

**Blending onsite and offsite working: Does Extraversion moderate the effect of Blended
Working on Anticipated Stress?**

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Bachelor Thesis

PSB3-BT.2021-2022.1

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January 16th, 2022

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Abstract

Remote work and flexible working arrangements have been gaining popularity among organisations as well as individuals, have developed over the past centuries and are now as prevalent as ever. This flexibility specifically refers to time- and place independent work which gets enabled through new means of communication and technologies. It can have major impact on health outcomes but research is yet limited so our aim is to contribute to the existing research. In our study we want to examine whether flexible work leads to less anticipated stress in comparison to traditional work environments. Secondly, we hypothesise that personality traits such as extraversion may moderate the relationship between blended working and anticipated stress. We conducted a vignette study ($N = 126$) by presenting descriptions of two hypothetical companies, where we manipulated the type of working arrangement (flexible vs. traditional) and controlled for extraversion. Results showed that participants perceived less anticipated stress in flexible working arrangements. Furthermore, against our second hypothesis, we did not find extraversion to moderate the effect on this relationship. We conclude that flexible working arrangements do play a role in regard to work-related stress but extraversion does not moderate this relationship significantly. Limitations of our study and future directions are discussed.

Keywords: working arrangements, flexible working, extraversion, work-related stress

Blending onsite and offsite working: Does Extraversion moderate the effect of Blended Working on Anticipated Stress?

We are living in a globalised, fast changing world. This can also be conveyed to and perceived in the working world (Hakken, 1993; Gratton, 2012; Neeley, 2020). On the one hand, this involves challenges and expects individuals and organisations to adapt, but on the other hand offers many new opportunities and enhancements (Velocity Global, 2020). Especially the transmission of technology and innovation (Qian & Wang, 2017; Velocity Global, 2020) come into focus in the workplace. Increasing usage of telecommunication technologies in the workplace (Topi, 2006) enables workers to be more flexible in both: means of communication and the places they decide to work. This kind of work known as telecommuting (alternatively: flexible or remote work) is no new concept generally speaking (Nilles, 1975), however it has become more and more diverse, important and popular in the past centuries (Potter, 2003; Future of Work Institute, 2012; Thompson et al., 2014).

Eminently recently, within the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the past two years have expected many people to become more flexible with their working arrangements (Parker et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2021). Being forced into flexible work by the sudden lockdowns have them experienced the effects of it first hand, for instance being less connected to their co-workers (Parker et al., 2020). Some have never worked in remote jobs or from home before but had to adapt to the changing responsibilities, especially people with academic degrees as research by Parker et al. (2020) suggest. That also includes university students. Furthermore, this adaptation, sometimes on daily basis, can have an impact on work-related stressors (Shao et al., 2021). These examples all demonstrate the undesirable outcomes the pandemic can have. They also bring into focus that flexible working arrangements gain compellingly of

importance now and in the future (Lund et al., 2021; Zucker, 2021) as these changes in the workplace will likely prevail and continue to shape the working world. This inevitability is partly reason of this paper.

As broached above, not only current worker but also (graduating) university students will have to face the challenges of the changing working world. Since they are the upcoming workforce it is particularly important to point out their expectations towards flexible working arrangements. According to Graham (2021) the professional environment of working a 9am-5pm job whilst sitting in an office can be deterrent to many students as they perceive the opportunity of flexible working arrangements as appealing. Furthermore, health concerns, especially among the future generation of workers (ie. students) become more and more important for example in terms of maintaining a work-life balance. However, graduating students might face challenges shifting from study life to the working world, as a professional environment. This can be observed as stress and can have an impact on health outcomes, which also can be more easily considered in flexible work rather than in traditional arrangements (Future of Work Institute, 2012; Perry et al., 2018).

Based on this topicality it is important to take these transpositions seriously and address possible changes that organisations can make. Thus, this paper aims to shed light on the potential that flexible working arrangements can have. In the following paragraphs I will elaborate on the concepts and variables important to our own study.

Blended Working arrangements

As pointed out already, flexible working arrangements are not new in the workplace (Thompson et al., 2014) but can be found under numerous different terms such as telecommuting or remote work (Potter; 2003; Topi, 2006). However, more recently the term ‘blended working’ (BW) was coined by van Yperen et al. (2014) and describes time- and

location-independent working arrangements. More specifically, this refers to two main distinctions between being flexible as in terms of flexitime (ie. you can choose the times you wish to work) and flex place (ie. you can choose the place you wish to work at). Thus, in our research, we will refer to flexible working arrangements or remote work from now on as blended work interchangeably.

