Managing a sustainable career in the contemporary world of work: personal choices and contextual challenges

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4 Does Flexible Working Stand in the Way of Objective Performance Ratings? Psychological Mechanisms and Boundary Conditions Explaining the Dark Side of Working from Home*

Abstract

While flexible working practices have been introduced seemingly as a tool to promote sustainable careers, recent research suggests that flexible workers may find their careers to be negatively affected. Integrating signaling theory with key tenets from social role theory and social identity theory, in this paper we identify factors that could account for this dark side. In two vignette studies, 149 university students (Study I) and 320 supervisors (Study II) were asked to rate the job performance of an employee who either worked from home on a regular basis or always worked at the office. The two studies did not yield entirely consistent results, but together they indicated that employees working from home on a regular basis were perceived as worse performers because supervisors perceived their work centrality and organizational commitment as lower. This was particularly so for those who regularly work from home but have no children and when the supervisor is a man and never works from home himself. These finding suggest that supervisors have a great influence on how the careers of employees develop. Our paper contributes to the literature on flexible working practices by showing that careers are contextualized. Moreover, our study is among the first to investigate psychological factors and boundary conditions that explain why and when employees working from home are perceived as lower performers.

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4.1 Introduction

Over the past years, technological advancement has transformed the way work is done and traditional work patterns are fading. This trend is reflected in the flexible working practices (FWPs) that many employers offer, which give employees the opportunity to choose when, how and where to work (Kelly & Moen, 2007). For many organizations, the adoption of FWPs has been a response to the growing concern for sustainable careers (Kelliher & Menezes, 2019), the introduction of laws giving parents the right to request FWPs (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010) and the need to attract and retain talent (Onken-Menke, Nüesch, & Kröll, 2017). FWPs cover a range of working patterns and include flexible working hours, working from home and compressed working time (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). The number of employers that offer FWPs, especially in terms of working from home, is increasing. A study across 1,051 American organizations with 50 or more employees showed that 66 per cent of organizations (compared to 34 percent in 2005) allow at least some employees the opportunity to work from home on an occasional basis and 40 per cent (compared to 31 percent in 2005) allow some employees to work from home on a regular basis (Matos, Galinsky, & Bond, 2016).

Given the rapid growth in the availability of flexible working, it is not surprising that FWPs have received significant research attention in terms of their consequences. The benefits of these practices for both organizations (e.g., reduced employee turnover intention and higher employee productivity) and employees (e.g., reduced stress, increased well-being and lower work-family conflict) are widely documented (for meta-analyses, see Baltes et al., 1999; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Martin & MacDonnell, 2012; the latter relates specifically to working from home outcomes). However, recent research suggests that there is also a dark side to FWPs (e.g., fewer opportunities for learning and promotion, see Kelliher & Anderson, 2008, lower reward recommendations when FWPs are used for personal life accommodation, see Leslie et al., 2012, and lower performance ratings for employees who arrive late at work, see Yam, Fehr, & Barnes, 2014). Yet, research to date has only begun to focus on the precise psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions that help understand this dark side. It therefore remains elusive *why* and *when* flexible working is harmful to career progression.

In the current paper, we address these limitations by focusing on one of the most frequently utilized forms of FWPs: working from home (Matos et al., 2016). Scholars focusing on the negative impact of FWPs have mostly focused on flextime as a practice (Leslie et al., 2012; Yam et al., 2014). This study is among the first to focus on flexplace as a practice and thereby provides much-needed insight into the effects of this form. We start from the premise that flexplace can stand in the way of objective performance evaluations. Similar to flextime, employees who work from home on a regular basis are less visible in the workplace, specifically in

terms of their work attitudes and behaviours. Supervisors may then decide to rely on employees' use of flexplace as a signal to form perceptions about employees' job attitudes (e.g., how important is work for them, how committed are they to the organization?) and how well they perform at their job. Previous research on the dark side of FWPs has shown that underlying any detrimental effects are the perceptions that supervisors develop of employees using FWPs. In this article, we focus on how employees who work from home on a regular basis are perceived in terms of work centrality and organizational commitment.

Whether those perceptions are positive or negative may depend on the employee's characteristics. Discretion over where one works may be more appealing to some individuals than others (Thompson, Payne, & Taylor, 2015) and this may be taken into account by supervisors when they evaluate those who work from home on a regular basis. In this study, we focus on the employee's parental status as a key individual difference that may shape the perceptions of supervisors. In addition, we propose that not all supervisors are equal. Specifically, we posit that the gender and own working from home pattern of supervisors influence the degree to which they hold employees to an 'ideal worker' standard by which employees always work at the office. Thus, we aim to identify important boundary conditions for the negative effects of working from home on supervisory performance ratings, focusing on the employee's parental status and the supervisor's gender and own working from home pattern. In doing so, we provide a detailed understanding of when and for whom working from home is related to lower performance ratings.

4.2 Theoretical Framework of the Current Study

Supervisors' perceptions of their subordinates influence key HR-related processes, such as performance evaluations (Bratton & Gold, 2012; Schuh et al., 2018). It has long been established that supervisors use observable signals from employees to draw conclusions about characteristics that are more difficult to observe. For instance, supervisors may want to learn about an employee's work centrality, which refers to the degree of importance that work plays in that person's life (Paullay, Alliger, & Stone-Romero, 1994). To this end, they may decide to focus on an employee's FWP use, which signals to them that the employee has personal life responsibilities that may reduce their commitment to the organization (e.g., Glass, 2004; Weeden, 2005). Drawing on signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973), we start from the notion that working from home might signal that the employee does not devote their full attention to the work role (i.e., has lower work centrality).

However, signaling theory would also suggest that the interpretation and implication of working from home is dependent on the employee's parental status. That is, it may send a different signal when a parent decides

to work from home than when an employee without children works from home on a regular basis. For instance, the care responsibilities of parents are more salient than those of employees without children. Hence, we propose that the negative effects of working from home depend on the employee's parental status in that supervisors may draw a different conclusion about (i.e., form a different perception of) employees who work from home when it concerns a working parent compared with an employee without children.

Supervisors are the receiver of the signal that is sent by employees who do or do not use flexplace as a practice. We argue that individual differences on the receiver's end impact the perception of those who work from home. In other words, we ask *which supervisors* are more likely to view employees who work from home as less devoted to their work than those who always work at the office. To this end, we integrate signaling theory with key tenets from social role theory and social identity theory.

First, we draw on social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2016) to argue that the supervisor's gender influences the negative perceptions of employees who work from home. Social role theory postulates that men and women are socialized into different roles. Traditionally, women have occupied the role of the family caregiver and spent little time in paid employment (Cejka & Eagly, 1999), while men were expected to take on the role of breadwinner for the family. Because gender norms have led men and women to differ in the importance they lend to the work role, we expect that male supervisors will perceive employees who work from home on a regular basis differently than female supervisors do. Second, we use social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to propose that supervisors' assessments of employees who work from home is dependent on their habits in terms of working from home. According to social identity theory, individuals may demonstrate a similarity bias by which they evaluate another person more favorably as a result of shared characteristics (Tajfel, 1978). We investigate this proposition by examining whether supervisors' own working from home behaviours influence how they perceive and evaluate those who work from home compared with those who are always at the office. The full model that we test is presented in Figure 4.1.

Given recent critique of psychological research for a lack of replicability examinations (Jiang & Johnson, 2018; Open Science Collaboration, 2015), we test our theoretical model in two different samples. Following the research of Leslie and colleagues (2012) and Yam and colleagues (2014), who tested their models among both college students and a working sample, we collected data from 149 university students for our first study and for our second study we recruited 320 respondents employed as supervisors. In both studies, we used an experimental vignette to examine the effect of the employee's use of the flexplace practice on supervisory performance ratings. In addition, we investigated whether the employee's parental status and the gender of the supervisor acted as boundary conditions for the effects of working from home on the supervisor's perceptions of the employee.

