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HOW DOES THE AVAILABILITY AND USE OF FLEXIBLE LEAVE INFLUENCE THE EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIP?

ABSTRACT

In this paper we develop, and empirically test, a moderated mediation model of the effects of flexible leave on employees' organizational attachment. Drawing on a social exchange framework and signalling theory, we explore how the material and non-material nature of exchange between the employer and employee shapes their relationship. First, we show that the relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational attachment is shaped by two competing mediators, perceived organizational support and perceived flexibility stigma. Second, we delineate between availability and use of the policy, to show how the effect of perceived organizational support is enhanced and perceived flexibility stigma reduced, with use. Our findings demonstrate that the relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational attachment is complex, but is enhanced through use of flexible leave. We contribute towards HRM scholarship about the relationship between employees' experience of HR practices and their corresponding impact on employees' subsequent behaviour

KEYWORDS: flexible leave, perceived organizational support, perceived flexibility stigma, social exchange theory, signalling theory.

HOW DOES THE AVAILABILITY AND USE OF FLEXIBLE LEAVE INFLUENCE THE EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIP?

INTRODUCTION

Flexible working arrangements are considered to be a positive development, leading to their proliferation, associated growing media attention, and a burgeoning literature on their effectiveness (Kossek, Sweet & Pitt-Catsoupes, 2006). Empirical evidence of their effectiveness, however, has been less than clear; meta-analyses of the growing literature include Byron's (2005) study showing a positive impact of flexible working arrangements and Mesmer-Magnus and Visweswaran's (2006) study showing insignificant results. In reviewing the evidence, Shockley and Allen (2007) conclude that, even within meta analytic research, there is a great deal of equivocality associated with the effectiveness of flexible working arrangements. Further, in their narrative review of the literature, Kelly and co-authors (Kelly, Hammer, Durham, Bray, Chermack, Murphy & Kaskubar, 2008: 306) suggest that despite the rapid adoption of flexible working arrangements, "managers in employing organizations simply do not know whether and which organizational initiatives ... are likely to impact employees and the organization as a whole." We suggest the lack of clarity about the relationship between flexible working arrangements and employee outcomes may be due to three limitations of extant studies.

First, scholars have employed "flexible working arrangements" as an umbrella term, assuming the effects of all flexible working policies will be uniformly positive across a range of, proximal to distal, employee outcomes (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). Second, scholars have tended to assume a direct relationship between policies for flexible working and employee outcome, with effects that are indirect in nature remaining under-researched (Allen, 2001; Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Butts, Casper & Yang, 2013). To

date, absent is any consideration of the question as to *how* flexible leave policies indirectly shape employees' experiences before leading to employee outcomes (Kelly et al., 2008). Third, scholars have paid little attention to whether or not the relation to the relationship between flexible working and employee outcomes is shaped by the difference between the availability and use of such arrangements (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Kelly et al., 2008). Differentiating between the availability and use of flexible leave enables us to address the question as to *when*, i.e. under what conditions does flexible leave matter? In this paper we focus on one specific form of flexible working arrangement, flexible leave, to explain how the availability and use of flexible leave shape employees' organizational attachment.

We address the three limitations of extant studies, and contribute to extant scholarship, as follows. First, we focus on a specific flexible working arrangement, flexible leave, because it is a flexible working arrangement that is available to all employees, regardless of family responsibilities and circumstances (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). Flexible leave, however, remains the least understood of flexible working arrangements in terms of its effects on employee outcomes (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wight & Neuma, 1999; Kelly et al., 2008). In addition, we note that extant studies have employed a wide range of outcomes relating to employees' attitudes, ranging from measures of employees' perceptions of work-life balance well-being, and job satisfaction, to organizational attachment encompassing both employees' organizational commitment and turnover intentions. In this study, we focus on the latter, employees' organizational attachment, because it is a general construct that encompasses the socio-emotional outcomes relating to employer-employee relationship (Lee & Mitchell, 1994), comprising both attitudinal (e.g. organizational commitment) and behavioural (e.g. turnover intention) components (Labianca & Brass, 2006).

Second, to address the *how* question we develop a mediation model to link the availability of flexible leave to employee outcomes through their effect employees' attitudes towards their employer. Drawing on social exchange theory (SET) (see: Cropanzano & Mitchell [2005] for a review) and signaling theory (Spence, 1973), we explore the process of social exchange between the employer and the employee, which are characterised by interdependency and contingency, involving material as well as non-material exchange (Blau, 1964). Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) suggest that employers provide the first "signal" of a desire for a closer working relationship with their employees, through the introduction of a new HRM practice such as flexible leave. Employers hope that their actions will be reciprocated in a positive manner by employees. It is through such signal-response incidents that employers intend to develop high quality employer-employee relationships.

Due to the equivocal findings of extant studies we include two mediators to account for the potentially positive and negative impact of flexible leave, perceived organizational support (POS) and perceived flexibility stigma respectively. We employ POS because it is a key concept in SET, which acts as a mediator in linking HRM practices to employee outcomes (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 2002). Our inclusion of perceived flexibility stigma stems from the recent emergence of a literature about the potential dark side of policies promoting flexible working (see: Perrigino, Dunford & Wilson, 2018, for a narrative review). In their review, Perrigino et al. (2018) highlight that it is important to incorporate the dark side into studies of the effects flexible working because the dark side is pervasive across different types of policies, and it enables a positioning of attitudes across a broad spectrum from positive to negative. In employing two mediators, we contribute to extant scholarship by exploring *how* flexible leave shapes employee outcomes.

Third, we explore the differential effect of the availability and use of the policy (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz & Shockley, 2013; Butts et al., 2013; Kelly & Moen, 2007; Kossek, 2005; Kossek, Barber & Winters, 1999). We do so by developing a moderated mediation model to examine the difference between availability and use of the policy on the relationship between our mediators (POS and perceived flexibility stigma) and employee outcomes. A moderated mediation approach enables us to contribute to extant scholarship by exploring the question as to *when* does flexible leave have an effect on employee outcomes, through our two mediators POS and perceived flexibility stigma. Simply stated, the moderated mediation model enables us to simultaneously address the *how* and *when* questions relating to the relationship between flexible leave and employee outcomes.

Theoretically, bringing the foci of our study together, we contribute towards HRM scholarship that has become increasingly concerned with the relationship between employees' experience of HR practices and their corresponding impact on employees' subsequent behaviour (Alfes et al., 2012; Baluch, 2017; Bos-Nehles & Veenendaal, 2017; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Jiang et al., 2017; Purcell & Kinnie, 2006; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Specifically focusing upon flexible leave, we highlight the relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational attachment is complex, but is enhanced through actual use of flexible leave.

Empirically, we examine the introduction of flexible leave at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the UK. At the time of our study, the BBC was going through a period of cutbacks, which exemplifies a context within which recent calls for research to investigate HR practices in organizations undergoing austerity, can be addressed (Ruth-Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013). We employed a longitudinal quasi-experimental approach, with all participants surveyed when flexible leave policy was first introduced, and then 12 months

later, which enabled us to delineate between the availability and use of the policy. To test our model we drew on a recent innovation in mediation modelling approach based on a path analysis, which is derived from developments in structural equation modelling (Kline, 2015), and the simultaneous testing of multiple indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

MODEL DEVELOPMENT

Flexible working spans a considerable range of organizational practices, including flexible work hours, working from home, sharing a full-time job between two employees (job sharing), family friendly leave programs (e.g. parental leave, adoption leave, compassionate leave), on-site childcare, and financial and/or informational assistance with childcare and eldercare services (Shockley & Allen, 2010). To date there is a lack of studies that examine the effects of specific flexible working policies on specific employee outcomes (Moen, Kelly & Chermach, 2009). Each form of flexible working, however, should be treated as a distinct policy (Kossek & Nichol, 1992).

To aid with definitional clarity, scholars differentiate between flexibility associated with place of work (referred to as flexplace) and flexibility associated with scheduling of work (referred to as flextime) (Allen et al., 2013). The distinction is important because flextime policies are mainly used to manage various non-work and personal concerns, whereas flexplace practices are useful only to those with current or future dependents (Casper & Harris, 2008). We focus on flextime, because unlike some forms of flexible working, it is a policy that is available to all employees regardless of family responsibilities and circumstances (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). Specifically, we focus on the flextime policy of flexible leave, following calls to focus on the effectiveness of specific policies (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Flexible leave constitutes taking leave when it suits the employee, thereby allowing the employee greater control and autonomy over their work time.

To explore the impact of the availability and use of flexible leave on employee outcomes we draw on SET and signalling theory to develop a moderated mediation model as outlined below. Specifically, we address the issue as to *how* POS and perceived flexibility stigma mediate the relationship between the availability of flexible leave and employee outcomes.

