of their home life (e.g. being a father or a mother) or the roles of their work.

People low in ambiguity tolerance may perceive the lack of structure and the increased role ambiguity as threatening and dislike blended working. Whereas people high in ambiguity tolerance may like the lack of structure and perceive this as a challenge, thus enjoying blended working. Van Vianen (2018) states that people want to experience compatibility with their environment, for example to reduce ambiguity. However, if that is not given like in the example above, they would experience a misfit and therefore, weaken the potential positive effect of blended working towards perceived organizational attractiveness (Van Vianen, 2018).

Other researchers found similar variables to ambiguity tolerance to be significant moderators in the context of blended working. Van Yperen et al. (2014), proposed that having a high need for structure includes a low tolerance for ambiguity. They found it to be negatively related to perceived effectiveness regarding blended working. Additionally, need for structure was positively related to a preference to keep home and work apart from each other which is characteristic of a traditional working arrangement. A similar result emerged in the research of Wörtler et al. (2021), who illustrated that a low need for structure positively moderated the effect of blended working on anticipated organizational attractiveness and intentions to display organizational citizenship behaviors. The research done by Jach and Smillie (2019) established a positive relationship between ambiguity tolerance and the two variables of openness to experience and extraversion. A study by Anderson et al. (2015) found that high openness to experience strengthened the positive relationship between home office and positive affect. However, it did not moderate the negative relationship between home office and negative affect. Additionally, Gainey and Clenney (2006) as cited in Beauregard et al. (2019) found individuals high in openness to experience to rate flexible place working arrangements as more attractive, while people who are extraverted seemed to face more challenges when having the flexibility to work from anywhere. Taken together, these findings suggest that ambiguity tolerance may be a moderator in the relationship between blended working and perceived organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 2: Ambiguity tolerance moderates the positive effect of blended working on perceived organizational attractiveness, such that for low levels of ambiguity tolerance the effect is weaker.

Method

Participants and Design

The participants in our study signed up through a university's first-year psychology student pool. By participating they achieved credits for a first-year research course. From the initial sample of 140 participants, 14 were excluded because they either failed attention checks that were included in the questionnaire or they did not complete the study. Consequently, 126 participants (87 females, 38 males, and one participant who preferred not to mention their sex, $M_{age} = 19.9$, $SD_{age} = 2.3$) were included in the analysis. Most participants were Dutch (45%) and German (25%). The remaining participants reported several different nationalities (29%). Furthermore, many participants had some work experience, either indicating that they had a job in the past (49%) or currently have a job (33%). The minority never had a job (17%).

This study utilized a one factorial repeated measures design. Additionally, it made use of vignettes to manipulate the factor variable blended working. Since each participant was exposed to both factors, the study made use of a within-subjects design.

Materials

Ambiguity Tolerance

Ambiguity tolerance was measured with the Multiple Stimulus Types Ambiguity Tolerance Scale-II (MSTAT-II) by McLain (2009). The scale consisted of 13 items which asked about attitudes toward ambiguous problems and situations. Example items were: "I am tolerant of ambiguous situations" and "I enjoy tackling problems that are complex enough to be ambiguous". The participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). High ratings corresponded to tolerating ambiguity and low ratings indicated an aversion to ambiguity. For the purpose of establishing the internal reliability of the scale, the reversed coded items had to be recoded at first. The results of the reliability analysis indicated a high internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). Additionally, all

items of the scale were averaged to obtain a scale score of ambiguity tolerance, which was then centered for the main analysis.

Manipulation

We used written vignettes to manipulate blended working which was the factor variable. This variable consisted of two levels with blended working either being present or absent, as in the case of a traditional working arrangement. The decision to implement vignettes was based on a previous study done by Thompson et al. (2015). The vignettes described two hypothetical companies. The participants were asked to imagine that they would apply for a job after graduating from their bachelor. The vignettes were constructed to present an attractive, yet realistic work arrangement that could appeal to the participants when starting a new job (see Appendix). Both vignettes included information about salary, promotion, benefit packages, training and working arrangement. The only difference between the two vignettes was the information about the working arrangements and the name of each company. The traditional working arrangement (company JIK) vignette consisted of information that was specific to a traditional workplace, such as having to work a fixed schedule from 9am to 5pm and a fixed working space at the office. Whereas the vignette for the blended working (company DCE) arrangement included information specific to this work arrangement like having a flexible work time, where one could work during any hours and at a place of their choice. The wording of the description for both working arrangements was kept as similar as possible, to clearly establish that any difference scores are due to the manipulation and not wording.