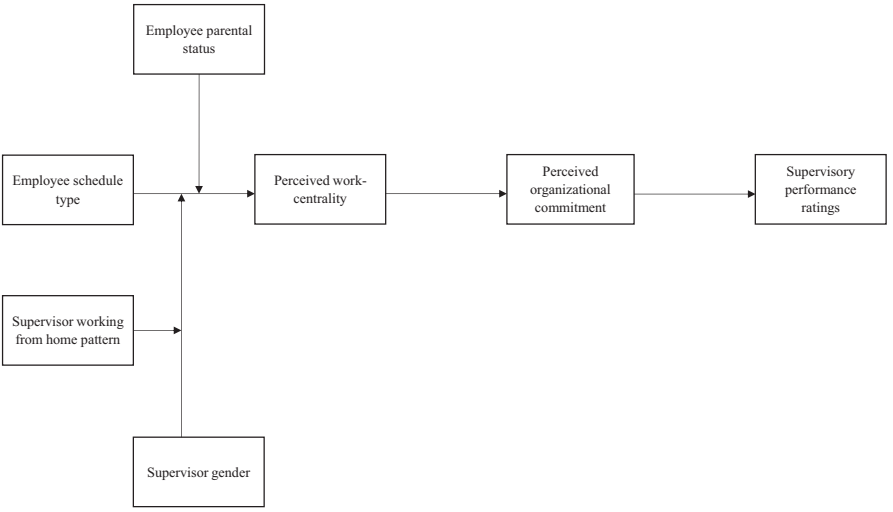

Figure 4.1 | Theoretical model

The sample for our second study (i.e., supervisors) allowed us to examine whether the supervisor's own working from home pattern acted as another important boundary condition. In the sections below, we build and formulate hypotheses that specify *why* and *when* working from home results in lower performance ratings.

4.3 Hypotheses

4.3.1 Determinants and Boundary Conditions of Supervisory Performance Ratings

Employees are often held to an 'ideal worker' standard where an employee should give work their full and unwavering dedication (Blair-Loy, 2003; Fuegen et al., 2004; Reid, 2015). The ideal worker is expected to be fully devoted to work, center their life on a full-time job, while someone else takes care of their caring responsibilities (Acker, 1990, Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl, 2013). In other words, the ideal worker is constantly available for work and puts work before personal life interests at all times (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). This image of the ideal worker is closely related to the concept of work centrality. Individuals who consider work (as opposed to non-work activities) as a central interest in their lives attach great importance to their work (Carr, Boyar, & Gregory, 2008). When one makes use of an employee-friendly policy, such as flexplace, it makes the personal life of the employee (and hence their interests outside of work) more salient (Leslie, Dahm, & Manchester, 2018) and this likely violates the image of the ideal worker who puts work ahead of all else. Based on these arguments, and in line with signaling theory (Spence, 1973), we expect that

supervisors interpret working from home on a regular basis as a signal that the employee has lower work centrality than those who always work at the office.

Perceptions of work centrality, in turn, are likely to shape supervisors' perceptions of the employee's organizational commitment. We posit that once supervisors perceive employees to have lower work centrality based on their schedule type, the employee is also perceived as less committed to the organization. Because individuals with high levels of work centrality attach great value to their work (Bal & Kooij, 2011), are very engaged in their work (Hirschfield & Feild, 2000) and have a strong work ethic (Fakunmoju, 2018), they tend to show higher levels of commitment to the organization (see Kostek, 2012 for a meta-analysis). Individuals with high levels of work centrality are more motivated to invest in building a relationship with the organization (Bal & Kooij, 2011; Diefendorff et al., 2002; Gavriloaiei, 2016). Thus, we expect that supervisors draw conclusions about an employee's organizational commitment based on how they view the employee's work centrality.

Perceptions of organizational commitment may be a strong predictor of supervisor performance ratings. Committed employees are productive (Wright, Gardner, & Moynihan, 2003), motivated to learn and eager to undergo training (e.g., Facteau et al., 1995; McNeese-Smith, 1995). Moreover, committed employees benefit the organization through their devotion and loyalty (Leslie et al., 2012) and exert extra-role contributions on behalf of the organization (i.e., organizational citizenship behaviour; Meyer et al., 2002). In line with the notion that committed workers are valuable workers that deserve rewards for their efforts, research shows that supervisors give higher job performance ratings to employees that are highly committed to the organization (Shore, Bommer, & Shore, 2008; see Meyer et al., 2002, for a meta-analysis).

Taken together, we posit that supervisors interpret working from home as a signal that the employee has lower work centrality and hence is less committed to the organization. As supervisors hold employees to an 'ideal worker' standard, perceptions of lower work centrality and organizational commitment will result in lower supervisory performance ratings. The previous arguments lead us to put forward the following serial mediation hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Use of flexplace is negatively associated with supervisory ratings of job performance and this association is mediated in serial by perceived work centrality and perceived organizational commitment.

4.3.2 Boundary Conditions of Supervisory Performance Ratings

Here, we aim to examine which employees who work from home are more, or less, likely to *receive* lower performance ratings and which supervisors are more, or less, likely to *give* lower performance ratings to employees

who work from home. We posit that the employee's parental status, the supervisor's gender and the supervisor's own working from home pattern influence the strength of the effect of working from home on supervisory performance ratings.

The Role of Employees' Parental Status

Previous research suggests that parents are sometimes viewed unfavourably in terms of work attitudes (Kelly et al., 2010; Reid, 2015). Fuegen and colleagues (2004), for instance, found that parents are perceived as less committed to the job and less likely to be available on the job (i.e., lower number of working hours, leaving early and taking sick days). As Heilman and Okimoto (2008) noted, "being a parent brings distractions and conflicting demands, which can be seen as limiting the unadulterated focus on work and as causing individuals to give their job lower priority in their lives than would be the case if they were not parents" (p. 190). The use of FWPs enables individuals with family responsibilities to accommodate their personal lives (Shockley & Allen, 2012), yet it makes their caring responsibilities also more salient to their supervisors. Indeed, while reasons for working from home can be numerous (e.g., avoid commuting time, videoconferencing, elder care), a recent paper by Leslie and colleagues (2013) showed that supervisors believe that parents make use of flexible working policies to accommodate their personal lives (e.g., caring responsibilities), while it is thought that non-parents do so for productivity reasons. Based on signalling theory, we posit that working from home sends a different signal depending on who does it and for what reasons; supervisors are likely to interpret parents' working from home behaviour as putting their family role first instead of the work role, which is not in line with the 'ideal worker' standard. Hence, we expect that being a parent strengthens the negative relationship between working from home and supervisors' perceptions of employees' work centrality.

Hypothesis 2: The employee's parental status moderates the relationship between use of flexplace and perceived work centrality, such that working from home is associated with perceptions of lower work centrality more strongly so for parents than non-parents.

The Role of Supervisors' Gender

Social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2016) suggests that the 'ideal worker' norm may be more salient among men than women. Men have traditionally been socialized into the breadwinner role and thus are expected to give more weight to the work role than the family role (Cejka & Eagly, 1991). Recent research shows that men continue to devote less time to the family role than women (Horne et al., 2018). Indeed, scholars have indicated that gender is a prominent factor influencing one's work centrality (Harpaz & Fu, 1997;

Mannheim, 1983; Mannheim, Baruch, & Tal, 1997), with men reporting higher work centrality than women (see Kostek et al., 2012 for a meta-analysis). Men may therefore be less understanding and tolerant of a work pattern that may be seen as placing emphasis on the importance of the family role. Women, in contrast, should be less likely to interpret working from home as a signal that the employee has lower work centrality. Thus, we suggest that the negative effect of working from home on perceptions of work centrality will be stronger when the supervisor is a man rather than a woman.

