

The Relationship Between Blended Working and Anticipated Intrinsic Motivation

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Abstract

As the different methods to work have modified over time, blended working arrangements have become increasingly common, especially in the current COVID-19 pandemic where working remotely is occurring more frequently. This study aimed to investigate the extent to which blended working opportunities affect individuals' anticipated intrinsic motivation to work at an organization and to examine whether open-mindedness moderates the strength of that relationship. Our first hypothesis was that the possibility for blended working positively affects anticipated intrinsic motivation in prospective employees and our second hypothesis was that the open-mindedness moderates the strength of that relationship. We acquired a sample of 126 participants who were first-year psychology students of differing backgrounds. They were requested to complete an online survey for our study. In this research we conducted a vignette study using a within-subject one factor repeated measures design. The findings provide evidence that the possibility for blended working positively affects an individual's anticipated intrinsic motivation to work at an organization, but do not support the moderating role of open-mindedness in that relationship. Yet, although we found no evidence for open-mindedness affecting the relation between blended work and anticipated intrinsic motivation, the findings of this research may aid varying organizations in considering the implementation of blended working arrangements for their employees and our findings also provide additional insight into the potential benefits of blended working.

Keywords: Blended working, anticipated intrinsic motivation, open-mindedness, openness to experience, flexible working, intrinsic motivation

The Relationship Between Blended Working and Anticipated Intrinsic Motivation

Over time, how individuals perform their work has changed. Companies across the world have developed working arrangements such as flexible or blended work (Thompson et al., 2014) in addition to the traditional onsite working arrangements known to society. Van Yperen and Wörtler (2017) define blended working as the combination of “on-site and off-site working, enabled by the utilization of ICTs that provide workers with almost constant access to job-relevant information and co-workers,” (p. 157). In blended working arrangements, employees can determine the time and duration that they engage in their work-related activities as well as the place where they would work (Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017). Thus, this differs from the traditional working arrangements where employees may work at a fixed appointed time and place. In relevance to that, the present research aimed to investigate the extent to which the possibility for blended working arrangements impact an individual's anticipated intrinsic motivation to work at an organization and we also examined whether the personality trait of “open-mindedness” affects the strength of that relationship. We argue for the importance of this research on the premise that blended working arrangements are becoming increasingly common in the current COVID-19 pandemic (Jooss et al., 2020) and that our research can bring about novel insights of blended working, aiding to extend or support the pre-existing literature on the subject.

Outcomes Of Blended Working Arrangements And Their Impact On Intrinsic Motivation

In general, blended working arrangements have the aim of improving organizational outcomes such as performance, productivity, customer service, employee motivation, and job satisfaction (Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Patrickson, 2002; Van Yperen et al., 2014). Blended working is advantageous for differing subgroups such as caregivers (Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017), through the opportunities to combine both work-

related and caregiving activities to improve and uphold work-life balance (Shockley & Allen, 2007), and for elderly employees too through their need for autonomy (Kooij et al., 2011) and tendency to work from home (Lister & Harnish, 2011) that are respected in blended working arrangements (Van Yperen et al., 2014). However, blended working arrangements also come with their potential disadvantages such as procrastination, job stagnation, social loafing in the team of co-workers working digitally, interferences and interruptions at home, technostress, and strain of distress (Allen et al., 2013; Bartel et al., 2012; Gerdenitsch et al., 2015; Greer & Payne, 2014; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; O'Neill et al., 2014; Perry et al., 2016; Salanova et al., 2013; Wheatley, 2012).

Yet, Van Yperen et al. (2016) found that blended working is an effective resource in coping with high job demands for employees that score highly for the need for autonomy, ultimately affecting their intrinsic motivation to work. Intrinsic motivation occurs when an individual engages in an activity for the sake of experiencing the enjoyment and pleasure in doing so (Deci & Ryan, 2002). There is evidence to support how blended working arrangements may positively affect intrinsic motivation (Van Yperen et al., 2016) and employee motivation in general (Petak & Miller, 2019). Thus, in this research, our first hypothesis is that the possibility for blended working positively affects anticipated intrinsic motivation in prospective employees.

