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Disentangling the Pros and Cons of Flexible Work Arrangements: Curvilinear Effects on Individual and Organizational Outcomes

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Abstract: The use of flexible work arrangements (e.g., remote, hybrid) has spread during the pandemic and cumulative studies provide mixed findings on the positive vs. negative consequences of these working methods for employees and organizations. The present study examined the potentially curvilinear effects of employees' attitude towards flexible work options (i.e., flexible work orientation; FWO) on individual- (i.e., performance, job satisfaction, stress, work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict) and organization-related outcomes (i.e., organizational social support, organizational justice, affective organizational commitment). Anonymous survey data were collected in 2021 from 1061 in-person and flexible workers nested within 100 Italian organizations. Measurement invariance across the two subsamples was supported and subsequent structural model analyses suggested a differential pattern of results for in-person and flexible workers. Results indicated a curvilinear U-shaped relationship between FWO and organizational support, justice, commitment and job satisfaction for the in-person subsample as compared to a positive linear relationship for flexible workers. Moreover, in both samples of flexible and in-presence workers, FWO exerted a positive linear effect on performance and a mainly negative linear effect on stress, WFC and FWC. Overall, flexible workers displayed linear relationships among all the study variables, whereas in-person workers showed the curvilinear effects of FWO on support, justice, commitment and satisfaction, all of which increased at high levels of employees' positive attitude towards FWO. Results are discussed in light of the globally elevated rates of flexible work arrangements and mixed findings on their implementation.

Keywords: flexible work orientation; curvilinear effects; well-being; productivity; organizational factors

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1. Introduction

Flexible working (FW) practices refer to working without rigid boundaries with respect to working spaces and schedules, such as remote work from home (Cooper & Baird, 2015; Groen et al., 2018). While remote work existed before the pandemic, its use has increased due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and the need to work safely. Before the pandemic, only 17 percent of U.S. employees worked from home 5 days per week, but this percentage increased to 44% during the pandemic. Similarly, according to Eurostat (2021), the percentage (12.3%) of European people working remotely by May 2021 showed a 140% increase compared to figures before the pandemic. Despite this rise, the post-pandemic scenario has witnessed the falling of the peak in remote jobs both in Europe and the US (Ziuznys, 2022). Indeed, the use of remote work at the global level has generated an enormous amount of information not only on the benefits of flexible work for both employers (e.g., office space costs) and employees (e.g., commuting costs), but also on the

problems associated with this change for employers (e.g., increased employee surveillance) and employees (e.g., blurred home–work boundaries), that contribute to explaining why the trend of remote jobs is decreasing (e.g., McGahey, 2024).

Overall, scholars and practitioners provide mixed findings and opposing arguments on the consequences of remote work, and debate around the potential benefits and pitfalls of remote jobs and how to blend them with more traditional in-presence work arrangements. Moreover, existing knowledge tends to be polarized in terms of its focus on the advantages (e.g., Bloom, 2024; Lee, 1991) as opposed to the problems (e.g., Chen, 2024a, 2024b; Soga et al., 2022) of flexible work arrangements.

The present paper fills this gap and addresses the opposing contentions on the positive vs. negative effects of flexible work practices by examining the potential curvilinear effects of employees' attitude towards flexible work (i.e., flexible work orientation; Albion, 2004) on individual- (i.e., performance, job satisfaction, stress, work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict) and organization-related outcomes (i.e., organizational social support, organizational justice, affective organizational commitment). Specifically, previous research on the outcomes associated with the use of FW practices has shown positive or equivocal findings (Albion, 2004). On the one hand, flexibility has been suggested to be a low-cost organizational practice bringing increased productivity and reduced turnover and absenteeism (Lee, 1991) as well as reductions in physical and psychological symptoms of job strain (Thomas & Ganster, 1995) and higher women's job satisfaction, job dedication in their own time and likelihood to return to work after parental leave (Galinsky & Stein, 1990). On the other hand, the literature suggests minor improvements or no change in organizational effectiveness, attendance behavior and job satisfaction (Christensen & Staines, 1990). Moreover, flexibility imposed on lower-paid workers, predominantly women, has been demonstrated to generate financial difficulties and to impact negatively on workers with family responsibilities due to the irregularity and unpredictability of income, whereas the benefits associated with workplace flexibility in terms of work satisfaction and family well-being were found to occur only when FW practices result from policies and work cultures designed to meet the needs of both employees and employers (Clark, 2001). As such, employees' positive attitudes towards flexible work options (i.e., flexible work orientation) more likely develop when the introduction of flexibility is employee-driven rather than imposed on workers in order to meet management's agenda (Albion, 2004).

The current study builds on previous research and controversial findings and aims at reconciling conflicting arguments on the detrimental, or conversely, beneficial effects of flexible work options by positing and testing a curvilinear relationship of employees' attitude towards FW practices on multiple work-related outcomes. To date, no study has previously investigated the potential curvilinear effects of FW practices on performance and well-being outcomes in organizations. As such, our study may inform flexible work theory (e.g., Dettmers et al., 2013), occupational psychology and the management literature by addressing seemingly puzzling results, thereby contributing to disentangling competitive contentions from scholars and practitioners in the field.

Below, we begin with a brief overview of flexible work arrangements and employees' attitude towards flexibility. Next, we review arguments underpinning the positive vs. negative relationship between FWP and individual-related outcomes (i.e., performance, job satisfaction, stress, work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict) as well as organization-related outcomes (i.e., organizational social support, organizational justice, affective organizational commitment). Finally, we test our hypotheses in a field study on 1061 employees belonging to 100 organizations from different industry sectors.

2. Flexible Working Practices and Flexible Work Orientation

In-person work refers to the job traditionally carried out by physically reporting to a centralized location (space) and during set work hours (time), whereas *flexible* work models often pertain to *remote* work performed away from common office spaces and time-related work (Jacobs & Padavic, 2015; Waples & Brock Baskin, 2021). *Hybrid* working practices result from a combined alternation of both in-person and remote work. Flexible work arrangements are mainly based on Atkinson's (1984) groundbreaking "flexible firm" model that enables an organization to adapt its workforce to changes in the working environment by setting non-standard time and space working conditions (e.g., contract workers, working from home). To date, there is a lack of uniformity among scholars regarding the meaning of FW practices, and the concept has evolved to include various connotations confusingly used interchangeably (Dettmers et al., 2013), such as the following: (a) remote work (i.e., work performed away from traditional office spaces and time-related work (Jacobs & Padavic, 2015; Waples & Brock Baskin, 2021)); (b) spatiotemporal work (i.e., clusters of workers collaborating in co-working spaces or within job sharing models; (Yu et al., 2019)); (c) on-demand work, i.e., workers that can be called unpredictably at any time and without any fixed terms of engagement with the organization (Marica, 2019); and (d) self-directed work (i.e., individuals who have the freedom in deciding their terms of engagement, such as self-employed or freelance workers (Furtmueller et al., 2011; Tudy, 2021)).

In particular, remote work variously includes concepts such as teleworking, work from home, telecommuting, virtual work, flex place, flexible hours/schedules, flex leave, and is enabled by technologies that allow communication either synchronously or asynchronously outside the office space (Dettmers et al., 2013). Given the lack of rigid boundaries around working spaces and undefined work time and schedules, remote work tends to create personal conflicts for employees due to vulnerability to family life interruptions (Como et al., 2020). More importantly, remote work may be associated with prolonged periods of losing social contact, thus contributing to feelings of loneliness and isolation as well as lack of engagement and low commitment (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011). Moreover, flexible work schedules, such as flex-time contracts, might leave employees vulnerable to irregularities in income and job insecurity due to the instability of the job and future financial plans (Marica, 2019).

In the pre-pandemic period, flexibility and mobility evolved over a few decades in response to the global economic changes that produced uncertainty in businesses' operating conditions and the consequent need for new forms of organizational structuring and modes of working in line with the changing needs of the modern workforce (Rubery et al., 2016). Moreover, the exponential growth of digital technologies has amplified such flexible working arrangements and increased the appeal of FW to the workforce and employers, making them desirable characteristics of alternative working models (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2016).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and quarantines sped up the trend of remote work since millions of people worldwide were unable to commute to work and working from home offered an alternative. In the US, by October 2020, 71% of workers who could work from home were doing so, up from 23% prior to COVID-19 (Parker et al., 2022). In Europe, prior to the pandemic only 5% of the European Union working population worked at home regularly, whereas, since the COVID-19 outbreak, this 5% has increased to 37% (López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020).

In the post-pandemic era, we are globally witnessing a widescale return-to-office and the peak in the rise in remote jobs is falling, a descending trend in figures that start in the winter of 2021 compared to the summer of 2022. In the US, the remote-jobs share reached a peak (17.2%) in 2021 and then steadily decreased to 11.9% in 2022, with California reporting

the highest share. In Europe, the remote-jobs share reached a similar peak (19.9%) in 2021 and then steadily decreased to 9.1% in 2022, with the United Kingdom reporting the highest share. At the global level, in the first quarter of 2022, the growth of remote-jobs shares stabilized and reported a slightly negative trend (Ziuznys, 2022).

Despite these striking numbers, the prevalence of remote work strongly varies across different industry sectors and occupations, as well as across countries. For example, support services, as well as sectors that involve the physical manipulation of materials and/or objects, such as manufacturing, are not typical teleworkable sectors, whereas IT and other communication services (telecommunications), finance and insurance, government and knowledge-intensive business services are occupational sectors where the shift to telework has been more prevalent (European Union, 2020). In 2021, the industries with the largest share of remote jobs were IT and Services (22.1%), Internet (18%), Social Organization (16.4%), Staffing and Recruiting (7.5%) and Computer Software (6%) (Ziuznys, 2022). In Europe, the industries with the most remote jobs available in 2021 were information technology (e.g., cyber security, software programming, front-end/back-end development), digital marketing (e.g., blog writing, search engine optimization), construction (e.g., designing, financing, and hiring contractors, not construction operations performed on-site) and customer care (McGahey, 2024). Moreover, organization size is an additional differentiating factor, and companies with 51–200 and 1001–5000 employees tend to offer the most remote job opportunities (Ziuznys, 2022).

