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Flexible work arrangement expectations in the post Covid-19 reality: the impact on psychological breach

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this thesis is to understand the impact that flexible work arrangements and the discrepancy between what is expected by employees and what they are getting in the reality of post Covid-19, have on organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. Moreover, the mechanism role of psychological contract breach. Sample of one hundred and thirty people from America and Europe participated in an online survey. Findings showed that what employees are expecting and what they are receiving is different in terms of flexibility, which has a positive relationship with a psychological contract breach.

Thus, the findings confirm the importance that flexible work arrangements have on psychological contracts to prevent their breach and reduce negative effects that this may cause on organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. This is relevant for organizations to comprehend the effects of not fulfilled flexibility employees' expectations and recognize that not all employees want the same flexible options, so they need to be adapted for what they want. Moreover, we highlight the benefits that flexible work arrangements have for employment relationships.

Keywords: *Flexible work arrangements, expectations, post Covid-19, psychological contract breach, organizational commitment, job satisfaction.*

JEL classification: *J28; J81.*

RESUMO

O principal objetivo desta tese é compreender o impacto das opções de trabalho flexível e a discrepância entre o que é esperado pelos colaboradores e o que eles estão a obter na realidade pós-Covid-19, e o efeito que têm no comprometimento organizacional, na satisfação no trabalho e o equilíbrio da vida. Além disso, o papel do mecanismo de quebra de contrato psicológico. Uma amostra de cento e trinta pessoas da América e Europa participaram num inquérito online. Os resultados mostraram que o que os funcionários estão a esperar e o que estão a receber é diferente em termos de flexibilidade, o que tem uma relação positiva com uma quebra do contrato psicológico.

Assim, os resultados confirmam a importância que as opções de trabalho flexíveis têm nos contratos psicológicos para evitar sua quebra e reduzir os efeitos negativos que isso pode causar no comprometimento organizacional, na satisfação no trabalho e no equilíbrio entre vida profissional e pessoal. Isso é relevante para que as organizações compreendam os efeitos da flexibilidade não atendida nas expectativas dos funcionários e reconheçam que nem todos os funcionários desejam as mesmas opções flexíveis, portanto, precisam ser adaptadas para o que desejam. Além disso, destacamos os benefícios que os arranjos de trabalho flexíveis trazem para as relações de trabalho.

Palavras-chave: *Opções de trabalho flexível, expectativas, pós Covid-19, quebra de contrato psicológico, comprometimento organizacional, satisfação no trabalho.*

Classificação JEL: J28; J81.

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GLOSSARY

Glossary of acronyms

The following table describes the abbreviations of standard and nonstandard acronyms used throughout the thesis.

Abbreviation	Meaning
FW	Flexible work
FWAs	Flexible work arrangements
FWD	Flexible work discrepancy
HRD	Human Resource Development
JS	Job Satisfaction
M	Mean
OC	Organizational commitment
PC	Psychological contract
PCs	Psychological contracts
PCB	Psychological contract Breach
<i>p</i>	p-value
R²	Adjusted correlation coefficient
SD	Standard deviation
B	Standardized coefficient of the independent variable
ID	Standardized indirect effect
WFH	Work from home
WFC	Work-family conflict
WLB	Work-life balance

Glossary of Symbols

The following table describes the symbols used in the thesis.

Symbols	Meaning
α	Cronbach's alpha

INTRODUCTION

Conventional work models are still valid in most companies across the world, however, the Covid-19 pandemic, technological changes, and the gig economy characterized by freelancing, shorter contracts, and entrepreneurship, triggered a change in workers' work preferences, turning flexible work into a new trend. These situations challenged businesses that have struggled to survive, profit, and maintain stable working relationships during the pandemic. As such, flexible work may be a concept to consider at companies that are eager to embrace the new reality of reconciling two different demands, life, and work, to gain advantages in the globalization where we live.

Before the pandemic, as of 2019, only 5.4% of employees in the EU-27 usually worked from home – a share that remained rather constant since 2009 (European Commission, 2020). Due to technology advancements and the covid pandemic, organizations were forced to find a way for their employees to work from home. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, companies were offering diverse types of flexibility. For example, based on the European Commission (Ahrendt, et al., 2020) suggested that close to 40% of those currently working in the EU began to telework full-time as a result of the pandemic.

In a study of 2020 conducted in a variety of industries, participants (employees) were asked about their new expectations regarding workplace conditions during the post Covid-19 pandemic. Findings showed that just 36% are expecting things to go back to normal (pre-Covid-19 conditions) whereas 64% are presuming that they will have the option to completely work from home. Also, more than half of the respondents supported the idea of a hybrid model, that is, half of the time working from home and the other half from the office. Lastly, 38% of respondents supported the notion of more flexible working hours after the pandemic (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). The study establishes that most respondents are hoping for changes to the conventional work expectations post Covid-19 pandemic (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).

A study (Eurofound, 2021) found that the number of teleworkers in the spring of 2021 fell as more workers returned to the office. Despite this, the desire to telework has not waned as most EU workers expressed a preference to work from home several times per week in the long term (Eurofound, 2021). Therefore, traditional expectations about work have evolved and become more flexible than they used to be. As such, understanding workers' new expectations about work flexibility, in contrast to traditional work models, is critical to provide insights to employers, so they can structure new strategies. According to LinkedIn's Global Talent Trends 2019 report, which surveyed 5,000 talent acquisition and HR professionals around the world,

although 36% of women and 29% of men say flexibility matters when they make job decisions (McLaren, 2019).

Additionally, in a review, Kossek, Gettings, and Misra (2021) explain that: yet coming out of the pandemic, a growing number of companies have announced that they plan to “embrace flexibility”, particularly in a hybrid working model. Three key reasons are pointed out: First, businesses believe that the 24/7 remote-work form of flexibility can be leveraged to support productivity. Second, employees — especially Millennials — are threatening to quit unless they’re granted flexibility. Third, some leaders assume that when employees are permitted to work flexibly, they automatically experience more harmony in their work-life balance.

Moreover, extensive data across surveys indicate that most people want hybrid work arrangements — that is, a mix of in-person and remote work — as we continue to move through the pandemic (Neeley, 2021). As an illustration, Microsoft’s 2021 Work Trend Index, a study of over 30,000 people in thirty-one countries, found that 73% of respondents desire remote work options. FlexJobs surveyed more than 2,100 people who worked remotely during the pandemic and found that 58% would leave their jobs if they weren’t able to continue working from home at least some of the time (Neeley, 2021). In the spring of 2021, in a survey carried out within the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Japan among 5,036 knowledge workers, 59% asserted that flexibility is a more important factor than salary or other benefits.

The flexible work arrangements are changing traditional models of work portrayed in terms of full-time, and work from offices with fixed schedules from Monday to Friday (Hayman, 2009). The pandemic and the new types of flexible work such as working remotely from home, flex time o location, compressed work week, telework, virtual work, and all those related to the flexibility in schedule, or the number of hours or place of work (Sulaymonov, 2020) has led many employees to rethink the importance of work in their lives and to change their relationship to it. Many employees are demanding more flexibility. In response, leaders need to stop viewing flexibility as an HR policy and regard it as an opportunity for organizational transformation that will benefit both employees and their businesses (Kossek, Gettings, & Misra, 2021).

In an interview with a Head of property Huw Llewellyn in the United Kingdom, a company that closed its Newport office as more staff continue to work from home after the pandemic said: “The Covid-19 pandemic has changed how we work and we have learned that we can continue to operate effectively while working differently, and remotely. Our business continues to grow but our people are embracing a more flexible, hybrid approach and are telling us it is how they want to work moving forward, as they have seen a positive impact on their well-being and work-life balance” (News, 2021). This new way of thinking based on studies as evidence, but also the actions of heads of the companies, is proof that the necessity of implementing

FWAs, creates likewise the existence of expectations for workers about flexible work conditions.

In the last stages of the pandemic, the matter of applying flexible work arrangements (FWAs) implies challenges for both employees and organizations, but also the generation of new expectations for each party (Cacoveanu, 2022). Expectations inform us about the likelihood of future events, but they can also influence expectancy-related outcomes (Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996). Expectations can guide their behavior and decisions, without necessarily being aware of doing so. People have expectations regarding personal achievement, the outcomes of substances, procedures, and other people. Such expectations can yield expectancy-confirming effects (Tamir & Bigman, 2018). Therefore, expectations have consequences in personal and work relationships because they move people's behavior, and in the last few years, the psychological contract has studied the notion of expectations (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006).

According to Rousseau (1989), the psychological contract outlines the individual's beliefs (expectations) concerning the reciprocal obligations that exist between the employee and the organization. When one party to a psychological contract believes that the perceived promissory obligations have not been met, a psychological contract breach occurs (Robinson & Rousseau, 2000).

For this reason, the concept of the psychological contract becomes relevant, because it allows an in-depth understanding of workers' expectations and the risk of its breach or violation. Hence, the knowledge about these expectations seems relevant to employers, because unfulfilled expectations may cause employees' trust to feel harmed, which significantly affects individuals, groups, and organizations (Ahmed, 2013). Breaches are associated with a decrease in job satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Bal, Lange, Jansen, & Velde, 2008).

