Investigating the Moderating Effect of Extraversion on the Relationship Between

Blended Working Arrangements and Perceived Organizational Attractiveness

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Abstract

Blended working, described as being able to work at any desired time and/or place, has become more feasible in modern times due to high developments in means of technology and communication. Although blended working arrangements generally provide positive outcomes like e.g., higher job satisfaction, better work-life balance, it is not said to be favorable for everyone. First it was tested whether blended working caused higher organizational attractiveness. Secondly, using Person-Environment Fit Theory, whether a high score on extraversion would weaken the effect of blended working on organizational attractiveness. In this study there was a within-subject one-factor repeated measures design, using two vignettes for manipulation of blended working amongst students ($N = 126$). Additionally, participants rated themselves on a 12-item extraversion scale. A significant effect of blended working on organizational attractiveness was found, while no significant effect was found when checking for the moderation of extraversion on the relation between blended working and organizational attractiveness. The findings build on the existing evidence regarding positive outcomes of blended working, and several implications are made for future research and the importance of taking into account the personality trait extraversion.

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With the increasing usability of the internet and extensive continuous developments in the field of communication, it has become feasible for employees (and their employers) to not only have to work onsite, but rather become flexible and choose the place and time they want to work themselves. These conditions combine forming a term called 'blended working'. Blended working is when people get to choose when and where they will work. It 'blends' both on-site and off-site working (Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017). A term that is so similar that within our line of argumentation and literature found can be considered the same is teleworking ("working away from the office for a portion of the work week while keeping in contact via information and communications technology" (Beauregard et al., 2019, p. 1)). Situations like the COVID-19 pandemic and lower emission of greenhouse gasses due to less traffic (Lister & Harnish, 2011), have made blended working much more common. It is therefore important to gain more knowledge regarding its effects. Central in this study is the question whether blended working arrangements have a positive impact on perceived organizational attractiveness (Highhouse et al., 2003). Perceived organizational attractiveness refers to the affective attitude towards a company one is considering to work at (Highhouse et al., 2003; Wörtler et al., 2021).

Looking at these presumptions made beforehand about an organization which offers these arrangements compared to one which does not is important. It creates more understanding for the organizations of what employees deem favorable. By gaining more knowledge on this perceived organizational attractiveness, it gives organizations a better view of employees' wishes, followed by implications for how to create environments that are thoroughly optimized.

Next to this, the role of the Big Five personality trait extraversion (Soto & John, 2017), which proposedly influences the relation between blended working and organizational attractiveness, is investigated. To do this, Person-Environment Fit Theory (P-E Fit Theory) (Van Vianen, 2018) is used. This theory explains that a combination of a person and their environment provides a better explanation of that person's behavior than each of them separately (Van Vianen, 2018).

The characteristics of extraversion very much focus on the need-part of human social interaction, and this is exactly where significant differences lie between blended and traditional working. Therefore, they are important to be looked at. With this study we aim to replicate partly, and contribute to, the literature on blended working (e.g., Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017; Wörtler et al., 2021).

Blended Working and Organizational Attractiveness

The conditions that arise from blended working compared to traditional working arrangements, differ on many fronts and thus it is important to investigate what various outcomes of previous research are to arrive at a proposed effect of blended working on organizational attractiveness. For instance, a large meta-analysis done by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) provided indications that employees who did not have to work at their office showed positive indications for job performance, work-home balance and job satisfaction. Because these possible positive facets can be thought of when a prospect is weighing between blended and traditional working, they could also influence how attractive working at an organization which has these to offer is perceived to be. These findings were supported by other studies too.

For example, a study by Kröll et al. (2021) among German job seekers. They already provided indications that having flexible work practices significantly improves the perceived organizational attractiveness. Another longitudinal experiment in China by Bloom et al.

(2015) over the span of nine months showed that job satisfaction was significantly higher when making the comparison between office-based working and working from home. Job satisfaction even seems to be amongst the most reported outcomes telework/blended working can have according to numerous studies (e.g., Manochehri & Pinkerton, 2003), which can be explained in the following way: the flexibility in choosing one's own time and place to put in the desired work which is different with blended working arrangements compared to traditional working arrangement, may cause higher feelings of autonomy (Kelliher & Anderson, 2008). And this autonomy, according to Gajendran and Harrison (2007) has by past research already been shown to have a positive association with job satisfaction.

This just described relation between job satisfaction and autonomy is an important argument for why blended working ultimately has a positive outcome on organizational attractiveness because the need, with ultimately the reward: satisfaction of autonomy, is deemed a basic human need (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Therefore, it implies that within their weighing of alternatives, the one with seemingly a higher possibility of fulfilling the autonomy need would be most attractive.