Relatedly, remote work distribution among workers is also different depending on education and income. For example, in the U.S., the higher-educated and highest-paid workers (e.g., more than $250,000 annually) have the greatest access to remote work and are concentrated in IT, finance and professional and business service roles (e.g., managers, accountants, HR representatives), whereas lower-paid workers (e.g., less than $50,000 per year) often hold in-person jobs in retail, transportation and warehousing and hotels and food service (Bloom, 2024).

Differences in remote work prevalence can also be seen across countries. While in several countries like the US and UK, companies have transitioned in-office roles to become either entirely or partially remote (i.e., hybrid working models), other nations have not embraced remote work and are returning to the on-site office, often because of technological or logistical barriers to telework as well as cultural factors (Johanson, 2022). For example, in France, only 29% of French workers reported to work remotely "at least once a week" as compared to 51% of Germans, 50% of Italians, 42% of Brits and 36% of Spaniards (Baumlin et al., 2022). Relatedly, Japan showed almost no uptick in remote jobs between January 2020 and September 2021 and, thus, qualifies as a poor candidate for remote work, likely because of a highly social work structure with employees working interdependently in teams, making assessments as a group, and needing to have in-person meetings because nonverbal communication plays a very important role. Overall, the UK, Spain, Germany and Finland appear to be the top nations for remote workers in Europe (Johanson, 2022).

While remote work existed before the pandemic, the COVID-19 outbreak has further highlighted some issues associated with FW and also revealed new concerns, thus disclosing the hidden problems of FW models (Furmańczyk & Kaźmierczyk, 2020). Specifically, the implementation of FW models has noteworthy consequences for digital technology platforms, workforce well-being, organizational structures and physical workspace designs (Bentley et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2020), but also raises issues on worker monitoring and control procedures that have an impact on both employers' and employees' rights and have sparked worries from the regulatory community (Choi, 2018; Pedersen, 2017). Relatedly, working from home may have uncertain productivity effects that disturb managers and, in response to less in-office work, 96% of employers are stepping up electronic surveillance

and using employee-monitoring software, much to the annoyance of employees (Bloom, 2024; Resume Builder, 2023). Moreover, according to US statistics, white-collar remote workers are 35% more likely to be terminated than in-person colleagues (Chen, 2024b), and the rise of AI will particularly threaten fully remote workers assigned to more repetitive and routine tasks such as payroll or data entry (Mok, 2023).

Flexible work orientation (FWO; Albion, 2004) refers to workers' attitude towards workplace flexibility and flexible work patterns. FWO captures workers' positions with regard to the use of FW methods and the potential benefits or barriers to the use of remote and hybrid work, such as the possibility to balance one's life commitments or, conversely, the fear of becoming disconnected or excluded from one's workplace and more exposed to pay and/or career loss, as well as the tendency to consider flexible workers as less committed or stigmatized. For example, employees with a negative attitude towards FW in terms of perceived stigma from others in case of FW usage or fear of being excluded from workplace life and becoming socially isolated are more associated with lower usage rates of FW arrangements (Albion, 2004).

Indeed, in the post-pandemic scenario, FW is increasingly requested by employees but unevenly embraced by employers. In Europe, 50% of Italians, 42% of Brits, and 36% of Spaniards want to work remotely, and a survey among Germany companies (Beardsley, 2022) found that three out of four workers wanted remote work even after the pandemic, whereas only 29% of French workers wanted FW (Baumlin et al., 2022). According to a 2021 report (Zoe Talent Solutions, 2023), 84% of employees who worked remotely during the pandemic were even willing to take a pay cut for a FW arrangement with their employers. As such, examining workers' attitude towards FW may significantly contribute to explaining the outcomes associated with newly embraced working models and how to navigate the modern workplace.

3. Flexible Work Orientation and Outcomes

The pre-pandemic literature on FW has already highlighted that flexibility may have not only positive but also negative effects and is therefore an ambiguous concept that may bring short-term economic success and competitive advantages as well as negative side-effects on workers and society (e.g., Dettmers et al., 2013). Throughout the pandemic, FW has been studied empirically (e.g., Zarei et al., 2021) and conceptually in terms of its impact on the future of work (e.g., Waples & Brock Baskin, 2021) as well as through personal narratives (e.g., Obenauf, 2021), and cumulative evidence further supports that FW arrangements come with many advantages but also show some drawbacks.

An overview of FW benefits may include the following factors and related motives (e.g., Birt, 2023): (a) a reduced commute (i.e., workers avoid making the trip to a physical workplace); (b) greater work–life balance (i.e., FW makes it easier to schedule time and meet family needs and personal obligations); (c) lowered childcare costs (i.e., two parents working remotely might coordinate and avoid paying for childcare); (d) a customized workspace (i.e., a personalized set up may increase motivation, productivity and satisfaction); (e) personal control (i.e., FW scheduling gives workers an increased sense of empowerment over work and environment and reduces the risk of stress and dissatisfaction); (f) greater productivity (i.e., self-set work schedules and rhythms may help synchronize activities with one's own chronotype and facilitate work); and (g) reduced tardiness and absenteeism (i.e., a self-set work schedule helps in meeting workers' needs and a lack of commuting prevents being late).

An outline of the main drawbacks of FW and related motives may include the following (e.g., Birt, 2023; Soga et al., 2022): (a) increased work–life conflict (i.e., difficulties in managing work–family boundaries, such as personal space and workspace); (b) an inclina-

tion to work more and health problems (i.e., difficulties in disconnecting when working at home and a higher risk of stress/fatigue); (c) reduced productivity (i.e., difficulties with adapting to flexibility and a lack of schedule/oversight); (d) diminished communication with staff (i.e., interacting through video or phone or emails is not the same as speaking with someone in person); (e) a decreased sense of teamwork (i.e., feelings of isolation, the lack of coworkers' presence and a lack of a sense of community as experienced on-site); and (f) diminished coordination and increased surveillance (i.e., FW requires more effort on the part of managers to include remote workers and coordinate in-person and remote workers as well as the higher control/surveillance of remote workers).

As can be seen, some widely acknowledged advantages of FW are also highlighted as its pitfalls, and the literature provides mixed inconclusive findings on FW connotations. Below, we delve into FW's consequences for organization-related factors such as organizational support and justice and affective organizational commitment, as well as individual outcomes related to performance, stress, work–life balance and job satisfaction.

Perceived organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of justice and fairness experienced within different domains of organizational life (Colquitt, 2001), such as equity in the allocation of resources and outcome decisions (i.e., distributive justice), employees' voice or influence during the process that leads to decision outcomes being carried out ethically and accurately (i.e., procedural justice), decision-making processes being candidly explained (i.e., informational justice) and the sensitive and respectful treatment of employees (i.e., interpersonal justice). The literature on FW before and during the pandemic suggests several unwanted consequences of remote work with respect to justice perceptions. Specifically, home working may hamper visibility and weaken the social cues that underpin trust among teammates (Allen et al., 2015; Hafermalz & Riemer, 2021) as well as career progression, such as a lack of promotions and unpaid overtime (Nohe & Sonntag, 2014; Junior et al., 2020). Relatedly, FW programs may not be family-friendly, and some employees may be denied regularity and predictability of employment (Albion, 2004), thus increasing workers' job insecurity (Kolasa et al., 2021) and the necessity to find other sources of income (Nohe & Sonntag, 2014; Junior et al., 2020). An additional unintended consequence refers to the increased control over employees' work arrangements (Clark, 2001) and the perception of organizational surveillance and a lack of trust (Soga et al., 2022). Indeed, the adverse consequences of FW are particularly associated with programs imposed on employees (i.e., low procedural justice), whereas the benefits associated with workplace flexibility appear when the process is employee-driven, likely because employees feel the need to respond to organizational fairness with loyalty (Albion, 2004).

Organizational support refers to employees' perception of favorable treatment received from their organization (Mowday et al., 1982) as well as their beliefs that their organization cares about their welfare and values their contributions (Eisenberger et al., 2001). To date, there is still little literature on the link between organizational support and FW. On the one hand, previous studies suggest that FW may create less shared experience of the organization and a lack of physical presence and the support of colleagues in particular (Birt, 2023; Raghuram, 2014). On the other hand, employees' perception of a strong organizational support for the use of FW may attenuate the negative effects associated with FW (e.g., limitations due to parenting responsibilities) and contribute to overcoming barriers to FW (Albion, 2004).

Affective organizational commitment refers to the emotional ties employees develop with the organization due to positive work experiences and reflects their willingness to devote efforts to its success (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Indeed, remote work and physical distance often come with feelings of isolation and disconnectedness from one's workplace and organization (Petitta & Ghezzi, 2023; Wigert & White, 2022) as well as the fragmentation of

work relationships (Hafermalz & Riemer, 2021; Soga et al., 2022) and the erosion of cohesion in organizations (Bentley et al., 2016), all of which contribute to weakening the emotional bond with one's company. However, the literature also suggests that employee-friendly FW policies (i.e., employees' choice) elicit a positive psychological contract mechanism according to which employees feel the need to respond by offering, in return, higher commitment and loyalty to their company (Scandura & Lankau, 1997).

Relatedly, job satisfaction refers to a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from job experiences (Locke, 1976) and thus indicates psychological responses to an individual's job or pleasant aspects of the job. The literature on the link between FW and workers' satisfaction provides a variety of mixed findings. Some research suggests that remote work and the related lack of social interaction and feelings of isolation may be associated with less work satisfaction (Mihhailova et al., 2011) as well as an erosion of cohesion that negatively effects work commitment in teams and the subsequent adverse feelings of job dissatisfaction (Jacobs & Padavic, 2015; Zarei et al., 2021). Conversely, other pre- and post-pandemic research suggests that remote work increases job satisfaction (Bentley et al., 2016), that home-based teleworkers report greater levels of satisfaction than other workers (Wheatley, 2012) and that remote work has a significant relationship with job satisfaction via employee's autonomy (Jamaludin & Kamal, 2023). Moreover, a study found that 65% of remote workers report being "extremely satisfied" with their jobs, compared to just 34% of office-based employees (Wickersham, 2023). Finally, some research has also found inconclusive findings. Christensen and Staines (1990) found minor improvements or no change in job satisfaction after FW implementation. Bellmann and Hübler (2021) found no clear effects of remote work on job satisfaction, whereas Clark (2001) found higher work satisfaction in association with FW only when flexibility was designed to meet employees' needs.

