

**The London School of Economics and
Political Science**

**Understanding Flexible Work and Well-being:
Analysis of a Critical Case**

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis examines the concept of flexibility as a characteristic of the employment relationship. It aims to provide a better understanding of the employees' experience of flexible work and to theorise its connection with well-being. To that end, a large consulting firm was explored as a critical case for theory development, using a mixed-methods approach.

Flexible working is an increasingly implemented practice within firms, yet there is little consensus over its possible outcomes, particularly with regards to employee well-being. This ambivalence is problematic to understand the mechanisms underlying flexible work and its consequences. I propose that equivocal consequences stem partly from the polarisation in the definition of flexibility itself. Flexibility is usually studied either as an employer-oriented or an employee-oriented practice. This thesis disagrees with this dichotomy and contributes to the literature by looking at flexibility as a major aspect of the employment relationship. As such, flexibility is neither an employer nor an employee-oriented practice exclusively, but a constructed exchange between the two parties.

This thesis contends that flexibility is perceived as a combination of contributions and inducements that are separate, but interrelated dimensions. Such perceptions are shaped by employees' experiences and evolve over time. Understanding flexibility as a dual, controversial, constructed, and evolutionary process, allows for an insightful exploration of its relationship with well-being.

Findings suggest that the two dimensions of flexibility are significantly related to employee well-being. Instead of stable concepts, flexible working and well-being are found to be entangled processes, which influence one another. Not only does flexibility affect well-being, perceptions of well-being can act as a trigger for employees to renegotiate their flexible work arrangements. The findings thus put forward that well-being, rather than being solely an outcome of work arrangements, has the potential to shape the construction of such arrangements.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

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1.0. Objective and overview

The overall objective of this thesis is to explore the concept of flexible working—as an HR practice and a characteristic of the employment relationship—and its relationship with employee perceived well-being. It extends current theory by observing flexibility as a controversial, constructed process in constant evolution. It provides a better understanding of the employees' experience of flexible working and develops theory on its connection with well-being.

The broad purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research and place it in its context. It presents the research questions of this thesis and explains the research process undertaken to answer them. To start, this introductory chapter examines the meaning of the terms 'flexibility' and 'well-being' to present this thesis' approach to them, and locates the research within the literature interested in human resource management and employment relations. Then, the rationale that underpins the research design and its appropriateness to answer the research questions are discussed. The final part of the chapter presents the research setting and provides a general overview of how the study was constructed and conducted in terms of data collection procedures and analytical methods.

1.1. Introduction

To survive, a firm's workforce needs to be able to adapt to changing circumstances more effectively than its competitors. In that sense, one of the challenges facing firms is to find the best possible way to manage its workforce. Ever more voices from within academy and industry signal the essential value of human capital when it comes to developing sustainable competitive advantage and generating wealth (Barney, 1995). Interest lies in what mechanisms ought to be established to make the most of that potential. In broad terms, the exponentially growing literature on human resource management focuses on investigating the mechanisms that make the employment relationship as profitable as possible.

Some scholars and practitioners argue that “healthy organisations” are those in which, “along with profits and productivity, the collective well-being of employees is an important outcome” (Macik-Frey et al., 2007; 827). Awareness of the interrelationship between well-being and working life is not new (Karasek, 1979; Marmot et al., 2006). There is enough epidemiological and public health literature to state that organisational practices have relevant effects on human health and perceived well-being (Akerlind et al., 2007). However, management research in general, and human resource management studies in particular, have mainly focused on studying the impact of managerial practices on performance, while largely disregarding their effects on employee outcomes such as health and well-being (Godard and Delaney, 2000; Pfeffer, 2010).