The mediators of flexible leave and employee outcomes

Social exchange theory (SET) is a key conceptual framework for explaining the link between employees' experience of, and attitudes towards, their employer (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). At its core, SET focuses on the series of interactions that create obligations between two or more parties (Emerson, 1976), with the interactions being interdependent and contingent on the actions of others (Blau, 1964). Over time, the interdependent interactions may lead to the development of high-quality reciprocal relationships, defined by trust, loyalty and mutual commitment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Reciprocal interdependence brings into focus the contingent nature of interactions and the exchange underpinning them. Reciprocal exchange does not include explicit bargaining (Molm 2000; 2003), rather one party provides a benefit, and if the other reciprocates, new rounds of exchange follow (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

An unresolved issue within SET, however, surrounds the causal order of exchanges between parties and their impact on the nature of relationships (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In the case of flexible leave, the causal order of exchanges is shaped by the distinction between the use and availability of the policy, which mirrors SET's distinction between material and non-material exchange (see: Homans, 1958). Use of flexible leave provides a material benefit for the employee in being able to take leave at their discretion. In contrast, the availability of flexible leave, independent of use, provides non-material benefit to the employee through the psychological and/or social gain that comes from

feeling that their employer is supportive of them. In Homan's (1958: 606) terms, non-material benefit derives from "the symbols of approval or prestige".

To examine the nature of social exchange, involving the non-material benefit that stems from the availability of flexible leave, we draw on the related concept of signalling theory. Signalling theory was developed to examine how employers assess the unobservable attributes of potential employees (see: Spence, 1973). Following Spence, scholars have broadened the focus of signalling theory to examine employees' interpretations of the actions of an organization as signals of unobservable intentions and motives (Goldberg & Allen, 2008). Applied to flexible leave, we suggest that availability of the policy provides the employer's first "signal" of a desire for a closer working relationship with their employees, which independent of use, the employer hopes that the non-material benefit will be reciprocated in a positive manner by employees (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Grover and Crooker (1995: 274) suggest that family-supportive policies "symbolize corporate concern, and such perceived care for employees may be construed positively by employees regardless of whether they personally benefit". If successful, the non-material benefit will help establish high-quality exchange relationships that create obligations for employees to reciprocate in positive, beneficial ways (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986; Shore & Wayne, 1993).

Rather than having a direct effect on employees' perceptions of the employer-employee relationship, we suggest that the effect of the availability of flexible leave will be indirect in nature. We do so because it is naïve to assume that the effect of a flexible working policy will have a direct effect on employee behaviour, particularly given that employee responses to HR practices are at the heart of all HRM-performance models (Alfes et al., 2012; Baluch, 2017; Bos-Nehles & Veenendaal, 2017; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Jiang et al., 2017; Purcell &

Kinnie, 2006; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Given the equivocal findings of extant studies (see: Byron, 2005; Kelly et al., 2008; Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006; Mesmer-Magnus & Visweswaran, 2006), we include two mediators to account for the potentially positive and negative impact of flexible leave, perceived organizational support (POS) and perceived flexibility stigma respectively.

Following the lead of Casper and Harris (2008), we employ POS because it is a key concept in SET, which acts as a mediator in linking HRM practices to employee outcomes (Eisenberger et al., 2002). POS is defined as employees' perception of the degree to which "an organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger, et al., 1986: 501). We argue that the introduction of flexible leave sends a signal to employees that they are valued, which will enhance the employees' POS; in turn POS will enhance employees' organizational attachment as they reciprocate the non-material benefit gained from their employer. Evidence to support the hypothesis that POS mediates the relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational attachment, is present in extant literature. For example, there is strong empirical support for the relationship between a range of family supportive practices and POS (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart & Adis, 2017). In addition, there is strong evidence that POS shapes the attitudes of employees towards their employer (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Hence, we suggest that the availability of flexible leave will send a signal from the employer to the employee that will increase employees' POS, which will in turn increase their organizational attachment as measured by organizational commitment and turnover intention. The argument above leads us to hypothesize H1a and H1b.

H1a: POS mediates the positive relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational commitment, with higher POS being associated with higher organizational commitment.

H1b: POS mediates the negative relationship between the availability of flexible leave and turnover intention, with higher POS being associated with lower turnover intention.

Although the organizational intention of introducing a policy of flexible working is to send a signal to the employee that they are valued, the uptake of flexible working practices has been relatively slow (Tipping, Chanfreau, Perry, & Tait, 2012). We suggest that slow uptake of flexible working practices may be due in part to their potential dark side, that is fear of employees that use of such practices disadvantages them. To date, consideration of this dark side has been absent from studies linking flexible working to employees' organizational attachment (Perrigino et al., 2018). To explore *how* the dark side of a policy of flexible leave may shape employees' organizational attachment, we again explore the indirect effect of employees' responses (see: Purcell & Kinnie, 2007)

We model the indirect effect of employees' response to the dark side of flexible working by focusing on the dominant reason employees give for not adopting flexible working arrangements. Specifically, employees' fear that adopting flexible working will send their employer a signal that their personal life responsibilities diminish their commitment to the organization, and that managers will penalise them accordingly (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Blair-Loy, Wharton, & Goodstein, 2011; McCloskey & Igbaria, 2003; Williams, Blair-Loy & Berdahl, 2013). Such a fear is termed flexibility stigma, which is defined as the discrimination towards workers using various types of flexible working arrangements for family responsibilities and care purposes (Williams et al., 2013). Employees' fear of flexibility stigma is very real, with over a third of all workers in the UK work-life balance survey of 2011 agreeing with the statement that those who work flexibly create more work for others (Chung, 2018).

To date, scholarship on flexibility stigma has focused on examining the impact on employees of requesting, and/or taking up different forms of flexible working, in terms of career penalties (see: Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Blair-Loy, 2003; Epstein, Seron, Oglensky & Saute, 1999). Following the lead of Chech and Blair-Loy (2014), our interest lies in examining how employees' perceptions of flexibility stigma are influenced by the introduction of a policy of flexible leave, independent of an employees' use of the policy. We suggest that the introduction of a policy of flexible leave will raise the visibility of flexible working in an organization, and with it employees' fear of the signals they may send to their employer through their attitudes towards and/or use of the policy. Paradoxically, the act of making the policy of flexible leave available will affect the social exchange relationship between the employer and employee, such that employees' perceive there being an elevated risk of flexibility stigma. In turn, an elevated level of perceived flexibility stigma will lead to a reduction in employees' organizational attachment, through a reduction in their organizational commitment and intentions to remain with their employer (Chech & Blair-Loy, 2014).

Hence, we suggest perceived flexibility stigma will mediate the relationship between the availability of flexible leave and employee's organizational attachment. Specifically, the availability of flexible leave will elevate employees' perceived flexibility stigma, and the fear that they will send a negative signal to their employer, which in turn will reduce employees' organizational attachment as measured by organizational commitment and turnover intention. Based on the above argumentation we suggest H2a and H2b.

H2a: Perceived flexibility stigma mediates the negative relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational commitment, with higher perceived flexibility stigma being associated with lower organizational commitment.

H2b: Perceived flexibility stigma mediates the positive relationship between the availability of flexible leave and turnover intention, with higher perceived flexibility stigma being associated with higher turnover intention.

Availability and use of flexible working: moderating effects

We now shift our attention to exploring the issue as to *when* flexible leave has an effect on employee organizational attachment for both of our mediators (POS and perceived flexibility stigma). Specifically, we develop a moderated mediation model, differentiating between the availability and use of the policy, and in doing so, simultaneously address the *how* and *when* questions relating to the relationship between flexible leave and employee outcomes. We do so because we cannot assume that the introduction of flexible leave will have a uniform effect on employees' organizational attachment. Rather, our interest lies in exploring *how* employees' responses to flexible leave may change *when* they use the policy (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Kelly et al., 2008; Thompson, Payne & Taylor, 2015).

We begin by examining the mediator of POS. In our mediation hypotheses 1a and 1b we argue that the availability of flexible leave provides a non-material benefit, which operates in the form of a signal from the employer to the employee that they are valued, enhancing their POS and organizational attachment in turn. We suggest that use of the policy will strengthen the mediating effect of POS, upon the relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational attachment, for two main reasons.

First, in relation to the signal sent from the employer to the employee through the availability of flexible leave, users of flexible leave will view the policy as being fairer (Parker & Allen, 2001) and more targeted towards them (Lambert, 2000), as compared to non-users. Users of the policy, therefore, will gain a higher level of non-material benefit from the availability of the flexible leave as compared to non-users. Second, users of flexible leave will gain an additional material benefit from use of the policy, as compared to those that do

not use the policy. Employing a logic of self-interest (see: Lind & Tyler, 1988), we suggest that the effect will be pronounced as users of flexible leave will value the policy more highly than non-users. Taken together, we argue that employees use of the flexible leave will provide them with additional non-material and material benefits, which will enhance the social exchange relationship with their employer, such that the relationship between POS and organizational attachment will be stronger for users as compared to non-users.