Organizational Attractiveness

The measurement for organizational attractiveness was done once for each vignette using the first five items of a scale by Highhouse et al. (2003), that referred to organizational attractiveness. An example item was: "For me this company would be a good place to work".

The participants had to rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*), with high ratings indicating attraction to the organization. The internal reliability of the organizational attractiveness scale was high for the blended working arrangement (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$) as well as for the traditional working arrangement (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$). Additionally, we computed the average of all five items to obtain the scale score for both the blended working arrangement and the traditional working arrangement condition of organizational attractiveness.

Attention Checks

The study included an attention check consisting of four questions. These questions asked the participants about the content of the vignettes and served the purpose of assessing whether the participants noticed the differences in the vignettes. One question was: "Did the companies differ in whether they offered flexibility in when employees work?" (*yes; no*).

Self-Rated Response Quality

In the present study, the participants also had to rate their own responses via two questions. They were used to evaluate whether the answers of the participants could be used for the further analysis. The questions asked the participants whether they answered honestly and whether they sometimes answered randomly. One question was: "I was honest in all my responses." (*yes; no*).

Procedure

Data Collection Methods

The participants were asked to complete the survey via Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com). In the first part of the questionnaire the participants were presented with several self-report scales measuring individual difference variables, to measure their scores, namely on ambiguity tolerance. After this the participants were asked some questions which assessed their demographic, as well as their background information. Hereafter the

vignettes were randomly presented for each participant. This was done in order to establish temporal precedence to ensure that the participants were not influenced by the order or direct comparison of the vignettes. Following each vignette, the participants were asked to evaluate the job description for each organization by completing the measure of organizational attractiveness. The participants finalized the study by completing the attention checks and the items checking on their self-rated response quality.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of ambiguity tolerance and the organizational attractiveness score for each working arrangement. Additionally, the inter-item correlations are displayed for each variable.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Ambiguity Tolerance and Both Organizational Attractiveness Scores

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
Ambiguity Tolerance	3.3	0.7	1.00	-.02	-.08
Organizational Attractiveness	5.3	1.3	-.02	1.00	.11
Blended Working					
Organizational Attractiveness	4.4	1.4	-.08	.11	1.00
Traditional Working					

Note. $N = 126$.

Analysis

The analysis was carried out using a Repeated Measures Analysis of Covariance (RM-ANCOVA). In order to ensure that the statistical procedure is justified, the data was

screened to find out whether the assumptions of homoscedasticity, normality and linearity are met.

For the assumption of homoscedasticity, the standardized residuals were plotted against the standardized predicted values of the organizational attractiveness scores for each working arrangement in a scatterplot. Since the individual points in the scatterplot were distributed in a random way, the assumption of homoscedasticity did not appear to be violated.

Afterwards the data was screened for violations of normality. The Q-Q plot for the blended working arrangement can be seen in Figure 1. It indicated a violation of normality because the points deviated from the trend line, this was confirmed by $W(126) = .91, p < .001$. The Q-Q plot for the traditional working arrangement can be found in Figure 2. The plot also indicated a violation of normality, since the points deviated from the trend line, this was again confirmed by $W(126) = .97, p = .002$.

In the last step we assessed, whether there is a linear relationship between ambiguity tolerance and organizational attractiveness for each working arrangement. The scatterplot in Figure 3 displayed the linear relationship between the organizational attractiveness scores of the blended working arrangement and ambiguity tolerance. Since the individual points were scattered randomly, the linear relationship appeared to be very weak, this was confirmed by $r_s(124) = .02, p = .870$. The second scatterplot in Figure 4 showed the linear relationship between the organizational attractiveness scores of the traditional working arrangement and ambiguity tolerance. In this plot, the individual points were scattered randomly as well; consequently, the linear relationship seemed to be very weak, which was again confirmed by $r_s(124) = -.10, p = .283$. Since for both working arrangements, the linear relationship between organizational attractiveness and ambiguity tolerance was very weak and not significant, the following findings should be interpreted with caution.