The field of Occupational Health studies whether work and workplaces contribute to health and promote the achievement of general wellbeing (Greasley and Edwards, 2015; Leka et al., 2004). This field of study has attracted the attention of all kinds of national and international institutions, such as the World Health Organisation (Burton, 2010), the OECD (Clark, 2009), the European Union (European Commission, 2010), and many national governments such as the UK (van Stolk et al., 2014), France (Ministère du Travail de la Solidarité et de la Fonction Publique, 2010) or Spain (Instituto Nacional de Seguridad, Salud e Higiene en el Trabajo, 2015) which are promoting and funding research projects. The issue of poor work well-being is not negligible: despite economic progress, the decline in the number of back-breaking physical jobs and the legal achievements in terms of working conditions, employee perceived well-being has been found to have decreased since the 1970’s (Green, 2006) while occupational injuries and illnesses have been found to have increased (Askenazy, 2001).

According to Pfeffer (2010; 36), “the available evidence suggests that there is a good likelihood of finding some interesting research results if we continue to expand our understanding of the connections between organisational practices and human well-being”. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the connection of the employment relationship and employee perceived well-being, focusing on one specific organisational practice: flexible working.

Flexible working is an increasingly popular topic whose advantages are advocated by many societal actors such as international organisations like the OECD (Eriksson, 2012) or the EU (Plantenga and Remery, 2010); governments such as the Spanish or the British (Kersley et al., 2006; Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social, 2013); professional organisations (CIPD, 2015); and employees (Acas, 2015; Sivatte and Guadamillas, 2013). Factors such as globalisation, the need for global competitiveness, uncertainty, the current economic crisis, the increasing relevance of the service sector or a changing and more demanding workforce, are often cited to justify a need for greater flexibility in the workplace (Zeytinoglu et al. 2009). However, in spite of previous research efforts, there is still no consensus on the outcomes of flexibility. After a systematic literature review, de Menezes and Kelliher (2011) conclude that evidence fails to support a business case for flexible work arrangements. At firm level, previous studies report both positive (Bhattacharya et al., 2005) and negative (van der Meer et al., 2009) relationships between flexibility and performance. Similar divergent results can be observed at the individual level. Some highlight the positive effects of flexible work arrangements on employees assuming that such arrangements allow employees to match working and personal life responsibilities (Hill et al., 2008b); but this assumption has been challenged (Fleetwood, 2007). Other studies are unable to find any clear links between flexibility and employee outcomes (Hayman, 2009), and a few connect it to negative outcomes such as higher work intensity (Bourne and Forman, 2014; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). These convoluted outcomes and its widespread interest make flexible work particularly appealing for research.

In this thesis, I will argue that such unclear consequences result partly from the ambiguity in the definition of flexibility. Flexible working is generally seen as opposed to Taylorism (de Menezes and Wood, 2006). It thus appears to involve a broad, changing, and adaptable way of organising work. Interestingly, whether control over changes depends on production or individual needs is controversial: some authors associate flexible work to employee choice (Hill et al., 2008a) and others to firm adaptability (Blyton, 1992). This bipolar employer / employee orientation is the main reason for which I chose to focus on this practice. Its discussion and clarification constitutes one of the contributions of this thesis.

Discussions on flexibility cover a wide range of topics and criticising the concept for being slippery and vague is not new (Pollert, 1991). Following Wood (1988; 135), “we need to be very clear about which types of flexibility we are talking about and not assume that they all move simultaneously together in the same direction”. The following section delves into a review of the term ‘flexibility’ and presents the approach adopted in this thesis.

1.2. Flexibility: a conceptual amalgam

In the human resource management (HRM) and employment relations (ER) literatures, the term ‘flexibility’ refers to the conditions under which labour is hired, deployed and rewarded, but it has been categorised and nuanced in many different ways. As a result, the variety of themes covered under the word ‘flexibility’ is substantial and confusing.