Zhao et al. (2007), in their meta-analysis on the psychological contract breach and work-related, employed affective events theory to explain the relationship between psychological contracts and attitudes and behaviors. According to affective events theory, a negative event at the workplace causes negative emotional reactions, such as anger or frustration (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). These emotions color the cognitive evaluations of one's job, in such a way that experience of negative emotions will cause more negative job attitudes (Bal, Lange, Jansen, & Velde, 2008). On the contrary, fulfilled expectations may benefit performance, productivity, engagement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work-life balance.

Therefore, employers should be aware of the expectations in flexible work which could be a resource for them, to supply the evolving needs of their employees, to get benefits, and not counterproductive behaviors and attitudes. So, it is suggested that companies reexamine their

conventional work policies and expectations to better adapt to the new and emerging reality (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).

Based on these theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, this study seeks to uncover the expectations about flexible work arrangements in the post Covid-19 context, and its implications for employees and employers, regarding psychological contract breach and its consequences on organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. This research has the potential to contribute results, considering the changes that the world is experiencing, and the desires of the new workforce for organizations.

This thesis has five chapters. In the first chapter, the literature review presents the theories and concepts as well as their relationship. This section reviews the concept of flexible work arrangements, their types, and inspects the outlook of workers' expectations, which entails the description of the consequences that flexible work arrangements involve for employers and employees. Then, it is explaining psychological contract, its breach and the effects on organizational commitment, job satisfaction and work life balance. At the end of this section, are establish one research question, two hypotheses, and the research model. In the second chapter, the methodology describes how the research is approach which includes the description of quantitative data and the statistical analysis strategy. In the third chapter, all the results are expose, and it shows insight into the discrepancies and the breach of the psychological contract, which it is explain in the following chapter within the findings, discussion, and implications for practice. Finally, they are recommendations and conclusions.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Flexibility at work

Trends from around the globe regarding the changing nature of work and the workforce suggest that effective workplace flexibility implementation to support work-life demands is critical for organizational effectiveness (Kossek & Thompson, 2015). Trends from around certainly, effective implementation means employees believe that their work-life needs are supported via employer-initiated job flexibility practices and that employers perceive those organizational goals are served via these practices and policies (Kossek & Thompson, 2015).

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) are agreements regarding hours and workplace arrangements agreed upon by employees and the organization where they work (Kossek, Hammer, Thompson, & Burke, 2014) that provide flexibility for employees to arrange their own time and place of daily working. The application of FWAs can thus accommodate the needs of employees so that they can fulfill their obligations and responsibilities both inside and outside the organization in a balanced way (Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

Although FWAs have been used in certain industries, for example, freelancers have used remote working conditions successfully throughout the years (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020), the Covid-19 pandemic showed that flexible work is possible in many other ways, for example, compressing hours (an employee could work during four longer days and not work on the fifth day, adjusted shift rotations (different shifts), changing working hours (for example some employees work from 7 am to 5 pm while others from 9 am to 7 pm), home working or for any place, and part-time, which let discover some benefits for workers and employers (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Moreover, technological advancements have made the phenomenon of FWAs salient to human resources development (HRD) researchers. New workplace contexts and changing work environments need further exploration of FWAs and the extent to which these programs may help organizations achieve desired outcomes (Bontrager, Clinton, & Tyner, 2021).

Types of workplace flexibility

Despite the fact there are variations of the traditional workday, we use the 8 am–5 pm Monday through Friday (fixed schedule at the office) work week as the traditional model's comparison. In contrast, there are four primary types of workplace flexibility: (1) flexibility in scheduling; (2)

flexibility in place/location; (3) flexibility in the amount of work/workload and hours; and (4) flexibility in leave periods and career continuity (Kossek & Thompson, 2015).

Flexibility in time allows full-time employees to choose to some extent how their total weekly work hours are allocated relative to a traditional work schedule. Examples include flexible shifts, part-year/seasonal work, and compressed workweeks, where an employee is allowed to work between 35 and 40 hours per week in less than five workdays, for instance, an employee could work 10 hours for 4 days and have one free day extra (Baltes et al., 1999; Kossek & Michel, 2011). There is one new model included in this section called trust-based working time (functioning time), which follows a similar concept to the 4-day work week. Goals and tasks are set beforehand and no fixed working hours are defined. The focus is on the productivity and the results of the employee—not the office time (Helmold, 2021).

Flexibility in location (“flexplace”) allows employees to choose where they perform their tasks relative to the main work site. This is, employees work away from the main work site and are supported by electronic resources, for some or all their work schedule (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Examples involve telework, remote work, and hoteling. Statistics show that 84% of people choose home as their primary work location (Doist, et al., 2019).

Flexibility in the amount of work consists of offering employees the ability to alter the amount of work they conduct, which includes policies such as part-time work, reduced-load work, and job-sharing (Kossek & Michel, 2011). This option lets employees modify two principal points: workload and hours, to meet non-work responsibilities when they have roles as parents, students, volunteers, or military personnel (Kossek & Thompson, 2015).

Last, flexibility in leave periods and career continuity regards the employees’ option to select when to take time off without losing their jobs. For example: leave maternity or paternity. (Kossek et al., 2011).

Employees demand flexibility for different purposes, e.g., an employee who has the responsibility to drop his child at school demands flexi-time; an employee who is looking after the sick may demand telework and an employee willing to pursue higher studies can demand a part-time work option (Kossek & Thompson, 2015). The primary purpose of using flexibility is to have more time for the family and to handle personal issues, and it reduces conflict within the family (Hofäcker, 2013). Therefore, flexible work arrangements are a multidimensional concept that includes a variety of practices and implies several consequences for both employees and employers.

Flexible work arrangement consequences

Many studies show the impact of FWAs on employees’ work attitudes and behaviors, some are beneficial for employees and employers, but others are detrimental. Benefits for employers

include time-cost savings (lower office space costs), lower overhead costs, a larger talent pool, and lower turnover, which means flexible working not only helps attract people but retains them. It is a wise strategy for smaller enterprises looking to compete for talent and gain a competitive advantage against large companies asking employees to return to the office (Harris, 2021). Also, fewer sick days (less absenteeism), and encourage planning skills that increase autonomy, engagement, and consequently, employee satisfaction and productivity (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).

Positive effects can be seen in other studies, for instance, remote work from home is positively associated with profit and perceptions of organizational performance (Meyer, 2001), and flexi-time is positively associated with profitability, employee retention, and negatively to turnover and absenteeism (Dalton & Mesch, 1990; Lee & DeVoe, 2012; Richman, Civian, Shannon, Hill, & Brennan, 2008; Stavrou & Kilaniotis, 2010). Bloom et al. (2015), in a Chinese experiment, found that working from home increases productivity while decreasing capital costs, also cost savings come from reduced office space.

In another study of 2020, Italian workers who were participants in a randomized experiment (control trials) in a large traditional company in the multi-utility which have never used any flexible working before, were selected a sample of 310 workers (containing both white and blue collar workers) and they were divided by two groups: the workers in the first group (the treatment group) have the option to work 'smart' (i.e. with no constraints on the place or time) one day per week for nine months, in agreement with their supervisors; the workers in the second group (the control group) continue to work traditionally. The results showed workers who engage in smart working increase their productivity compared to workers who continue working traditionally (Angelici & Profeta, 2020). This outcome holds whether productivity is captured by an objective measure or measured according to several specific productivity traits (e.g., compliance with deadlines) either self-reported by the worker or reported by the supervisor. Also, people into teleworking took fewer leave days which had a positive effect on well-being and work-life balance (Angelici & Profeta, 2020).

Regarding the benefits for employees, one is increased autonomy, which consists of controlling the work schedule and working hours, and how they manage their work (Molleman, 2009). Flexible work hours allow individuals to feel increased control over their lives due to the opportunity to work during times more suited to personal needs (e.g., child-care or elderly care obligations) or personal biological clocks because not everyone is most productive from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. (Scandura & Lankau, 1997).

Other benefits are reflected in their work-life balance (Dilmaghani, 2021). Essentially, it allows people to fit life commitments, like dropping kids to school, into their workday (Harris, 2021), caring for a child, attending school, serving in the military, or recovering from illness (Kossek & Thompson, 2015). Also, job sharing, temporary reduction of hours, work from

anywhere (flexible location), increase employee satisfaction and well-being. In many cases, employees have reported feeling trusted by their manager when allowed to work from home (WFH) (Baker, Avery, & Crawford, 2007). They also have less exhaustion from global or national trips, the freedom to live closer to family, the ability to return to work sooner, less burnout, and coordinate and accomplish work using technology (Kossek, Michel, Kurland, & Lautsch, 2009; Ferdous, Ali, & French, 2021).