The less distinctive border between work and non-work roles employees can have due to blended working also has an impact on people's work-life balance. Blended working circumstances, when compared to traditional working arrangements here, as just said, create a higher flexibility due to employees being able to fill in their work time by themselves, and therefore provide more possibilities of combining work- and personal life (Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017). Caring for children, going to a dentist appointment, filling breaks with watering plants or going out for a walk in a park you chose to work close by to, are all possibilities that will have become easier if employees get to choose when and where to work, and have been found to increase perceived organizational support (Thompson et al., 2015; Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017). If these are considered when choosing between blended and

traditional working, it would seem logical that the blended working arrangements are perceived as more favorable and thus is followed by higher organizational attractiveness.

Higher job satisfaction, more feelings of autonomy, more flexibility and greater work-life balance have all been reported positive outcomes of past research on blended working related practices (e.g., teleworking). If, and it is plausible to think this, it is possible employees can come up with these predominantly positive outcomes when judging between blended working arrangements and traditional working arrangements, it is likely that organizations which offer the former will be judged more attractive. Therefore, the first hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 1. Blended working arrangements cause higher perceived organizational attractiveness compared to traditional working arrangements.

Extraversion as a moderator on the relation between Blended Working and Organizational Attractiveness

Because people are intrinsically motivated differently (Steinbauer et al., 2018) and react to environments differently depending on their personalities (Van Vianen, 2018; Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017), it cannot be said that blended working is suitable for everyone. Person-Environment Fit Theory (P-E Fit Theory) (Van Vianen, 2018) is used to elaborate on the relation between a person and their environment. Generally, it is defined as the compatibility between a person and said environment. It claims that the quality of the distinct connection between a person and their environment is a better predictor of individual outcomes (productivity, job satisfaction etc.) than the person or the environment alone. To succeed in this, P-E Fit Theory states that, to arrive at the best outcome, it must be made sure that the person factors and the environmental factors are compatible (Van Vianen, 2018). As one can expect, when looking at an individual's position within an organization, a good fit between this person's environment and themselves is rather favorable.

The meta-analysis by Gajendran and Harrison (2017) already provided insights that the effects of blended working were moderated by variables like sex, previous experience with offsite working conditions and the amount of blended working one must indulge in. Next to this, Van Yperen and Wörtler (2017, p. 161) stated that in terms of psychological needs, "blended working is most satisfactory for those who have a high need for autonomy, a low need for structure and a low need for relatedness". It is therefore also likely that broadly used personality traits in scientific psychological research may also direct and point out different compatibilities of blended working.

The corrected and improved Big Five Inventory (BFI-2) by Soto and John (2017) provided us with five important personality domains which could be scored on, that are used broadly in academic research to differentiate people's characteristics. These are conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, extraversion, and open-mindedness. Differentiating on these dichotomic spectra and the possible combinations that arise are at the base of why people behave differently, and the Big Five have provided accurate prospective statements to be done within and about social human life. Within the present research there has been chosen to look at the trait extraversion, which according to the BFI-2 is the overarching term for "sociability (desire to socially approach and engage with others), assertiveness (willingness to express personal opinions and goals in social situations, and energy level" (Soto & John, 2017, p. 121).

Regarding blended working, a big difference compared to traditional working arrangements is the social component where the core of extraversion lies. According to a study by Lowry et al. (2006), having less face-to-face interactions with colleagues or clients, a lower quality of communication, less onsite politics and more feelings of isolation are all possible consequences of blended working, and we will now substantiate through existing

literature on how being extraverted (person fit) could work or not work well within those blended working arrangements (environment fit).

As stated above, extraversion has a big impact on how people cope with their surroundings in social situations, and the higher someone scores on its three facets; sociability, assertiveness and energy level, the more extraverted one is considered to be (Highhouse et al., 2003). If we look at sociability (the desire to socially approach and engage with others), we can clearly conduct that not being able to work at the office with co-workers and thus not being able to engage with them in social interactions, is different when compared to onsite working. This has even been shown already in a past study by O'Neill et al. (2009), where in regard to teleworking, having a higher score on sociability was related to lower job performance. Weisenfeld et al. (2001) brought forward the explanation that this effect exists because employees with higher sociability are more able to feel the absence of others in their work environment, plus are also more likely to feel isolated in their house. If prospective employees take this with them in their consideration between the blended and traditional working, it is very likely that those higher on extraversion and thus sociability take this into account and will perceive the former as less attractive compared to the latter.

A study done by Golden et al. (2008) showed that, due to less face-to-face interactions people have when making extensive use of blended working, they get a higher feeling of being out of touch with their colleagues. This in turn may have a negative impact on job performance. Golden et al. (2008) also provide evidence that when there is reduced contact with their co-workers, people lose confidence in their competences for their work. The same work from Golden et al. (2008) then argued that this negative consequence can be avoided when people who do more blended working also have more face-to-face interactions through means like videoconferences and web meeting software. Interestingly, when there is an increase in technologies that enable for more approximate simulations of face-to-face contact

like those videoconferences and web meeting software, the negative impact of isolation is reduced, which in turn increased job satisfaction. However, when an extravert prospective employee is weighing between blended and traditional working arrangements it is likely they will not consider these technologies as a sufficient alternative compared to regular in-office interactions.