Despite—maybe even because of—the large amount of research conducted on this topic, flexibility is quite convoluted. It has been utilised as an umbrella-term including a broad range of practices, work arrangements, and workforce organisation systems (Kelliher and Anderson, 2008). Extremely contrasting definitions can be easily found. For instance, for Gittleman et al. (1998; 10) flexible work practices represent “a movement away from a traditional, hierarchical structure in which employees have rigid, narrowly defined roles”. Wright and Snell (1998) define it as the firm’s ability to quickly reconfigure resources and activities to respond to environmental pressures. For Dastmalchian and Blyton (2001) flexibility is a set of practices that allow organisations to adapt to changes, with only minor regard to workers. Following MacDuffie (1995), flexible systems create the conditions under which high performance work practices are most likely to yield effective performance. Hill et al. (2008a) describe flexibility as an employee empowering practice that allows individuals to make work arrangement choices. Overall, despite its widespread usage, flexibility is still an imprecise, confusing term. The lack of consistency in the conceptualisation of the term generates great difficulties when it comes to analysing its outcomes for employees and organisations.

Some observe flexibility as a characteristic of low quality jobs with limited stability and few advancement opportunities (Amuedo-Dorantes and Serrano-Padial, 2010), where

organisational competitiveness is achieved through low job security and putting pressure on employees. Others assume employers and employees can equally benefit from flexibility and see it as an organisational must to increase performance and innovation (Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2009). For the growing literature on work-life balance, flexibility is contemplated as a ladder towards reduced work-family conflict and employee autonomy (Hill et al., 2008a).

Two explanations to this definitional conundrum can be raised: (1) the confusion between labour market and organisational flexibility, (2) the different meanings that flexibility has for different actors.

With regards to the first explanation, macro level studies focus on labour market flexibility which denotes the extent and speed with which labour markets adapt to economic, social, and productive changes and variations (Standing, 1999). It is argued that, to ensure such flexibility, the regulation of business practices—particularly employment protection legislation—should be minimal (OECD, 2013). The lack of labour market flexibility was believed to be a cause of high unemployment and slow employment growth in Europe during the 1970's and the 1980's (Walsh, 1991). Similar arguments are put forward nowadays to explain the high number of European citizens out of work and to encourage policy changes (European Commission, 2012). Over the last 10 years, many OECD countries, including Spain (Corral, 2015), have systematically reduced the strictness of employment protection legislation to guarantee that organisations are able to react more flexibly to economic fluctuations (OECD, 2013).

Micro or organisation level studies of flexibility typically use the terms 'flexible work arrangements', 'flexible working practices', or 'HR flexibility'. Their approach draws from seminal work on the issue of flexibility conducted in the 80's. At the time, a number of influential authors argued that flexibility was at the heart of a fundamental transformation in the productive structures of capitalist economies and societies (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Streeck, 1987). The *flexible specialisation* thesis (Piore and Sabel, 1984) postulated the ending of mass production and standardisation, and suggested that only those firms who were able to respond quickly to market fluctuations and adapt to changing demands would succeed and survive. According to this theory "the market and technological conditions for Taylorism no longer exist" (Wood, 1989; 11) and economies of

scope should come to replace economies of scale. This meant that to reduce the total cost of production it would no longer be necessary to produce as many equal items as possible, but to increase the number of different goods produced.

As a result, the Taylorist-Fordist premise that employee management issues can be tackled by substituting labour for machinery and high levels of employee control with low discretion specialist jobs, became outdated. In the flexible specialisation context the ability of the firm to build a pool of multi-skilled flexible workers, able to work on different activities and products, is essential to accommodate “ceaseless change” (Piore and Sabel, 1984; 17). The concept of flexibility is therefore associated to “labour process restructuring, to increased versatility in design and greater adaptability of new technology in production” (Smith, 1989; 203). Although one may argue that a flexible labour market may be necessary for firms to implement flexible production, these are really two very different aspects of flexibility and should not be mixed up. Decisions on the former are taken by governments and supranational organisations; decisions on the latter are taken by firms. This thesis is interested in developing theory on the way flexible work arrangements are constructed in organisations and how such construction is connected to the experiences of employees and their well-being. Therefore it only considers flexibility from an organisational perspective, rather than a labour market one.