Policy Type	Policy Examples	Employee Benefits	Employer Benefits
Flexibility in time (Schedule): Employees can vary their schedules to meet daily, weekly, or monthly expectations	Compressed workweek, shift swapping, self-scheduling	More Control over days or hours worked, less time commuting, greater ability to meet nonwork needs during regular work hours, greater feeling of control	Greater productivity and employee focus, less absenteeism, less overtime
Flexibility in location (Place): Employees can work away from their employer's work site using technology or other types of communications	Telework (using technology to work from any locations), remote work (living outside geographic area of the employer), Telecommuting (working from home), Hoteling/Satellite offices	Less time commuting locally, less exhaustion from global or national trips, freedom to live closer to family or friends	Less turnover, lower overhead cost, larger talent pool
Continuity: Employees can choose when to take time off without losing their jobs	Leaves (family, sick, maternity, paternity, education, military)	Time to give birth, care for a child or parent, attend school, serve in the military or recover from illness. Ability to return to work sooner when combined with job sharing or part time work. Less burnout. Time to nurse or bond with a child	Less turnover, retention of quality employees
Workload: Employees can opt for a less-than-full-time schedule in return for a commensurate cut in pay	Job share, part-time work, lighter workload	Less overload or burnout, decreased work-family conflict	Less turnover, retention of quality employees
Mix of all FWAs: Employees can vary the degree to which they work off-site	Site work, hybrid, remote	Ability to coordinate and accomplish work using technology	Greater productivity, lower office-space costs

(Adapted from Kossek, Michel, Kurland, & Lautsch, 2009; 2015) – Figure 1: Flexible work arrangements.

FWAs may also have negative consequences for both individuals and organizations which can create barriers to their implementation. Some examples include isolation work, work-family conflicts, and health. (Soga, Bolade-Ogunfodun, Mariani, Nasr, & Laker, 2022). Specifically, at the individual level, FWAs can trigger and exacerbate work-family conflict (WFC), resulting in damages to family structures (Bellmann & Hübler, 2021, O'Connor & Cech, 2018) through a blurring of boundaries and extended demands on worker time (Soga, Bolade-Ogunfodun, Mariani, Nasr, & Laker, 2022). A work-family conflict is a specific form of role conflict in which role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible (Frone et al., 1992). Work-family conflict is associated with increased psychological strain, with higher levels of

stress and lower levels of well-being associated with both work-to-family and family-to-work sources of conflict (Chandola, Booker, Kumari, & Benzeval, 2019).

Further, a major disadvantage for individuals relates to health problems (Lockwood & Nath, 2021, Müller et al., 2018), including stress, mental health impairment, and burnout (Peasley et al., 2020). These issues are the result of overwork, exhaustion, and other workload pressures as individuals remain switched on to their digital technology platforms for work (Turkle, 2008, Cech & O'Connor, 2017).

At the organizational level, scholars have suggested that home working can affect trust in working teams (Allen et al., 2015, Hafermalz & Riemer, 2021). There are also unintended consequences of using digital technologies and platforms to support home working, such as exclusion and perceptions of surveillance (Soga et al., 2020). Furthermore, there are negative effects on work commitment in teams with corresponding adverse effects on job satisfaction as businesses deploy FWAs (Jacobs & Padavic, 2015, Zarei et al., 2021). Monitoring workers may also be more difficult when workers work remotely, particularly in jobs where workers have more discretion over tasks. Working from home or with a flexible schedule may allow workers to shirk or get distracted (Mas & Pallais, 2020).

Other types of barriers to FWAs implementation that may not be necessarily qualified as negatives are employees who prefer traditional work models, or employees who have jobs that do not allow for flexibility in location due to their nature (i.e., doctors, drivers, operations in food industries, pilots), but does not mean they can apply other kinds of flexibility.

The organization must apply FWAs with a design and adequate logistics. There are four components required to form a flexible workspace for FWAs adoption, such as open plan workspace design, task-oriented space, hot desking policy, and IT infrastructure (Chua, Myeda & Teo, 2022). However, since many employees are considering whether flexible work could be the trend of the future, the negative consequences and barriers to its implementation will be challenges to study deeper and overcome them.

Despite the negative consequences that are also challenges, flexible work is particularly suitable to respond to the new needs of workers and to better combine their professional and private life, which implies new working models (Helmold, 2021). This causes organizations awareness of how employees want to work in the future, and the importance of recognizing giving more flexibility to choose their working hours and location as an effective measure (Helmold, 2021) to improve employee satisfaction, trust, appreciation, and be seen as an interesting employer in the long term. That also will enable the highest productivity and the greatest success for the company in the future (Bergmann, 2019).

Psychological contract (PC) and its transactional trend

The psychological contract can be defined as the employee's belief regarding the mutual obligations between the employee and the employer (Rousseau, 1989). That said, individuals' perception of psychological contract is largely influenced by organizational processes (Chan, 2021). When an individual supposes that the organization where he/she works has fulfilled its promises, the relationship between the organization and the individual flourishes, consequently resulting in positive organizational and individual outcomes. Therefore, the needs of an individual and the organization are aligned (Chan, 2021).

Nowadays, the concept of psychological contract is related to employment trends concentrated upon transactional rather than relational exchanges, which made organizations need a newer and more flexible form of organization–employee relationship (Cullinane & Doundon, 2006), and go beyond the written employment contract with less relational exchanges (job security and loyalty), as the old psychological contract is distinguished (Costa, 2020).

Transactional exchanges in the new psychological contract are characterized to have flexible employment relationships, short-term work, more autonomy and the possibility of negotiation, share responsibility, focus on employability and boundary-less, protean careers, flexplace, and flex time work possibilities, the pay is based on performance, and it is evaluated by 360° appraisal methods, and finally interdependent work (Costa, 2020). Based on this transactional view, flexibility gains strength and is relevant to psychological contracts.

Dynamics of Psychological contract

Scholars have recognized the dynamic nature of PC: "Psychological contracts are established at a certain point in time, and they are assumed to be able to change over time. Psychological contracts can be breached or violated and can be abandoned or deserted" (Schalk & Roe, 2007, p. 169). The psychological contract plays an important role in the shift from traditional work models to flexible work arrangements that companies are offering after the global pandemic (Wong, 2021), which were probably emerging new expectations among employees, so psychological contracts might help to understand this contemporary employment relationship.

Given that PC as being defined as employees' beliefs about expectations, obligations, and promises, it is proper to distinguish what each one means. A promise is "a declaration that one will do or refrain from doing something specified"; an obligation is "something (such as a formal contract, a promise, or the demands of conscience or custom) that obligates one to a course of action"; an expectation is "the act or state of expecting or anticipation" (Rousseau, Hansen,

& Tomprou, 2018, p. 1083). Researchers have noted that promises and expectations can both create obligations, which in turn regulate and direct behavior (Rousseau, Hansen, & Tomprou, 2018). Mainstream definitions also make clear that promises give rise to obligations and not vice versa. Indeed, PCs exist where no explicit promises have been made (Arnold, 1996). In the absence of promises, PC beliefs can be based on more general expectations (Montes & Zweig, 2009).

Rousseau et al. (2018) explain that expectations are beliefs about a future state of affairs that can be categorized as probabilistic or normative (Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996). Probabilistic expectancies refer to beliefs about the likelihood of future events, whereas normative expectancies refer to beliefs about future events that should happen based on normative standards (Higgins, 1992).

Employees enter the organization with normative expectations about the experiences and resources that they will receive based on their preexisting beliefs about employment relationships (Louis, 1980). We argue that these expectations give rise to perceived obligations (Roehling, 2008). For instance, an employee may expect the new employer to provide flexible hours to accommodate parenting responsibilities because this is a known norm in other organizations. This expectation may create a perceived obligation for the organization to provide flexible hours. However, it is also true that if one holds a perceived obligation to be given something, that individual expects to receive it. Indeed, a perceived obligation is attached to a probabilistic expectation concerning how likely it is that an organization will meet that obligation in the future (Roehling, 2008). Pre-Employment normative expectations can give rise to perceived obligations, and those obligations are associated with probabilistic expectations of what will occur in the future (Higgins, 1992).

With PC it is recognized that promises are one potential antecedent of perceived obligations and that's why PC schema is also influenced by normative expectations, particularly those derived from sources external to the organization (e.g., societal norms and previous experiences of self and others) (Rousseau, Hansen, & Tomprou, 2018). Perceived obligations influence employees' subsequent probabilistic expectations for what will be delivered in the future and guide employees' future actions toward the organization (Rousseau, Hansen, & Tomprou, 2018).

In this sense, the Covid-19 pandemic forced many governments around the world to ordain many organizations to work from home (normative), and after regulations ceased to be mandatory, expectations about the future were created for many workers. (Probabilistic expectations) This makes formulate a research question to know *if there are discrepancies between what employees expect and what companies are providing concerning flexible work arrangements*.

Content of Psychological Contract

To have a better understanding of the content of the psychological contract, Guest's and Conway's (1997) have a model to explain three important components: trust, fairness, and the delivery of the deal. Trust is defined as the confidence and certainty of an organization in its workers and their performance. Trust between employers and employees plays a key role as a facilitator of flexibility (Dex & Scheibl, 2002). Fairness is an element that managers and other organizational agents must be sensitive to employees' perceptions about how they are treated, to ensure that perceptions of unfairness do not damage the employment relationship. The personal use of FWAs was also related to fairness perceptions (Parker & Allen, 2001). This one element also has an important influence on outcomes such as employee engagement (Naidoo, Abarantyne, & Rugimbana, 2019). The deal refers to the obligations included in the psychological contract (Naidoo, Abarantyne, & Rugimbana, 2019). These include job content, job security, training and development, rewards and benefits, fair pay, good working conditions, and future career prospects (Atkinson & Cuthbert, 2006). Since FWAs are benefits that can be used by all employees, their use may be more likely to create positive perceptions regarding work/family benefits (Parker & Allen, 2001).