In the first hypothesis we argued for a positive effect of blended working on perceived organizational attractiveness. The output from the RM-ANCOVA indicated that the main effect of working arrangement on perceived organizational attractiveness was significant, such that the organization offering a blended working arrangement received higher organizational attractiveness scores than the organization that offered a traditional work arrangement ($F(1,124) = 29.30, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .191$). However, due to the violation of normality in both working arrangements, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was performed to establish if there is still a difference between the two variables. The following results showed that blended working ($Mdn = 5.7$) received higher organizational attractiveness scores than traditional working ($Mdn = 4.8$). Additionally, the results indicated that the difference between the two working arrangements is statistically significant ($Z = 5.07, p < .001, r = .45$). Therefore, the results supported the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis was about the potentially moderating effect of ambiguity tolerance on this effect. The interaction effect of ambiguity tolerance on the effect of blended working towards perceived organizational attractiveness, was not significant ($F(1,124) = 0.30, p = .586, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .002$). As such, the second hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion

The study was conducted to investigate whether ambiguity tolerance is a moderator on the effect of blended working on perceived organizational attractiveness. Consequently, two hypotheses emerged which we investigated.

The first hypothesis was about the positive effect of blended working on perceived organizational attractiveness. The results from this study supported the first hypothesis, and this finding still held true when controlling for the violation of normality. Therefore, the present study was able to replicate some findings from previous studies (Wörtler et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2015; Kröll et al., 2021).

The second hypothesis dealt with the potential moderating role of ambiguity tolerance on the effect of blended working on perceived organizational attractiveness. The results of the present study did not support this hypothesis. This contradicts previous research which found related variables to be potential moderators in the relationship of blended working and other concepts with perceived organizational attractiveness or other outcome variables (Wörtler et al., 2021, Van Yperen et al., 2014, Anderson et al., 2015).

An explanation for this might be the very weak linear relationship between ambiguity tolerance and each organizational attractiveness score. Since there was only a very weak linear relationship, it was very unlikely that ambiguity tolerance would moderate the effect of blended working on perceived organizational attractiveness. Another explanation for the missing interaction effect is that the present study used a general measure of ambiguity tolerance. A more specific measure that focuses either on the low or high end of ambiguity tolerance may provide clearer results. This can also be explained by the person-environment fit theory (Van Vianen, 2018). The review places a strong emphasis on basic psychological needs, the reason behind this might be that the measurement for these concepts is very specific. Thus, by using a focused measure, future studies may obtain a more differentiated result.

Practical Implications

In the beginning of the paper, a statement by Taskin and Edwards (2007) was presented, who stated that employers may offer flexible place and flexible time working arrangements to increase their organizational attractiveness. The present study provides empirical evidence to this statement; therefore, the results could be used to raise employer's awareness to the promising effects of blended working. During this time, employers seem to be more open as ever to changing their work arrangements, as indicated by Ker et al. (2021), who stated that employers are more open to continue offering working from home. While

working from home may already be beneficial for employers and employees, blended working may be even more promising, since it provides more flexibility. Consequently, employers should be made aware of blended working and its promising effects. A potential strategy would be to present employees the benefits that come with blended working. Van Yperen and Wörtler (2017) mention several aspects in which employees and organizations can benefit from when using blended working. As a strategy to convince employers of blended working, one could tell them the benefits that come with it. For example, one benefit would be saving money by needing less office space and the present finding together with past research which shows that blended working has a positive effect on organizational attractiveness.

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation concerns the use of vignettes. The result of the first hypothesis together with the answers of the attention check suggested that the vignettes worked as intended and participants noticed the difference between the vignettes. Additionally, past research by Thompson et al. (2015) and Wörtler et al. (2021) also made use of vignettes in a similar study. Therefore, future studies may also benefit from using them. Nevertheless, the ecological validity will always be less compared to a real-life situation when participants are searching for a job. As such, future research may benefit from looking more into other possibilities of creating a manipulation with a higher ecological validity.

Another limitation concerns the sample in this study. The participants were first year students which may not be as representative as for example students that just graduated and are looking for employment. The rationale for choosing first year students was that they will be the future job force and as such, blended working arrangements are most applicable to them. Nevertheless, research in the future may benefit from using a sample consisting of participants who are about to start employment or have already gained some experience in

the job market. Such participants may be better equipped to make an informed decision about the attractiveness of an organization, either due to their expectations or because of their experience.

One possible direction for future research may be to assess whether there are differences between just time independent, place independent and blended work in relation to organizational attractiveness. By doing so, one would be able to clearly differentiate the effects of all three working arrangements and see whether there may be differences concerning their effects on organizational attractiveness among them.