Based on the argument above, we hypothesize that the effect of the mediator of POS on the relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational attachment will be stronger for users as compared to non users. Hence 3a and 3b:

H3a: Use of flexible leave moderates the indirect relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational commitment in such a way that the effect of POS on organizational commitment is stronger for users as compared to non-users of flexible leave.

H3b: Use of flexible leave moderates the indirect relationship between the availability of flexible leave and turnover intention in such a way that the effect of POS on turnover intention is stronger for users as compared to non-users of flexible leave.

We now turn to our mediator of perceived flexibility stigma. In our mediation hypotheses 2a and 2b we argue that the availability of flexible leave will elevate employees' perceived flexibility stigma, via the fear that they will send a negative signal to their employer, which in turn will reduce employees' organizational attachment. We suggest that use of flexible leave will dampen the mediating effect of perceived flexibility stigma, on the relationship between the availability of flexible leave on organizational attachment, as follows.

Employees' use of flexible leave will provide the employer an opportunity to demonstrate their positive intention towards, and commitment to, the the introduction of the policy. As employees use the policy they will gain confidence about their employer's positive intentions for, and commitment to flexible leave, and the security of knowledge

that they are not being judged or penalized for doing so. Accordingly, employees' use of flexible leave will reduce their perceived flexibility stigma, as their fear of being negatively judged or penalised by their employers is diminished (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Blair-Loy, Wharton, & Goodstein, 2011; McCloskey & Igbaria, 2003; Williams, Blair-Loy & Berdahl, 2013). Employees' use of flexible leave, therefore, will enhance an employee's social exchange relationship with their employer, through dampening the mediating effect of perceived flexibility stigma on the relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational attachment.

Based on the argument above, we hypothesize the effect of the mediator of perceived flexibility stigma on the relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational attachment, will be weaker for users as compared to non users. Hence: H4a and H4b.

H4a: Use of flexible leave moderates the indirect relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational commitment in such a way that the effect perceived flexibility stigma on organizational commitment is weaker for users as compared to non-users of flexible leave.

H4b: Use of flexible leave moderates the indirect relationship between the availability of flexible leave and turnover intention in such a way that the effect perceived flexibility stigma on turnover intention is weaker for users as compared to non-users of flexible leave.

A summary of our theoretical model is presented in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

DATA AND METHOD

Our study took place at the BBC during a period of cutbacks, when the organization was subject to significant budget cuts in the run up to the renewal of its charter in 2016-2017. A pressing need to respond to performance measures imposed by BBC stakeholders and consumer groups had led to the introduction of a range of new measures: a more flexible

workforce; reducing the number of senior managers and flattening the structure; modernizing terms and conditions for staff; increasing out-of-London production; and reducing the BBC's property estate. Job cuts were announced in October 2011, which led to the Unions claiming staff morale was at an all-time low. At the same time, the BBC remained an employer enacting good HR practices as they compete for, and seeked to retain, talent.

In an attempt to balance the competing tensions, of the need for austerity and to attract and retain talent, management (including the HR Director) and trade union representatives sought to introduce flextime as a means of improving job outcomes for staff. In this study we focus on the introduction of a flexible leave policy, which allowed employees to choose and distribute their leave entitlement, with its aim being to give employees maximum latitude in scheduling their leave. The introduction of flexible leave policy was clearly communicated to all employees participating in the initiative, with managers also receiving guidance on how to handle a flexible leave request with a clear steer to approve requests whenever possible.

Data

We adopted a quasi-experimental design for the study (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002), in order to compare an intervention group (which were subjected to the introduction of the flexible leave policy - located in the Bristol office) with a near-equivalent control group (no introduction of the policy - located in the London office) at two points in time with researchers controlling for pre-existing differences, allowing estimates of the intervention's effectiveness, even when intervention and control groups are non-equivalent (Shadish et al., 2002). As we can only assume our estimators are unbiased when using a randomized research design, it was advantageous there was no interference between the intervention group and the control group as they were based on different sites, some distance apart

(Bristol and London). Thus, we avoided contamination effects, where members of the intervention group may influence members of the control group and vice versa (Cook & Campbell, 1976).

The data collection involved four stages. Stage 1 (three months prior to the pilot) involved a “town hall” meeting with all staff at Bristol, which was conducted to inform and discuss the introduction of the flexible leave scheme to be piloted. Stage 2 (one month prior to the pilot) involved an online pre-test questionnaire, which was administered to all staff at both sites one month before the 12-month pilot of the new flexible leave scheme. The online survey captured data relating to our model variables (as detailed later in the paper). Scale items were presented in randomized order within question blocks to reduce order effects and common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Podsakoff & Lee, 2003). The survey was linked to employee records in order to collect data on demographic characteristics of gender, education, tenure, job type (full-time or part-time) and age group. In Stage 3 the pilot scheme was rolled out for 12 months and individuals in the intervention group were asked whether they wished to opt in or opt out of the pilot. Here, the researchers had no control over assignment to intervention condition. Following the start of the pilot, the research team collected monthly leave records. Each month the researchers would ask each participant in the experimental group how much leave they had taken that month. The data on leave was not shared with the employer. Finally, in Stage 4 (one month after the pilot) we administered the post-test survey to all employees (in both sites) when the flexible leave policy was implemented and then 12 months later. The use of repeated measurements in our design allowed each individual to be used as his or her own control, which typically increases the power and precision of statistical tests (Schmidt & Hunter,

2004). The timing of the posttest measurement is an important aspect of our research and twelve months provided sufficient duration for the effects to take place (Baltes et al., 1999).

The sample

The participants for the study were a heterogeneous sample representing a wide cross-section of employees in terms of gender, age, organizational tenure, level of education, or their rank in the organization. Participants were employees from three sections of the BBC in both London and Bristol (Natural History Unit, Features and Documentaries). Participation in the study was limited to those employees who were on full-time contracts and fixed term contracts of more than a year. At Time 1 the survey was completed by 235 of 250 potential respondents, giving a response rate of 87%. There were 66.5% women and 33.5% men in the intervention group and 68.6% women and 31.4% men in the control group. The average age of participants was 33.34 years, and their average tenure was 39.76 months. At Time 2 the same members were asked to complete the survey, including those who did not respond at Time 1 or had joined since Time 1. The survey was completed by 222 of 250 potential respondents, giving a response rate of 85%. In terms of robustness check, Chi-square and *t*-tests confirmed there were no differences between the sample of employees that were in the intervention group and those who formed our control group in terms of their gender, age, organizational tenure, level of education, or their rank in the organization. Chi-square and *t*-tests also confirmed that there were no differences between our sample for the study and the total possible sample on any of the above demographics.

The longitudinal sample, comprising those who responded at both Time 1 and 2, was 210, of which there were 125 team members in the intervention group and 85 in the control group. Of the 210 Time 1 respondents, 204 potential respondents remained at Time 2, as six employees had either moved elsewhere within the organization, quit voluntarily, or taken

maternity leave. The response rate for the Time 1 respondents remaining at Time 2 was 97.1%. Finally, 60% of the intervention group opted to use the arrangement.

To test for the effects of participant attrition we followed the lead of Goodman and Blum (1996), conducting a logistical regression in which the dependent variable is a dichotomous variable representing those present at time 1 and time 2 (stayers) and those represented at time 1 but had left in time 2 (leavers). All main study variables were entered as independent variables. No significant effect was found, indicating that participant attrition should not bias the results.

Measures

We employed five model variables to test our conditional mediated model that examines the effect of job outcomes (organizational commitment and turnover intention), arising from the impact of flexible working arrangements on POS and perceived flexibility stigma. The measure for each model variable is detailed below, for which we compute the Cronbach's alpha for all multi-item scales. All Cronbach's alpha scores were all 0.80 or above indicating a high degree of internal consistency in responses to the individual questions.

Organizational commitment was measured using Allen and Meyer's (1996) abridged 5 item version of Meyer and Allen's (1984) affective commitment scale. The items reflect the respondent's commitment based on emotional attachment the employee develops with the employer, predominantly from positive work-based experiences, and were measured using a five-point likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha for organizational commitment was 0.81.

Turnover intention was measured using the four-item scale employed by Colarelli (1984), involving a five-point likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha for turnover intention was 0.89.