Psychological contract breach

When an employee perceives that the organization has failed to live up to one or more of its promises, scholars have labeled this as a violation, breach, and/or low fulfillment (Morrison & Robinson 1997; Robinson & Morrison 2000; Rousseau & McLean Parks 1993). The negative consequences of breaching the psychological contract have their roots mostly in reciprocity, and this could be explained through the social exchange theory, which as the norm of reciprocity helps explain how social exchange relationships develop, and how the failure to reciprocate prevents social exchange relationships from developing (Blau, 1986). This is understood as if the employer does not comply with the expectations or obligations of the worker, then employees will also do the same (Cook, Cheshire, & Rice, 2013). The last conceptual frame of flexible work arrangements and psychological contract makes formulate the following first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Discrepancy between FWAs expectations and what is provided by the organization is positively related to psychological contract breach.

Attitudinal and behavioral reactions to FWA's discrepancies

In a global report by Jabra (2021) about the ways of working, over 5,000 knowledge workers around the world expressed what they wanted from the future of their work arrangement. 59% of respondents reported that "flexibility" is more important to them than salary or other benefits, and 77% said they would prefer to work for a company that gives them the flexibility to work from anywhere rather than fancy corporate headquarters. (Reisinger & Fetterer, 2021).

Following the situation that employees might have expectations about flexible work arrangements and poor attention to them during post Covid-19, could risk the psychological contract and cause its breach. Most of the research on psychological contract breaches is focused on negative consequences regarding attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Costa, 2017). Based on Guest's and Conway's (1997) model, being aware of the consequences of outcomes of not fulfilling employees' expectations are relevant for organizations to prevent the breach.

In this paper, we decided to focus on three outcomes (two attitudinal and one behavioral) to see how they may be affected when the expectations about FWAs are not being fulfilled by the organizations causing the breach of the psychological contract. Relating attitudinal consequences, the first choice was organizational commitment because it enables employees to fulfill their responsibilities with motivation and even voluntariness in line with the aims and objectives of the organization (Imamoglu, Ince, Turkcan, & Atakay, 2019), which means it is linked with organization. The second attitude was job satisfaction, which is determined by feelings toward the job (Spector, 1997), so assesses the relationship with the job itself. Finally, work-life balance is a behavior associated with flexibility in the work (Klindžić & Marić, 2019), because individuals may perceive the organization's offering of FW as representing the organization's concern for work and family (Scandura & Lankau, 1997).

Attitudinal consequences

Organizational commitment (OC) should be considered a psychological state as it refers to employees' acceptance of work relations (Meyer & Allen, 1991). OC represents an individual's identification with the goals of the organization, how much the individual values membership in the organization, and the degree to which they intend to work to attain organizational goals (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). This acceptance is fundamental to their continuance to be a member of the organization (Loan, 2020). There are three forms of organizational commitment: (a) affective commitment, referring to the emotional attachment of an employee to the organization, (b) normative commitment, emphasizing the importance of obligations, and

(c) continuous commitment, referring to employees' awareness of the consequences of leaving the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This Thesis focuses on the affective commitment component.

Having flexible work available improves employees' perceptions of their employer and increases employees' overall positive feelings toward the employer which impacts organizational commitment and job satisfaction. In response to offering flexible work, employees may reciprocate with greater loyalty to the employer and better morale (Scandura & Lankau, 1997).

Flexible work practices improve job satisfaction and organizational commitment while reducing inter-role conflict (Bainbridge & Townsend, 2020). Also, Timms et al. (2015) asserted that company policies involving flexible work arrangements positively influence employees' levels of work commitment and engagement. According to Golden and Veiga (2008), highly committed employees are more likely to be identified with their organizations and are more inclined to contribute to organizational performance. In short, these practices, potentially at least, benefit both the employee and their organization, in relation to organizational commitment.

Job Satisfaction (JS) is an important concept that has attracted the attention of industrial-organizational psychologists for decades (Loan, 2020). Job satisfaction can lead to behaviors affecting organizational functioning. It can be considered an indicator of emotional well-being or psychological health (Thu, Loan, & Quynh, 2022).

Job satisfaction means "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Lock, 1976). It is an attitude with both affective (mood, emotional) and cognitive (belief, judgment, comparison) components (Fisher, 2000). Researchers who follow the cognitive approach suppose it is a subjective nature, so results of a comparison of what is received by employees and their work compared to what is expected, wanted, and examined as things that are appropriate or entitled to them (Hu et al., 2019).

The negative impact of the breach on employees' job satisfaction is well documented in the literature (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Tekleab et al., 2005). Research has indicated that when a breach occurs, employees will be dissatisfied with their work/job (Costa, 2017). It represents a feeling that appears as a result of the perception that jobs enable material and psychological needs (Rashid et al., 2003; Rotenberry & Moberg, 2007; Fu & Deshpande, 2014). Employees who are satisfied with their job may have accrued resources which make them better positioned to obtain new resources to augment their life satisfaction (Hobfoll, 2001; Koo et al., 2019). Furthermore, employees are more likely to protect work resources that can increase their job satisfaction, because the loss of those resources may diminish their life satisfaction (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

The relationship between organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance has been confirmed in numerous studies, but its strength varies (Rotenberry & Moberg, 2007). Most studies found a positive relationship between organizational commitment and job performance, with higher commitment leading to enhanced performance (Rashid et al., 2003; Rotenberry & Moberg, 2007; Fu & Deshpande, 2014).

Masuda et al. (2012) stated that, at the individual level, work-life flexibility is closely related to increased satisfaction and reduced stress. Ma (2018) reported that, a higher level of workplace flexibility leads to a corresponding higher level of job satisfaction, and Neirotti et al (2019) noted that, the adoption of flexible work arrangements has a positive impact on job satisfaction. Davidescu et al. (2020) stated that, it is essential to develop workplace flexibility, including flexibility in work hours and workspaces, to increase employees' job satisfaction. According to Ray and Pana-Cryan (2021), telecommuting as part of work flexibility lowered the likelihood of job stress and increased job satisfaction. It is assumed that workplace flexibility would increase employees' work engagement and satisfaction (Jung & Yoon, 2021).

Behavioral consequence

Concerning flexibility options in place and time are arrangements designed to aid the work-life balance (WLB), it generates positive organizational outcomes. When companies are aware of looking for work-life balance they implement healthcare arrangements, and flexible work practices, which will benefit their employees, and the organization by retaining, attracting new employees, and reducing turnover intentions (Klindžić & Marić, 2019). To have a successful implementation of work-life balance initiatives, it is important to promote factors such as a supportive work culture including encouraging employee growth and development, fair treatment, and provision of a trusting environment. The focus on flexible work schedules is one key to improved work-life balance for employees and results in reduced stress levels and better health overall (Peters et al., 2009). Millennials' top work-life balance expectations, include flextime and telecommuting, highlighting their desire to have greater autonomy and control in their work schedule (Marques & Berry, 2021).

A recent social media-based survey of global workers demonstrated that reception to WFH initiatives in the context of Covid was resoundingly positive (73%), with employees expressing joy, anticipation, and trust. Of the 27% with a negative perception of WFH, the most commonly expressed emotions were fear, sadness, anger, and distrust (Tripathi, 2020). As Berkery et al. (2017) point out, employees may increase their efforts if flexible arrangements help them manage their work-life balance. Such a relationship where employers motivate their employees to work in accordance with the organizations' plans is a typical example of exchange described in the social exchange theory. The availability of FWAs helps employees

manage their work-life balance and reduce levels of stress, exhaustion, burnout, etc., and it is expected that they may want to return the favor to their employers (Klindžić & Marić, 2019).

Following the last theoretical framework, a psychological contract breach could reduce trust in the organization, decrease employee motivation, job performance, engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and increase turnover intentions and cause poor mental health outcomes (Zhao et al., 2007). The attitudinal and behavioral consequences of non-fulfilled expectations about FWAs may cause consequences for organizations, so they should considering psychological contract to prevent their breach.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological contract breach mediates the negative relationship between FWAs discrepancy and organizational commitment (H2a), job satisfaction (H2b), and work-life balance(H2c).