The literature on FW and the work–family interface provides polarized findings as well. Working remotely without strict space and time restrictions often implies a work-from-home arrangement instead of working in an on-site office or cubicle (Cooper & Baird, 2015). As such, home-based work often comes with the need to juggle the role requirements of work and family or, rather, the most central and salient domains in a person's life (Wei et al., 2016). While work–family balance refers to the experience of a state of well-being in which employees' work life and family life are perceived as generally compatible (Wei et al., 2016), work–family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Grzywacz & Demerouti, 2013) appears when the two social roles impose conflicting role expectations, such as work requirements interfering with family obligations (i.e., work–family conflict; WFC) and family hindering work (i.e., family–work conflict; FWC), thus creating psychological conflict and role overload (Kahn et al., 1964).

On the one hand, FW has blurred the separate domain structure of work and home, and was found to exert a debilitating effect on the home setting as it becomes a multipurpose site for professional work but also domestic activities such as childcare and leisure activities (Boncori, 2020; Crawford, 2020; Soroui, 2021). Overlapping work and life functions in the same space and extended demands on worker time were reported to be associated with poor work–life balance (Como et al., 2020) and to damage family structures and increase work–life conflicts (Bellmann & Hübler, 2021; O'Connor & Cech, 2018). On the other hand, FW arrangements have also been suggested to make it easier to adjust families' needs or personal obligations with work requirements due to less commuting time and the ability to optimize childcare around a flexible work time schedule (e.g., Birt, 2023; Saxena & Mokhtarian, 2010; Williams, 2008). However, the positive impact of FW on workers' lives seems to also depend on the workers' gender (e.g., a higher burden of childcare for women and more work–family conflict; (e.g., Albion, 2004; Boncori, 2020; Drew & Humbert, 2012))

and FW policies (e.g., women working for companies with family-friendly FW policies worked more in their own time and were more likely to return to work after parental leave; Galinsky and Stein (1990)).

Additional controversial findings of FW's effects have been reported with regard to workers' well-being. Some research suggests that remote work and the blurring of personal life and working time foster excessive overtime working (Tahavori, 2015) and the feeling that one is working all the time, which can also be because of a lack of boundaries in the home between personal space and workspace and the constant availability of computers at all hours (Birt, 2023). Remote work technology induces teleworkers' technostress (Suh & Lee, 2017) as individuals remain switched on to their digital technology platforms for work (Turkle, 2008; Cech & O'Connor, 2017) and thus experience overwork, exhaustion and other workload pressures. The pandemic particularly highlighted the inability to disconnect (e.g., workaholism) from work and related health problems (Lockwood & Nath, 2021; Müller et al., 2018) such as stress, mental health impairment and burnout (Peasley et al., 2020). Remote work also reduces spontaneous and casual social interactions as experienced in on-site office and fosters feelings of social isolation and potential depression issues (Integrated Benefits Institute, 2024) and higher suicide rates (Neis & Neil, 2020). Conversely, FW is reported to save commuting time and trips, thus reducing the stress and costs associated with traveling (Birt, 2023) as well as facilitating a more efficient use of time and the setting of a more personalized way of working that improves personal well-being (Wigert & White, 2022). Indeed, research has found that 41% of in-office personnel tend to experience more burnout in comparison to 26% of remote workers, who are also generally happier than their in-office counterparts (Wickersham, 2023).

FW's effects on teleworkers' performance and productivity are again controversial (e.g., Ismail & Michael, 2023). On the one hand, remote work from home may expose individuals to tasks that cannot be performed from home or difficulties in accessing needed data or documents, and may be associated with more distractions and difficulty with keeping focus when alone (Bolisani et al., 2020), thus adversely affecting employees' productivity. Moreover, the literature suggests that flexible workers might undergo the social stigma of being considered as less committed and devoted than traditional workers who are considered more productive (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014). Women in particular tend to undergo the bias against mother workers and a negative assessment of their performance (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019). As noted above, the lack of a concrete working schedule and oversight for remote work may deprive workers of a source of motivation or assurance often associated with in-office work and, thus, contribute to reducing workers' productivity (Birt, 2023). Indeed, the literature suggests that teleworkcomes with a higher managerial need to monitor and coordinate teleworkers as control mechanisms (Lockwood & Nath, 2021; Richardson, 2017) and European employers have concerns with regard to remote workers' productivity (Zoe Talent Solutions, 2023). On the other hand, research suggests that during the pandemic 90% of remote workers reported that they were either as productive or even more productive when compared to working in the office (Zoe Talent Solutions, 2023), and 52% of UK staff enjoyed a better work–life balance that bred greater productivity (Lund et al., 2020). In particular, the opportunity to flexibly structure one's own work and adjust one's work schedule to personal needs and preferences may ensure the greatest level of productivity (e.g., Birt, 2023; De Smet et al., 2023).

Indeed, an additional recent study on more than 6000 employees working full-time across the world at organizations employing over 500 employees which assessed the impact of modern stratified workplaces (i.e., remote, hybrid and onsite workspaces) on employees' bond with their organization and related outcomes provided findings that conflict with theories touting the essential importance of in-presence work (Dalessandro & Lovell, 2024).

Overall, while some research has indicated a negative relationship between FW and the above individual- and organization-related outcomes, other contributions have found a positive relationship or even no relationship. As such, we argue that these mixed findings might be the result of nonlinearity in FW-outcomes relationships. Moreover, in the current paper, we focus on employees' orientation towards FW (i.e., FWO) and examine the effects of workers' position with regard to the use of FW methods on organization- (i.e., organizational social support, organizational justice, affective organizational commitment) and individual-related outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction, work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, stress, performance). While no study has previously examined the curvilinear effects of FW, let alone of employees' FWO, on the outcomes of interest, consistent with the above literature review we speculate there may be a nonlinear relationship between employee's attitude towards flexibility and the study outcomes.

Thus, based on the above arguments, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 1. *Flexible work orientation will have a curvilinear relationship with (a) organizational support, (b) organizational justice, (c) organizational commitment, (d) job satisfaction, (e) WFC, (f) FWC, (g) perceived stress and (h) performance.*

Moreover, as previously reviewed, FW's association with its outcomes may also vary as a function of the employees' working arrangement, whether fully on-site or, conversely, remote.

Hence, we pose the following research question:

Research Question: Does work arrangement (i.e., in-person vs. flexible) moderate the relationship between flexible work orientation and organizational support, organizational justice, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, WFC, FWC, perceived stress and performance?

4. Method

4.1. Participants and Procedure

The initial sample consisted of 1061 adult workers from 100 different Italian organizations. In the analyses, we kept participants who answered quality-check questions correctly, leading to a final sample of 843 employees. In the overall sample, 63.5% of respondents identified as female and 36.5% as male. The average age of participants was 43.29 years (SD = 12.49) and the average job tenure was 11.65 years (SD = 10.28). More than seventy percent (74.5%) held a permanent position within their organization. Only sixteen percent (16.7%) of respondents held a supervisor role. The educational level of the vast majority was college (52.4%) or high school (42.1%). Almost 70 percent (68.4%) of respondents worked in-person, whereas the remaining 31.6% worked flexibly (i.e., remote, hybrid). A total of 59 percent (59.8%) of organizations were private, whereas 40.2% were public. Organizations belonged to the following industry sectors: education and artistic (23.5%), communication and technology (17.2%), health care (11.7%), commerce (5.4%), manufacturing (1.3%), restoration (5.4%), services and finance (7.0%), transportation and repair (3.9%), military (3.4%), construction (0.7%) and other sectors (19.9%).

We collected online cross-sectional anonymous survey data via Survey Monkey. Participation was voluntary, anonymous and not rewarded by any incentive. The study followed the guidelines of research ethics in compliance with the Ethical Principles of the Helsinki Declaration of 1964 in order to protect individual participants from any form of potential physical and/or emotional harm. The research team approached individual employees to request their participation in the study, provided information about the project, encouraged participation and addressed concerns from potential participants. Participants were provided with informed consent materials that explained the anonymous nature of the

data collection and their rights as research participants. Moreover, the survey included five quality-check items to detect careless responding.

4.2. Measures

Below is a description of the measures used to obtain the data for the current analyses. Items from the flexible work options questionnaire, organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, perceived organizational justice and job satisfaction scales were translated into Italian from the English version using the standard translation–back-translation procedure recommended by Brislin (1980). The correspondence of the original and the back-translated items was then verified by the authors.

4.2.1. Flexible Work Orientation

Five items from the Flexible Work Options Questionnaire (FWOQ; adapted from Albion, 2004) measured attitudes and barriers to the use of flexible work options. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A sample item is as follows: "*Flexible work options do not suit me because they tend to make me feel disconnected from the workplace*". Given the negative content measuring barriers towards FWO items were reverse-coded, and higher scores indicate more favorable attitudes towards the use of FWO.

4.2.2. Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment was measured using seven items from the affective organizational commitment subscale of the Commitment Scale (Allen & Meyer, 1990). A sample item is as follows: "*I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it*". Participants answered the statements using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Items were positively and negatively worded in order to avoid response-set bias. Negative items were reverse-coded such that higher scores reflect more affective commitment.

4.2.3. Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support was measured using six items from the scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (2001). A sample item is as follows: "*My organization really cares about my well-being*". All items were responded to on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Items were positively and negatively worded in order to avoid response-set bias. Negative items were reverse-coded such that higher scores reflect more perceived support from the organization.