Hypothesis 3: The supervisor's gender moderates the relationship between use of flexplace and perceived work centrality, such that working from home is associated with perceptions of lower work centrality more strongly so for male supervisors than female supervisors.

Combining Hypothesis 1 with Hypotheses 2 and 3 implies that employees' parental status and supervisors' gender should influence the strength of the indirect effect from flexplace use to supervisory performance ratings through the serial mediators we proposed. Hence, we put forward two additional hypotheses.

Hypothesis 4: The employee's parental status moderates the indirect association between use of flexplace and supervisory ratings of job performance via perceived work centrality and perceived organizational commitment, such that the indirect association is stronger for employees who are parents than for those without children.

Hypothesis 5: The supervisor's gender moderates the indirect association between use of flexplace and supervisory ratings of job performance via perceived work centrality and perceived organizational commitment, such that the indirect association is stronger for male supervisors than female supervisors.

The Role of Supervisors' Own Working from Home Pattern

When an employee uses FWPs and works from home regularly, this may make salient a particular work pattern that the supervisor shares with the employee or on which they differ. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), people categorize and identify themselves along certain dimensions and they make judgments about another person on the basis of whether that person belongs to the same group as themselves or not. People are known to generally evaluate those who belong to the same group that they derive their identity from more favourably (in-group favouritism; Tajfel, 1978). When an individual evaluates another person more favourably on the basis of shared characteristics, this is known as similarity bias (Byrne, 1971). Consistent with SIT, we argue that supervisors who have a habit of working from home occasionally themselves believe they share similarities

with employees who use the flexplace practice. This view of shared identity should make it less likely that those supervisors consider working from home as a signal of lower work centrality. In contrast, supervisors who always work at the office may be less tolerant of this work habit; they will evaluate employees who work a standard schedule more favourably, demonstrating a similarity bias. In sum, we posit that the negative effect of working from home on perceptions of work centrality will be less strong when supervisors have a tendency of working from home themselves.

Hypothesis 6: The supervisor's working from home pattern moderates the relationship between use of flexplace and perceived work centrality, such that working from home is associated with perceptions of lower work centrality more strongly so for supervisors who always work at the office compared with supervisors who occasionally work from home.

Combining Hypothesis 1 with this latter hypothesis would imply that the supervisor's own working from home pattern should also influence the strength of the indirect effect from flexplace use to supervisory performance ratings through the serial mediators perceived work centrality and organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 7: The supervisor's working from home pattern moderates the indirect association between use of flexplace and supervisory ratings of job performance via perceived work centrality and perceived organizational commitment, such that the indirect association is stronger for supervisors who always work at the office compared with supervisors who occasionally work from home.

4.4 Study I

4.4.1 Participants and Procedure

For Study I we recruited 149 students (M_{age} = 21. 2 years; 84.5% Dutch; 51.4% men) at a large university in The Netherlands. Participants were asked to assume the role of a supervisor at a fictitious consultancy firm and were randomly assigned to one of eight profiles of an employee working at the firm. Across all eight conditions, the employee worked a 40-hours working week and the employee's schedule was approved by the company. Specifically, all vignettes emphasized that the company supported flexible working, indicating that there was an organizational culture supportive of working from home. After reading the vignette, participants were asked to fill out a survey, which assessed their perceptions of the employee's work centrality and organizational commitment. The study has a two (working schedule: flexible or standard) × two (gender: man or woman) x two (parental status: children or no children) design. Whilst these respondents were not super-

visors themselves, the majority indicated that they had work experience (85.7%), with 60.4% reporting at least one year of work experience and 60.5% specified that they currently had a job, suggesting that they would have some knowledge of what a supervisory role entails. We also measured participants' demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, and nationality).

4.4.2 Manipulation and Measures

Employee schedule type, parental status and gender manipulations. We randomly presented participants with one of eight profiles. In the flexible schedule condition, participants were told that the employee works two days a week at the office and the remaining three days from home. In the standard schedule condition, the employee works five days a week at the office. Parental status was manipulated by describing the employee as having children or not. The employee was either a woman (named Anne) or a man (named Gregg); hence, we also manipulated the gender of the employee (see our section on control variables). In all conditions, participants were presented with the same objective performance chart of the employee over the last 26 weeks. In this way, we could ensure that objective performance was held constant. The chart that we used was taken from work conducted by Yam and colleagues (2014).

Perceived work centrality. We measured perceptions of employees' work centrality using the 12-item work centrality scale developed by Paullay, Alliger and Stone-Rome (1994). We adapted the items for peer rating and excluded those that were not suitable for peer rating (e.g., "If the unemployment benefit was really high, I would still prefer to work"). This left us with five items from the 12-item work centrality scale. An example item adjusted to peer rating is "[Name employee] has other activities more important than his/her work." Moreover, we selected one extra item from Lodahl and Kejner's (1965) Job Involvement scale, namely "[Name employee] quite often feels like staying home from work instead of coming in." Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree.* The internal consistency for this scale was $\alpha = .58$.

Perceived organizational commitment. Consistent with the work of Leslie and colleagues (2012), respondents' perceptions of the employee's organizational commitment was measured with two items (e.g., "[Name employee] does not feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization") selected from the Affective Organizational Commitment scale developed by the six-item scale of Meyer and colleagues (1993) and one item selected from the Perceived Commitment Measure of Heilman and Okimoto (2008) (i.e., "[Name employee] is very committed to the company"; 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was $\alpha = .57$.

Supervisory performance ratings. Supervisors were asked to rate their employees' job performance with three items selected from a five-item Job Performance Scale (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1989). This measure has been

used in other studies on perceived employee job performance (see Yam et al., 2014). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) with statements such as "[Name employee] adequately completes assigned duties." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .63.

Control variables. In line with other studies on the effects of flexible working practices (e.g., Leslie et al., 2012), we controlled for gender to ensure that findings are not confounded by the possibility that working from home is interpreted as a signal of lower work centrality for employees of a certain gender. We manipulated gender by using either a female or male name. We chose the names "Anne" and "Gregg" because these names evoke the predicted gender attributions (see Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Moreover, we controlled for participants' nationalities (0 = foreign, 1 = Dutch).

4.4.3 Results Study I

The descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 4.1. As can be derived from Table 4.1, none of our control variables were significantly correlated with our focal variables. Regarding our study variables, working from home was negatively correlated with perceived work centrality ($r = -.22$, $p = .007$) and perceived work centrality was positively correlated with perceived organizational commitment ($r = .43$, $p < .001$). Finally, both perceived work centrality and organizational commitment were positively related to supervisory performance ratings ($r = .19$, $p = .018$ and $r = .39$, $p < .001$, respectively). These findings provide preliminary support for our notion that perceived work centrality and perceived organizational commitment serially mediate between the employee's use of flexplace and supervisory performance ratings.

We used a stepwise approach in which we start with three regression analyses to test our serial mediation hypothesis (*H1*) and our moderation hypotheses (*H2* and *H3*) and end with our two full hypothesized models, which are essentially two moderated serial mediation models (*H4* and *H5*).