Additionally, future research may also decide to select participants based on their cultures. The rationale behind this comes from Hofstede (1983) who found that cultures differ on how uncertainty avoidant they are. He defines uncertainty avoidance as “the level of anxiety within the members of a society in the face of unstructured or ambiguous situations” (Hofstede, 1983, p. 295). Considering that this definition is similar to the definition of ambiguity tolerance by McLain et al. (2015), future research might benefit from using a selected sample of participants which are from cultures that score very high and very low on uncertainty avoidance.

At last, future research may choose not to focus on individual differences. While it is interesting in what way and how individual differences affect whether someone likes blended working or not, this may be a too narrow focus. Therefore, future research may concentrate more on the environment in which individuals engage in blended working and how that affects their performance. By doing so, one could identify environments that are beneficial or harming to the effectiveness of blended working. The advantage of this is that it may be easier to shape the environment so that individuals successfully engage in blended working. The review by Beauregard et al. (2019) mentions several aspects which may account for the improved performance of employees who engage in flexible place working arrangements.

One such aspect that refers to the environment is that they may perform better due to having less interruptions. Based on this, companies could make recommendations for employees who engage in blended working where they suggest to have a quiet and separate workspace. Another possible benefit of focusing on the environmental aspects is that those findings could also be used to improve the traditional working arrangement for employees which may not be able to engage in blended working. By doing so, one would be able to enrich the working environment for more than just blended workers.

Conclusion

In the present study, we had two aims. The first aim was to show that blended working has an effect on perceived organizational attractiveness. The second aim was to demonstrate that ambiguity tolerance is a moderator on the relationship of blended working on perceived organizational attractiveness. Our first aim was met, since we were able to show that blended working had a positive effect on perceived organizational attractiveness. This finding can be used in practice to demonstrate to employers the benefits that blended working has. However, the second aim could not be met, since we did not find a moderation effect. Future studies could address the limitations of the present study to try to obtain a moderation effect. However, it may also be good to start focusing on possible environmental factors that contribute to the effectiveness of blended working. One benefit of this direction is that it one would be able to reach a larger audience by focusing on the environment and not on individual differences. Furthermore, this could give employers more feasible approaches for integrating blended working so that it provides the possible benefits.

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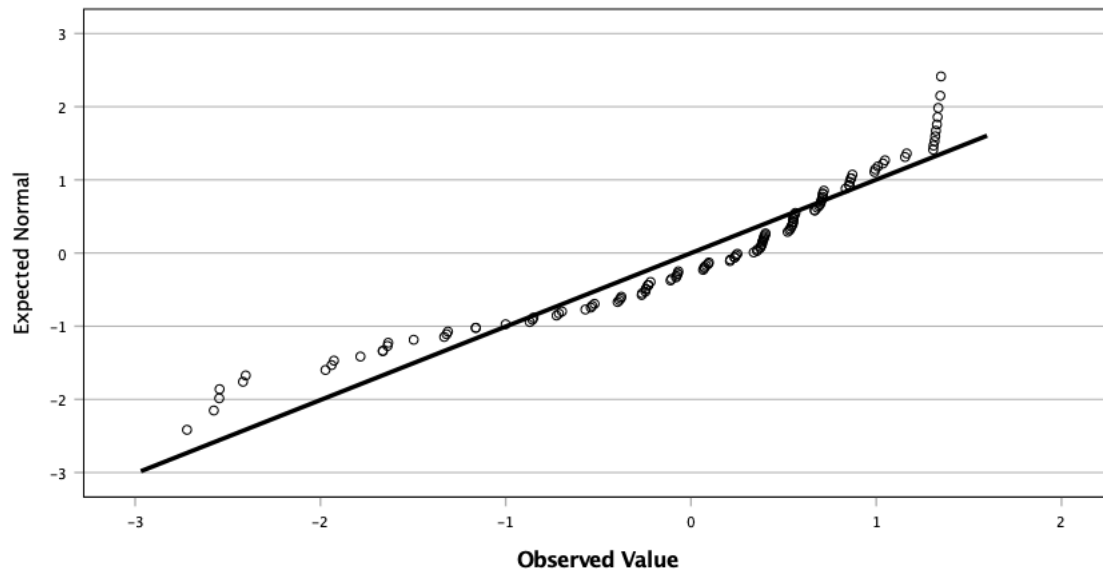
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Figure 1