4.2.4. Perceived Organizational Justice

Psychological justice perceptions were assessed using four items from the Psychological Justice Perceptions Scale (Colquitt, 2001) that taps procedural, distributive, informational and interpersonal justice climate perceptions. Respondents rated the items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A sample item is as follows: "*At my workplace, a person's job opportunities and promotions are based only on work-related characteristics*".

4.2.5. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction was measured using five items from the Overall Job Satisfaction Scale (Judge et al., 1998). A sample item is as follows: "*Overall, I am satisfied about my job*". Items were answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Items were positively and negatively worded. Negative items were reverse-coded such that higher scores reflect more job satisfaction.

4.2.6. Performance

Four items measured employee performance of in-role behavior, defined as behaviors that are formally recognized and required as defined by job descriptions (Williams & Anderson, 1991). A sample item is as follows: "*I fulfill the responsibilities specified in my job role*". Items were responded to on a 5-point Likert-type frequency scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

4.2.7. Perceived Stress

Perceived stress was measured using a shortened four-item Italian version (Mondo et al., 2021) of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983) developed to assess the degree to which individuals perceive situations in their lives as stressful, focusing on aspects such as unpredictability and lack of control. A sample item is as follows: "*In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?*" The PSS items, relating to the last 30 days, asked individuals to indicate the frequency with which they have experienced certain sensations or mental states using a 5-point Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very often). Items were positively and negatively worded, and positive items were reverse-coded in order to reflect more perceived stress.

4.2.8. Work–Family Interface

We used the short Italian version (Petitta & Ghezzi, 2023) of the Work–Family Conflict scale from Matthews et al. (2010). Three items measured the extent to which work commitments interfered with family life (i.e., WFC). A sample item is as follows: "*I am often so emotionally drained when I get home from work that it prevents me from contributing to my family*". Three items were used to measure the extent to which family commitments interfere with work life (i.e., FWC). A sample item is as follows: "*Because I am often stressed from family responsibilities, I have a hard time concentrating on my work*". Response options could range from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) on a Likert-type scale.

4.2.9. Workload

Individual workload was assessed using five items from the quantitative workload inventory (QWI) developed by Spector and Jex (1998), measuring the amount of work and work pace perceived by workers. A sample item is as follows: "*How often does your job require you to work very fast*?". Items were answered on a 5-point Likert response scale ranging from 1 (Never or almost never) to 5 (Very often or always).

4.2.10. Control Variables

We controlled for organization type (i.e., public = 1 vs. private = 2) and workload on the latent outcomes of interest. Specifically, the literature suggests that employees' belongingness to an organization from the private vs. public sector may have consequences for their organizational commitment (e.g., Flynn & Tannenbaum, 1993); job satisfaction (e.g., Gastearena et al., 2021); organizational justice perceptions (e.g., Mengstie, 2020); performance (e.g., Rolim Ensslin et al., 2021); stress (e.g., Bano & Kumar, 2012); work–life balance (Aslam et al., 2011); and social support (e.g., Aarons et al., 2009). Moreover, employees' perceptions of workload may affect (see Bowling et al., 2015 for a review) their stress levels, in-role performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and work–life balance (Britt & Dawson, 2005). Finally, in line with the literature (e.g., Albion, 2004) suggesting that positive attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, commitment) and benefits (e.g., performance, low strain, organizational effectiveness) associated with workplace

flexibility occur when the introduction of FWO is employee-driven, we controlled for the type of flexible work policy (i.e., employees' choice = 1 vs. imposed by employer = 2).

4.3. Statistical Procedure

The analytical strategy included several steps, which are described below. As a premise, using different steps for the diverse scales in our study did not affect the interpretation of our findings given the standardized variables used in the modeling analyses that allow for the direct comparability of the results (Cohen et al., 2003; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). First, given the large number of items used to measure the hypothesized constructs, we maximized the reliability and parsimony of our structural equation model by parceling the items of construct measures with more than four items (i.e., FWO, organizational support, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, stress). We followed the recommendations of Little et al. (2013) and sequentially assigned items based on the highest to lowest item-to-scale corrected correlations to create three item-parcels per construct. Indeed, using parcels in the context of measurement invariance testing across different groups has the potential advantages of minimizing the unique variances of items and improving the ratio of true-score variance to error variance for manifest indicators. Second, given the nested nature of individual responses within distinguishable organizational contexts, we assessed whether item scores varied as a function of organizational differences by means of the intraclass correlation coefficient ($ICC_{(1)}$, Bliese, 2000). Third, in order to assess the measurement and structural invariance of the model implied in our study (i.e., FWO, organizational support, organizational justice, commitment, job satisfaction, stress, performance, WFC, FWC and workload) across in-person and flexible workers, we conducted single-group and multigroup confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). We used multiple-group structural equation modeling (MG-SEM) to test and compare progressively more constrained models in order to assess the following measurement and structural invariance levels (Meredith, 1993): configural (equality for form), metric (equality for factor loadings), scalar (equality for items' thresholds), strict (residual variances) and the invariance of latent means. In all models, all covariate effects were specified as free parameters across groups. After establishing the highest level of measurement invariance, the invariance of structural effects among latent constructs was evaluated, and constraints on model parameters were considered appropriate when the model's chi-square did not change significantly (for $p = 0.01$, Scott-Lennox & Scott-Lennox, 1995) and the decrease in Comparative Fit Index (CFI) between adjacent nested models was less than 0.01 (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). All analyses were conducted using the Mplus 8.10 software (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2018).

Finally, to assess the linear vs. quadratic nature of the effects of FWO on the outcomes of interest and whether such effects were invariant across in-person and flexible workers, we tested multigroup mixture structural equation models (MM-SEM; Mayer et al., 2017) as outlined by Perez Alonso et al. (2024). This method enables the comparison of nonlinear relationships, such as U-shaped effects, across groups, while also addressing the limitations of standard SEM approaches in handling group-specific nonlinearities.

As a first step (S0), we examined an MM-SEM model by including the unconstrained quadratic effects of FWO on all latent variables between groups while maintaining all equality constraints established in previous measurement invariance analyses. Specifically, the S0 model also included all equality constraints on parameters between groups achieved in the previous measurement and structural invariance models. As a second step (S1), quadratic effects were constrained to equality between groups. The invariance of quadratic effects was evaluated by comparing S0 and S1 with respect to the sample-size-adjusted Bayesian criterion (ssBIC; see Henson et al., 2007), where lower values of the ssBIC suggest the preferred model, along with the evaluation of the *D* test, which represents a special

case of a log-likelihood ratio test in the presence of nonlinear effects (Gerhard et al., 2015; Maslowsky et al., 2015). In particular, the MM-SEM approach (which is based on finite-mixture modeling assumptions) allows for a direct comparison of the equality of nonlinear (i.e., U-shaped) latent effects, which is not possible with standard SEM modeling. Additionally, the method ensured that potential differences in measurement parameters did not interfere with the identification of structural effects. This rigorous methodological framework allowed us to uncover nuanced insights into the interplay between FWO and key outcomes, providing robust evidence of group-specific nonlinear dynamics regarding the association between latent variables.

In the first step (S0), a baseline MM-SEM model was specified where the quadratic effects of FWO on all latent variables were freely estimated across the two groups. This model retained all equality constraints established in prior measurement and structural invariance analyses (including direct effects), ensuring the comparability of effects across groups while allowing for potential differences in the nonlinear relationships. The S0 model thus captured distinct U-shaped patterns in how FWO influenced outcomes for in-person and flexible workers. For S0, and the next model, the following default settings were used in Mplus. The "type = mixture complex random" option specifies a mixture model with complex sampling and random effects, where "mixture" indicates the presence of groups (in our cases, these are "known" groups, in-person vs. flexible), "complex" accounts for dependencies in the data structure (i.e., individual observations were nested within organizations) and "random" incorporates random effects to model the variability of nonlinear effects. The "algorithm = integration" option specifies numerical integration, which is essential for models that include random effects or nonlinear terms like quadratic effects, with Mplus using adaptive quadrature for precise estimation. The "estimator = mlr" option selects the maximum likelihood robust estimator, which adjusts for non-normality in the data and provides robust standard errors and chi-square test statistics in the presence of clustering effects. Additional defaults used by Mplus include full-information maximum likelihood for handling missing data and numerical integration, with 15 integration points per dimension to balance computational efficiency and accuracy.

In the second step (S1), the quadratic effects were constrained to equality across the two groups to test their invariance. This involved imposing additional constraints on the structural relationships while retaining all prior measurement invariance constraints. The comparison between S0 and S1 models allowed us to test whether the nonlinear effects were significantly different between groups.