Opposite to blended working arrangements we will refer to traditional working arrangements that do not offer this flexibility. Traditional work in this context refers to a 9am-5pm work day at a centralised office (Zucker, 2021). As this kind of work it is disappearing and less popular among young individuals companies have to rethink modern working structures that include more blended working arrangements. In our study, we will give the participants hypothetical job offers from these two opposing work environments and want to investigate whether they prefer this over the other and which impact they have on health outcomes.

Person-Environment Fit Theory

Our study will be embedded in the Person-Environment-Fit framework (PE-Fit). Working arrangements as described in the paragraph above can be considered as environmental factors. According to Person-Environment Fit theory, individual- and environmental factors taken together lead to attitudinal outcomes, for example stress (van Vianen, 2018) . Taken together, they predict human behaviour better than separately. Thus, individual factors can function as moderators on the relationship of an environmental factor on a dependent variable; in our case we expect the type of working arrangement to have an effect on anticipated stress, which will be explained further in a paragraph below.

Especially in the context of organisational psychology this framework is often used and applied (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; van Vianen, 2018). Thus PE-Fit will be an applicable

framework in our study and the individual factor for our research, extraversion, will be described next.

Extraversion

Extraversion is a measure of how sociable, energetic and friendly a person can be. It is a broad personality trait and includes assertiveness, energy level, sociability, increased need for arousal and excitement seeking (Lucas & Diener, 2001), just to name a few. Extraverts therefore thrive especially when being around other people and having the opportunity to interact with them. Since extraverts have a greater social seeking tendency they drift more towards seeking social support in order to cope with problems (Swickert et al., 2001), which will likely translate into the workplace, too.

In this research extraversion is expected to moderate the relationship between the given working condition and anticipated stress. The moderation effect is expected to enhance the effect of the predictor on the outcome (van Vianen, 2018). Having the opportunity to socialise and having people around might be restricted in the blended working condition as they do not necessarily need to be at the office and might only have contact to their colleagues through means of online communication, is why anticipated stress could increase in extraverted individuals. In traditional working arrangements they have colleagues around themselves and can seek contact if needed, so we would assume extraverted individuals anticipate less stress in this condition. To put it short: The personality trait extraversion thus may moderate the relationship between blended working and anticipated stress.

Anticipated Stress

Multiple studies and meta-analyses have demonstrated that stress in the workplace can have effects on well-being and health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; MacKay et al., 2004; Nixon et al., 2011; Richardson, 2017). As work is a big part of everyone's daily lives and has shown

to have an influence on our physical states, it is of importance to investigate stress in the context of (blended) work arrangements as dependent variable. Perry et al. (2018) consider the popularity of blended working arrangements to rise but also state that yet not much is known about how that influences employee well-being though it has much practical implication for designing such blended working arrangements. MacKay et al. (2004) also consider stress and health outcomes in the workplace as issues that should be considered. So considering the home or office environment could be different in blended vs. Traditional working arrangements, this can also have an impact on stress levels in individuals.

In our research, we aim to measure anticipated stress by using an adjusted version of the work-related stress scale by Cousins et al. (2004). We are especially interested in the stressor domains demands and control as we expect a link to flexible working arrangements because these are likely to change in comparison to traditional working environments.

Overview

The aim of this study is to extend the findings of the vignette study done by Thompson et al. (2014). Specifically, we are interested to investigate whether extraversion has a moderating effect in the relationship of blended working on anticipated work-related stress. The dependent variable stress can be divided and measured in terms of work demands and work control (Cousins et al., 2004). We hypothesise that (1) there is an effect of blended working arrangements (1a) on anticipated work-related stress demands as well as (1b) on anticipated work-related stress control compared to traditional working arrangements. Furthermore, we hypothesise that (2) extraversion moderates the relationship of blended working (2a) on anticipated work-related stress demands and (2b) on anticipated work-related stress in the control domain compared to traditional working arrangements. We will expect to have individuals experience less stress when having the opportunity to work in blended

working arrangements compared to traditional working arrangements. Primarily, we want to assess whether there is an interaction effect between working arrangement and anticipated stress, whilst controlling for extraversion.

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 utilised 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

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 an internal reliability of $\alpha = .85$. This was attained by re-coding reversed items before averaging the item scores to a scale score. For further analysis, the centred 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

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 Stress

To measure anticipated stress we used the Work-Related Stress Scale by Cousins et al. (2004). The scale served as a template, of which we adjusted the demand and control items, in order to measure anticipated stress in both organisations. The participants were presented with 12 selected items from the Control and Demands domains of the scale, which were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

The demand items (e.g., "I would feel pressured to work long hours") and the control items (e.g., "I would have some say over the way I work") measured for the first company offering blended working arrangements had a high internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .86$ and a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .76$ respectively. The items measured for the second company offering traditional working arrangements also had high internal reliability scores for demands (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$), as well as control (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$). Additionally, we computed the average of all four measures to obtain the scale scores in order to compare the differences of the ratings for demands and control on both levels.