Nevertheless, the varying outcomes of blended working, including enhanced intrinsic motivation, tie into the concept that the goals of blended working are realized by depending on a number of circumstances. In particular, for blended working to be optimal in an organization, arrangements must be made for employees to meet and work onsite besides being able to work remotely away from the office (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012). Moreover, O'Neill et al. (2009) even found how an individual's personality traits are related to job effectiveness differentially, being contingent upon the matter of whether one works

traditionally onsite or whether one can work flexibly offsite. This would entail that the advantages and disadvantages of blended working are also based upon the individual's traits and needs rather than the situational circumstances of the company solely. This is evident in the study of Van Yperen et al. (2016) where it was found that the need for autonomy affects whether blended working predicts intrinsic motivation. Besides this, Van Yperen et al. (2016) also found how individuals low in need of autonomy do not experience intrinsic motivation at their job when opportunities for blended working are presented. Hence, one can observe that the relationship between blended working opportunities and intrinsic motivation can be moderated by differing traits or needs, such as the need for autonomy.

Blended Working and Open-Mindedness

Therefore, in the study of this paper, we apply the Person-Environment (P-E) Fit Theory (French et al., 1974) to investigate how the relationship between blended working opportunities and anticipated intrinsic motivation may be moderated by the person-variable “open-mindedness”. According to French et al. (1974) who initially proposed the theory, P-E Fit Theory entails the idea that an individual may either fit or misfit with their environment contingent upon the extent to which their environment matches their traits and needs. In relevance to this research, the theory could be a useful tool in helping to understand whether the relationship between blended working and anticipated intrinsic motivation to work at an organization depends on open-mindedness.

Open-mindedness is one of the core personality traits in the five-factor model (John, 1989), and individuals that score high on it “have greater permeability of consciousness and perceptive cognition, and are more motivated to seek variety and experience” (Ramicic & Bonarini, 2019, p. 125). Blended working requires employees to adapt to a new and different work setting and structure in addition to the usage of technology in doing their work remotely

(Haines et al., 2002). Therefore, it seems that a certain extent of open-mindedness can be advantageous in aiding employees with the process of adapting to the conditions of blended working arrangements. Clark et al. (2012), for instance, found a positive association between open-mindedness and positive perceptions of flexibility in telework. On the basis of these arguments, we expect that blended work and open-mindedness will be a positive “fit”, in terms of the PE-Fit Theory. With that, our second hypothesis is that open-mindedness moderates to strengthen the relationship between blended working and anticipated intrinsic motivation in prospective employees.

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

Open-Mindedness

In order to measure the personality trait of open-mindedness, we utilized 12 items from the open-mindedness subscale of the Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2), which was developed by Soto and John (2017). The participants in this study had to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* based on the extent that the statements of each item applied to them. Examples of statements included were "I am someone who is inventive and finds clever ways to do things" and "I am someone who is curious about many different things". We re-coded the reversed items of this scale for the sake of computing the average of all items measured to obtain a scale score for open-

mindedness. In addition to the scale-score, the centered mean was also computed which were both required for the main analysis. The items selected for this scale displayed a high internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$).

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.

Anticipated Intrinsic Motivation

For the assessment of anticipated intrinsic motivation in the participants after exposure to each of the two vignettes, four adapted items were selected from the Intrinsic Motivation

Inventory (IMI) by Ryan (1982). For the sake of applicability to the context of this research, the selected items from the IMI have been rephrased. The scale consisted of a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), once again based on the degree to which the statements from these four items applied to them. An example of one of these statements was “I would enjoy working in this company very much”. To obtain a scale score we computed the average of the items measuring anticipated intrinsic motivation in both conditions of blended working arrangements and traditional working arrangements. Overall, the items of this assessment showed a high internal reliability for the first company with blended working arrangements, (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.94$), and for the second company with traditional working arrangements, (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.93$).

Attention Checks

The study included an attention check consisting of four questions. The 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 a self-report scale measuring the individual difference variable of open-mindedness. After this the participants were asked some questions that 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 questions measuring anticipated intrinsic motivation. The participants finalized the study by completing the attention checks and the items checking on their self-rated response quality.

Results

For our main analysis, we computed descriptive statistics to observe a difference between the means for anticipated intrinsic motivation in both conditions of blended work and traditional work. As one can observe in Table 1, there is a descriptive difference for IMB, $\bar{x} = 4.88$, and for IMT, $\bar{x} = 3.72$. This provides descriptive evidence that blended working arrangements enhance anticipated intrinsic motivation.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Open-mindedness	3.99	0.59
IMB	4.88	1.28
IMT	3.72	1.30

Note. This table displays the descriptive statistics for the average values of open-mindedness and anticipated intrinsic motivation in blended working conditions and traditional working conditions. The intrinsic motivation measured in the condition of blended work is labeled as "IMB" while the intrinsic motivation measured in the condition of traditional work is labeled as "IMT".