A second explanation to the flexibility conceptual amalgam lies in the different meanings that the term has for different constituencies. Governments, international organisations, employers, unions, and employees may attach very different connotations to the same term (Zeytinoglu et al., 2009). In particular, two categories of definitions are visible in the literature: those having an employer orientation and those having an employee one.

Some authors adopt an employer-focused or “managerialist” definition of flexibility (Brewster et al. 1997; 134), matching the above-discussed *flexible specialisation* thesis (Piore and Sabel, 1984). They depict flexibility as a tool to be deployed by the organisation to pair its changing needs. Atkinson’s (1985) model of the flexible firm is probably the most referenced illustration of this perspective. The model proposes the existence of three types of flexibility: numerical, functional, and financial. Numerical flexibility allows the organisation to adjust labour input to contextual factors, through outsourcing

and non-standard employment contracts (for instance, short fixed term contracts, freelancers who are paid for a precise piece of work, temporary staff supplied by agencies, etc.). Functional flexibility, also labelled as multiskilling or polyvalence, underscores the ability of the firm to allocate employees to different activities and tasks, and to redistribute them in order to adapt to changing environmental conditions. It implies blurring labour functional boundaries to meet business needs. Financial flexibility should support the former types of flexibility and refers to a firm's ability to adjust employment costs to internal labour market factors, external conditions and business performance. Nowadays, some authors mirror Atkinson in arguing that 'HR flexibility' is reflected in an employer's ability to recruit or dispose of employees as needed, allocate work and responsibilities efficiently within the firm, define working hours to match business requirements, and modify labour costs to adapt to market needs (Reilly, 1998).

Other authors adopt an employee-centric perspective (Atkinson and Hall, 2011; Richman et al., 2008; Russell et al., 2009). This approach has gained relevance because increasing numbers of workers seek to have flexible work arrangements that match their specific needs (AEGON, 2012). For example, working parents suffer from a mismatch between the traditional working patterns most organisations have and their evolving needs because organisational values and practices change more slowly than individual conditions and expectations (Kanter, 1989). Employees push their organisations to respond to this gap by allowing for more flexibility in the way they organise their work (Christensen and Schneider, 2010). Flexibility is therefore understood as "the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks" (Hill et al., 2008a; 152). The concept includes two broad categories: spatial flexibility which enables workers to perform their tasks and activities from remote locations (Martinez Sanchez et al., 2007); and temporal flexibility which may grant employees scheduling freedom, short-term time off or reduced work hours (Christensen and Schneider, 2010).

This thesis contributes to this debate by arguing that flexibility is a major aspect of the employment relationship. As such, it is neither an employer nor an employee oriented practice, but a negotiated agreement between the two actors that can be quite idiosyncratic and evolves over time. This understanding deviates from the mainstream conception of flexibility present in the HRM literature. This is so because an underlying uni-

tarist paradigm—in which employees are assumed to hold a united interest with the firm (Fox, 1974)—is inherent to HRM research and practice (Lewin, 2001). However, in addition to the unitarist approach, Fox (1974) proposed the existence of two alternative frames of reference: radical and pluralist. In contrast to the HRM literature, this thesis proposes to adopt a pluralist approach, which assumes conflict is an intrinsic aspect of the employment relationship and that working conditions ought to be negotiated to match employer and employee needs. The following section provides a review of Fox’s (1974) three frames of reference and analyses how they provide different lenses to explain flexible working.

1.3. “Frames of reference” to understand flexibility

Fox (1974) coined the term “frames of reference” to allude to the presumptions and values that individuals refer to when reflecting about the nature and governance of work. He held that three of such frames exist: unitarist, radical, and pluralist.

1.3.1. Unitarist

Unitarism posits that employers and employees have a common interest: the survival of the organisation. In that sense, conflict is not an inherent feature of the employment relationship. Instead, this relationship is intrinsically prone to cooperation and any conflict is the result of poor management (e.g. inappropriate recruitment or poor communication) (Fox, 1974).