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 on extraversion. 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, anticipated intrinsic motivation, and anticipated stress. The participants finalised the study by completing the attention checks and the items checking on their self-rated response quality.

Results

We conducted our statistical analysis using the SPSS software. Before entering our data into the general linear model we had to centre our covariate extraversion.

Preliminary Analysis

Descriptives and Correlations

The individuals in our study taken together scored average on Extraversion (M = 3.29, SD = .71)

In the blended working condition the correlation between the work-related stress demands domain and extraversion was statistically significant ($r = -.241, p = .007$) as well as the correlation between work-related stress control domain and extraversion ($r = .168, p = .06$). In

the traditional working condition the correlation between the work-related stress demands domain and extraversion was statistically significant ($r = -.180, p = .044$). The correlation between work-related stress control domain and extraversion, on the other hand was not statistically significant ($r = .035, p = .696$).

Other descriptives and correlations are displayed in the Appendix B.

Hypothesis testing

The average of the blended working arrangement offered by company DCE ($M = 3.44, SD = 1.27$) was similar to the traditional working arrangement offered by company JIK ($M = 3.59, SD = 1.1$) in the stress demands domain, which indicates there is no main effect opposed to what we hypothesised. In the control domain the average of blended working arrangement ($M = 5.78, SD = .85$) was slightly higher than the traditional working arrangement ($M = 3.48, SD = 1.06$). As the means differ, there might be a main effect.

The correlations as displayed above suggest there is a statistically significant difference between anticipated stress when controlling for extraversion in the blended working condition. This is in line with our first hypothesis (1a, 1b).

We performed factorial RM-ANCOVA to determine whether the difference between blended working and traditional working arrangements (= levels IV) on anticipated stress (=DV) when controlling for Extraversion (=covariate) is statistically significant.

Assumptions

In order to run the main analysis, we have checked whether the assumptions of a repeated-measures analysis of variance (RM-ANCOVA) were met. The assumption of having two independent variables, of which each has (at least) two levels, was given by our within-subject design. The second assumption of normality was checked by looking at the 4 QQ-Plots, which all can be described as normally distributed. As ANOVA's are robust against vio-

lations if the sample is large enough, which is the case, this assumption can be regarded as fulfilled. The assumption of homogeneity can be ignored as our study did not include any between-subject factors.

As all of the assumptions seem to hold, we could continue further with the data analysis as planned.

Testing the interaction effect

We hypothesised that extraversion moderates the relationship of blended working on anticipated stress (2a) in the demands as well as (2b) in the control domain. The interaction effect (2a) was not significant ($F(1, .754) = .67, p = .416, \eta^2 = .005$) thus hypothesis was not supported. Furthermore, the interaction effect (2b) was not significant ($F(1, .70) = .861, p = .369, \eta^2 = .007$), which is also not in support of our hypothesis. This indicates there was no combined effect for blended working and extraversion on anticipated stress, neither in the demand nor control domain.

Discussion

Findings

Our study investigated whether there is an effect of blended working arrangements on anticipated stress in terms of demands and control. Furthermore, we expected extraversion to moderate the relationship of blended working arrangements opposed to traditional working arrangements. In our sample we found support for our first hypothesis and can conclude there is a negative effect of blended working arrangements on anticipated stress compared to traditional working arrangements. Unfortunately, the findings do not support our second hypothesis. Extraversion does not show to have a moderating effect on anticipated stress in neither the blended working condition nor the traditional condition. How these findings might relate will be discussed in the next sub-section.

Strengths

Next to our findings, I would like to point out strengths our study. First of all, as we carried out our research orienting ourselves by another vignette study by Thompson et al. (2014) with a similar sample size. Thus, we can say that our sample size was sufficient in order to draw conclusions. Further, as shown in the method section, the Cronbach's alpha's show high scale reliability and indicate internal consistency. Another strength are the vignettes we designed as they were consistent across both companies in terms of salary, benefits and promotion except for the description of working arrangements (see Appendix A), which resembles the difference in working arrangements that we aimed to manipulate.

Limitations of our Research and Future Directions

There were a few limitations in our study. This should not be much of concern though, as it delivers the opportunity for future research.