A study done by Maruyama and Tietze (2012) interestingly found amongst 394 teleworkers that before they would start with blended working, 53.5% were concerned about losing professional- and 54% about losing social interactions. However, when they had had some time to experience blended working, only 24.2% felt this loss happened professionally, and 32.7% socially. This could mean within our research that even though there is a reduction in social interactions that may be perceived higher beforehand then what is actual reality, it could still impact extraverted people more due to their intrinsic importance felt towards these social interactions. This would then also decrease the perceived organizational attractiveness for blended working. As the arguments supported by past research above suggest, the second hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 2. A higher score on extraversion weakens the effect of blended working arrangements on organizational attractiveness.

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

Materials

Extraversion

For the measurement of extraversion, we used the 12 extraversion items from the Big Five Inventory (BFI-2) by Soto and John (2017), with a high internal reliability (Cronbach's α = .85). This was attained by re-coding reversed items before averaging the item scores to a mean scale score. For further analysis, the centered mean score was then computed. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* . Example items were: "I am someone who is outgoing, sociable" and "I am someone who has an assertive personality".

Manipulation

Written vignettes were used 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 α = .94) as well as for the traditional working arrangement (Cronbach's α = .93). Additionally, the average of all five items was computed 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 a self-report scale measuring individual difference variables to measure their scores on extraversion. After this, the participants were asked questions which assessed their demographic, as well as their background information. Hereafter the vignettes were randomly presented for each participant. This was done 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, anticipated intrinsic motivation, and anticipated stress. The participants finalized the study by completing the attention checks and the items checking on their self-rated response quality.

Results

To see whether the means of organization attractiveness in the blended working condition and the traditional working condition differed significantly, a paired-samples t test was conducted. First, the assumptions were checked. Both the blended working and the

traditional working conditions used a Likert scale, which is a form of discrete data. However, it can be and was used to approximate a continuous scale and thus the assumption was met. It is reasonable to assume that the participants were independent of one another and thus the independent samples assumption was also met. To check for normality a histogram was produced which indeed showed a normal curve. Because the range of the Likert scale is from one to seven and scoring either very high or very low is plausible, no meaningful outliers were taken out. Thus, the fourth assumption was also met. After conducting the paired-samples t test there was a significant difference in the scores for the blended working condition ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.28$) and the traditional working condition ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.42$); $t (125) = 5.43$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that an organization which offers blended working arrangements has higher organizational attractiveness compared to an organization which offers traditional working arrangements.

To test the second hypothesis; the moderation of the covariate extraversion on the relation between blended working and organizational attractiveness, a repeated measures ANCOVA was used. The covariate was first centered, then the assumptions were checked. As explained with the paired samples t test above, the assumption for independence was reasonably assumed. The assumption for sphericity was violated because there were only two conditions: blended working and traditional working. For homogeneity of regression slopes, scatterplots of the covariate extraversion with blended working and the covariate extraversion with traditional working were looked at and a normality test was conducted. After the analysis and an inspection of the scatterplots, a significance of linearity was found between extraversion and blended working; $F (32, 92) = 1.18$, $p = .26$. However, between extraversion and traditional working there was not; $F (32, 92) = 1.78$, $p = .02$. Because of these discrepancies, the results of the analysis need to be regarded with caution. The conducted repeated measures ANCOVA concluded that the interaction effect of extraversion and

blended working/traditional working was found to be non-significant; $F (1, 124) = 1.01$, $p = .32$.

Discussion

In a within-subject vignette study exposing participants to both blended working arrangements and traditional working arrangements concerning a prospective job, it was measured whether either one of these two conditions had higher organizational attractiveness. As past literature already provided ample groundwork, it was first hypothesized that the prospect of having blended working arrangements, due to higher flexibility, more autonomy and a better combination of work and personal life, would be considered more positive than traditional working arrangements (e.g., Thompson et al., 2015; Van Yperen & Wörtler, 2017). Then there was argued, using P-E Fit Theory (Van Vianen, 2018), that many aspects of the personality trait extraversion (person fit) would be negatively impacted in case of blended working (environment fit). This then brought forward the second hypothesis that scoring high on this trait would show to be less compatible with blended working.