Research model:

The research model, along with the hypothesized relationships, is shown in the next figure:

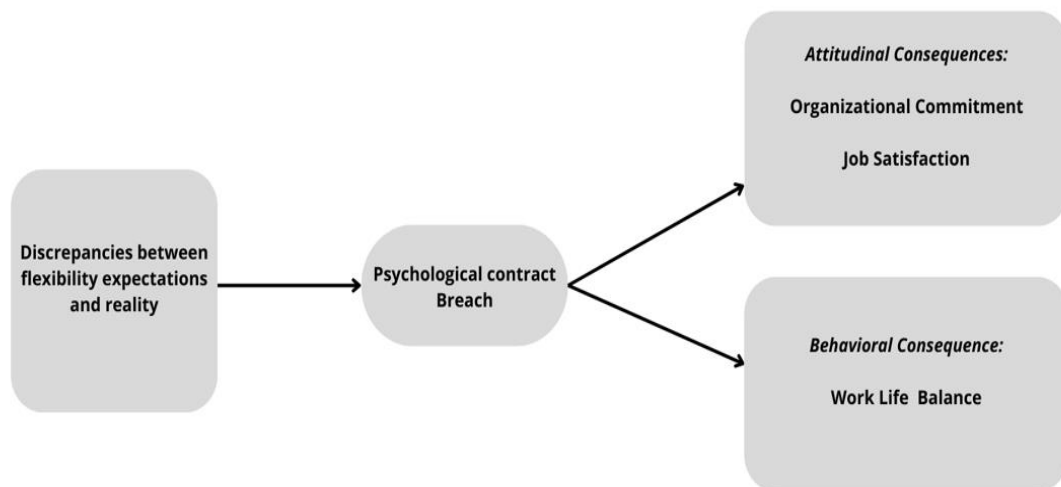


Figure 2- Research Model.

The model used for this thesis explains there are discrepancies between what employees expect of flexibility and what they are getting from their organizations in the post Covid-19 context, and how this has an impact on psychological contract breach, and consequently affects organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work-life balance.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach to test the proposed model, with a survey questionnaire to get data. Quantitative research deals with quantifying and analyzing variables in order to get results (Apuke, 2017). It involves the utilization and analysis of numerical data using specific statistical techniques (Apuke, 2017). Also, it takes an apprehension about the social reality, consisting of an external and objective reality. The four main focuses of doing a quantitative study are measurement, causality, generalization, and replication (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022). Through quantitative research, it is easier to measure with more objectivity the empirical evidence. To make quantitative research dependable, the study must show high validity as well as high reliability. Validity is you can trust the results obtained with the survey. If the validity is good, the implications are highly demonstrable, and if not, the implications will be hard to establish (Borg & Westerlund, 2007). Reliability shows what degree the chosen assessment tool produces stable and consistent results. If the reliability is good, the results are stable and consistent (Borg & Westerlund, 2007). This thesis uses two types of quantitative research:

1) Descriptive: To examine the situation, as it exists in its current state (Williams, 2011). In this thesis, descriptive data helps to know if there are discrepancies between what employees expect and what companies are providing in terms of flexible work arrangements.

2) Correlational: The purpose is to establish whether two or more variables are related (Bold, 2001). The correlational analysis helps to understand the relationship between flexible work discrepancies, psychological contract breach, and outcomes.

The study also uses a deductive approach which means the hypotheses have been based on the literature (theory), and after that was designed a research strategy that can help to test the hypothesis (Wilson, 2010). Both hypotheses established in this thesis were decided after choosing the theory described in the theoretical framework section, then came to the empiric gathering data to be tested.

Sample and Procedure

The sampling method used was the snowball technique, in which participants are expected to invite people around them who have the characteristics needed to participate in the research. To gather responses from participants, data collection was carried out using an online survey on the Qualtrics platform, which included questions related to each variable that wanted to be

measured. To avoid bias, questions were organized randomly. This study was conducted from January 2022 to October 2022, but the survey was distributed over a period of six months (February 2022 to July 2022). The survey was designed to take no longer than ten minutes.

Two hundred and seven people participated in this study, which was carried out on employees in America and Europe, with a minimum age limit of 18 years old. The criteria of selection to be suitable for the study was to be currently working, which reduced the sample to a total of one hundred and thirty. The subjects of study, the age ranged from 21 to 68 years old, with a mean value of 30.6 years and a standard deviation of 6.9 years. As for gender, 34% of participants were male, 64% were female and 2% were considered non-binary. Finally, 79.86% of the participants reported not having any children.

Measures

Unless otherwise stated, all scales used to measure the constructs used a five-point Likert ordinal scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). (Annex A)

For flexible work arrangement discrepancy, we used two items to measure; what do you expect from your company about flexible work arrangements; and what is currently offered by your company (Cronbach's alpha was 0.981). This was asked by a presence/absence scale, in which participants could choose none or all options between time, location, amount of work, and leave periods. Then, discrepancies for each category (time, location, amount of work, and leave periods) were calculated considering if the person both expected and had not received flexibility. The number of discrepancies (ranging from 0 to 4) was summed for each individual. For example, participants that expected and did not receive flexibility in location and time, had two discrepancies, while people that only expected and did not receive flexibility regarding leaving periods, had one discrepancy.

Psychological contract breach, we used Robinson and Morrison (2000) five item scale to assess PCB, "So far my employer has done an excellent job of fulfilling its promises to me", "I feel that my employer has come through in fulfilling the promises made to was hired" (Cronbach's alpha was 0.868).

In this way, the most accepted measure of *Organizational Commitment* (Allen & Meyer, 1990), we used six items: reflecting affective commitment scale (ACS). Sample items are "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization." "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me." "I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own." (Cronbach's alpha was 0.844).

Regarding *Job satisfaction*, the short satisfaction instrument by Schriesheim and Tsui (1980) was used taking into account five items (colleagues, supervisors, income, and overall job satisfaction). (Cronbach's alpha was -0.801).

Work-life balance (WLB) was adjusted from the work-life balance self-assessment scale that consists of 3 factors; work interference with personal life, personal life interference with work, and work/personal life enhancement questionnaire by Fisher et al. (2009) that consist of fifteen-items . Sample items are “My job makes my personal life difficult”, “I neglect personal needs because of work”, “I put personal needs second because of work.” (Cronbach’s alpha was 0.773).

Survey

The data are information collected through close-answer questionnaires designed based on the literature and have been modified regarding the supervisor's recommendations and the expert’s academic judgments. The literature included a diversity of sources such as the following: Academic papers and magazines, scientific journals, international reports of governmental entities, and databases as WebSciencie, Emerald, and ScienceDirect. The survey includes socio-demographic data and personal information, questions about flexible work expectations, and the measures. (Annex B)

Statistical analysis

IBM SPSS V.28.0.0 was used to perform all the analyses. First, internal consistency was determined for each variable by calculating Cronbach's alpha. Then, descriptive statistics and correlations were obtained using all the variables mentioned before to understand the overall behavior of each variable and identify if demographic characteristics were correlated with flexible work discrepancies, psychological contract breach, or outcomes. Afterward, the first hypothesis was evaluated through a Simple Linear Regression to determine if flexible work discrepancies and psychological contract breach were correlated and to what extent.

Then, using the Process Macro for SPSS, mediation analyses were realized for each of the outcomes (organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work-life balance) to evaluate the second hypothesis and determine if psychological contract breach mediates the negative relationship between flexible work discrepancies and each outcome. For these analyses, first, simple linear regressions between flexible work discrepancies and each outcome had to be evaluated, followed by a multiple regression, where each outcome was the dependent variable. Finally, the type of mediation (between partial and total) and the standardized indirect effect of flexible work discrepancies were determined for each outcome.

In the reporting of the results, α refers to Cronbach’s alpha, SD means standard deviation, M refers to mean, B stands for the standardized coefficient of the independent variable, p refers to the p-value (0.05 is used for significance), R^2 represents the adjusted correlation coefficient and finally, ID stands for the standardized indirect effect.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Flexible work expectations

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of people that had a flexible work discrepancy (FWD) for each category, between time, location, amount of work and leave periods. The category with higher flexible work discrepancies was leave periods, while the category with the lowest flexible work discrepancies was the amount of work. As for the general score of flexible work discrepancies, the mean number of discrepancies per person (between 0 and 4) was 1, with a standard deviation of 1.13.

Table 1. Flexible work discrepancies per category.

	TIME	LOC	AOW	LP
Freq.	44	39	32	58
%	33.85	30.00	24.62	44.62

Freq: Frequency, %: Percentage, TIME: Time, LOC: Location, AOW: Amount of work, LP: Leave periods

Table 2 presents the number of people with discrepancies about what they expect versus what they are really getting from Flexible Work Agreement models. At least, 76,15% percent of the participants have one discrepancy and only 23,85% don't have any.

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of discrepancies per person.

Discrepancies	0	1	2	3	4
Freq	31	52	27	12	8
%	23.85	40.00	20.77	9.23	6.15

Freq: Frequency, %: Percentage

Demographic variables, flexible work discrepancies and outcomes

Table 3 includes the descriptive statistics correlations and the Cronbach alphas for all variables. The outcome with the highest mean score was job satisfaction, followed by work-life balance. In contrast, the outcome with the lowest mean score was organizational commitment. As for psychological contract breach, the mean value was 2.14, meaning that on average people slightly disagree that their psychological contract is being breached. As for the Cronbach alpha, this value ranged from 0.642 to 0.981, meaning that all variables had good internal consistency.

None of the demographic characteristics were strongly or moderately correlated with outcomes. Additionally, flexible work discrepancies and psychological contract breach were significantly and negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($r = -0.282$, $p = <0.001$ for FWAs discrepancies and $r = -0.657$, $p = <0.001$ for PCB), while only psychological contract breach was significantly and negatively correlated with organizational commitment and work life balance ($r = -0.531$, $p = <0.001$ and $r = -0.408$, $p = <0.001$ respectively). Flexible work discrepancies were weakly correlated with job satisfaction, while psychological contract breach was strongly correlated with job satisfaction and moderately correlated with organizational commitment and work- life balance. Last, although some outcomes are correlated between them, these correlations are moderate.