The first limitation I want to address in our research is, that it is rather difficult to measure anticipated stress after presenting vignettes (e.g. in comparison to perceived stress). Although vignettes, as Thompson et al. (2014) suggest, are helpful to conceptualise other concepts, it is rather difficult to measure anticipated stress the they can only imagine how it possibly would feel like to work in this organization. We do not want to undermine the participants ability to imagine, but experiencing working in either a traditional or more flexible working environment would likely evoke more feelings of experiencing the stress first hand. Therefore, it might make sense to extend the study, go into organisations and conduct field studies in real life working environments. It would be interesting to see how the study would unfold in real working environments for example at a company in greater scale. This can be done in future research.

Secondly, as our study showed we just did research with psychology students in our study so far. Therefore, we cannot conclude much about the generalisability of our study. This leaves opportunity to extend our study for example with students within the whole university or from different backgrounds. Different or more diverse professions could be considered in conducting research as some work fields (e.g. nurses, doctors) are not necessarily able to switch from traditional to flexible working arrangements. Students are the ones that are the next generation of workers, so it is important to see what they value in working environments in order to react to it. Thus our study is a good indication of what students potentially value in their future (potential) organisations, what environment they would rather want to work at. Research can build up on these findings and for example conduct studies that compare young vs. old generations, or undergraduates vs. apprentices.

A third limitation I want to point out is extraversion as moderator as it did not show a significant effect. Instead of extraversion, which is a broad personality trait including multiple facets (Lucas & Diener, 2001) it might be favourable taking this personality trait apart and taking a closer look at the concepts combined under this umbrella term. Especially social support would be interesting to look at as sociability plays an immense role in the differentiation between introverts and extroverts. As an example, we can choose an organisation that has a traditional working environment. There, we can assess the above used personality traits and dependent variable in advance and split the people working there in two groups (blended working vs. traditional) and compare after a month, how their dependent variables have changed over the course of a month. We could use the personality assessment beforehand. Existing research on blended working and extraversion (or personality traits in general) is very rare so far, thus it adds to existing literature

And lastly, stress in the scale by Cousins et al. (2004) mentions six domains measuring work-related stress as a whole. There are next to demands and control, which we measured in our study, four other domains, e.g. social support, which again in terms of extraversion could possibly have a more significant effect. As pointed out in the introduction, extroverted people seek more contact to colleagues in comparison to introverted people. They are less likely to profit from flexible working arrangements and experience more anticipated stress but it would be interesting to see, whether introverted individuals would also perceive less social support when only working for example in online environments.

Conclusion

Overall, we can conclude that our study is not flawless but none of the limitations mentioned are considerably scuppering. There is furthermore room for improvements, for example instead of using vignettes doing field studies. This is discussed in detail and shows there is room for further investigations of both different moderators to be considered as well as other variables that might come into play when discussing blended working arrangements. Another suggestion for future research can be, that customised working arrangements are likely the way to go; the more we tailor working arrangements to specific individuals or personality traits, the more effective an individual can work and profit. Our research contributes to the existing literature on blended working arrangements, which is yet limited and offers future direction that can be investigated further. Much research still needs to be done, especially when looking at individual traits as they usually include multiple facets.

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Appendix A

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 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.

<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 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>Working arrangement</p> <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 workfloor and during meetings at the office.

Appendix B

Descriptives and Correlations

Descriptives

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Extra_Mean	126	1.58	4.92	3.2851	.70980
Valid N (listwise)	126				

Descriptives

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Extra_centered	126	-1.70	1.63	.0001	.70980
Valid N (listwise)	126				

Descriptives

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mean_Demand1	126	1.00	6.33	3.4418	1.27407
Mean_Control1	126	1.67	7.00	5.7765	.85066
Mean_Demand2	126	1.50	6.33	3.5899	1.09537
Mean_Control2	126	1.17	6.67	3.4775	1.05543
Valid N (listwise)	126				

Correlations

		Extra_Mean	Mean_Demand1	Mean_Control1	Mean_Demand2	Mean_Control2
Extra_Mean	Pearson Correlation	1	-.241**	.168	-.180*	.035
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007	.060	.044	.696
	N	126	126	126	126	126
Mean_Demand1	Pearson Correlation	-.241**	1	-.337**	.201*	-.209*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007		<.001	.024	.019
	N	126	126	126	126	126
Mean_Control1	Pearson Correlation	.168	-.337**	1	-.111	.066
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.060	<.001		.218	.465
	N	126	126	126	126	126
Mean_Demand2	Pearson Correlation	-.180*	.201*	-.111	1	-.311**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.044	.024	.218		<.001
	N	126	126	126	126	126
Mean_Control2	Pearson Correlation	.035	-.209*	.066	-.311**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.696	.019	.465	<.001	
	N	126	126	126	126	126

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).