To evaluate whether the additional constraints in S1 significantly degraded model fit, we applied two complementary criteria. First, the log-likelihood ratio test (namely, the D statistics test, see Gerhard et al., 2015; Maslowsky et al., 2015) was used, providing a robust measure of the impact of imposing constraints in models with nonlinear effects, such as quadratic terms. A significant result indicated that constraining the quadratic effects resulted in a poorer model fit, suggesting meaningful differences in the U-shaped relationships between groups. Second, we calculated the sample-size-adjusted Bayesian Information Criterion (ssBIC, see Henson et al., 2007), a widely used measure that balances model fit with complexity. Lower ssBIC values for the S0 model indicated that allowing the quadratic effects to vary freely across groups provided a better explanation of the data compared to the constrained (S1) model.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities and intercorrelations among the study variables.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlations and reliabilities.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Organization Type	1.54 (1.73)	0.50 (0.44)	-	−0.08	0.09	0.02	0.02	−0.05	−0.14 **	−0.08	0.07	0.01	0.06	0.04
2. FW Policy	1.74 (1.70)	0.44 (0.46)	−0.23 **	-	−0.09	−0.12	−0.10	−0.17 **	−0.14 **	−0.04	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.03
3. FWO	3.84 (4.13)	0.77 (0.70)	−0.01	−0.01	0.78 (0.77)	0.23 **	0.30 **	0.24 **	0.30 **	0.35 **	−0.20 **	−0.09	−0.30 **	−0.03
4. Organizational Support	4.73 (4.66)	1.21 (1.13)	0.12 **	−0.18 **	0.20 **	0.90 (0.89)	0.55 **	0.55 **	0.55 **	0.15 *	−0.26 **	−0.21 **	−0.12 *	−0.17 **
5. Organizational Justice	3.31 (3.33)	0.96 (0.98)	0.06	−0.13 *	0.27 **	0.62 **	0.85 (0.83)	0.44 **	0.43 **	0.20 **	−0.25 **	−0.24 **	−0.15 *	−0.12 **
6. Affective Commitment	3.56 (3.45)	0.90 (0.92)	−0.04	−0.15 *	0.19 **	0.59 **	0.55 **	0.90 (0.91)	0.66 **	0.20 **	−0.38 **	−0.10	−0.17 **	0.02
7. Job Satisfaction	5.11 (4.94)	1.27 (1.32)	−0.11 *	−0.04	0.25 **	0.49 **	0.48 **	0.72 **	0.86 (0.87)	0.27 **	−0.48 **	−0.27 **	−0.31 **	0.00
8. Performance	4.54 (4.55)	0.65 (0.66)	−0.09 *	−0.04	0.23 **	0.13 **	0.16 **	0.21 **	0.28 **	0.88 (0.89)	−0.25 **	−0.21 **	−0.38 **	0.09
9. Stress	2.88 (2.79)	0.86 (0.86)	0.11	−0.06	−0.28 **	−0.31 **	−0.29 **	−0.38 **	−0.50 **	−0.25 **	0.68 (0.68)	0.26	0.23 **	0.06
10. WFC	2.33 (2.18)	0.84 (0.79)	0.00	0.05	−0.38 **	−0.24 **	−0.24 **	−0.22 **	−0.24 **	−0.05	0.31 **	0.72 (0.68)	0.45 **	0.32 **
11. FWC	1.88 (1.75)	0.79 (0.74)	−0.01	0.07	−0.37 **	−0.22 **	−0.23 **	−0.27 **	−0.31 **	−0.26 **	0.33 **	0.55 **	0.73 (0.72)	−0.01
12. Workload	3.47 (3.44)	0.83 (0.91)	0.03	0.04	−0.20 **	−0.13 **	−0.15 **	−0.07	−0.10 *	0.08	0.18 **	0.45 **	0.26 **	0.86 (0.89)

Note. Means, standard deviations and reliabilities for flexible workers are in parentheses. Reliabilities are along the diagonal. Correlations below the diagonal are for in-person workers and correlations above the diagonal are for flexible workers. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

5.2. Multiple-Group SEM Analyses Across In-Person and Flexible Workers

The $ICC_{(1)}$ coefficients of the manifest indicators (FWO, organizational support, organizational justice, commitment, job satisfaction, stress, performance, WFC, FWC and workload) showed the following values, respectively, for in-person workers, 0.34, 0.24, 0.31, 0.27, 0.12, 0.10, 0.06, 0.09, 0.19, and flexible workers, 0.26, 0.16, 0.10, 0.21, 0.07, 0.16, 0.06, 0.09, 0.27, thus suggesting the need to take into account the non-negligible dependence of individual data within the organizations.

Given the hierarchical structure of our data, wherein individuals are nested within organizations, we used the M*plus* "TYPE=COMPLEX" procedure (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2018). This M*plus* procedure allows, along with robust maximum likelihood (MLR) estimators, for an appropriate correction of standard errors and test statistics in the presence of clustering effects (Stapleton et al., 2016). Below, the detailed description of each step is reported.

Table 2 shows the results of the analyses for multilevel measurement invariance testing. All models were carried out by using the full information maximum likelihood approach (FIML; Arbuckle, 1996) to handle missing data, which were lower than 3% for all manifest indicators. As can be seen, the values for the in-person and flexible worker samples both showed an acceptable fit to the data, thus demonstrating the appropriateness of the nine hypothesized latent factors and the distinctiveness among the study variables. When constraints on factor loadings were added to test for metric invariance, the model (M2) still showed a good fit, and the ΔCFI was less than 0.01 in comparison to the configural model (M1) as well as the p value of $\Delta YB\chi^2$. When constraints on intercepts were introduced to test for scalar invariance, the model (M3) still showed a good fit and the ΔCFI was less than 0.01, but failed in comparison to the metric model (M2) with respect to the $\Delta YB\chi^2$-established criterion. Thus, we released the equality constraints on three intercepts, and we reached the partial scalar invariance (M3a). Constraints on residual variances to test for strict invariance (M4) still provided a good fit to the data, and the ΔCFI was less than 0.01 in comparison to the partial scalar model (M3a). Finally, the latent mean invariance model (M5) was not rejected, suggesting that in-person and flexible workers did not differ on latent scores for any construct.

Table 2. Results of tests for measurement invariance across in-person and flexible workers.

	Model Fit						Model Comparison		
Models (M)	**YBχ^2**	**df**	**RMSEA (90% CI)**	**CFI**	**TLI**	**SRMR**	**ΔM**	**Scaled ΔYBχ^2 (Δdf)**	**ΔCFI**
Measurement Models									
Model $_{\text{in-person}}$	1080.14 ***	528	0.043 (0.039−0.046)	0.938	0.926	0.053	–	–	–
Model $_{\text{flexible}}$	910.59 ***	528	0.052 (0.046−0.058)	0.910	0.900	0.066	–	–	–
Measurement Invariance Models									
M1: Configural	2001.59 ***	1056	0.046 (0.043−0.049)	0.929	0.915	0.058	–	–	–
M2: Metric	2015.01 ***	1079	0.045 (0.042−0.048)	0.929	0.917	0.060	M2-M1	$19.23_{(23)}$ ^{ns}	0
M3: Scalar	2074.52 ***	1103	0.046 (0.043−0.049)	0.927	0.916	0.060	M3-M2	$58.88_{(24)}$ ***	0.002
M3a: Scalar$_{\text{partial}}$	2045.84 ***	1100	0.045 (0.042−0.048)	0.928	0.918	0.060	M3a-M2	$31.24_{(21)}$ ^{ns}	0.001
M4: Strict	2040.61 ***	1134	0.044 (0.041−0.047)	0.931	0.924	0.062	M4-M3a	$27.44_{(34)}$ ^{ns}	−0.003
M5. Latent Means	2064.24 ***	1144	0.044 (0.041−0.047)	0.930	0.923	0.065	M5-M4	$23.11_{(10)}$ ^{ns}	0.001

Note. At each step in the sequence of invariance tests, all earlier constraints remain in place. YBχ2 = Yuan–Bentler chi-square; *df* = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual. ^{ns} = not statistically significant for $\alpha = 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Multigroup Linear and Quadratic SEM Models.

A multigroup SEM model where the effects of independent latent variables on the target outcomes were constrained to equalities across groups was compared with the most stringent model established in a previous analysis (M5). This model reached a satisfying fit: $YB\chi^2_{(df=1176)} = 2115.809$, RMSEA = 0.044 (90% Confidence Intervals: 0.044−0.047), CFI = 0.929, TLI = 0.924, SRMR = 0.069. Since this model did not result in a worsening of model fit with respect to M5 ($\Delta YB\chi^2_{(\Delta df=32)} = 51.10$ with $p > 0.01$ and ΔCFI = 0.001), we can reasonably conclude that the posited linear structural effects did not vary across groups.

Finally, we tested and compared the two MM-SEM models described above (i.e., S0 with quadratic effects free to vary across groups and S1 where they were constrained to equality). Since the most restrictive model (S1) resulted in a higher sample-size-adjusted BIC (i.e., $ssBIC_{S0} = 72{,}744.90$ vs. $ssBIC_{S1} = 72{,}751.90$) and their direct statistical comparison was significant ($D_{(df=8)} = 22.08$, $p < 0.01$), we concluded that one or more quadratic effects significantly differ across in-person and flexible workers. Thus, S0 was considered the final empirical model, as well as its estimates.

Specifically, for the in-person workers, while the linear effects were exactly the same as the flexible group (see below), the results indicated the standardized significant quadratic effect of FWO on organizational support (0.12, $p < 0.05$), organizational justice (0.13, $p < 0.001$), organizational commitment (0.14, $p < 0.001$) and job satisfaction (0.12, $p < 0.001$), and a significant linear positive effect on performance (0.37, $p < 0.001$) as well as a standardized linear negative effect on WFC (−0.31, $p < 0.001$), FWC (−0.39, $p < 0.001$) and stress (−0.35, $p < 0.001$). As an example, the effect of FWO on organizational support for the in-person group was significantly steeper for high levels of FWO, while it was rather flat for low or average levels of the independent latent variable (i.e., before the inflection point of the U-shaped effect). In terms of control variables, organization type (public vs. private) was only significantly and negatively associated with affective commitment (−0.14, $p < 0.01$), performance (−0.12, $p < 0.01$) and job satisfaction (−0.17, $p < 0.01$), and positively associated with stress (0.18, $p < 0.001$). Flexible work policy (employees' choice vs. imposed by employer) was only significantly and negatively associated with organizational support (−0.15, $p < 0.01$), organizational justice (−0.12, $p < 0.05$), affective commitment (−0.18, $p < 0.001$) and job satisfaction (−0.12, $p < 0.05$), whereas workload was significantly and positively associated with WFC (0.42, $p < 0.001$), FWC (0.13, $p < 0.05$), stress (0.16, $p < 0.05$) and performance (0.15, $p < 0.01$). Overall, the model explained 14% of the variance in organizational support, 21% of organizational justice, 15% of organizational commitment,

18% of job satisfaction, 15% of performance, 35% of WFC, 21% of FWC and 21% of the variance in stress. Moreover, the incremental added value of quadratic effects reflected an additional 5% explained variance in organizational support, 7% of organizational justice, 6% of organizational commitment, 6% of job satisfaction, 2% of performance, 0% of WFC, 1% of FWC, and 0% of the variance in stress, thus lending support to the incremental role of curvilinear effects in explaining variance in the data, and further strengthening the robustness of model S0 including quadratic terms for almost all latent outcomes.