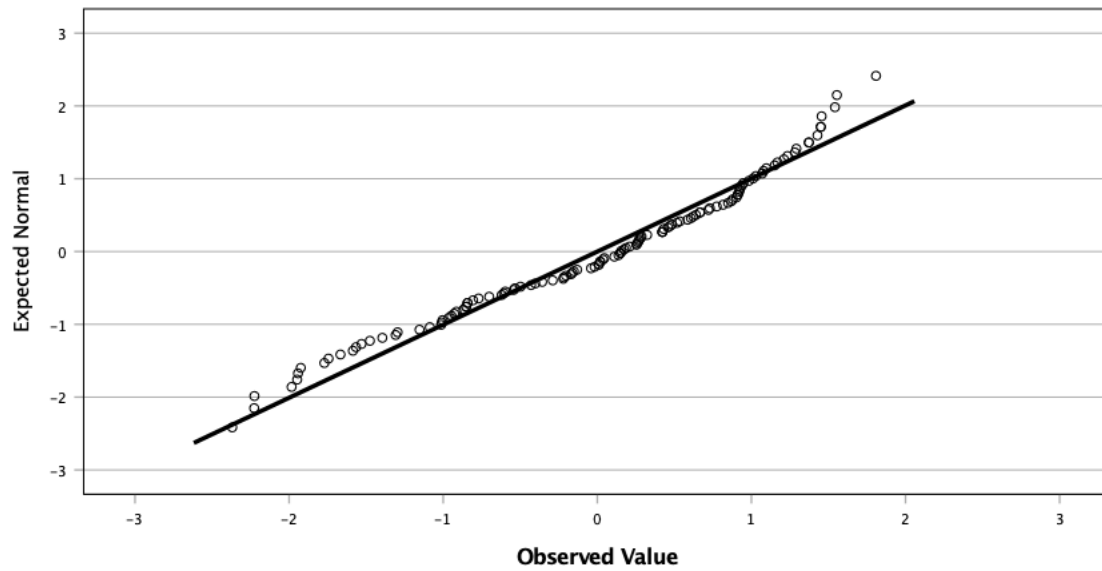
A Q-Q Plot of the Standardized Residuals of the Organizational Attractiveness Scores



Note. This scatterplot shows the scores of the blended working arrangement. The deviating points from the trendline indicate a violation of normality.

Figure 2

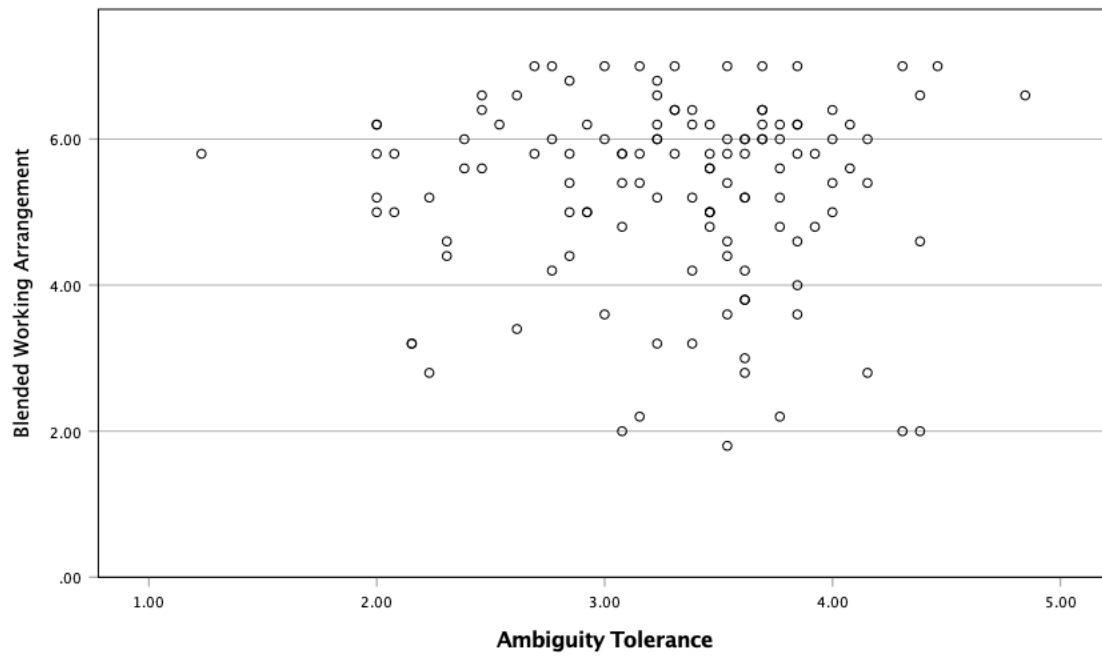
A Q-Q Plot of the Standardized Residuals of the Organizational Attractiveness Scores



Note. This scatterplot shows the scores of the traditional working arrangement. The deviating points from the trendline indicate a violation of normality.