With this set of assumptions and values, the unitarist perspective has played a significant role in the development of HRM theories (Godard and Delaney, 2000), relying on three relevant premises. First of all, conflict can be resolved by nurturing a psychological contract based on collaboration and promoting a collective understanding that both parties are better served by working together (Abbott, 2006). Second, interests can be aligned through the implementation of bundles of novel HRM practices. Employees and employers may initially have different goals but these are not necessarily conflicting in the long run because practices can be designed that benefit both parties and encourage mutual cooperation. For instance, conflict can be dealt with through agreed problem-

solving techniques that enhance mutuality and collaboration. *Win-lose* type of conflict can be controlled, minimised and conceivably eliminated to be replaced by *win-win* initiatives (Ulrich, 1997) and any form of employee discontent indicates a management failure (Delaney and Godard, 2001). Third, the establishment of shared goals should make power imbalances wither away (Lewin, 2001). This is the reason why “HRM research often pays little attention to power differences as manifested in the ability of one party to impose its interests on the other” (Delaney and Godard, 2001; 398).

According to Coats (2004; 23), unitarism can “be described as the commonsense of the HR profession today”. Thus, practitioners adhere to the idea that the right HR practices are equally beneficial for both the organisation and its employees. Therefore, if management comes up with the correct HRM approach—including flexible working—both sides of the employment relationship will be better off. As a result of this vision, the HRM literature has been primarily concerned with linking HRM practices to organisational performance (Boselie et al., 2005). The underlying assumption is that, since the company invests in specific activities for its employees, these should have positive experiences and attitudes (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Whitener, 2001), creating a *win-win* relationship: employees feel better because of the practices and therefore they perform better (Delbridge and Whitfield, 2001). These positive employee effects are labelled HRM outcomes (Boselie et al., 2005). Job satisfaction, commitment, motivation, engagement or involvement (Alfes et al., 2013; Boxall and Macky, 2009; Guest, 1997; Paauwe and Richardson, 1997; Wood and Wall, 2007), are some of the most recurrently discussed ones.

This highlights that employees’ experiences and reactions are at the core of the HRM-performance relationship. Indeed, “there is a consensus among those researchers who have reported a link between HPWS¹ and organisational performance measures (...) that the associations reflect a causal link which flows from practices through people to performance” (Ramsay, et al., 2000; 503).

Unitarist assumptions of HRM studies entail two relevant limitations. First, the HRM literature mostly “uses organisations as the unit of analysis, [and] largely ignores the

¹ High-performance work systems

differences in individual employees' work attitudes and performance" (Green et al., 2006; 560). The literature assumes a positive relationship between HR and performance that is mediated by the employees, but ignores or neglects asking them about this relationship (Godard and Delaney, 2000). What happens at the individual level is therefore supposed, viewed from the perspective of management, giving substantial weight to managerial perspectives on employee outcomes (Bartel, 2004). Independent employee voice is absent from these discussions (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000). Since employer and employee interests always coincide, there seems to be no room to study the employee's view on HR practices: it is assumed to be the same as the employer's (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004). In addition, there is no point in looking at the ability of one party to impose its interests on the other (Delaney and Godard, 2001). By refocusing the unit of analysis on employees, the influence of HR practices could be fruitfully explored.

Second, the literature overwhelmingly focuses on data collected from managers, assuming, yet again, that they are more knowledgeable about HR practices (Purcell, 1999). Managers, however, may be biased in their accounts that tend to report on the intended practices rather than on their actual implementation (Khilji and Wang, 2006). For this reason, perhaps, there is still little exploration over the relationship between HR practices and well-being, since HR managers might focus on strategic concerns (Chow, 2012). Nonetheless, some authors call for a more holistic approach to contextualise HR processes (Truss, 2001). The process approach to HRM suggests that the relationship between intended HR practices and performance is mediated by implementation and specific employee interpretations (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Nishii and Wright, 2007). This highlights the importance of carefully analysing employee perceptions rather than just HR practices as intended by management.