Perceived organizational support (POS) was measured using an eight-item scale with respondents asked to indicate the extent to which they disagreed or agreed with the statements, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The Cronbach's alpha for POS measure was 0.81.

*Perceived flexibility stigma*¹ was measured using the four-items suggested by Blair-Loy (2003) with respondents asked to indicate the degree to which they disagreed or agreed ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha for perceived flexibility stigma was 0.81.

Availability of flexible leave policy was assessed as an individual-item dichotomous measure, where 1 indicates the availability of the policy (intervention site) and 0 otherwise.

Use of the arrangement is measured as a binary variable and reflects whether the members of the treatment group used the flexible leave policy for the 12 month period. A value of 1 indicates that the person had used the policy for the 12 months and 0 they had not used the policy.

Finally, we also included control variables including *tenure* (number of years with the BBC), *gender* (0 = female, 1= male) and age, which has been identified in extant research as a significant correlate of the measures of interest in this study (Meyer, Mukerjee & Sestero, 2001). Given the importance of gender to previous studies of flexible working, although not the focus of our study, we comment on any gender specific effects in our results section. In addition, we also examined other sample characteristics that may affect our predicted effects, employees who are *married-cohabiting* (1= married-cohabiting, 0 = otherwise) and/or who have *dependents* (1 = with dependents, 0 = otherwise).

¹ The measure for perceived flexibility stigma relates to both formal and informal HR policies. In this study our focus is on formal HR policies only.

All variables were mean centred to provide a meaningful zero point for interpreting the results (as suggested for mediation studies by Judd, McClelland & Culhane 1995), whereby tests of the interactions could be carried out, and also to reduce the likelihood that multicollinearity could influence the results (Aiken & West, 1991).

Statistical method

Although our study did not conform to the strict criteria for a randomized control trial, our data set is characterized by observations drawn from the same participants at two points in time and across two locations (i.e. we have longitudinal data for both a treatment group and a control group). Using the DID approach to longitudinal pretest-posttest design we were able to consider differences between the mediators and dependent variables between Time 1 (pre-test) and Time 2 (post-test) (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002). In doing so we imposed two assumptions in order to restrict the scope of possible bias (MacKinnon, 2008). The first assumption is that the treatment variable (i.e. exposure to the availability of flexible leave) is time invariant. We also included a time variable that indicated observations at Time 2 (controlling for Time 1), with the treatment effect being the product of both the treatment and time variable. In doing so we made our second assumption, the common trend assumption, that the confounders varying across the intervention and control groups are time invariant, and time-varying confounders are group invariant.

The empirical testing of multiple moderation and mediation models is methodologically complex, and so we draw on recent developments in structural equation modelling (Kline, 2015) and the simultaneous testing of multiple indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). We employ a path-analytic framework (Preacher & Selig, 2012), expressing the relationships between our constructs via regression equations, and incorporate moderation by extending these equations with the moderator variable and its product with the mediator variables

(Edward & Lambert, 2007). The path-analytic approach has a number of advantages. First, mediation can be performed through a single test of the indirect effects (Hayes, 2013; Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher & Selig, 2012), which reduces likelihood of making an inferential error (Hayes, 2013). Second, a path-analytic framework facilitates the testing of multiple mediators, with the ability to compare the relative magnitude of indirect effects through the mediators, and assess whether the mediators are independent of one another (MacKinnon, 2000; MacKinnon, 2008; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Third, a path-analytic approach enables us to model the indirect effect as a function of another variable, allowing researchers to test how indirect effects depend on other variables to explore moderated mediation (Preacher, Rucker & Hayes, 2007). Our approach involves a focus on the estimation of interactions between the moderator and the pathways that defined the indirect effect (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Muller, Judd & Yzerbyt, 2005; Preacher et al., 2007), which emphasizes the estimation of conditional indirect effects (i.e. the value of indirect effects conditioned on values of the moderator). The results for our path model of mediation and moderation is presented in Table 3.

For further tests of the indirect effects of our mediators and moderators, rather than employing the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982), which is commonly used to further establish the mediation (and moderated mediation) effects (as suggested by Baron & Kenny, 1986), we adopt a non-parametric approach (Efron & Tibshirani 1993; MacKinnon, Lockwood & Williams, 2004). We do so because the Sobel test requires all coefficients to be normally distributed, which is usually not true for smaller samples (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West & Sheets, 2002). Specifically, we employed a non-parametric bootstrapping approach, which has different assumptions relating to normal distribution, symmetries, and large sample sizes (Bollen & Stine, 1990; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Our approach involved

estimating the sampling distribution of the moderated mediation effects non-parametrically, through bootstrapping, and then using the estimations to generate confidence intervals for the moderated mediation effects (Muller et al., 2005; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Our approach is considered to be most effective for small samples and least vulnerable to Type I errors (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The resultant confidence interval, when not containing the value of zero, demonstrates there is a significant difference in the change of coefficients for the test of mediation. The results of our non-parametric bootstrapping approach are presented in Tables 4a and 4b.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the correlations amongst all the study variables for the samples within time period 1 and time period 2. The correlations show the model variables are not confounded by differences in levels of married-cohabiting, tenure and age, as judged by the absence of statistically significant correlations with the model variables. In addition, we found that the variables for married/cohabiting were correlated with the variable for dependents. Consequently, married-cohabiting, tenure and age are excluded from further analysis to reduce the number of parameters estimated, and because analysis that includes unnecessary control variables may yield biased parameter estimates (Becker, 2005). We retained gender and dependents because they were significantly correlated with our model variables, and previous studies of flexible working arrangements have identified them as key predictors of job outcomes (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Finally, we can see from Table 1 there is substantial correlation between the same variable measured at pretest time and post-test time, indicating that our relationships among variables are stable over time.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Table 2 shows that all model variables were similar across the intervention and control groups for time period 1, with no significant differences in group means. In contrast, in period 2 we found significant differences across the means for the intervention group and the control group for all model variables (all at $p < 0.5$). When turning to the comparison of means across time, as expected, we found no significant differences for all model variables for the control group. In contrast, we found significant differences for organizational commitment, POS and perceived flexibility stigma (all at $p < .05$), but no significant differences for turnover intention.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Our analysis progressed in a series of stages. First, tested our mediation and moderated mediation models employing ordinary least squares regression analysis, incorporating DID as our data is quasi-experimental in nature. Table 3 outlines the different elements of our path model. First, we examined the regression coefficients for the effects of the availability of the flexible leave policy on our mediators, POS and perceived flexibility stigma (models 1 and 2). The results indicate that the availability of flexible leave is associated with the mediators, having a positive and significant effect on POS (coefficient = .38, $p < .05$) and a positive and significant effect on perceived flexibility stigma (coefficient = .2, $p < .05$).

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Second, we examined the paths for our mediators on our outcome variables of organizational commitment (model 3) and turnover intention (model 4). Model 3 indicates that POS has a positive and significant (coefficient = .31, $p < .01$), and perceived flexibility stigma a negative and significant (coefficient = -.06, $p < .05$), relationship with organizational commitment. Model 4 indicates that POS has a negative and significant (coefficient = -.35, $p < .01$), and perceived flexibility stigma a positive and significant (coefficient = .02, $p < .01$),

relationship with turnover intention. Turning to the non-hypothesized paths, indicating the direct effect of availability of flexible leave, in model 3 availability has a positive and significant relationship with organizational commitment (coefficient = .17, $p < .05$) indicating partial mediation, but in model 4 the availability is not significantly associated with turnover intention indicating full mediation. For models 3 and 4 we also note that our treatment effects were statistically significant, with the intervention group is seeing a reduction in organizational commitment (model 3: -.12, $p < .05$) and turnover intention (model 4: -.16, $p < .05$) as compared to the control group.

Third, we examined the moderated mediation effects (models 5 and 6), the path models for which are presented in Figures 2 and 3. The inclusion of the moderator of use of flexible leave led to a significant increase in the predictive power of our models (model 5 $R^2 = .15$, $p < .01$; model 6 $R^2 = .26$, $p < .01$). The results for POS indicate that the mediator remained positive and significantly related to organizational commitment (coefficient = .34, $p < .01$) and negatively and significantly related to turnover intention (coefficient = -.35, $p < .01$). In addition, the coefficient for the cross product (POS x use) was positive and significant for organizational commitment (coefficient = .11, $p < .05$) and negative and significant for turnover intention (coefficient = -.15, $p < .05$). The results for perceived flexibility stigma indicate that the mediator remained negatively and significantly related to organizational commitment (coefficient = -.04, $p < .05$) and positively and significantly related to turnover intention (coefficient = .02, $p < .01$). In addition, the coefficient for the cross product (perceived flexibility stigma x use) was not significant for organizational commitment but was negative and significant for turnover intention (coefficient = -.16, $p < .05$). We also note from Table 3, our estimates of the treatment effect were significant (model 5: -.12, $p < .05$; model 6: -.16, $p < .05$).