Figure 3

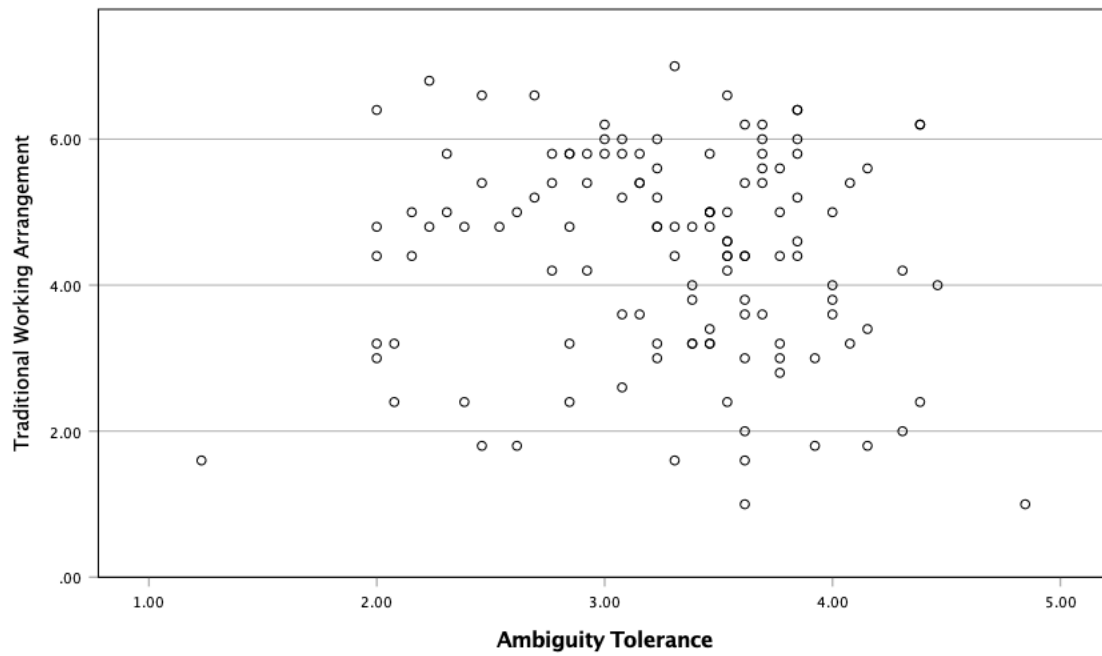
A Scatterplot of Organizational Attractiveness Plotted Against Ambiguity Tolerance



Note. This scatterplot shows the scores of the blended working arrangement. Since the individual points are distributed randomly, the linear relationship appears to be very weak.

Figure 4

A Scatterplot of Organizational Attractiveness Plotted Against Ambiguity Tolerance



Note. This scatterplot shows the scores of the traditional working arrangement. Since the individual points are distributed randomly, the linear relationship appears to be very weak.

Appendix

General instruction:

Imagine that in a few years from now, when you will be graduating from university, you will be seeking employment. You are given the information below about two companies which offer an entry-level job without leadership requirements and are deciding whether or not to pursue employment with either one. Please read the descriptions of the companies carefully and answer the questions that follow each description.

Offers	Company DCE	Company JIK
Salary and Promotion	A competitive salary and opportunities for promotion based on performance	A competitive salary and opportunities for promotion based on performance
Benefits package	A benefits package including a retirement fund and paid time-off in the event of sickness. Next to this employees will receive a work phone which can be used privately.	A benefits package including a retirement fund and paid time-off in the event of sickness. Next to this employees will receive a work phone which can be used privately.
Training	Employees will receive job-relevant training at the start of their employment.	Employees will receive job-relevant training at the start of their employment.
Working arrangement	<p>Employees are free to work at any time and day they want to, provided that they get their work done. They can also choose, at any time, where they work (e.g. work from home or any other place convenient to them).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This implies that employees frequently interact with co-workers and supervisors through information- and communication technologies such as video and phone calls and shared online documents. 	<p>Employees work a fixed schedule (from 9am till 5pm) from Monday to Friday. They are required to always work in their designated office, at the company's office building.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This implies that employees typically interact with co-workers and supervisors in person such as on the workflow and during meetings at the office.