As expected, a significant main effect of blended working on organizational attractiveness was found, which supported hypothesis 1. This finding is in line with past research done in this field (Thompson et al., 2015; Wörtler et al., 2021). Our study was partly a replication of the study done by Wörtler et al. (2021), which was conducted amongst full-time employees, and the study done by (Thompson et al., 2015) amongst US students. This is important for the generalizability because it builds on the evidence already existing and decreases the overall possibility of accidental effects. However, opposed to expectations, there was not a significant interaction effect found of extraversion on the relation between blended working and organizational attractiveness. And thus, our second hypothesis was not supported. In the upcoming paragraphs thoughts on this will be discussed.

First, looking at the research design. An important aspect which could have influenced the participants perception on the attractiveness of either blended working or traditional working, is that a questionnaire was used. This does not represent an actual environment and may thus be unrealistically perceived. In this case, people scoring high on extraversion may not have realistically weighed all the consequences (e.g., less-face-to-face interactions, social isolation) when judging the proposed companies and therefore may have perceived both working arrangements not significantly different from people scoring low on extraversion. It must however be said that the study focused on 'perceived organizational attractiveness', which is not organizational satisfaction as both working conditions are not actually experienced.

Another explanation for this could be in line with earlier discussed work from Golden et al. (2008), which brought forward indications that when there is an increase in technologies like videoconferences and web meeting software, the negative effect of social isolation is reduced. It was from that point argued that extraverted participants may not see such measures as a suffice replacement for actual social interactions. However, as the insignificant result may suggest, it may indeed hold and such so that extraverted participants did in fact consider the difference in social interaction between blended and traditional working. But, in this case, due to the numerous actual developments in communication methods, their perception of how negative the effect of these different social interactions is, could be more positive than previously regarded.

Next to this, the vignettes may have contained not enough strongly differentiating information for participants to create the most possible realistic situation. If perhaps even more emphasis would have been put on the consequences that either blended or traditional working could have, extraverted participants may have had a more representative overview.

The age of the participants could also be a possible explanation. Because the participants are all young, they presumably are all very up to date with technological possibilities which enhances the available resources. People from older generations scoring high on extraversion who do not like, do not know how to use, or do not know of the existence of newer online social interaction methods may thus perceive blended working as more negative than the participants of the current study.

Although through the argumentation provided earlier in the paper it would seem plausible that extraversion would negatively affect perceived organizational attractiveness, it cannot be excluded that extraversion simply does not moderate the hypothesized effect. However, it is too early to conclude, and more research is needed.

It was chosen to use Person-Environment Fit Theory (Van Vianen, 2018) as the framework to explain the proposed effect. What may be but cannot be concluded here is that this framework is realistically insufficient when in this case taking a personality trait as the person fit. It cannot be denied that there is a staggering complexity regarding personality trait combinations, and although theoretically it would seem a good fit to take one (extraversion) as a proposed variable in the theorem, it may be too penurious.

Despite these limitations, the results of the present study suggest several implications. First, as stated shortly before, it adds to the already existing evidential implications that blended working overall has a positive impact on organizational attractiveness. This provides suggestions for employers to consider the possibilities regarding blended working. However, it may not be for everyone. And this is rather important. How organizations approach this discrepancy may be very different when considering the organization's size and technological budget. Also, having a completely offsite work climate may introduce new challenges regarding work-floor politics.

Although the interaction effect of extraversion on blended working was not found, it is too early to conclude that any effect regarding would be non-existent. It could still implicate that due to the strong variability between real life social interactions and virtual social interactions, the personality trait extraversion should be dissected into its three components: sociability, assertiveness, and energy level (Soto & John, 2017). Because these three alter, creating studies with, for example, only sociability (desire to socially approach and engage with others) may bring forward new insights.

In terms of future research, it would be useful to extend the current findings in line with the technological developments which strongly influence the manner of blended working. As there are high-speed technological advances creating more possibilities for social interaction, the term social interaction could gain a whole new dimension. An example to elaborate on this is the recent announcement of Meta by Mark Zuckerberg. The implication is that people may soon not only exist in the real world, but in a high-tech, virtual world as well. Here, people could create avatars which may or may not look like the real person and interact with one another (Houser, 2021). Because of the visual 'anonymity' that may be possible, human behavior in this world is ready to be dissected all over again. Regarding the present research, people may be executing blended working at an organization but from all over globe, using virtual reality methods to still be in an office together.

The present research contributes to a growing body of evidence suggesting that blended working is overall favored above traditional working when considering an organization to work at. Although evidence was not found that extraversion negatively impacts the relation of blended working on organizational attractiveness, more research is needed to fully comprehend its effect.

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Appendix: Vignettes

Company DCE offers:	Company JIK offers:
Salary & promotion 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. **Training** Employees will receive job-relevant training at the start of their employment. **Working arrangement** 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). 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.	**Salary & promotion** 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. **Training** Employees will receive job-relevant training at the start of their employment. **Working arrangement** 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. 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.