As a first step, we used Andrew Hayes' (2018) PROCESS model 6 to test our serial mediation model. The results showed that working from home was negatively related to perceived work centrality ($B = -0.31$, $p = .010$), perceived work centrality was positively related to perceived organizational commitment ($B = 0.48$, $p < .001$) and the perception of organizational commitment was positively related to supervisory performance ratings ($B = 0.43$, $p < .001$). In support of Hypothesis 1, we observed that the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ($B = -0.06$) did not include zero with a 95% CI [−0.132, −0.013], indicating a significant indirect effect of working from home on supervisory performance ratings through perceptions of the employee's work centrality and organizational commitment. The results of our serial mediation analysis are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1 | Descriptive statistics and correlations between Study I variables

Study I Study Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Schedule of employee[a]	0.48	0.50								
2. Perceived work centrality	4.01	0.72	–0.22**	(.58)						
3. Perceived organizational commitment	4.29	0.81	–0.10	0.43**	(.57)					
4. Supervisory performance ratings	4.58	0.93	0.12	0.19*	0.39**	(.63)				
5. Employee parental status[b]	0.50	0.50	0.01	0.04	0.16*	0.07				
6. Employee gender[c]	0.53	0.50	–0.02	0.01	0.15	0.03	0.03			
7. Supervisor gender[c]	0.49	0.50	0.04	0.03	0.03	–0.08	–0.01	–0.04		
8. Supervisor nationality[d]	0.84	0.37	–0.09	0.10	0.03	–0.09	0.00	0.17*	–0.07	

Note. [a]Schedule of employee: 0 = standard, 1 = flexible. [b]Parental status 0 = no child, 1 = children. [c]Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [d]Supervisor nationality: 0 = non-Dutch, 1 = Dutch. The reliability coefficients are presented on the diagonal between parentheses.
* p < .05. ** p < .01.

Table 4.2 | Study I: The indirect effect of schedule type on performance ratings

	Perceived work centrality (M1)		Perceived organizational commitment (M2)		Supervisory performance ratings (Y)	
Independent variables	*B*	SE	*B*	SE	*B*	SE
Study I						
Schedule of employee[a] (X)	–0.305*	0.116	–0.006	0.123	–0.168	0.145
Perceived work centrality (M1)			0.482***	0.086	0.035	0.112
Perceived organizational commitment (M2)					0.426***	0.098
Constant	4.023***	0.163	2.302***	0.386	2.929***	0.508
Employee gender[b]	–0.015	0.117	0.255*	0.122	–0.016	0.146
Supervisor nationality[c]	0.162	0.160	–0.093	0.167	–0.266	0.196

Note. [a]Schedule of employee: 0 = standard, 1 = flexible. [b]Employee gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [c]Supervisor nationality: 0 = non-Dutch, 1 = Dutch.
**p < .05. *** p < .001.

As a second step, we tested our two moderation hypotheses using Andrew Hayes' (2018) PROCESS model 1. The results of our first moderation hypothesis (*H2*) indicated that the regression coefficient for the interaction between working from home and the parental status of the employee was not significant in predicting perceptions of work centrality ($B = -0.06$, $p = .805$). This result does not lend support to *H2*. With regard to the second moderation hypothesis (*H3*), however, we found that the gender of the supervisor significantly moderated the effect of working from home on perceived work centrality ($B = 0.53$, $p = .023$). More specifically, the results showed that when the supervisor was a man, the perception of the employee's work centrality was significantly lower ($p < .001$) in the working from home condition ($M = 3.67$) compared to the working at the office condition ($M = 4.23$). There was no significant difference in perceptions of work centrality, however, when the supervisor was a woman ($p = .850$). That is, the employee's work centrality was perceived equally in both conditions ($M = 4.05$ for working at the office and $M = 4.02$ for working from home). A visual representation of these results is shown in Figure 4.2.

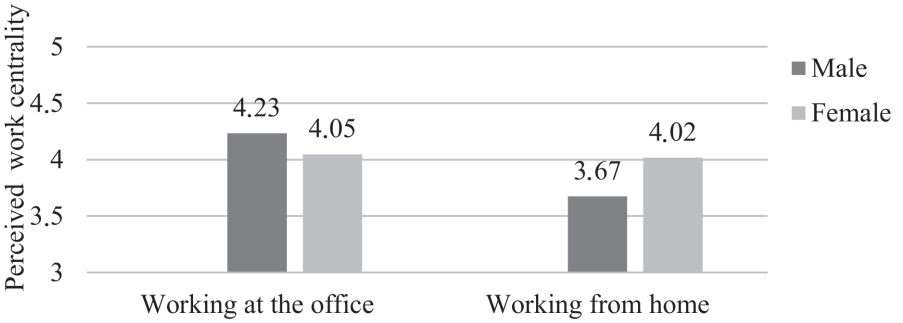

Figure 4.2 | Study I: Interaction of supervisor gender with employee schedule type in predicting perceived work centrality

Note. The values on the y-axis refer to the mean and ±1 SD scores for perceived work centrality

The last step involved examining our two moderated serial mediation hypotheses, *H4* and *H5*. These models were tested holistically using Andrew Hayes' (2018) model 83. First, looking at *H4*, the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the index of moderated mediation (*B* = –0.12) included zero, 95% CI [–0.118, 0.088], indicating that the indirect effect of the employee's use of flexplace on supervisory performance ratings was not moderated by the parental status of the employee. *H4* was therefore not supported, which is consistent with the lack of support for *H2*. The result of the moderating role of employee parental status are depicted in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 | Study I: The moderating role of employee parental status

	Perceived work centrality (M1)		Perceived organizational commitment (M2)		Supervisory performance ratings (Y)	
Independent variables	*B*	SE	*B*	SE	*B*	SE
Study I						
Schedule of employee[a] (X)	–0.276	0.165	–0.006	0.123	–0.168	0.145
Perceived work centrality (M1)			0.482***	0.086	0.035	0.112
Perceived organizational commitment (M2)					0.426***	0.098
Employee parental status[b] (W)	0.090	0.161				
X × W interaction	–0.058	0.233				
Constant	3.981***	0.180	2.302***	0.386	2.929***	0.508
Employee gender[c]	–0.016	0.118	0.255*	0.122	–0.016	0.146
Supervisor nationality[d]	0.159	0.161	–0.093	0.167	–0.266	0.196

Note. [a]Schedule of employee: 0 = standard, 1 = flexible. [b]Employee parental status 0 = no child, 1 = children. [c]Employee gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [d]Supervisor nationality: 0 = non-Dutch, 1 = Dutch.
**p < .05. *** p < .001.

Examining our second moderated serial mediation hypothesis (*H5*), we found that the bias-corrected confidence interval for the index of moderated mediation (*B* = 0.11) did not include zero, 95% CI [0.012, 0.261]. Thus, in support of *H5*, the indirect effect of the employee's use of flexplace on

supervisory performance ratings through perceived work centrality and organizational commitment was moderated by the gender of the supervisor. When the supervisor was a man, the indirect effect was estimated at B = −0.12 and the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero, 95% CI [−0.236, −0.034]. In contrast, when it concerned a female supervisor, the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval included zero, 95% CI [−0.071, 0.068], indicating a non-significant indirect effect (B = −0.01). These results are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 | Study I: The moderating role of supervisor gender

	Perceived work centrality (M1)		Perceived organizational commitment (M2)		Supervisory performance ratings (Y)	
Independent variables	*B*	SE	*B*	SE	*B*	SE
Study I						
Schedule of employee[a] (X)	–0.559**	0.161	–0.013	0.124	–0.16	0.146
Perceived work centrality (M1)			0.482***	0.086	0.031	0.112
Perceived organizational commitment (M2)					0.429***	0.099
Supervisor gender[b] (W)	–0.186	0.159				
X × W interaction	0.528*	0.230				
Constant	4.084***	0.185	2.318***	0.388	2.901***	0.511
Employee gender[b]	–0.009	0.116	0.251*	0.122	–0.011	0.146
Supervisor nationality[c]	0.183	0.161	–0.111	0.170	–0.241	0.200