INSERT FIGURES 2 AND 3 HERE

Fourth, we formally tested our model of mediation using the bootstrapped method as an alternative to the Sobel Test, and employing confidence limits as a test for mediation rather than significance tests (Shrout & Bolger, 2002; Preacher & Selig, 2012), the results for which are presented in Table 4 Panels A and B. The results in Table 4 Panel A show, based on 5,000 bootstrap samples, the 95% confidence interval range for POS and organizational commitment (coefficient .31, 95% CI: .11 to .61) was positive and different from zero and POS and turnover intention (coefficient = -.35, 95% CI: -.27 to -.03) was negative and different from zero, supporting H1a and H1b. The results for perceived flexibility stigma were similar, with zero lying outside the 95% confidence interval for perceived flexibility stigma and organizational commitment (coefficient = -.03, 95% CI: -.11 to .06) and outside the 95% confidence interval for perceived flexibility stigma and turnover intention (coefficient = .13, 95% CI: .03 to .26). The results lead us to support both H2a and H2b.

We note that the availability of flexible leave had a direct effect on organizational commitment and no direct effect on turnover intention, but when we compared the indirect effects to the direct effect of the availability of flexible leave on our outcome variables we found full mediation of turnover intention. In addition, we note that POS and perceived flexibility stigma partially mediated the effects of the availability of flexible leave on organizational commitment. Overall, the bootstrapping results corroborate the results of the regression analysis for mediation effects.

INSERT TABLE 4 PANEL A ABOUT HERE

Fifth, the bootstrapping results for the moderated mediation models (models 9 and 10) are presented in Table 4 Panels A and B. As our moderating variable is categorical we examine its effect at two values (non-use = 0; use = 1). For POS (see: Table 4 Panel A) the

results indicate that non-use of the flexible leave policy did not strengthen the effect of POS on organizational commitment or turnover intention, with zero lying inside respective 95% confidence intervals. In contrast, the relationship between POS and organizational commitment (coefficient = .20, 95% CI: .09 to .56) and turnover intention (coefficient = -.17, 95% CI: -.35 to -.03) were strengthened by the use of flexible leave, as zero was not contained within either of the 95% confidence intervals. The results support H3a and H3b, that use of flexible leave moderates the mediating effect of POS on the relationship between flexible leave and organizational commitment and turnover intention respectively. Figures 4 and 5 plot the moderating effects of use on our two mediators based on our estimates of the path models presented in Figure 2.

INSERT TABLE 4 PANEL B ABOUT HERE

INSERT FIGURES 4 AND 5 ABOUT HERE

Finally, the bootstrapping results for perceived flexibility stigma presented in Table 4 panel B, indicate that non-use of flexible leave policy did not moderate the mediator of perceived flexibility stigma on organizational commitment nor the effect of perceived flexibility stigma on turnover intention, with zero lying inside of the respective 95% confidence intervals. In addition, use of the flexible leave policy did not significantly moderate the mediator of perceived flexibility stigma on organizational commitment, but did significantly moderate the mediator of perceived flexibility stigma on turnover intention (coefficient = -.11, 95% CI: -.25 to -.18), as zero was not contained within the 95% confidence interval. Hence our results do not support H4a but support H4b. Figures 6 and 7 plot the moderating effects of use on our two mediators based on our estimates of the path models presented in Figure 3.

INSERT FIGURES 6 AND 7 ABOUT HERE

Finally, we controlled for the effect of employee gender in our models. While this was not the focus of our study, we found that while gender had an effect on POS (coefficient = -0.21, $p < 0.05$), it had no effect on our overall moderated mediation models.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We make a contribution to HRM literature, through our empirical example of flexible leave policy, to confirm that employees' experience of HR practices has significant impact upon their subsequent behaviour, in our empirical case, their organizational commitment and turnover intention (Alfes et al., 2012; Baluch, 2017; Bos-Nehles & Veenendaal, 2017; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Jiang et al., 2017; Purcell & Kinnie, 2006; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Specifically focusing upon flexible leave, we highlight the relationship between the availability of flexible leave and organizational attachment is complex, but a positive perception of employees about flexible leave that gives rise to their increased organizational attachment, is enhanced through actual use of flexible leave.

The motivation for focusing our study on flexible leave stems from the equivocality of evidence, even with meta-analytic research, associated with the effectiveness of flexible working arrangements (Shockley & Allen, 2007); i.e. it is a particularly interesting empirical example of our broader research concern. To tackle the equivocal nature of findings to date our study addressed three main concerns in extant literature. First, rather than treating flexible working arrangements as an umbrella concept, we focused specifically on the case of flexible leave (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). We did so because flexible leave is available to all employees, regardless of family responsibilities and circumstances (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005), yet it remains the least understood of flexible working arrangements (Baltes et al., 1999; Kelly et al., 2008). Second, rather than assume that the effects of the availability of flexible leave are direct in nature, we examined the

question as to *how* flexible leave policies indirectly shape employees' experiences before leading to employee outcomes (Kelly et al., 2008). Drawing on SET (see: Cropanzano & Mitchell [2005] for a review) and signaling theory (Spence, 1973) we developed a model of the indirect effects of flexible leave in terms of POS and perceived flexibility stigma (Allen, 2001; Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Butts et al., 2013). Third, we developed a moderated mediation model in order to explain the differential effect of the availability and use of the policy of flexible leave (Allen et al., 2013; Butts et al., 2013; Kelly & Moen, 2007; Kossek, 2005; Kossek, et al., 1999). Differentiating between availability and use of flexible leave enables us to address the question as to *when*, i.e. under what conditions does flexible leave matter.

Employing a quasi-experimental research design, and a moderated mediation model, we were able to address our three concerns above. Specifically, we were able to incorporate multiple indirect effects, and delineate between availability and use of the policy over time, which is novel in the wider HRM literature (Harley, Allen & Sargent, 2007; Macky & Boxall 2007, 2008; Mohr & Zoghi 2008; Takeuchi, Chen & Lepak, 2009). Due to recent methodological developments in structural equation modelling (Kline, 2015), we were able to simultaneously test multiple indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), via a path model allowing for mediation and moderated mediation models. We encourage other scholars of HRM to follow our methodological lead.

In summary, our findings demonstrate that the availability of flexible leave enhances employees' organizational attachment, but that the relationship is complex, being shaped by indirect and moderating effects. We begin by addressing the *how* question, through discussing the importance of our mediators, POS and perceived flexibility stigma, which were both found to be significant in shaping the relationship between the availability of

flexible leave and employees' organizational commitment.

For POS, we argue that the availability of flexible leave constitutes a non-material social exchange, in the form of a signal from the employer to the employee, that will shape employees' perceptions of the employer's unobservable intentions and motives (Goldberg & Allen, 2008). Independent of use, the availability of flexible leave sends a signal of their commitment to, and concern for, employees' (Grover & Crocker, 1995; Suazo, Martinez & Sandoval, 2009). The signal will enhance employees' POS, which will in turn translate through into their enhanced organizational commitment. The availability of flexible leave, therefore, should be viewed as an antecedent to the development of high-quality social exchange relationships, which lead employees to feel a greater sense of obligation to reciprocate (e.g. Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Wayne, 1993).

The inclusion of the mediator of perceived flexibility stigma (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014) enabled us to embrace the potential dark side of flexible working (for a review see: Perrigino et al., 2018). Perceived flexibility stigma is an important concept that has yet to be incorporated into scholarship on flexible working and employee outcomes, with the notable exception of Cech & Blair-Loy (2014) who correlated perceived flexibility stigma with employee characteristics and outcomes. Our findings indicate that perceived flexibility stigma is elevated by the availability of flexible leave, which in turn reduces employee's organizational attachment. Hence, perceived flexibility stigma is real and has a detrimental effect on the social exchange relationship between an employer and employee.

To address the *when* question we employed our moderated mediation models to delineate the effect of availability and use of flexible leave on organizational attachment (Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton, 2006), and highlight the importance of our work with reference to

Butts and co-authors (Butts et al., 2013: 2) who suggest that: “To our knowledge, no research has examined the processes through which policy availability and use relate to employee work attitudes.” In all four models we found the relationship between the mediator and the outcome variable was strengthened, but the effect was greatest for POS, as compared to perceived flexibility stigma.

For POS, our results indicate that the additional non-material and material benefit users gain from the availability of the flexible leave, as compared to non-users, will enhance their social exchange relationship with their employer, such that the relationship between POS and organizational attachment will be stronger for users as compared to non-users. The moderator of use being statistically significant for both organizational commitment and turnover intention.