Furthermore, we applied a Repeated Measures Analysis of Covariance (RM-ANCOVA) to test our hypotheses, due to the within-subject one factor repeated measures design of our study. Our first hypothesis was that blended working positively affects anticipated intrinsic motivation. We found the effect for the relationship between blended working and anticipated intrinsic motivation to be significant, $F(1, 124) = 56.989$, $p < 0.001$. As such, this demonstrated support for our first hypothesis of the main effect. Our second hypothesis was that open-mindedness moderates to strengthen the relationship between blended working and anticipated intrinsic motivation in prospective employees. We

did not find the effect for the moderation of open-mindedness to be significant, $F(1, 124) = 0.435, p > 0.05$. Therefore, we did not find any support for our second hypothesis.

Discussion

Implications

The aim of this research was to investigate the extent to which the possibility for blended working arrangements impact an individual's anticipated intrinsic motivation to work at an organization and we also examined whether open-mindedness affects the strength of that relationship. After conducting the experiment for our study we found the positive main effect of blended working on anticipated intrinsic motivation to be significant. This demonstrates how the opportunity for blended working enhances an individuals' anticipated intrinsic motivation to work at an organization. To that end, this finding of our research supports the literature that addresses the positive effect of blended working on intrinsic motivation and extends the literature on the benefits of blended working arrangements. Furthermore, this finding may be useful for varying organizations in aiding them with the consideration of implementing blended working arrangements.

However, our finding in relevance to the potential moderating variable for this relationship, open-mindedness, did not support what we initially hypothesized as the moderation effect of open-mindedness was not significant. This demonstrates that we found no evidence for the premise that open-mindedness moderates to strengthen the relationship between the possibility for blended work and anticipated intrinsic motivation. Therefore, this would entail that although it would seem open-mindedness might be useful in adapting to the novel and technological conditions of blended work (Haines et al., 2002), and elevating positive perceptions of blended working arrangements (Anderson et al., 2015; Dütchke and Boerner, 2012), open-mindedness does not moderate the enhancing effect of blended working on anticipated intrinsic motivation per se.

This non-finding may be related to the breadth of the personality trait of open-mindedness (Soto & John, 2017) and that an alternative individual difference plays an

essential role in the relationship between blended work and anticipated intrinsic motivation, rather than open-mindedness. Also, despite the fact that we assessed participants on their occupational status, we did not measure the extent of their work experience and since participants were aged 20 years on average it is possible that limited work experience of the participants may have contributed to the non-finding of open-mindedness as a moderator.

Strengths and Limitations

Overall, though, our research had strengths in terms of its design and type of measurements. Our within-subject one-factor repeated measures design allows the inference of causality between our variables to a relative degree. The randomized order of the presentation of the written vignettes established temporal precedence, which increases the internal validity of our research. Further, the questionnaires that were applied for this study had high internal reliability and were based on scales from well-established research by Soto and John (2017) and Ryan (1982). Nevertheless, our research had some limitations as well. While it has been demonstrated how applying vignettes is useful in simulating reality towards some level (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), it can be argued that the simulation experience of our written vignettes was limited in realism as it required participants to use their imagination. The generalizability is also limited because the participants were all first-year psychology students who, most probably considering their average age, did not have extensive work experience.

Future Research

For future research it may be beneficial to study the potential role of “adaptability” in the relationship between blended working and intrinsic motivation, as Grelle and Popp (2021) suggest that adaptability would be likely to predict success in making a positive transition to blended work. The American Psychological Association has defined adaptability as “the capacity to make appropriate responses to changed or changing situations” (Van den Bos,

2007, p. 17). Likewise future research could utilize alternative simulation techniques, such as virtual reality, to further investigate the effect of blended working arrangements and intrinsic motivation. Virtual reality (VR) technology is the “combination of hardware and software that enables developers to create VR applications” (Riva, 2009, p. 337). As it has been argued to be a useful tool for experiential assessments in fields like Clinical Psychology (Riva, 2009), it could be a possible method that future research can utilize to increase the realism in simulating experiences of blended working arrangements.

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Appendix

Manipulation of blended working arrangements

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 that 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

<u>Company DCE offers:</u>	<u>Company JIK offers:</u>
<p>Salary & promotion</p> <p>A competitive salary and opportunities for promotion based on performance.</p>	<p>Salary & promotion</p> <p>A competitive salary and opportunities for promotion based on performance.</p>
<p>Benefits package</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Benefits package</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Training</p> <p>Employees will receive job-relevant training at the start of their employment.</p>	<p>Training</p> <p>Employees will receive job-relevant training at the start of their employment.</p>
<p>Working arrangement</p> <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</p>	<p>Working arrangement</p>

<p>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 9 am till 5 pm) 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 work floor and during meetings at the office.
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