Note. [a]Schedule of employee: 0 = standard, 1 = flexible. [b]Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [c]Supervisor nationality: 0 = non-Dutch, 1 = Dutch.
*p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

4.4.4 Discussion Study I

The aim of this first study was to examine factors indicating *why* and *when* working from home can bring about negative effects, in terms of supervisory performance ratings. We found that perceived work centrality and perceived organizational commitment elucidate the negative effects of working from home on supervisory ratings of job performance. Importantly, we found that this effect was stronger for *only* male supervisors. Our results suggest that working from home signals to male supervisors—not female supervisors—that the employee has lower work centrality. In other words, only male supervisors give lower performance ratings to employees who work from home on a regular basis because they view those employees as having lower work centrality compared with those who always work at the office. We did not find support for an impact of the employee's parental status on the indirect effect of working from home on performance ratings.

To provide a convergence of evidence (Jiang & Johnson, 2018) regarding the processes and boundary conditions that underlie the negative effects of working from home for employees, we conducted Study II to test our full theoretical model among supervisors who are actually responsible for evaluating the performance of their employees. Moreover, the question

remains whether supervisors' own working from home habit influences supervisors' perceptions of employees who use flexplace. With our Study I sample (i.e., university students) we were not able to test this, yet in our second study among professional supervisors we sought to examine this question. Our first aim is test all the hypotheses put forward in the front end of this paper but this time with a sample of respondents employed as supervisors. The second aim is to explore the effect of the supervisor's own working from home pattern on the relationship between the employee's use of flexplace and job performance ratings given by the supervisor.

4.5 Study II

4.5.1 Participants and Procedure

For this second study we recruited 320 participants (M_{age} = 41.6 years; 94.7% Dutch; 55.1% men) through PanelClix, which is a large and diverse online panel situated in The Netherlands. We specifically targeted participants holding a management position (i.e., supervisors). Of these 320 supervisors, 36 were excluded from the analysis since they filled out the questionnaire in less than three minutes. This was chosen as a cut-off point based on a pilot study among 10 participants to assess how long it would take to read and answer the questions. The final sample consists of 284 supervisors. A total of 27.4% had undertaken vocational education, and 24.6% achieved a master's degree. Furthermore, the majority (62.3%) indicated that they worked in the private sector. Additionally, 44.8% of the supervisors indicated that they never worked from home and 28.2% reported working from home one day a week.

Similar to Study I, participants were asked to assume the role of a managing partner at GlobeXL consultancy. They were randomly assigned to one of eight profiles of an employee working at their company and were asked to fill out a survey, which measured our study variables and participants' demographics (i.e., age, gender, marital status and nationality).

4.5.2 Manipulation and Measures

Employee schedule type, parental status and gender manipulations. Similar to Study I, we randomly presented participants with one of eight employees, based on a 2 (schedule type: flexible or standard) x 2 (parental status: children or no children) x 2 (employee gender: Anne or Gregg) design. Moreover, we presented the participant with the same objective performance chart used in Study I (see Yam et al., 2014).

Perceived work centrality. We asked participants to rate the employee's work centrality with the same six items as in Study I (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965; Paullay et al., 1994; 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha was .60 in this study.

Perceived organizational commitment. Supervisors' perceptions of the employee's organizational commitment was measured with the commitment items of Study I (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008; Meyer et al., 1993; α = .62; 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

Supervisory performance ratings. Participants were requested to rate their employees' job performance using the same three-item Job Performance scale as in Study I (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1989; α = .82; 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

Supervisor working from home pattern. We asked participants to indicate how often they work from home and categorized their answers into 0 = never, 1 = 1 day a week or more.

Control variables. Similar to Study I, we treated the employee gender manipulation as a control variable (0 = male, 1 = female). We also controlled for participants' own parental status (0 = no children, 1 = one or more children) and nationality (0 = foreign, 1 = Dutch).

4.5.3 Results Study II

The descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 4.5. Similar to Study I, we did not find significant correlations between our control variables and study variables. As can be derived from Table 4.5, use of flexplace was negatively but not significantly correlated with perceived work centrality ($r = -.06$, $p = .351$) and perceived work centrality was positively correlated with perceived organizational commitment ($r = .51$, $p < .001$). Moreover, both perceived work centrality and organizational commitment were positively related to supervisory performance ratings ($r = .40$, $p < .001$ and $r = .57$, $p < .001$, respectively).

Similar to Study I, we used a stepwise approach to test our hypotheses, using Andrew Hayes' (2018) PROCESS macro. We started with testing our serial mediation model (*H1*) and our three moderation models (*H2*, *H3* and *H6*). This was followed by examination of our three moderated serial mediation models (*H4*, *H5* and *H7*). Replicating Study I as a first step, we tested our mediation model using PROCESS model 6. The bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ($B = -0.03$) included zero with a 95% CI [−0.106, 0.036], indicating that the indirect effect of flexplace use on supervisory performance ratings through perceptions of the employee's organizational commitment and work centrality was not significant. Unlike our finding in Study I, this result does not lend support to *H1*. An overview of our mediation analysis results is presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.5 | Descriptive statistics and correlations between Study II variables

Study II Study Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Schedule of employee[a]	0.51	0.50										
2. Perceived work centrality	4.08	0.78	–0.06	(.60)								
3. Perceived organizational commitment	4.41	1.06	–0.03	0.51**	(.62)							
4. Supervisory performance ratings	4.51	1.18	0.06	0.40**	0.57**	(.82)						
5. Employee parental status[b]	0.51	0.50	0.00	0.07	–0.05	–0.09						
6. Employee gender[c]	0.50	0.50	–0.01	0.07	0.04	–0.01	–0.01					
7. Supervisor working from home pattern[d]	0.56	0.50	–0.07	0.08	0.11	0.09	0.04	0.01				
8. Supervisor genderc	0.47	0.50	–0.08	–0.05	–0.04	–0.03	0.04	–0.02	–0.04			
9. Supervisor parental status[b]	0.52	0.50	0.05	0.03	0.11	0.09	–0.04	0.04	0.10	–0.13*		
10. Supervisor nationality[e]	0.95	0.22	0.02	–0.01	–0.03	–0.01	0.02	0.02	–0.08	–0.09	–0.10	

Note. [a]Schedule of employee: 0 = standard, 1 = flexible. [b]Parental status 0 = no child, 1 = children. [c]Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [d]Participant working from home pattern: 0 = never, 1 = 1 day or more. [e]Supervisor nationality: 0 = non-Dutch, 1 = Dutch. The reliability coefficients are presented on the diagonal between parentheses.
* p < .05. ** p < .01.

Table 4.6 | Study II: the indirect effect of schedule type on performance ratings

	Perceived work centrality (M1)		Perceived organizational commitment (M2)		Supervisory performance ratings (Y)	
Independent variables	*B*	SE	*B*	SE	*B*	SE
Study II						
Schedule of employee[a] (X)	–0.087	0.093	–0.021	0.109	0.184	0.115
Perceived work centrality (M1)			0.689***	0.070	0.224**	0.086
Perceived organizational commitment (M2)					0.549***	0.063
Constant	4.082***	0.221	1.560***	0.384	1.024*	0.417
Employee gender[b]	0.098	0.093	0.008	0.108	–0.087	0.115
Supervisor nationality[c]	–0.036	0.209	–0.052	0.243	0.065	0.257
Supervisor parental status[d]	0.048	0.094	0.190	0.109	0.070	0.116

Note. [a]Schedule of employee: 0 = standard, 1 = flexible. [b]Employee gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [c]Supervisor nationality: 0 = non-Dutch, 1 = Dutch. [d]Supervisor parental status: 0 = no child, 1 = children.
**p < .05. *** p < .001.