Table 3. Cronbach alpha, descriptive statistics and correlations.

	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. FWD	0.981	1	1.13	1						
2. PCB	0.868	2.14	1.01	0.386**	1					
3. OC	0.844	3.10	0.93	-0.147	-0.531**	1				
4. JS	0.801	3.56	0.86	-0.282**	-0.657**	0.704**	1			
5. WLB	0.773	3.53	0.73	-0.150	-0.408**	0.232*	0.335*	1		
6. Gen.	-	-	-	-0.092	-0.053	-0.150	0.066	-0.015	1	
7. Age		30.60	6.90	-0.189*	-0.024	-0.015	0.044	0.199	-0.101	1
8. Child	-	-	-	0.025	-0.033	0.377	-0.078	-0.086	-0.091	-0.493**

FWD: Flexible work discrepancies, PCB: Psychological Contract Breach, OC: Organizational Commitment, JS: Job satisfaction, WLB: Work-life Balance

Gen.: Gender, α : Cronbach alpha, *SD*: Standard deviation.

*Significant at 0.05, **Significant at 0.01

Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis 1 stated that discrepancies between FWAs expectations and what is provided by the organization is positively related to PCB. As shown in Table 4, the standardized coefficient from the simple linear regression is $B = 0.386$ with a p of <0.001 , meaning that the regression is significant. The adjusted R^2 was 0.139, stating that 13.9 % of the variation of the PCB is explained by FWAs discrepancies. Consequently, these results support hypothesis 1.

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression between Flexible Work Discrepancies and Psychological Contract Breach.

<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	R^2
0.386	<0.001	0.139

B: Standardized coefficient, *p*: *p*-value, R^2 Adjusted *R* Squared

Hypothesis 2, which states that PCB mediates the negative relationship between FWAs discrepancies and the evaluated outcomes (OC, JS, and WLB) was tested using mediation analysis. This analysis was separated into three steps: 1) the Direct effect of FWAs discrepancies on each outcome with a simple linear regression, 2) the joint effect of FWAs discrepancies and PCB on each outcome with a multiple linear regression, and 3) the Indirect effect of FWAs discrepancies on each outcome. As for the first step, results (Table 5.) show that there is a negative relationship between FWAs discrepancies and organizational commitment ($B = -0.147$, $p = 0.148$, $R^2 = 0.147$), job satisfaction ($B = -0.282$, $p = 0.005$, $R^2 = 0.079$) and work-life balance ($B = -0.149$, $p = 0.164$, $R^2 = 0.022$). Even though the only significant relationship between FWAs discrepancies and outcomes was found with job satisfaction, according to MacKinnon et al. (2002), the mediation model accepts to proceed despite the fact that the relationship between X and Y is not significant. Therefore, the two following steps of the mediation analysis were realized in order to test hypothesis 2.

Table 5. Simple Linear Regression between Flexible Work Discrepancies and each outcome.

Outcome	B	p	R²
OC	-0.147	0.148	0.147
JS	-0.282	0.005	0.079
WLB	-0.149	0.164	0.022

OC: Organizational commitment, JS: Job satisfaction, WLB: Work-life balance.

After the negative relationship between FWAs discrepancies and each outcome has been supported, a multiple regression that evaluated the relationship between FWAs discrepancies and PCB with each outcome was realized (Table 6). For organizational commitment, FWAs discrepancies were not significant ($B = 0.064$, $p = 0.508$), but PCB was significant ($B = -0.556$, $p = <0.001$). This model had an adjusted R^2 of 0.534, meaning that it explains 53.4% of the variation of organizational commitment. As for job satisfaction, FWAs discrepancies were not significant ($B = -0.018$, $p = 0.827$), but PCB was significant ($B = -0.650$, $p = <0.001$). This model had an adjusted R^2 of 0.657, meaning that it explains 65.7% of the variation of job satisfaction. Finally, for work-life balance, FWAs discrepancies were not significant ($B = 0.002$, $p = 0.982$), but PCB was significant ($B = -0.489$, $p = <0.001$). This model had an adjusted R^2 of 0.408, meaning that it explains 40.8% of the variation of work-life balance.

Taking into account that the standardized coefficient of FWAs discrepancies decreases when evaluated with PCB in the multiple linear regression, compared to those of the simple linear regression, and, that FWAs discrepancies do not have a significant effect on the respective outcomes in the multiple linear regression, this means that PCB totally mediates the relationship between FWAs discrepancies and each outcome. Consequently, these results support hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2c.

Table 6. Multiple Linear Regression between Flexible Work Discrepancies, Psychological Contract Breach and each outcome.

Outcome	B-FWD	p-FWD	B-PCB	p-PCB	R²
OC	0.064	0.508	-0.556	<0.001	0.534
JS	-0.018	0.827	-0.650	<0.001	0.657
WLB	0.002	0.982	-0.489	<0.001	0.408

OC: Organizational commitment, JS: Job satisfaction, WLB: Work-life balance,

B-FWD/p-FWD: Standardized coefficient and p-value for flexible work discrepancies, B-PCB/p-PCB: Standardized coefficient and p-value for psychological contract breach

For the third step, the standardized indirect effect of FWAs discrepancies on each outcome was calculated. The standardized indirect effect of flexible work discrepancies on organizational commitment, job satisfaction and work life were -0.178, -0.251 and -0.161 respectively, meaning that the highest indirect effect of flexible work discrepancies was observed on job satisfaction. These results are presented in table 7, along with its respective lower and upper limit confidence intervals and also support hypothesis 2, since PCB is mediating the relationship between FWAs discrepancies and each outcome.

Table 7. Standardized Indirect Effect of Flexible Work Discrepancies mediated by Psychological Contract Breach on each outcome.

	ID	LLCI	ULCI
OC	-0.178	-0.300	-0.074
JS	-0.251	-0.374	-0.130
WLB	-0.161	-0.263	-0.070

OC: Organizational commitment, JS: Job satisfaction, WLB: Work-life balance, LLCI: Lower limit confidence interval, ULCI: Upper limit confidence interval

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The main goal of this study was to evaluate if there are expectations about flexible work arrangements in the post Covid-19 context, and whether these expectations impact organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. Moreover, this study assesses the role of psychological contract breach as a mediator in the relationship between discrepancies (what employees want regarding FWAs and what companies are providing).

The findings indicate that despite companies are offering flexible work options after Covid-19, employees are still expecting more, which supports the idea that flexible work models are suitable to respond to the new worker's needs (Helmold, 2021). Confronting the empirical

evidence, organizations and industries across the globe are providing a variety of components of flexible work arrangements - flexible time, flexible location, amount of work, and leave periods - (Kossek & Thompson, 2015). Despite most workers reporting having at least one flexibility, they wanted more flexible options.

The Covid-19 pandemic shifted the way how people used to work, under a more transactional perspective with flexibility, causing many companies to transition to other ways of work, mainly working from home. Even when large companies in the world are implementing WFH as the common way of FWAs, organizations are ignoring many other possibilities that these practices can offer, and how to implement it in the best way to obtain benefits from this trend which is becoming more desirable for employees.

In this study, results suggest that employers are focusing on two components of FWAs: time and location, which is clearly a must that workers want for the fact of having the opportunity to work anywhere they want and adjust the time at their convenience according to their needs. However, it was evident that employees want more flexible work options (because on average they are expected to have at least one flexible work arrangement that they did not have), and they do not just expect location and time as the traditional forms of flexible work, they also expect flexibility on leave periods and amount of work.

A remarkable discrepancy was found on leave periods being one of the most desirable flexibilities, but not being offered enough by organizations. A possible explanation is that leave periods are fundamental for unpredictable situations to help employees manage their time when they require personal leaves, such as caring for a parent or child, giving birth, recovering from illness, etc (Kossek, Michel, Kurland, & Lautsch, 2009; 2015), and this aspect is currently not being fulfilled because employees are not being taken care of properly regarding leave periods. The amount of work is also drawing attention as long as studies have found that overwork might affect physical and/or mental health (Oo, Lim, & Zhang, 2021). This is the reason that many governments have been implementing a global trend towards shorter hours to control the amount of time at work (i.e., the 40-hour working week), with considerable regional variations (Lee, Cann, & Messenger, 2007).

The discrepancy between expectations and what employees get in terms of FWAs, means employees want more and different flexible work arrangement options, and this occurs because workers used to think flexible work was just work from home and was used for a specific sector like freelancers (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020), but the Covid-19 pandemic showed that many jobs can be performed from home or from everywhere, and it also had an impact in other forms of FWAs (CIPD, 2021). Thus, the pandemic pushed companies and employees to adopt new behaviors, accelerating the existing trends of flexible work arrangements (Lund, et al., 2021). Nevertheless, companies still have dilemmas in their implementation (Arquisola, Liswandi, Hutabarat, & ChoerunnisaFauzi, 2021), while employees

are waiting for it, which may explain the discrepancies between workers' expectations and reality.