For perceived flexibility stigma our findings were more mixed. We suggest that use of flexible leave will enable employees may gain more confidence of the employer’s commitment to flexible leave, and so be more secure in the knowledge that they are not being judged or penalized by their employer. Accordingly, use of flexible leave will reduce employees’ fear of sending a negative signal to their employer, and thus their perceived flexibility stigma, and so the relationship between availability of flexible leave and organizational attachment, will be weaker for users as compared to non users. The mixed results stem from the fact that the effect of the moderator of use was only found to be significant for turnover intention but not organizational commitment.

We suggest, therefore, that studies of flexible working arrangements need to include use, as well as availability, due to its discretionary nature (Shockley & Allen, 2010; Veiga, Baldrige & Eddleston, 2004). Further, the effects of perceptions on employee outcomes may be enhanced through use, which suggests that it is importance to increase participation

in such schemes if their true benefits are to be felt by all employees.

In summary, our moderated mediation model demonstrates the importance of focusing on the material and non-material social exchanges, between employers and employees, to understand how the availability of flexible leave shapes employees' organizational attachment. Rather than having a direct effect on employee outcomes, we find that the indirect effects of our model dominate employee outcomes, and attest to the complex relationships that exist between the introduction of flexible leave and employee outcomes.

Managerial implications

Our study shows the importance of understanding how flexible working arrangements are perceived by employees, if they are to have a positive effect on outcomes. In essence, we suggest that flexible working arrangements may be best viewed as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for enhancing employee outcomes. The danger for employers being that employees view such arrangements as tokenistic. Our mediation model demonstrates the importance of employers sending their employees a signal they are serious about flexible working arrangements as a means of enhancing employees' POS, if they are to enhance organizational attachment. At the same time, however, employees may have concerns about the availability of a policy flexible leave raising perceived flexibility stigma, and indirectly reducing organizational attachment.

We suggest employers can further enhance POS through the introduction of flexible leave by better signaling that flexible working are part of a raft of initiatives encompassed within broader HR strategies, such as those for greater work-life balance (Lewis, Gambles & Rapaport, 2007) and/or a more diverse workforce (Atkinson & Sandiford, 2016). Such strategies, and the place of flexible leave within them, should be clearly communicated as a signal of the value they place on employees. In addition, for organizations to fully harness

the positive effects of flexible leave they need to ensure that they address employees' concerns about perceived flexibility stigma. To minimize the perceived flexibility stigma employers need to demonstrate that employees will not suffer career penalties for using flexible leave. We suggest such an approach will require senior managers ensure all line managers implement policy consistently throughout the organization (Galea, Houkes & De Rijk, 2014).

Finally, our results show the importance of differentiating between the availability and use of flexible leave, both in enhancing the mediating role of POS, and diminishing mediating role of perceived flexibility stigma, on employee outcomes. We suggest, therefore, that the continued and sustained availability of flexible leave is important in fostering a supportive organizational climate, and is necessary for organizations to fully realize the benefits of flexible working (Beauregard & Henry, 2009).

Limitations and future research

As with all studies our study does have limitations, which we hope can provide directions for future research. First, our sample of respondents was composed entirely of BBC employees, therefore, it is a matter of debate as to whether the findings obtained can be generalized to other populations. The BBC is a public organization, incorporated by Royal Charter. We suggest future research replicate our study in private organizations and across industrial sectors to see whether our results hold beyond the BBC.

Second, our study is based on questionnaire data only, therefore, we could not confirm that common method bias is not a problem in our data (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To mitigate against the problem of common methods bias, as outlined in our data and method section, we did the following: we selected different types of scales and formats for our constructs, and used reverse-scored items where possible (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). In addition, we

conducted a Harman's one-factor test. The Harman test involved entering all of our variables into an exploratory factor analysis to determine the number of factors that account for the variance in the variables, and then the variables were loaded on one factor to examine the fit of the confirmatory factor analysis model. We found five factors emerge from exploratory factor analysis, and the one-factor confirmatory factor analysis model did not fit the data well, confirming that common method bias is unlikely to be a problem with our data.

Our study addresses calls for more longitudinal approaches to study flexible working arrangements (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Kelly et al., 2008). For future research, while the estimation of longitudinal mediation models is complex, it is also rewarding, since only through such an analysis can we understand the process whereby flexible working arrangement effects are produced (MacKinnon, 2008). Without knowledge of this process, generalizing flexible working policy or intervention effects may be difficult (Butts et al., 2013, MacKinnon, 2008). However, the predominance of mediation hypotheses for flexible working are still tested with cross-sectional data (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood & Lambert, 2007). Furthermore, consensus on the best approach to longitudinal mediation modelling methods is largely lacking. In our study, we were limited in that our design only collected two waves of data. Some scholars advocate that three waves or more of data are necessary to truly test mediation (Collins, Graham, & Flaherty, 1998). There is now a growth in interest in models through which three or more waves of data are collected. These include cross-lagged panel models (MacKinnon, 2008), latent difference scores models (McArdle, 2001; MacKinnon, 2008), and latent growth curve models (Bollen & Curran, 2006). Longitudinal mediation modelling has much to offer future research.

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TABLE 1
Correlations between main study variables for periods 1 and 2

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Organizational commitment (1) | .76** | .36** | .23* | .31** | -.07 | -.14 | -.05 | -.01 | .08 |
| Turnover intention (2) | .30** | -.73* | .12* | -.47** | -.10 | -.05 | .01 | -.04 | .01 |
| Perceived flexibility stigma (3) | -.10 | .18* | -.63* | .03 | -.16* | -.04 | -.07 | -.03 | .01 |
| POS (4) | .24** | -.48* | .06 | .75* | .06 | -.24* | .16 | .04 | .04 |
| Gender(5) | -.05 | -.08 | -.00 | .13 | - | -.10 | .09 | .02 | .05 |
| Dependents (6) | -.13 | -.12 | -.07 | -.19* | -.10 | - | .42* | -.34* | .03 |
| Married-cohabiting (7) | -.05 | .02 | -.09 | .11 | .09 | .42* | - | -.03 | .04 |
| Age (8) | -.01 | -.06 | -.06 | .06 | .02 | -.34* | -.03 | - | .16* |
| Tenure (9) | .06 | -.04 | .01 | .03 | .05 | .03 | .04 | .16* | - |

Note: Correlations below the diagonal are for period 1 (N = 235); correlations above the diagonal for period 2 (N =222); diagonals represent correlations between period 1 and period 2; correlations significant at * p<.05, ** p<.01

TABLE 2
Comparison of means between intervention and control groups for periods 1 and 2

| | Intervention group Mean (S.D) | Control group Mean (S.D) |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| Organizational commitment (1) | 3.91 (0.91) | 4.02 (0.75) |
| Organizational commitment (2) | 4.08 ² (0.91) | 4.00 ¹ (0.76) |
| Turnover intention (1) | 2.62 (0.95) | 2.63 (0.95) |
| Turnover intention (2) | 2.55 (0.91) | 2.62 ¹ (0.93) |
| POS (1) | 3.77 (1.36) | 3.75 (1.45) |
| POS (2) | 3.99 ² (1.31) | 3.78 ¹ (1.43) |
| Perceived flexibility stigma (1) | 4.09 (1.30) | 4.03 (1.32) |
| Perceived flexibility stigma (2) | 3.81 ² (1.38) | 4.02 ¹ (1.31) |

Note: ¹ Indicates significant difference between intervention group and control group within time point, $p < .05$; ² Indicates significant difference across time within the group, $p < .05$.