As a next step, we tested our three moderation models (*H2*, *H3* and *H6*) using PROCESS model 1. Contrary to our findings of Study I, the results regarding *H2* indicated that the effect of working from home on perceptions of work centrality was conditional on the parental status of the employee, indicated by a significant interaction between the two factors, $B = 0.57$, $p = .002$. The results illustrated that supervisors perceived the work centrality of employees who were parents equally in both conditions ($M = 4.03$ for working at the office and $M = 4.23$ for working from home, $p = .129$). In contrast, when the employee did not have children, supervisors' perceptions of the employee's work centrality differed significantly across the working from home and working at the office scenario ($p = .004$). In fact, the perception of the employee's work centrality was lower in the flexplace

condition (M = 3.84) compared to the office condition (M = 4.22). These results are opposite to what we proposed in *H2*. A visual presentation of this result is depicted in Figure 4.3.

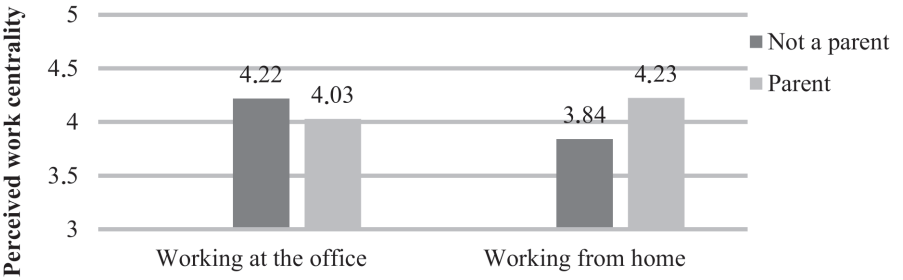

Figure 4.3 | Study II: Interaction of employee parental status with employee schedule type in predicting perceived work centrality

Note. The values on the y-axis refer to the mean and ±1 SD scores for perceived work centrality

Test of our second moderation hypothesis (*H3*) indicated that the interaction between use of flexplace and the supervisor's gender was not significant (B = 0.27, p = .157). While we found support for this hypothesis in Study I, we did not replicate this result in the second study. Our final moderation hypothesis proposed an interaction between use of flexplace and the supervisor's own tendency to work from home in influencing perceptions of the employee's work centrality. Results indicated that the regression coefficient for the interaction between the two variables was not significant (B = 0.11, p = .543), which does not lend support to *H6*.

As a third step, we examined our three moderated serial mediation models in line with *H4*, *H5* and *H7*, using Andrew Hayes' (2018) model 83. Starting with *H4*, the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the index of moderated mediation (B = 0.22) did not include zero, 95% CI [0.076, 0.386]. That is, in line with the moderation results regarding *H2*, the indirect effect of the employee's use of flexplace on supervisory performance ratings through perceived work centrality and organizational commitment was moderated by the employee's parental status. We found that for parents, the indirect effect was estimated at B = 0. 07 and the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval included zero, 95% CI [−0.025, 0.187]. When the employee was not a parent, however, the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero, 95% CI [−0.252, −0.050], demonstrating a significant indirect effect (B = 0.14). In other words, differences in perceptions of employees' performance was found *only* for employees without children. These results are opposed to our expectations as postulated in *H4*. Examining our second moderation hypothesis (*H5*) as a next step, we found that the bias-corrected confidence interval for the index of moderated mediation (B = 0.10) included zero, 95% CI [−0.039, 0.251], resulting in the rejection of *H6* regarding the influence of the supervisor's gender. Finally, we did not find support for *H7* regarding the influence of the super-

visor's own working from home pattern, as the bias-corrected confidence interval for the index of moderated mediation (B = 0.04) included zero, 95% CI [–0.099, 0.186]. Hence, the indirect effect was not dependent on the characteristics of the supervisor. The results from our conditional process modelling are depicted in Tables 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9.

Table 4.7 | Study II: The moderating role of employee parental status

	Perceived work centrality (M1)		Perceived organizational commitment (M2)		Supervisory performance ratings (Y)	
Independent variables	*B*	SE	*B*	SE	*B*	SE
Study II						
Schedule of employee[a] (X)	–0.377**	0.130	–0.021	0.109	0.184	0.115
Perceived work centrality (M1)			0.689***	0.070	0.224**	0.086
Perceived organizational commitment (M2)					0.549***	0.063
Employee parental status[b] (W)	–0.189	0.132				
X × W interaction	–0.574**	0.184				
Constant	4.168***	0.227	1.560***	0.384	1.024*	0.417
Employee gender[c]	0.100	0.091	0.008	0.108	–0.087	0.115
Supervisor nationality[d]	–0.014	0.206	–0.052	0.243	0.065	0.257
Supervisor parental status[b]	0.026	0.093	0.190	0.109	0.070	0.116

Note. [a]Schedule of employee: 0 = standard, 1 = flexible. [b]Parental status 0 = no child, 1 = children. [c]Employee gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [d]Supervisor nationality: 0 = non-Dutch, 1 = Dutch.
**p < .05. *** p < .001.

Table 4.8 | Study II: The moderating role of supervisor gender

	Perceived work centrality (M1)		Perceived organizational commitment (M2)		Supervisory performance ratings (Y)	
Independent variables	*B*	SE	*B*	SE	*B*	SE
Study II						
Schedule of employee[a] (X)	–0.219	0.129	–0.021	0.109	0.184	0.115
Perceived work centrality (M1)			0.689***	0.070	0.224**	0.086
Perceived organizational commitment (M2)					0.549***	0.063
Supervisor gender[b] (W)	–0.218	0.133				
X × W interaction	0.267	0.188				
Constant	4.180***	0.234	1.560***	0.384	1.024*	0.417
Employee gender[b]	0.101	0.093	0.008	0.108	–0.087	0.115
Supervisor nationality[c]	–0.024	0.211	–0.052	0.243	0.065	0.257
Supervisor parental status[d]	0.048	0.095	0.190	0.109	0.070	0.116

Note. [a]Schedule of employee: 0 = standard, 1 = flexible. [b]Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [c]Supervisor nationality: 0 = non-Dutch, 1 = Dutch. [d]Supervisor parental status: 0 = no child, 1 = children.
**p < .05. *** p < .001.

Table 4.9 | Study II: The moderating role of supervisor working from home pattern

	Perceived work centrality (M1)		Perceived organizational commitment (M2)		Supervisory performance ratings (Y)	
Independent variables	*B*	SE	*B*	SE	*B*	SE
Study II						
Schedule of employee[a] (X)	–0.143	0.140	–0.021	0.109	0.184	0.115
Perceived work centrality (M1)			0.689***	0.070	0.224**	0.086
Perceived organizational commitment (M2)					0.549***	0.063
Supervisor working from home pattern[b] (W)	0.047	0.136				
X × W interaction	0.115	0.188				
Constant	4.046***	0.239	1.560***	0.384	1.024*	0.417
Employee gender[c]	0.097	0.093	0.008	0.108	–0.087	0.115
Supervisor nationality[d]	–0.019	0.210	–0.052	0.243	0.065	0.257
Supervisor parental status[e]	0.034	0.094	0.190	0.109	0.070	0.116

Note. [a]Schedule of employee: 0 = standard, 1 = flexible. [b]Supervisor working from home pattern: 0 = never work from home, 1 = 1 day a week or more. [c]Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [d]Supervisor nationality: 0 = non-Dutch, 1 = Dutch. [e]Supervisor parental status: 0 = no child, 1 = children.
**p < .05. *** p < .001.