For the flexible workers, the results showed the non-significant standardized quadratic effects of FWO on the outcomes. Moreover, the results revealed a significant linear positive effect of FWO on organizational support (0.25, $p < 0.001$), organizational justice (0.37, $p < 0.001$), organizational commitment (0.27, $p < 0.001$), job satisfaction (0.36, $p < 0.001$) and performance (0.36, $p < 0.001$), as well as a standardized linear negative effect on WFC (-0.31, $p < 0.001$), FWC (-0.40, $p < 0.001$) and stress (-0.35, $p < 0.001$). In terms of control variables, organization type (public vs. private) was only significantly and negatively associated with affective commitment (-0.15, $p < 0.01$), performance (-0.12, $p < 0.01$), stress (-0.18, $p < 0.001$) and job satisfaction (-0.17, $p < 0.01$). Flexible work policy (employees' choice vs. imposed by employer) was significantly and negatively associated with organizational support (-0.15, $p < 0.01$), affective commitment (-0.18, $p < 0.001$), organizational justice (-0.12, $p < 0.05$) and job satisfaction (-0.12, $p < 0.05$), whereas workload was significantly and positively associated with WFC (0.43, $p < 0.001$), FWC (0.14, $p < 0.05$), performance (0.15, $p < 0.01$) and stress (0.16, $p < 0.05$). Overall, the model explained 10% of the variance in organizational support, 18% of organizational justice, 10% of organizational commitment, 16% of job satisfaction, 16% of performance, 32% of WFC, 18% of FWC and 19% of the variance in stress. Taken together, our results provide partial support for Hypothesis 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d (i.e., curvilinear effects only for in-person workers), but not for Hypothesis 1e, 1f, 1g and 1h (i.e., linear effects for both in-person and flexible workers).

In order to evaluate the form of the significant quadratic vs. linear effects, we used the Excel plotting program developed by Dawson (2014). As can be seen in Figure 1a–h, the results indicated a curvilinear U-shaped relationship between FWO and organizational support, organizational justice, organizational commitment and job satisfaction for the in-person subsample, such that all outcomes appear at the highest level only for very high levels of FWO. That is, the levels of these latent outcomes tend to diminish as FWO increases and then turn positive, but only when FWO reaches very high levels, such that employees with moderate levels of FWO reported the lowest levels of perceived organizational support, organizational justice, affective organizational commitment and job satisfaction compared to employees with high levels of FWO, who showed the highest levels of perceived support, justice, commitment and satisfaction.

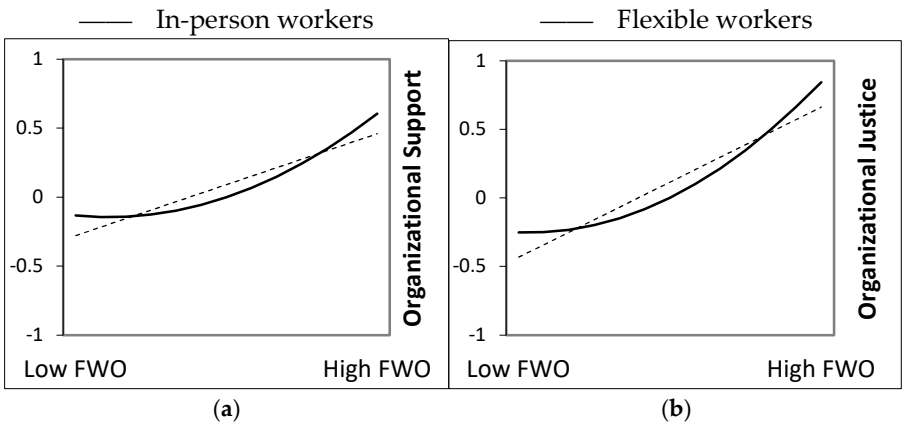

Figure 1. *Cont.*

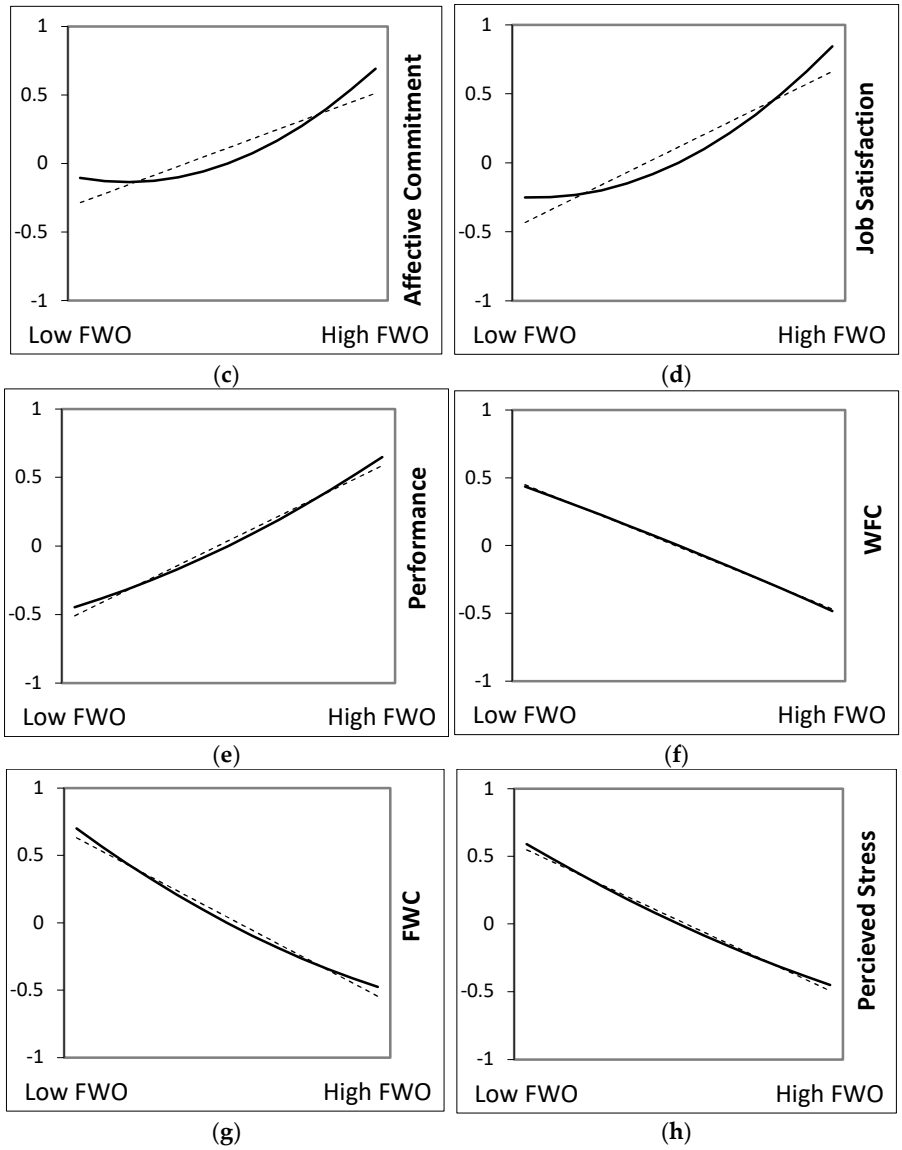

Figure 1. Quadratic and linear effects of FWO on (**a**) organizational support, (**b**) organizational justice, (**c**) commitment, (**d**) job satisfaction, (**e**) performance, (**f**) WFC, (**g**) FWC and (**h**) stress, for in-person and flexible workers. Solid lines refer to in-person worker effects and dotted lines refer to flexible worker effects. Quadratic effects of FWO were significant only on organizational support, organizational justice, organizational commitment and job satisfaction exclusively for the in-person group. Results are presented in a completely standardized metric.

6. Discussion

The trend of remote work and flexible work arrangements is now stabilizing at lower levels than the pandemic peak, but still persists (e.g., Judes et al., 2021; McGahey, 2024), and scholars and practitioners continue to provide conflicting arguments on the consequences of FW practices and debate on whether flexibility may have adverse rather than beneficial effects on employees' welfare and productivity as well as organizational functioning. The aim of the present study was to disentangle the positive vs. negative effects of employees' attitude towards flexible work practices (i.e., FWO) on their levels of job satisfaction, work–family balance, stress and performance, as well as their perceptions of organizational support and justice and affective organizational commitment. Moreover, the research examined whether the hypothesized curvilinear effects invariantly apply to both in-person and flexible workers or whether the type of working arrangement may moderate the links

among the study variables and further contribute to explaining inconsistent findings when dealing with FW issues.

Our findings suggest a non-invariant pattern of results across the two groups of in-person and flexible workers and the need to consider different sets of findings for the two subsamples. For the in-person workers, in partial support of the hypothesized curvilinear effects, we found a U-shaped asymptotic relationship between FWO and organizational support, organizational justice, organizational commitment and job satisfaction. That is, the levels of these factors tend to diminish as FWO increases and then turn positive, but only when FWO reaches very high levels. As such, employees working on-site report higher levels of affective commitment and job satisfaction as well as more favorable perceptions of organizational support and justice only at very high levels of a positive attitude towards flexibility (i.e., FWO). Moreover, curvilinear effects play a significant incremental role in explaining variability in the data, thus demonstrating the relevance and added-value of their contribution. These results comport with the literature that warns against the potential downsides of FW for organizational factors such as perceived support and fairness and employees' loyalty, as well as work satisfaction (e.g., Jamaludin & Kamal, 2023; Junior et al., 2020; Soga et al., 2022), while also supporting contributions on the benefits of FW for organizational functioning and workers' satisfaction (e.g., Scandura & Lankau, 1997; Zarei et al., 2021). Conversely, we found a positive linear effect of FWO on employees' performance, such that the more on-site employees are favorable to FW, the more their in-role performance increases. In addition, we found a negative linear relationship between FWO and WFC, FWC and stress, such that employees' positive attitude towards FW was associated with lower levels of stress as well as lower experience of work interfering with family (i.e., WFC) and family interfering with work (i.e., FWC).