TABLE 3
Regression results for testing mediation and moderated mediation

| | Mediating Variables | | Organizational attachment (mediation) | | Organizational attachment (moderated mediation) | |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| | POS | Perceived flexibility stigma | Organizational commitment | Turnover intention | Organizational commitment | Turnover intention |
| | Coefficient (S.E.) (Model 1) | Coefficient (S.E.) (Model 2) | Coefficient (S.E.) (Model 3) | Coefficient (S.E.) (Model 4) | Coefficient (S.E.) (Model 5) | Coefficient (S.E.) (Model 6) |
| Availability of flexible leave | 0.38* (0.16) | 0.20* (0.06) | 0.17* (0.07) | -0.10 (0.14) | 0.20* (0.08) | -0.10 (0.14) |
| POS | | | 0.31** (0.05) | -0.35** (0.05) | 0.34** (0.07) | -0.35** (0.05) |
| Perceived flexibility stigma | | | -0.06* (0.03) | 0.02** (0.01) | -0.04* (0.02) | 0.02** (0.01) |
| Use | | | | | 0.10* (0.04) | -0.20* (0.09) |
| POS x Use | | | | | 0.11* (0.05) | -0.15* (0.07) |
| Perceived flexibility stigma x Use | | | | | -0.07 (0.11) | -0.16* (0.07) |
| Treatment effects | -0.16 (0.11) | -0.16 (0.10) | -0.12* (0.05) | -0.16* (0.08) | -0.12* (0.05) | -0.16* (0.08) |
| Gender | -0.21* (0.10) | 0.14 (0.10) | -0.06 (0.10) | -0.13 (0.10) | -0.04 (0.11) | -0.15 (0.10) |
| Dependents | -0.12 (0.10) | 0.45* (0.11) | -0.28 (0.14) | -0.07 (0.10) | -0.27 (0.14) | 0.08 (0.09) |
| R-squared | 0.03** | 0.04** | 0.14** | 0.04** | 0.15** | 0.26** |

Note: N=204; Standard errors in parentheses; *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

FIGURE 1
A moderated mediation model of the influence of flexible leave on organizational attachment

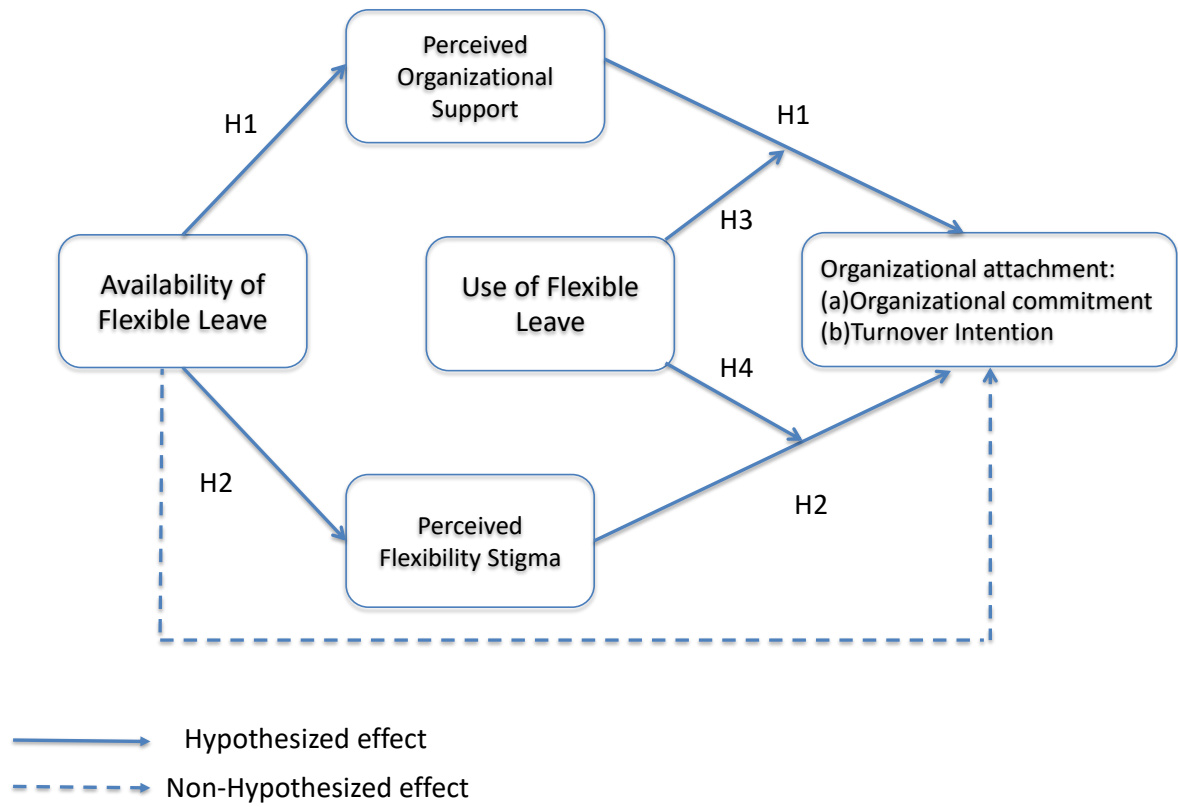


FIGURE 2
A path model of the influence of flexible leave on organizational commitment