So, considering that the Covid-19 pandemic pushed companies to use flexibility as work from home, in the beginning, it caused a normative expectation, but then probabilistic expectancies emerged when employees turn their wishes of having FWAs, and even more different forms of it (Higgins, 1992), into expectations for their job future. The fact that organizations are not having the ability to fulfill those expectations, causes the breach of the psychological contract.

Nowadays, psychological contract is characterized by a flexible employment relationship, which means it is seen from a transactional view (Costa, 2020) since it explains the importance of flexibility expectations. Consequently, findings indicate that PCB acts as a mechanism role between FWD and work-related attitudes and behaviors, in this specific case on organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work-life balance.

The negative consequences of breaching the psychological contract have their roots mostly in the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), which also is related to the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), and refers to mutual exchanges between employees and their organizations (Costa & Neves, 2017). When employees perceive that her/his organization is unfulfilling their expectations about having flexible work (including different forms of it), the psychological contract is breached, then, the symmetric exchange of employment relationship is affected in its reciprocity, which is the basis of social exchanges, so employees will return in the same kind they are receiving (Costa & Neves, 2017).

As Costa & Neves (2017) cited, research on psychological contract breach adopts social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity as the explanation for the negative effects of the breach (e.g., Robinson, 1996; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). The norm of reciprocity assumes that one party's contributions are based on the other party's contributions (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). Thus, researchers use the norm of reciprocity to explain the negative attitudinal and behavioral consequences of psychological contract breaches (Shore & Tetrick, 1994). The findings demonstrated that when the psychological contract is a mediator in the relationship with flexible work discrepancies and organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work-life balance, its breach causes a negative impact on these outcomes, evidencing a reduction on them that are key aspects in the employment relationship.

The first attitudinal consequence studied was organizational commitment which refers to the degree of loyalty one has for the organization (Iverson & Buttigieg, 1999). Our findings showed that OC was indirectly affected by flexible work discrepancies when the psychological contract is breached. Organizational commitment is one of the most important for understanding psychological contracts when it is influenced by individuals' needs and expectations about their organization (Restubog et al. 2006). When the organization fails

employees' expectations, they will view their relationship with the employer as less valuable and respected. Therefore, employees will lower their OC and they will be less likely to identify, be involved with, and attached to the organization (e.g., Costa & Neves, 2017; Lester et al., 2002; Burderson, 2001; Restubog et al., 2006; Rousseau, 1990). Considering that reciprocation can take a positive form when the organization fulfills employees' flexible work expectations, this is reflected in terms of organizational commitment (e.g., Cassar & Briner, 2011; Suazo, 2009), so the emotional attachment of an employee to the organization increase (P.Meyer & J.Allen, 1991), but on the other hand if their expectations are not fulfilled, they will have negative reciprocity to their organization in terms of loyalty (Scandura & Lankau, 1997) and engagement (Timms et al.,2015).

The second attitudinal consequence examined was job satisfaction, and taking into account its cognitive component -belief, judgment, comparison-(Fisher, 2000; Hu et al.,2019), the expectations took strength for this outcome. Its cognitive approach supposes the results of their satisfaction stem from what is received by employees and their work compared to what is expected and wanted (Hu et al., 2019). The negative impact of the breach on employees' job satisfaction has been confirmed in numerous studies (Robinson &Rousseau, 1994; Knights & Kennedy, 2005; Zhaoet al., 2007; Suazo, 2009). In this sense, when the organization fulfills employees' expectations, they are more motivated to positively reciprocate and it is demonstrated in terms of high levels of job satisfaction (Nteirotti et al, 2019), but on the contrary, employees will be dissatisfied with their work/job (Costa & Neves, 2017).

For so, findings evidenced the significant negative relationship between FWD and Job satisfaction, and the indirect impact that this outcome has when the organization unfulfilled the employees' expectations of FWA. As findings demonstrated that PCB has a negative impact on JS even when there are no flexible work discrepancies, therefore, if there is another factor (other than FWD) that may breach the psychological contract, the negative impact on job satisfaction increases. The strong impact that PCB has on JS is represented by the feeling that appears as a result of the perception that jobs enable material and psychological needs. (Abdul Rashid et al., 2003; Rotenberry & Moberg, 2007; Fu & Deshpande, 2014). Same as if there is FWD and PCB is occurring, the consequence is that Job satisfaction will be affected in a bigger proportion. Therefore, organizations need to enhance flexible working practices to prevent PCB, particularly taking into account it is a job resource (Hoeven & Zoonen, 2015).

Findings also observed that organizational commitment and job satisfaction, as attitudinal outcomes, will improve a labor relationship if the expectations of FWA are fulfilled, but, if they unfulfilled, they will decrease. It is also important to mention that several studies have supported that job satisfaction positively influences organizational commitment (Dirani and Kuchinke, 2011; Fabi et al., 2015; Froese and Xiao, 2012; López-Cabarcos et al., 2015; Lee

et al., 2017; Yang, 2010). When employees are more satisfied with their jobs, they feel more attached to the organization to which they belong (Brown and Peterson, 1993; Yang, 2010).

Work-life balance which despite having the least indirect effect caused by flexible work discrepancies, psychological contract breach continues mediating the relationship between FWD and work-life balance. In this sense, employees who are able to establish a balance between their multiple life roles and have positive functioning due to management's WLB initiatives are unlikely to suffer violations in the psychological contract. If WLB is one of the signs of promises kept by the company, this will decrease feelings of psychological contract breach. (Kayaa & Karatepeb, 2020). On the other hand, an organization is likely to observe positive attitudinal outcomes if it keeps its promises by enabling employees to avail themselves of family-friendly initiatives (Kraak et al., 2018). Collins, Cartwright, and Hislop (2013) showed that temporal flexibility for home working was an important sign of WLB, which was associated with the fulfillment of the psychological contract.

The fact that pandemic of Covid-19 outbreaks the traditional way of work for most people in the world and reinforced flexibility, untie conflict between work and life to such an extent that most employees have never experienced before (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020). This made employees perceive FWAs as an essential work feature allowing them to attend to work and personal life commitments, concerning family, social and personal ones (as part of their WLB), but despite the employees' eagerness to work in a more flexible environment and their expectations about it, just a portion of employers are aware of giving some options of flexibility compared to the group of expectations that employees are contemplate having and this may cause the breach of psychological contract with negative consequences.

Implications for practice

This research provides insights for managers and organizations about the relationship between flexible work expectations in the post Covid-19 context, the mechanism of psychological contract breach as a mediator, and consequently the effects on organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. Moreover, emerging ideas for further investigation.

The first implication based on empirical evidence, the post Covid-19 context, and the transactional view of the psychological contract, is that employees have new expectations about flexible work and not just regarding location and time. So, FWAs should be seen as a holistic package of components, where the amount of work and leave periods are still important for workers, for several reasons, such as the fact of avoiding burnout and stress from an overload of work, decreased work-family conflict, and employers are not taken care

employees expectations as they want, having in mind that they could also benefit with less turnover and retention of quality of employees (Kossek, Michel, Kurland, & Lautsch, 2009; 2015). For this reason, organizations should implement flexible working options based on their employees' preferences, to prevent psychological contract breach and minimize the negative effects on the outcomes.

The second contribution is about the relevance for the companies to respond to workers' flexibility expectations because ignoring those, leads to the breach of the psychological contract. For this reason, the implementation of FWAs may play a significant role among organizations that want to prevent negative attitudinal and behavioral consequences of breaching PC.

The third contribution is the strong negative impact that psychological contract has on job satisfaction. So, organizations and managers ought to pay attention to fulfilling expectations, and something that would help to do it is taking care of FWAs' expectations, to prevent low levels of job satisfaction. This outcome may bring benefits for organizations such as: reduce turnover (Taotao & Bingxiang, 2020), higher productivity (Ricard Myongjin, & Inhyouk, 2017), and decrease employee absenteeism (Gyekye and Salminen 2006; Böckerman and Ilmakunnas 2008). Also, there is available evidence supporting that work flexibility in terms of location and work hours (Kossek & Thompson, 2015) gives workers some sense of job control, improves their engagement, and increases their job satisfaction, thereby improving their health and well-being (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). Therefore, companies that want to be benefit from all these should create strategies to provide FWAs.

Furthermore to the last explanation, many studies have demonstrated the influence of job satisfaction on organizational commitment (Dirani and Kuchinke, 2011; Fabi et al., 2015; Froese and Xiao, 2012; López-Cabarcos et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2017; Yang, 2010), where employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to have higher organizational commitment, because they tend to also be satisfied with their careers (Carson et al., 1996). When employees are not satisfied with their current jobs, they do not feel committed to the current organization, which can solidify their decision to leave it (Allen et al., 2003). Preventing the breach of psychological contract by organizations giving flexible work options, let them not just raise levels of JS, but also levels of OC among workers, so employees will feel an emotional attachment to their organization. OC positively influences employees' professional efficacy and reduces the likelihood of professional burnout and withdrawal behavior (Genevičiūtė-Janonienė & Endriulaitienė, 2014).

The fourth implication is that flexibility is considered for workers a component of work life balance when it makes them feel that they can reconcile their lives and their work, spending more time with their families, managing personal issues, feeling less stress and exhausted resulting in employees returning the favor to their employers - social exchange theory- (Klindžić

& Marić, 2019). The trend of using flexibility to endorse WLB is seen by employees as a new need, so if it is applied with successful implementation, the benefit will be reflected in organizational effectiveness (Yadav, Pandita, & Singh, 2022).