For the flexible workers, we only found linear effects and no support for the hypothesized curvilinear effects. Specifically, higher levels of FWO predicted higher levels of organizational support, organizational justice, affective commitment, job satisfaction, in-role performance and lower levels of stress, WFC and FWC. That is, the more flexible workers had a positive attitude towards FW, the more they experienced lower levels of stress and work–life conflict issues, the more they were productive, and the more they reported to be satisfied with their job and attached to their company as well as reported being treated fairly and supported by the organization.

Overall, for flexible workers (but not for their on-site counterparts) we may expect a linear the-more-is-better effect of FWO on perceptions of organizational support and justice, feelings of affective commitment and satisfaction with one's job, whereas on-site workers experience more nuanced and controversial effects of their FWO on these factors. These differential findings for in-person and flexible workers seem to comport with the literature suggesting that a higher use of FW as experienced by flexible workers is associated with more positive outcomes (Albion, 2004). Notably, the results on linearity vs. curvilinearity of FW effects were also achieved by controlling for FW policies or, rather, the employees' possibility to choose FW arrangements as opposed to FW imposed on workers by the employer (Clark, 2001), thus further contributing to the robustness of the study's findings.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

Our findings contribute to flexible work theory and the managerial literature as well as occupational health psychology. First, the literature (Soga et al., 2022) suggests that the impact of FW practices is not restricted to discrete areas but may span across different domains and levels of organizational functioning. Our findings add to FW and the management literature by extending research on the impact of FW beyond the more commonly studied outcomes such as work–life balance, productivity, stress and satisfaction,

while also examining the effect of employees' FWO on their perception of organizational support and justice as well as attachment to their organization, thereby shedding light on more organization-related factors.

Second, our results on the curvilinear effects of FWO contribute to the ongoing debate on the controversial consequences of FW, and add to FW theory by disentangling the positive vs. negative effects of FW on employees' health and productivity as well as organizational functioning. Specifically, our findings unravel a composite frame among the workforce depending on their on-site or flexible arrangement. The U-shaped asymptotic curvilinear relationship between FWO and organizational support, organizational justice, organizational commitment and job satisfaction for on-site workers suggests that only in-person employees with very positive attitudes towards FW view their organization as supportive and fair, and feel attached to it as well as satisfied with their job. That is, in-presence employees who are extremely convinced (and extremely unconvinced, i.e., low FWO levels) that working remotely does not cause being excluded, losing significant events or being stigmatized are those who are the most confident in their organization (i.e., support, trust), attached to it and satisfied, in comparison to their colleagues with moderate levels of FWO, who show the worst perception of and attachment to their organization. On the one side, the left-hand section of the U-shaped plots (i.e., slight negative relationship) comports with arguments suggesting that FW may have negative effects on employees' trust in organizational support and fairness (e.g., Birt, 2023; Soga et al., 2022) as well as loyalty (e.g., Hafermalz & Riemer, 2021) and satisfaction (e.g., Mihhailova et al., 2011; Zarei et al., 2021). On the other side, the right-hand section of the curve showing a positive relationship between FW and outcomes is in line with research on the positive effects of FW for employees' trust in their organization (e.g., Albion, 2004) as well as commitment (e.g., Scandura & Lankau, 1997) and satisfaction (e.g., Jamaludin & Kamal, 2023; Wickersham, 2023). At the same time, flexible employees display a linear relationship among these variables such that the more they have a positive attitude towards FW, the more they have confidence in and are attached to their organization. This comports with the psychological contract literature suggesting that positive outcomes occur when employers offer FW options and employees feel the need to return higher commitment, loyalty and job performance (Scandura & Lankau, 1997). For example, research has found that during the COVID-19 outbreak employees who perceived a flexible work arrangement policy as an organizational effort to protect them from COVID-19 felt the need to return affective commitment, job satisfaction and work engagement (Sunaryo et al., 2022).

Overall, employers may face a composite workforce situation such that their flexible workers positively oriented towards FW have higher trust in and loyalty to their organization, whereas their in-person employees who are both negative or extremely positive towards FW hold the best perception of and attachment to the organization. Indeed, our findings also suggest that for both in-person and flexible workers, high levels of support, trust, commitment and satisfaction are associated with employees' choice of FW. From a systemic perspective, flexibility for an organization does not automatically correspond to flexibility in terms of control and decision latitude for employees (e.g., Höge, 2011; Hornung et al., 2008; Reilly, 1998), and the literature suggests differentiating between flexibility "demands" and flexibility "opportunities" in order to capture the potential positive or negative effects of FW on both employees and organizations. As such, FW imposed on employees may represent an additional demand from the organization, such as increased telework among employees with routine tasks (Thulin et al., 2019) motivated by the employers' interests in reduced costs, reduced absence and efficiency, rather than by individual workers' own needs and motives (López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020). Another relevant distinction is between 'being flexible' and 'having flexibility' (Jonsson,

2007), wherein the employer typically has flexibility whilst the employee has to be flexible. While the number of job postings mentioning remote work tripled during the pandemic (Judes et al., 2021) and flexibility is currently the top reason for candidates accepting job offers (Howlett, 2023) leading to a reversal of the asymmetrical power relation between the employer and the employee (Jonsson, 2007), the literature suggests the relevance of considering employee-friendly flexibility and "equiflex" FW strategies designed to meet the needs of both employees and employers (Albion, 2004).

Third, we add to occupational health psychology by showing that across different occupational settings and industry sectors, for both in-person and flexible workers, we may expect a the-more-is-better (i.e., linear) effect of a positive attitude towards FW (FWO) on stress, work–life balance and performance, such that employees with a more favorable FWO also tend to experience less stress and more work–life balance and productivity. That is, employees who have a positive attitude towards FW and also experience flexibility because they work remotely or hybridly (i.e., a mix of in-person and remote work) tend to have a non-controversial and straightforward work experience associated with more productivity, well-being and work–family balance (i.e., lower stress, WFC, FWC). Interestingly, on-site workers who do not use flexibility but have a positive FWO tend to have a similar straightforward work experience associated with higher productivity and well-being at work and at home as their flexible co-workers, but have a more controversial view (i.e., curvilinear) of organizational factors (e.g., organizational support and justice).

Our findings are in line with research on the positive effects of FW for employees' work–life balance (e.g., Birt, 2023; Boncori, 2020; Williams, 2008) and stress (e.g., Wickersham, 2023; Wigert & White, 2022). Moreover, the positive effects of FWO on in-role performance support the literature suggesting that FW is associated with higher productivity (e.g., De Smet et al., 2023; Lund et al., 2020). While our data are in line with metanalytic findings suggesting that flexible work arrangements can facilitate employees in maintaining their health (Shifrin & Michel, 2021) and productivity, they further suggest that these results apply to both on-site and flexible workers with a positive orientation towards FW. Indeed, Italy is a country committed to social welfare and strong social security through standard agreements between employers and employees (i.e., national work contracts) in both public and private organizations (Conflavoro, 2022) that provide workers with strong protection (Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2021). Moreover, the Italian Ministry for the Family (2023) is an institution dedicated to developing policies aimed at encouraging and financing initiatives to reconcile working hours and family care, and supporting maternity and paternity. Consistently, a report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2024) aimed at surveying the member countries with regard to the quality of work–life balance suggests that in Italy, full-time workers devote 69% of their day on average (i.e., 16.5 h) to personal care (e.g., eating, sleeping, etc.) and leisure (e.g., socializing with friends and family, etc.) in comparison to the average 63% of the 38 OECD member countries (i.e., 15 h), thereby achieving the best work–life balance at the global level. Overall, results from the current study are in line with the contention on the differential prevalence of FW across different countries and national regulations (e.g., European Union, 2020; Johanson, 2022).

Overall, the findings of the present study may help bridge the contributions on FW arrangements in the still disparate fields of flexible work theory and occupational psychology, as well as management literature. First, management in organizations should take into consideration the relevance of employees' diversity and encourage a culture of diversity that may help in blending employees who work in different workspaces and use different working methods. Second, the potential positive or negative effects of FW in terms of support, trust, commitment and satisfaction on both in-person and flexible

workers as well as organizations are heavily dependent upon employees' choice of FW. Organizations are advised to manage efficiency and flexibility by using control mechanisms in supportive rather than coercive ways in order to prevent unwanted consequences of forceful control such as decreased employee performance and well-being as well as higher turnover (Burney et al., 2024). Below, we delve into the practical implications of the current findings and include suggestions for managerial and systemic practices.

6.2. Practical Implications

Our findings have several implications for practice. First, results from the current study across different occupational settings and industry sectors further corroborate the idea that employees with a positive attitude towards FW, whether flexible or on-site workers, tend to report better work–family balance and well-being as well as productivity. Indeed, the ever-increasing adoption of remote working suggests that European employees do prefer flexible work arrangements (e.g., working remotely at least once a week) compared to traditional office work (Baumlin et al., 2022). However, the literature suggests that the benefits associated with workplace flexibility in terms of work satisfaction and family well-being tend to occur particularly when FW practices result from policies and work cultures designed to meet the needs of both employees and employers (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission; HREOC, 1996). Moreover, the adoption of FW models raises significant implications for organizational structures and physical workplace designs as well as workforce well-being (Bentley et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2020), and increases the demand for the regulation of FW given its impact on both employers' and employees' rights (Soga et al., 2022).

At the national level, government legislation on employee-secure work laws and social safety nets as well as family support and the marketization of care work (Klimczuk & Klimczuk-Kochańska, 2016) may help individuals manage work–family balance and prevent the threat of losing one's job, particularly for more vulnerable workers with respect to the unwanted consequences of flexibility such as precarious and lower-paid jobs, particularly for women (López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020). At the organizational level, organizations are warned that family-friendly FW policies are associated with lower absenteeism and higher job satisfaction and dedication, especially for women (Galinsky & Stein, 1990; López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020), and, thus, interventions may range from workplace policy development and organizational culture changes toward a strong culture of support up to leadership training in family support supervisor behaviors (Hammer et al., 2013).