4.5.4 Additional Analyses

In Study II, we did not find support for any moderation involving the characteristics of the supervisor. As a supplemental investigation, we tested a three-way interaction between the gender of the supervisor and his or her working from home pattern. We used Andrew Hayes' (2018) model 3 to test a model that included a three-way interaction additionally when predicting perceptions of work centrality. Interestingly, the results of this model illustrated that the lower-order interactions were significant. Both the supervisor's gender and working from home pattern significantly moderated the effect of the employee's use of flexplace on perceptions of the employee's work centrality (B = 0.76, p = .008 and B = 0.53, p = .041 respectively), in support of *H3* and *H6*. In addition, the three-way interaction between the employee's schedule, the supervisor's gender and the supervisor's working from home pattern was significant in predicting perceptions of work centrality (B = – 0.84, p = .026). Specifically, we found that perceptions of work centrality of employees who worked from home were different for supervisors without a working from home pattern (B = 0.75, p = .008) and did not change when supervisors indicated to have a working from home habit themselves (B = – 0.08, p = .730). Specifically, the results illustrated that *only* the perceptions of *male* supervisors who have the tendency to never work from home are affected by the use of flexplace by their subordinates. The indirect effect for this subgroup was estimated at B = –0.52 with a 95% CI of [–0.913, –0.136]. The results from these additional analyses are depicted in Tables 4.10 and 4.11.

Table 4.10 | Study II: Results of conditional process modelling

Independent variables	Perceived workcentrality (M)		Perceived organizational commitment (Y)	
	B	SE	*B*	SE
Study II				
Schedule of employee[a] (X)	–0.525**	0.197	–0.021	0.109
Perceived work centrality (M)			0.689***	0.070
Supervisor gender[b] (W)	–0.549**	0.209		
Supervisor working from home pattern[c] (Z)	–0.240	0.193		
X × W interaction	0.755**	0.208		
X × Z interaction	0.532*	0.259		
W × Z interaction	0.557*	0.270		
X × W × Z interaction	–0.842*	0.376		
Constant	4.300***	0.260	1.560***	0.384
Employee gender[b]	0.087	0.093	0.008	0.108
Supervisor nationality[d]	0.024	0.211	–0.052	0.243
Supervisor parental status[e]	0.022	0.095	0.190	0.109

Note. [a]Schedule of employee: 0 = standard, 1 = flexible. [b]Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [c]Supervisor working from home pattern: 0 = never work from home, 1 = 1 day a week or more. [d]Supervisor nationality: 0 = non-Dutch, 1 = Dutch. [e]Supervisor parental status: 0 = no child, 1 = children.
**p < .05. *** p < .001.

Table 4.11 | Study II: Results of conditional indirect effects

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Mediator	First moderator (supervisor gender)	Second moderator (supervisor working from home pattern[b])	Indirect effect	95% CI
Study II						
Schedule of employee[a]	Perceived organizational commitment	Perceived work centrality	Male	No	–0.525**	[–0.913;–0.136]
			Female	No	0.230	[–0.160; 0.620]
			Male	Yes	0.008	[–0.323; 0.339]
			Female	Yes	–0.079	[–0.448; 0.289]

Note. [a]Schedule of employee: 0 = standard, 1 = flexible. [b]Supervisor working from home pattern: 0 = never work from home, 1 = 1 day a week or more.
** p < .01.

4.5.5 Discussion Study II

Contrary to Study I, we did not find support for our basic premise that working from home results in poor supervisory performance ratings due to perceptions of lower work centrality. In this sample, it seems that working from home did not send a signal to supervisors that the employee has lower work centrality. However, this conclusion should be nuanced; the signal may be dependent on boundary conditions. We took into account the

characteristics of the supervisor as conditional factors and discovered that supervisors who are male and do not work from home themselves are more likely to perceive employees who work from home as having lower work centrality. We also modelled the employee's parental status as a conditional factor and found that employees *without* children are more likely to receive lower performance ratings when they work from home than employees who are parents. Hence, it appears that working from home is acceptable for parents only. This result was surprising as previous research found that supervisors deny employees with personal life responsibilities pay raises, promotions, and other career-related rewards (Glass, 2004; McCloskey & Igbaria, 2003). Yet an explanation for this finding might nonetheless be found in the history of flexible working practices. FWPs, including the ability to work from home, were introduced in many organizations to enable the careers of those with care responsibilities. Up until today, professionals living alone and without care responsibilities feel they do not receive equal treatments when it comes to flexible working practices. This was discovered in a recent qualitative study by Wilkinson and colleagues (2017). Participants in that study raised the issue that "only certain non-work roles and activities were considered to be legitimate reasons for pulling time and energy away from the workplace – primarily those related to care and family responsibilities" (p. 650).

4.6 General Discussion and Conclusion

Integrating signalling theory (Connelly, 2011; Spence, 1973) with key tenets from social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2016) and SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), we put forward an integrative model that examined the role of key characteristics of supervisors and employees in the process by which working from home may result in lower supervisory ratings of job performance through perceptions of the employee's work centrality and organizational commitment. We tested this model across two studies with different samples.

In our first study, using a sample of students, we demonstrated that employees who choose to work from home subject themselves to negative perceptions about their work centrality and commitment to the organization, which results in receiving lower performance ratings from their supervisors. This negative effect was stronger when employees had a male supervisor. Our second study, using a sample of managers, did not replicate these findings. That is, working from home did not result in lower perceptions of work centrality for the employee and we did not observe gender differences on this point. However, we discovered that this effect was more complex and depended on supervisors' own working from home patterns. In the second study, differences between male and female supervisors were only found when taking into account supervisors' own tendencies to work from home. We demonstrated that the tendency to give lower job perfor-

mance ratings to employees who work from home on a regular bias (versus always work at the office) was most pronounced among male supervisors that never work from home themselves. Another key finding of our second study was the influence of the employee's parental status; working from home is more detrimental to one's performance ratings for employees without children than for parents.

The fact that we obtained different results across the two studies raises questions about whether and how sample characteristics may have impacted perceptions of the hypothetical employee described in the vignettes. It stands to reason that students are more likely to rely on stereotypes and the 'ideal worker' standard when evaluating an employee's performance, given that they lack experience with the flexplace practice in organizational settings. Perhaps they believe that employees who work from home are 'lazy' individuals who do not have a strong work ethic and do not give their all for the organization. In a way, our second study is in line with this notion because it shows that individuals' own working from home pattern influences their perceptions of employees who work from home. That being said, a recent meta-analysis concluded that work ethic endorsement (closely related to the 'ideal worker' standard) is higher in industry samples than student samples (Zabel, Biermeier-Hanson, Baltes, Early, & Shepard, 2017). Evidently, more research is needed to understand how perceptions of those who work from home differ across groups and generational cohorts (including the dominance of the 'ideal worker' standard).