The last contribution is a warning to organizations that want to implement flexibilities, because to really obtain their benefits, flexible work arrangements should be applied with proper strategies including adapt flexible work options by employees' preferences, give support to develop a culture of flexibility, and technological tools (Shirley Jin Lin Chua, 2022).

Regarding the promotion flexibility culture, it ought to be from a right supportive work where employees are encouraged to grow, have fair treatment, and provision of a trusting environment (Peters et al., 2009). This is because in organizations that are adopting FWAs, sometimes not all of the employees agreed with the transitioning, and sometimes is because flexibility is not seen as a good practice, for example a person that works fewer hours but with the same productivity than the person who works more hours, may be stocked at the same position without progressing just because apparently is working less and affecting his/her career development, so employers should take into consideration the culture of flexibility in order to prevent this type of situations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations and future research

One of the main limitations of our study is that the cross-sectional nature of data does not allow for a proper test of mediation and results, which imply the need to be interpreted with caution. Also, the sample size was reduced (two hundred and seven participants to one hundred and thirty) due to the criteria of selection that required participants to be currently working, impacting the results because a statistical analysis with a larger sample size reduces the measurement error (Sullivan & Feinn, 2012). Hence, it is worth evaluating a bigger sample and collecting more objective data with time points using more sources of information such as supervisors that may offer guidelines for reducing the occurrence of inaccuracies.

Moreover, this study was developed during the end of the lockdown, but it was not complete over, quantifying the total impact of the pandemic must be done after the definitive end preferably using a time-lagged design. So, a cross-lagged model could be much better for estimating the effect size of mediation, to obtain more accurate results (Maxwell and Cole, 2007).

Also, because the participants in this study were just from America and Europe, in an effort to have more precise results about flexible work arrangements, and their outcomes when the psychological contract is acting as a mediator, is suggested to develop cross-cultural studies that challenge mainstream theoretical notions and forced to rethink basic theories based on personalities, perceptions, cognitions, emotions, social psychology, and categorizing industries, nationalities, gender, ages, for example, the impact in different generations of it, and more profound ways to generalize measures, theories and models (Matsumoto,2001).

This thesis also examines the negative consequences of the psychological breach as a mediator in some outcomes, leaving others aside. In this sense, productivity, performance, and worker well-being are outcomes that many empirical studies have included because it is relevant to companies' effectiveness, and employees' health. Consequently, future research can be made measuring the impact of FWAs and whether psychological contract breach mediates this relationship among these three variables. Also, other moderators in the relationship with flexible work discrepancies as work-family conflict related to the number of kids may intensify the context.

According to study results, now that it has been stated that FWAs discrepancies do affect employees' organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work-life balance, it is worth evaluating how to implement flexibilities, and which strategies should be conducted to increase benefits and create positive impacts on each outcome. Other FWAs that can be the subject of future research are the amount of time and leave periods according to some of the feedback received by participants surveyed.

Conclusion

The World Is Changing — So Can We

David Byrne

Flexible work arrangements have been relatively stable over the past 20 years, however, Covid-19 pandemic has pushed to implement flexibility creating expectations about the future of this topic. For that, the research model examined the discrepancies between what employees expected and what they are receiving from their companies regarding flexible work options, and then, how psychological contract breach acts as a mediator of the impact of negative relationship between flexible work discrepancies on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work-life balance.

Post Covid-19 caused uncertainty at different levels (health, social and economic) which affected employees' expectations, altering the dynamic of psychological contract, in this case with flexibility. The flexibility of location and time was the common flexibility used during the

pandemic around the world, but then more forms and mixtures of flexibility began to be used and expected by employees, for example, leave periods and amount of time, which in most of the situations are not being contemplated for organizations. In this sense, guaranteeing flexibility as a holistic package is crucial for companies to prevent the breach of psychological contract and get positive consequences in workers' outcomes, particularly on job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

The impact that flexible work arrangements have on employees' expectations, behaviors and attitudes suggests that its implementation may be critical for organizational effectiveness (Kossek & Thompson, 2015). Otherwise, employment relationships may break down despite management's best efforts.

Maintaining employees' psychological contract in good balance is employer's responsibility. For so, preventing a breach will be better than trying to repair the damage afterward (Wong, 2021). To do so, organizations and employers should reexamine and transform conventional work policies and expectations to adapt to the new reality of flexibility. This suggestion should be developed by right strategies to avoid falls in damage practices that will influence work-family conflict (Bellmann and Hübler, 2021, O'Connor and Cech, 2018), health problems (Lockwood and Nath, 2021, Müller et al., 2018), over workload (Turkle, 2008, Cech and O'Connor, 2017) or stock in career development (Mas & Pallais, 2020). On the contrary, get benefits such as time-cost savings, attracting talent, retaining talent (Harris, 2021), and decrease absenteeism (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).

For this reason, it is recommended for organizations and employers to have in mind two factors; first, training employees to learn about having a culture of flexibility to prevent negative bias between individuals, colleagues, and supervisors, and in contrast create a good environment for implementing it. Second, giving enough support for technological tools and software is fundamental to facilitate the use of flexibility at work (Shirley Jin Lin Chua, 2022).

Constantly, workforce is demanding new ways of work, even more, when social, economic, health, and technological challenges are occurring in the world, creating future expectations among employees, which make psychological contracts relevant, especially from a transactional view. So, flexible work became essential to all organizations and employers that value their employees, understand their needs and expectations, and want to prevent the breach of PC and the harmful effects on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. In this changing context, employers should pay attention to the key drivers of the employment deal with the aid of psychological contract (Wong, 2021). We might be too far down the road to implement FWAs perfectly, but it is a broad topic that is changing the mind of our society and provoking impacts and challenges for employers and employees, so, it is the perfect time to continue studying it with collective actions.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX A: Likert scale

<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Somewhat agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Somewhat disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Scale</i>	5	4	3	2	1

ANNEX B: Survey measures

In order to complete the study with socio-demographic data, could you please tell us your:

-Gender

A)Male

B)Female

C)Non Binary -third gender

-Age

-Do you have children? Your child (ren) age

A)yes – How many

B)Not

-Are you currently working?

A)yes

B)Not

-What's your work status? – or occupation

•fulltime

• Part-time

• Unemployed- Looking for work

- Studying
- Military/Forces
- Other

Flexible Work Arrangements (questions guide by the supervisor)

Yes or no questions:

- Did you work during the lockdown of Covid-19 pandemic?
- Did you work remotely during covid-19?
- Do you have the option to work remotely now?
- Did the company offer work flexibility options after the lockdown?

Five-point Likert scale question:

-It is an obligation from your company to provide:

a) Flexibility in time (employees can vary their schedules, for example compressed workweeks, flexible shifts, and part-year/seasonal work).

b) Flexibility in location (employees can work away from the main work site using technology or other types of communications. Examples involve telework, remote work, and hoteling.)

c) Flexibility in the amount of work (employees have the ability to alter the amount of work they conduct, which includes policies such as part-time work, reduced-load work, and job-sharing)

d) Flexibility in leave periods and career continuity (the employees can select when to take time off without losing their jobs. Are leaves; maternity, paternity, sick , education, military).

Multiple answer questions:

-What do you expect from your company about flexible work arrangements? Please select all options that apply.

a) Flexibility in time

b) Flexibility in location

c) Flexibility in the amount of work.

d) Flexibility in leave periods and career continuity.

-What is currently offered by your company? Please select all options that apply.

a) Flexibility in time

b) Flexibility in location

c) Flexibility in the amount of work.

d) Flexibility in leave periods and career continuity.

e) None

Five-point Likert scale questions:

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT (Allen & Meyer, 1990)

Affective Commitment Scale Items:

- I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization.

- I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.

- I do not feel like "part of my family" at this organization (R).

- I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization (R).

- This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.

- I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization (R).

JOB SATISFACTION (Schriesheim and Tsui 1980)

- I am satisfied with my current job.

- I am satisfied with my current co-workers.

- I am satisfied and feel happy with my current boss.

- I am satisfied with my current salary.

- Overall, I am satisfied with my current job.

WORK LIFE BALANCE (Fisher et al. 2009)

- My personal life suffers because of work.
- My job makes my personal life difficult.
- I neglect personal needs because of work.
- I put off enjoying my personal time just to work during working from home.
- I put personal needs second because of work.
- I struggle to separate work and non-work.
- Most of the time, I prefer work from home rather than engage in personal interests.
- I'm too tired to work from home.
- My work suffers because of my personal life/interests during working from home.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT BREACH regarding FWAs (Robinson and Morrison,2000)

- I feel that my employer has come through in fulfilling the promises made to me when I was hired.
- I have not received everything promised to me regarding flexibility in exchange for my contributions.
- My employer has broken many of its promises regarding flexibility to me even though I have upheld my side of the deal.
- So far my employer has done an excellent job of fulfilling its promises to me regarding the flexible arrangements
- Almost all the promises made by my employer during recruitment about flexibility have been kept so far.