Indeed, according to the literature (Burney et al., 2024), companies can manage efficiency and flexibility by using control mechanisms in both coercive and supportive ways. However, social exchange theory holds that employees suffer when forceful control is used and coercive control may result in decreased employee performance, well-being and higher turnover. Specifically, research shows that decentralization and involvement in the design of the control system are two strategies that organizations can employ to lessen the negative consequences related to the application of coercive control. Moreover, the literature suggests that organizational culture is likely more important than physical workspace for employees' involvement with their organization and has a massive impact on employee performance and satisfaction (Lam et al., 2021). Specifically, organizational culture sets the norms and expectations of the organization, such as inclusive practices and the fair treatment of all types of employees (i.e., remote, hybrid and in presence) as well as choice and autonomy (Canning et al., 2020), that underpin employees' attachment to their organization and willingness to commit regardless of their working arrangement (Dalessandro & Lovell, 2024). Regarding methods to improve employees' contribution, studies

have demonstrated that managerial initiatives including mentoring programs, diversifying teams (e.g., self-*managed teams*, which allow people in different roles and functions to work together on projects as equals) and leadership positions (e.g., cross-*training* by rotating management trainees through departments may increase their contact with diversity and deepen their understanding of the whole organization) can improve equity and inclusion leading to effective organizational outcomes, possibly implementing voluntary training and avoiding negative or threatening messages (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Indeed, exchanges of positive emotions among employees during social interactions at work whether in-presence or remotely may help build a safe and psychologically healthy work environment (Petitta et al., 2021). Furthermore, giving workers freedom and choice at work might promote favorable results (Lovell et al., 2021) and organizations are advised to implement a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion rather than concentrating solely on the workplace.

Second, our data demonstrate a curvilinear U-shaped asymptotic relationship between FWO and organization-related factors for on-site workers (i.e., organizational support, justice and affective commitment) such that these factors turn positive at very high levels of employees' FWO, and a linear the-more-is-better effect of FWO on these outcomes for workers already using FW options. Notably, for both in-person and flexible workers, the organization's policy to make FW available upon employee's choice is associated with high levels of support, trust and commitment. As noted, employees perceive higher procedural justice in their organization when they have a voice during the process that leads to decision outcomes (Colquitt, 2001), such as FW policy design or implementation. Taken together, our findings across different occupational settings and industry sectors corroborate the notion that flexibility imposed on workers falls short in developing employees' positive attitudes (Albion, 2004) and warn organizations on the relevance of maximizing FW benefits for workers (e.g., well-being, productivity) and organizations (e.g., loyalty, trust) by introducing employee-driven FW practices. On the one hand, organizations may boost positive organizational outcomes by strengthening positive psychological contracts with employees (Albion, 2004). For example, equiflex FW strategies (HREOC, 1996) designed to meet the needs of both employees and employers could be implemented by offering employees whose job is teleworkable the option to choose flexibility. Relatedly, the literature suggests that the factors that significantly influence workers' use of FW arrangements are not primarily concerns about financial and career costs or the opinion of supervisors but, rather, negative attitudes from others (e.g., stigma on flexible workers) and the fear of feeling isolated and not involved in the workplace (Albion, 2004). As such, initiatives at the organizational level that focus on social life might also involve planning networking events with the goal of promoting informal social life and reducing the negative consequences of working remotely by encouraging social bonding, problem-solving and/or informal leadership. An additional tool in developing a positive psychological contract is flexibility implemented through personal negotiation. For example, flexibility has currently become the top reason for candidates accepting a job offer and, interestingly, in addition to saving money, the main reason could be the worker's control and decision latitude that allows for a better life balance within work and family domains (Arveseth, 2024). As such, recruiters may increase the likelihood of employee retention if they are prepared to make reasonable and acceptable changes that suit the candidate (Howlett, 2023). On the other hand, FW practices involve the blending of people working on-site and those working remotely or flexibly, thus raising the issue of how to develop a common mindset that facilitates widespread cohesion and a positive psychosocial environment. Intervention programs may attempt to develop a culture of support and flexibility in the workplace (Clark, 2001) in order to overcome the typical barriers to the use of FW (e.g., resentment of in-presence

workers) and prevent the toxic effects of non-supportive behaviors (Albion, 2004; Han & McLean, 2020).

Overall, while measuring the success of FW arrangements is challenging due to the intangible nature of some of its key outcomes such as employee morale, collaboration and performance, the individual- (i.e., performance, job satisfaction, stress, work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict) and organization-related outcomes (i.e., organizational social support, organizational justice, affective organizational commitment) tested in the current study stand as key performance indicators of FW programs' effectiveness and provide a metric for their assessment. Organizations may utilize quantitative (e.g., surveys) and qualitative (e.g., feedback sessions) tools of productivity and well-being and compare their levels before and after the FW programs' implementation to determine the presence of a significant improvement.

6.3. Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions

While our study is an important first step at disentangling the positive vs. negative effects of FW and expanding the research on FW outcomes on the less-studied organizational support and justice as well as affective commitment, it also has limitations that should be addressed in future research endeavors. First, we tested our hypotheses using cross-sectional data, which raises the possibility that common method variance bias is affecting our observed correlations (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and prevents causal conclusions. Future studies may attempt to mitigate this potential bias and clarify the causal relationships of the suggested nomological network by using cross-lagged data with longitudinal designs that introduce temporal distance between the predictor (i.e., FWO) and the proposed individual- and organization-related outcomes. Relatedly, for the purpose of strengthening the assessment of the curvilinear effects of FW, future longitudinal designs may examine FWO recorded at Time 1 and individual-related outcomes (e.g., stress, WFC) measured at Time 2, while also including additional long-term health outcomes (e.g., physical health) measured at Time 3. Latent growth curve models applied to three-wave data allows for the analysis of within-person processes (i.e., employee FWO) and examination via a parallel process model whether concomitant increases or decreases in employees' FWO are associated with similar trends in a) individual-related workers' outcomes (e.g., stress) and subsequent physical health indicators (Shifrin & Michel, 2021) and b) organization-related outcomes (e.g., support, trust) and subsequent levels of absenteeism and/or organizational effectiveness (e.g., Albion, 2004) across time.

Second, while individuals are the best informants when assessing constructs such as perceived stress, our data using self-report measures may increase the likelihood of common method bias. Future studies should use multi-source measures of employee outcomes, such as supervisor's ratings of employees' performance and health records if available.

Third, a notable strength of the current study is the large sample size and multilevel data drawn from numerous organizations spanning across miscellaneous occupational sectors as well as public and private settings. Nonetheless, our set of data was a convenience sample and, thus, our findings might be affected by a self-selection bias. As such, future studies should attempt to include additional types of occupations as well as organizational samples from diverse national contexts in order to increase the generalizability of the present findings.

Finally, our findings on the positive effects of FWO on employee well-being, productivity and work–life balance rely on data from one country and may arguably be affected by the national-level contextual resources available to Italian workers and strong social safety nets of Italian work laws. Indeed, in order to develop successful equiflex FW practices that

meet the needs of both employers and employees, research on FW points to the relevance of a flexibility-friendly workplace culture or, rather, organizational culture norms that overcome barriers to the use of FW and encourage social support among all relevant parties such as coworkers and supervisors (e.g., Clark, 2001). Moreover, the prevalence of FW arrangements strongly varies across different countries and national cultural norms that may variously fit with FW models (European Union, 2020). For example, more traditional cultures (e.g., citizens are rule-based and tend to do what they are told) may tend to see more negative effects when implementing flexible work that implies employees' autonomy and self-management skills (Wilkinson, 2017). Consistently, future research endeavors could examine how different types of organizational culture, norms and values (Schein, 1985) shape and influence employees' FWO and subsequent outcomes, as well as how national cultural norms (Hofstede, 1980) affect the nomological network examined in the current study using cross-country data from different national contexts. An additional factor diversely affecting equiflex FW implementation across countries, and, therefore, influencing the proposed outcomes (e.g., well-being, loyalty) is employees' vulnerability to irregularity of income due to flexible work schedules or flex-time contracts (e.g., Albion, 2004; Kolasa et al., 2021). As such, future studies may extend the current investigation and examine the role of economic stress (i.e., objective and subjective aspects of income and employment that may potentially stress individuals and their families; Voydanoff, 1990), which the literature suggests affects organizational functioning (Petitta et al., 2020), in determining employees' attitude towards FW (i.e., FWO) and related well-being and productivity outcomes.

7. Conclusions

Cumulative studies provide inconsistent findings on the positive vs. negative consequences of flexible working methods for employees and organizations. In order to disentangle the existing literature's mixed results, the present study examined the potentially curvilinear effects of employees' attitudes towards flexible work options (i.e., flexible work orientation; FWO) on individual- (i.e., performance, job satisfaction, stress, work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict) and organization-related outcomes (i.e., organizational social support, organizational justice, affective organizational commitment). Interestingly, our results indicated that flexible workers displayed linear relationships among all the study variables, whereas in-person workers showed the curvilinear U-shaped effects of FWO on support, justice, commitment and satisfaction, all of which increased at high levels of employees' positive attitude towards FWO. Overall, our results suggest the importance of taking into account the potential downsides of flexible working arrangements and the necessity to organize remote work in light of employees' desires and needs.

Transparency and Openness

The rationale for data exclusion is reported above under the sample description. The covariance matrix and analysis code are available upon request from the first author. The raw data for this study are not available as we do not have permission from participants for raw data sharing.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, L.P. and V.G.; methodology, L.P.; formal analysis, V.G.; writing—original draft preparation, L.P.; writing—review and editing, L.P. and V.G.; funding acquisition, L.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Institutional review and approval were obtained for this study (RP120172B962500C —2020; approval S.A 256/200, date: 24/11/2020) that followed the standard research procedure for anonymous survey studies in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and European Union and Italian privacy laws. All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data of the present study is unavailable as participants did not provide their permission to share raw data. The covariances matrix and analysis code are available upon request from the first author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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