4.6.1 Strengths and Implications for Research

Our study contributes to theory and research on flexible working by investigating the dark side of FWP use for employees. We have focused on flexplace as a flexible working practice because the number of employers that offer employees the possibility to work from home is rapidly increasing (Matos et al., 2016). In doing so, we complement previous research on the effects of FWPs, which has primarily focused on the negative effects of flextime as a practice (Leslie et al., 2012; Yam et al., 2014). Research on the effects of FWPs has put a premium on signalling theory (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973). In this article, in developing our conceptual model, we also drew on signalling theory to enhance our understanding of *why* (mediators) FWPs lead to career penalties in the form of negative performance evaluations. We have identified supervisors' perceptions of the employee's work centrality as a key mechanism that explains why working from home may result in lower supervisory performance ratings. Our results suggest that the decision of an employee to work from home sends a signal to the supervisor that work is not central to their lives and they are not fully committed to the organization. Supervisors may then respond by 'penalizing' the employee with lower performance ratings. It should be noted, however, that working from home does not always send the same signal. Our second

study suggests that working from home only signals lower work centrality to supervisors if it concerns an employee without children. Parents who use the opportunity to work from home were not perceived as having lower work centrality and did not receive lower performance ratings. This is in line with recent research that dismisses the historical assumption that the ideal worker is an employee without family responsibilities; in fact, having children can increase employees' immersion in the work role (Dumas & Perry-Smith, 2018). In examining other moderators, we drew on social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2016) and SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Based on an integration of these theories with signalling theory, we posited that the signal sent by an employee working from home depends on characteristics of not only the employee but also the supervisor. In line with social role theory, it seems that mostly male supervisors interpret working from home as a signal of lower work centrality. In addition, supervisors who work from home themselves appear more accepting of this habit, which is in line with arguments underpinning Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory that people tend to evaluate those who are similar to them more favourably. Jointly, our results contribute to an emerging body of research on boundary conditions for the effect of flexible working practices (Leslie et al., 2012; Yam et al., 2014) and explain *when* (moderators) use of flexplace leads to detrimental consequences for the employee.

4.6.2 Practical Implications

Our research holds two critical practical implications for organizations that offer a working from home policy and supervisors who evaluate the performance of employees who make use of this policy. First, an important message for organizations who offer FWPs is that working from home may potentially generate unfair employee performance ratings. Supervisors may have an 'ideal worker' bias, which can have negative consequences for the performance evaluations of their subordinates. Specifically, supervisors might assume that employees who use flexplace do not put work at first, are not committed to their work and thus perform less well. Importantly, the experimental vignettes in our studies emphasized that the company was supportive of flexible working and thus it seems that even in an organization with a supportive flexplace culture, there might be reprimands for those who work from home. Our finding that supervisors who work from home themselves are less biased confirms recent research indicating that supervisor support plays a critical role in the acceptance of flexible working practices (Lautsch, Kossek & Eaton, 2009). Hence, organizational support might not be sufficient to help reduce the negative effects of flexible working on employees' career success but needs to be supplemented by support at lower levels in the organization. We recommend that organizations develop and implement interventions targeted at supervisors who manage employees who work from home on a regular basis. Interventions should be primarily aimed at raising awareness of supervisors' potential

'ideal worker' biases. But organizations should also re-assess the design of evaluation systems to prevent that supervisors act on their potentially faulty perceptions of subordinates. Our study indicates that supervisory ratings of employees' job performance are prompted by supervisors' perceptions of how dedicated to work employees are. Employees who work from home are less visible to their supervisors and may be at risk of creating negative impressions regarding their approach to work. Hence, performance ratings systems should be as objective as possible.

Second, when organizations decide to offer employees the option to work from home, they need to raise awareness among all stakeholders that this practice has benefits for different groups of employees, not just for those with caregiving demands. Results from our second study showed that employees who do not have children and work from home regularly may receive unfair evaluations, probably because supervisors assume that these employees do not need flexibility since they do not have care responsibilities. However, supervisors should remain mindful that working from home has a myriad of other benefits and is not solely aimed at enabling employees to manage care responsibilities. Indeed, research indicates that on days that individuals work from home they experience more job-related positive affective well-being and less job-related negative affective well-being (Anderson, Kaplan, & Vega, 2015). Working from home has also been linked to less interruptions (Haddad, Lyons, & Chatterjee, 2009) and more flow (Peters & Wildenbeest, 2010), which are key predictors of employee and organizational productivity (Taris & Schreurs, 2009; Wright, Cropanzano & Bonnet, 2007). We suggest organizations to offer training sessions that emphasize the benefits of working from home (e.g., health and productivity benefits) for all groups of employees. Such sessions can reduce the likelihood that supervisors treat employees differently based on parental status and may also stimulate any employee to use flexplace without the fear of backlash from supervisors or co-workers.

4.6.3 Limitations and Future Research

A number of limitations of our research should be noted. First, our manipulation of the employee's schedule type captured only the usage or non-usage of the policy (i.e., working from home two days a week versus never). We believe it would be a valuable research endeavour to use a more refined measure of working from home that allows for the *extent* of working from home to be taken into account. It is important to build on our research and gain specific insights regarding the relationship between the number of days an employee works from home and supervisors' perceptions of work-related outcomes. In our research we also did not specify whether the employee's schedule type was an ad hoc or a regular arrangement. Recent research suggests that the role of the supervisor in setting up formal and informal arrangements may influence their assessment of employee performance (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017). We recommend that future

research on the dark side of working from home examines both how the arrangement was set up (through a formal or informal process) and the supervisor's involvement in order to understand whether this influences supervisors' perceptions and evaluations of employees who work from home.

A second limitation concerns the manipulation of the employee's parental status. We did not distinguish among employees on the basis of number and age of children. Given that these factors may influence (perceptions of) caregiving demands, we recommend future work to use samples that comprise employees with differing care responsibilities and measure the number and age of children. Such studies could formally test whether working from home is considered more legitimate for parents due to their care responsibilities, which is the explanation we put forward for the somewhat surprising finding that parents are not 'penalized' when working from home. Perhaps more importantly, to gain further insights on how working from home sends a different signal for parents versus non-parents, we recommend that researchers measure respondents' ideas concerning employees' reasons for flexplace use. Researchers could, for instance, ask respondents to indicate whether they think the employee works from home for commuting, productivity or care reasons and examine whether these reasons exacerbate (or buffer) the relationships proposed in our conceptual model. After all, previous research has shown that flexible working for productivity reasons may facilitate career success (Leslie et al., 2012).

Third, we acknowledge the limitations concerning the methodology employed. We are aware that our focus on supervisors' perceptions and evaluations involves the risk of common method bias because all the study constructs were measured through self-reports (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Moreover, while the experimental design of our studies enabled us to establish causal inferences for the effects of working from home, it should be noted that the experimental vignette designs of both our studies may lack realism. We recommend future researchers to test our hypothesized model by employing supervisor-employee dyads to see whether our results also hold in field settings. Field settings also allow for more individuating information to be collected. In the current research, we have highlighted only a few of those factors. Hence, this could further nuance our results on the impact of working from home.

Finally, we focused on characteristics of the employee (i.e., parental status) and the supervisor (i.e., gender and working from home pattern) as boundary conditions for the negative effect of working from home on supervisory performance ratings. It would be interesting to also examine the interplay between flexplace and elements of the organizational culture or climate (e.g., transparency). For instance, it stands to reason that negative perceptions of those who work from home occasionally are less likely to develop in an open culture where all members of the organization have a good grasp of each other's tasks and responsibilities. Moreover, perceptions are likely to be influenced by the extent to which norms for flexplace use,

including those held by supervisors, are more or less congruent with flexplace policies. Our measure of the supervisor's own working from home pattern is a proxy for how supportive the supervisor is of flexplace use, but we recommend future researchers to explicitly assess the latter. All in all, we agree with Allen and colleagues (2015) that telework research should provide organizational context for a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of working from home. We acknowledge there may be limits to the generalizability of our findings, as the vignettes in the current work emphasized that the organization was supportive of flexible working.