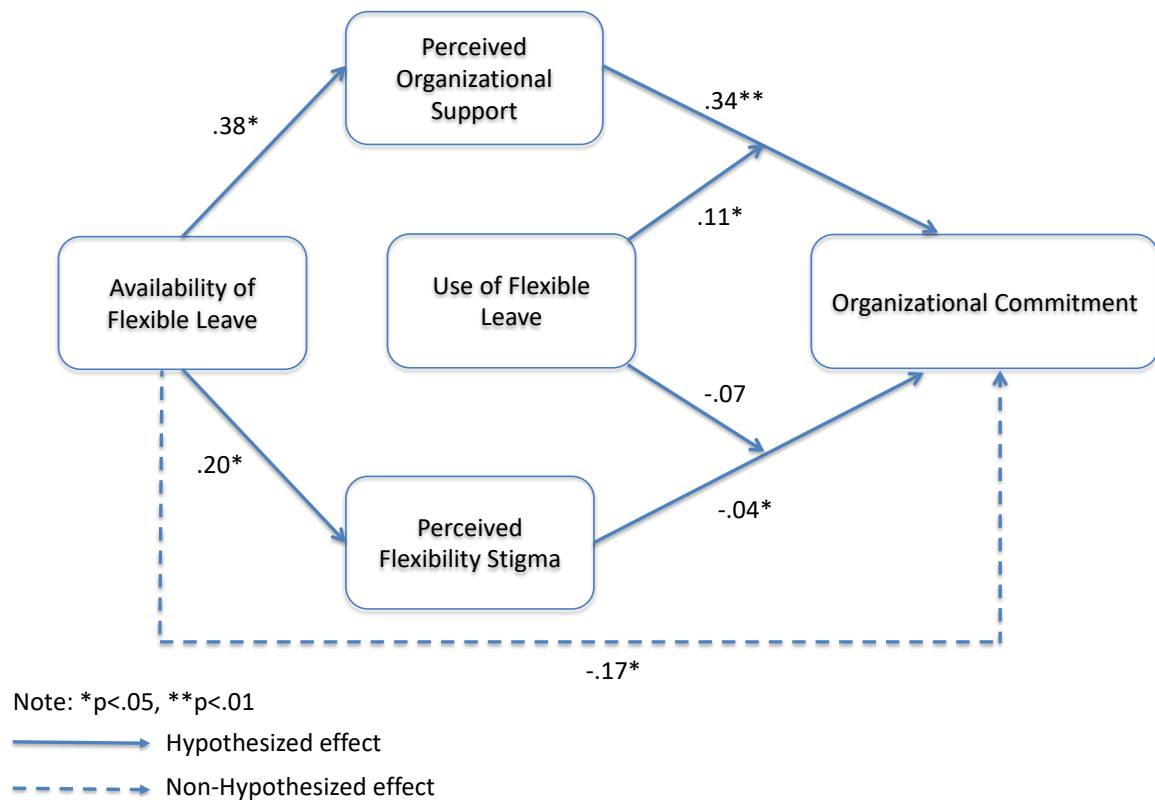


FIGURE 3
A path model of the influence of flexible leave on turnover intention

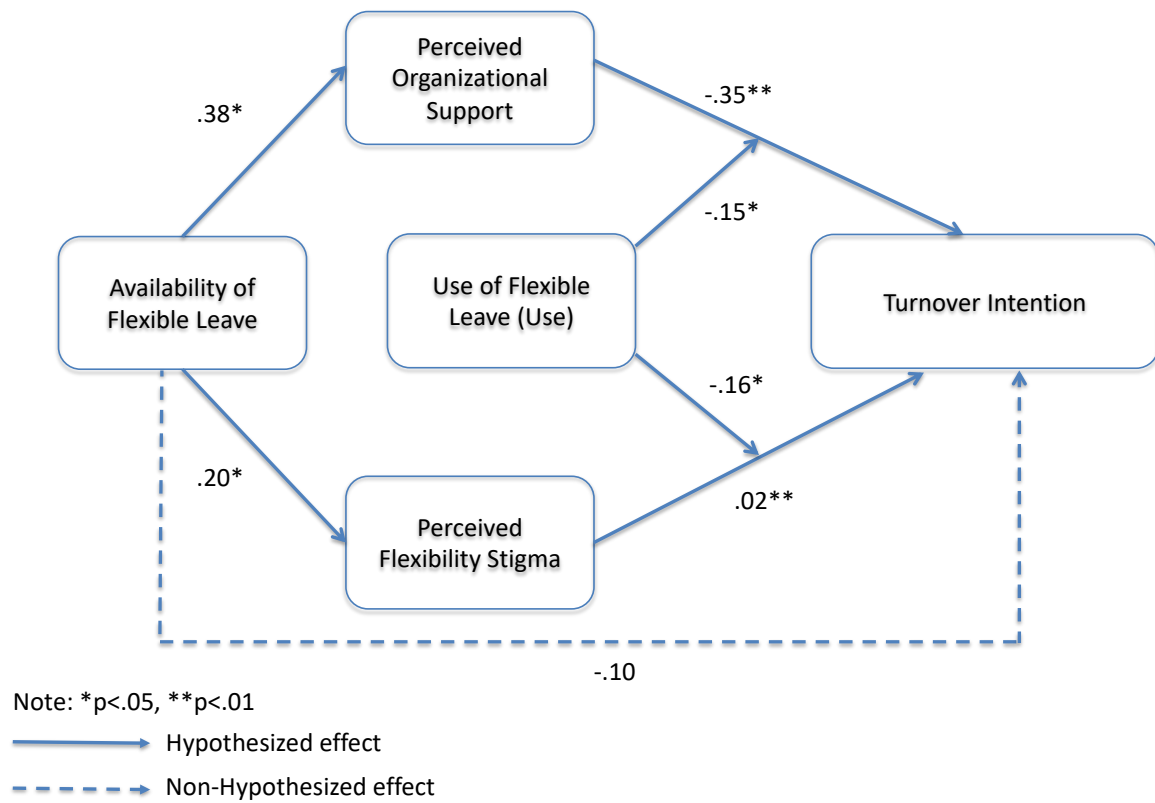


TABLE 4
Analysis of direct and indirect effects

Panel A: Direct and indirect effects (no moderator)

| | Organizational commitment (Model 7) | | Turnover intention (Model 8) | |
|---|--|---------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| | Coefficient (S.D.) | Bootstrap 95% CI | Coefficient (S.D.) | Bootstrap 95% CI |
| Direct effect: Availability of flexible leave | .17 (0.07) | .01 to .34 | -.10 (.14) | -.10 to .04 |
| Indirect effect: POS | .31 (.13) | .11 to .61 | -.35 (.11) | -.27 to -.03 |
| Indirect effect: Perceived flexibility stigma | -.03 (.01) | -.11 to -.06 | .13 (.05) | .03 to .26 |

Note: LLCI is lower level confidence interval, ULCI is upper limit confidence interval. Number of bootstrap samples for bias corrected bootstrap confidence intervals: 5000.

Panel B: Direct and conditional indirect effects (with moderator)

| | Organizational commitment (Model 9) | | Turnover intention (Model 10) | |
|--|--|---------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| | Coefficient (S.D.) | Bootstrap 95% CI | Coefficient (S.D.) | Bootstrap 95% CI |
| Indirect effect: POS Moderator: no use of flexible leave | .07 (.02) | -.04 to .05 | -.02 (.25) | -.01 to .10 |
| Indirect effect: POS Moderator: use of flexible leave | .20 (.10) | .09 to .56 | -.17 (.08) | -.35 to -.03 |
| Indirect effect: Perceived flexibility stigma Moderator: no use of flexible leave | .01 (.02) | -.04 to .05 | .01 (.15) | -.05 to .10 |
| Indirect effect: Perceived flexibility stigma Moderator: use of flexible leave | -.02 (.02) | -.06 to .01 | -.11 (.05) | -.25 to -.18 |

Note: LLCI is lower level confidence interval, ULCI is upper limit confidence interval. Number of bootstrap samples for bias corrected bootstrap confidence intervals: 5000.

FIGURE 4
The moderating effect of use on the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment

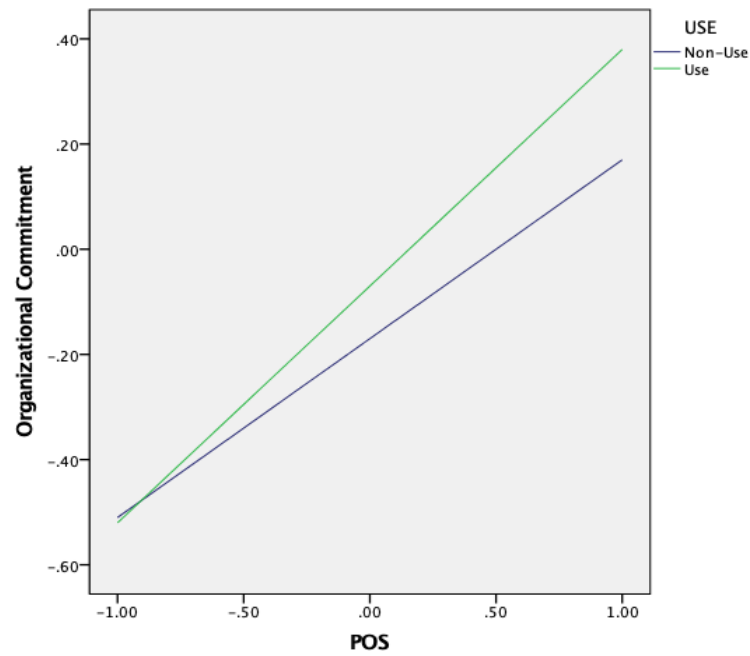


FIGURE 5
The moderating effect of use on the relationship between perceived organization support and turnover intention

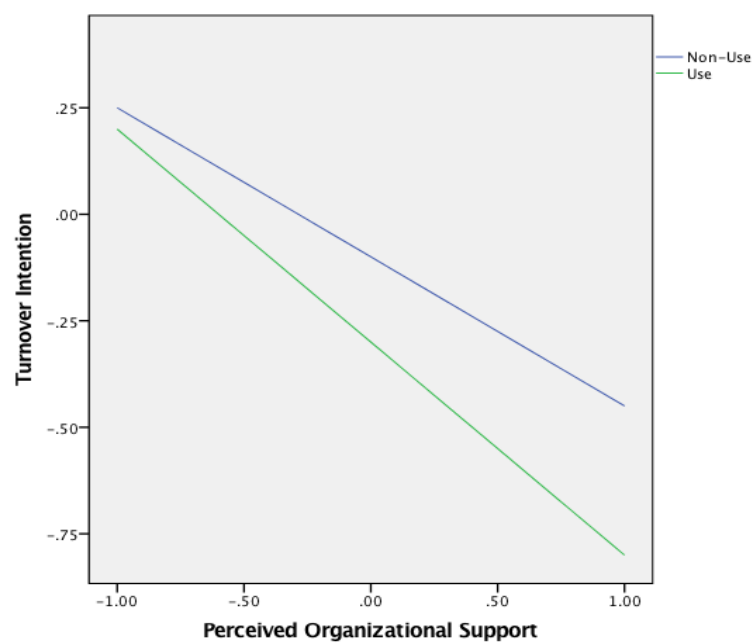


FIGURE 6
The moderating effect of Use on the relationship between perceived flexibility stigma and organizational commitment

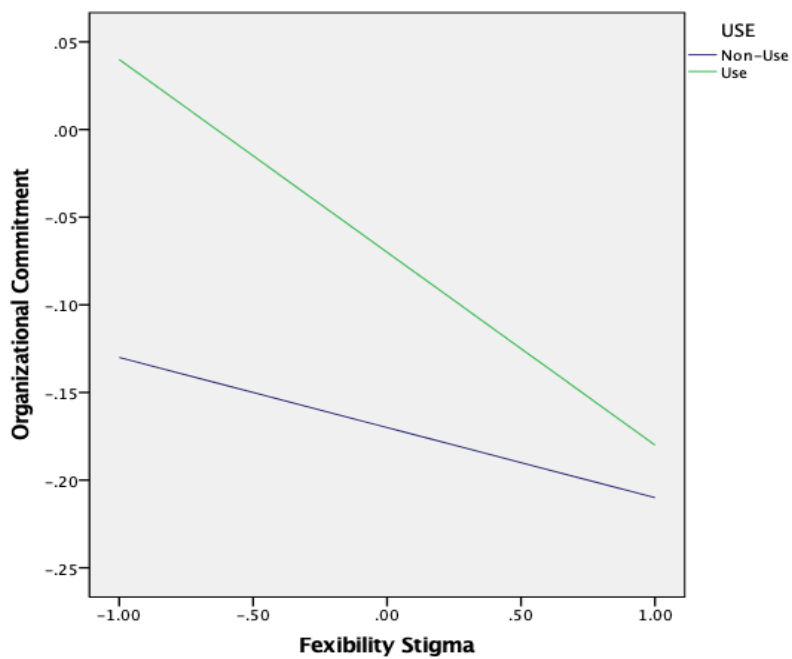


FIGURE 7
The moderating effect of use on the relationship between perceived flexibility stigma and turnover intention