1.3.2. Radical

The radical approach is diametrically opposed to unitarism. It states that the employment relationship is naturally characterised by exploitation, due to the inequality in the distribution of wealth and power between capitalists (employers) and workers. This approach draws on the Marxist perspective that capitalism requires organisations to engage in ruthless competition, demanding constant cost cutting and efficiency measures.

This dynamic pushes for the minimisation of wages and the maximisation of effort through the threat of dismissal. Under this frame of reference, cooperation is not an option. Class struggle and conflict are viewed as unsolvable aspects of employment relations. Coming to an equally beneficial arrangement is not possible because management will always impose its vision and employees can merely comply with it (Abbott, 2006; Fox, 1974).

The radical approach is now largely ignored by the HRM literature, being ensconced firmly in a historical time period and political context. The only studies that are influenced by it, are those drawing from labour process theory (Braverman, 1974). Labour process theory (LPT) suggests that labour power is an inherent and inalienable property of human beings. It is a special production input, which cannot be put in storage and that firms aim to extract from workers as effort. The means employed to maximise that effort “may vary from enforcement upon the worker of the longest possible working day (...) to the use of the most productive instruments of labour and the greatest intensity of labour” (Braverman, 1974; 56).

From a labour process perspective, to maximise profit, firms need to maximise labour input as well. According to Braverman, the realisation of this potential will depend, other factors aside, on the organisation of the process. Indeed, to this aim, firms are driven to implement practices that make the workforce deploy more effort by working longer or harder, in other words, practices that intensify work (Ramsay et al., 2000). Fleetwood (2007; 388) argues that management treats labour power as a commodity, as a mere means to build profit. He relies on the conviction that current capitalism is “wrapped in the velvet glove of freedom, individualism and, above all, flexibility” to emerge as different and more acceptable to the workforce, while remaining the same that Marx criticised. In contrast with the unitarist approach, under this perspective power imbalance is such that management imposes unilaterally beneficial practices for the firm on the employees (Hyman, 1975).

A stream of the HRM literature known as the “conflicting-outcomes” perspective (van de Voorde et al., 2012), follows a LPT line of thought. It claims that HRM practices increase organisational performance at the expense of employee well-being by increasing undesirable employee outcomes such as work intensity (Gallie, 2005; Green, 2001;

Orlitzky and Frenkel, 2005), stress (Ramsay et al., 2000; Tarafdar et al., 2007) or occupational hazards (Askenazy, 2001). However, these authors cannot be argued to adhere to the radical approach. Although they posit that management makes decisions that harm employees, they do not posit that conflict is unsolvable and have no interest in class struggle. In fact, the radical approach is difficult to find in contemporary studies. Some attempts have been made to bridge LPT and HRM theories by nuancing some of the most radical aspects of the former (Thompson and Harley, 2009).

For the purposes of this thesis, the radical approach has three major shortcomings. First, it understands the employment relationship as a way to forcefully extract effort from workers. It seems that workers are unable to escape the will and prerogative of management. Nevertheless, in developed economies nowadays, employees have rights, are protected by the law and, most importantly, are free and capable of exiting the employment relationship. Of course, they may have incentives to stay or difficulties to make the decision to quit (secure wages, stable employment, etc.), but a Zolian or Dickensian situation of extreme exploitation tends to be marginal.

Second, the radical approach does not put much stock in the option of peaceful negotiation that characterises modern employment relations. Employees can voice their discontent through direct and indirect participation schemes (Wilkinson et al., 2010). Work arrangements are negotiated both at the individual level and through collective bargaining (Marsden, 2013).

Third, the radical approach was developed taking the industrial manual worker as a model for theorisation. Some current roles differ drastically from this model. Knowledge workers, highly qualified and generally scarce are not usually a vulnerable entity, but tend to hold power and to be able to negotiate beneficial work arrangements for themselves (Rousseau et al., 2006). In sum, the radical approach may pass over valuable insights on current employment relations for knowledge workers.

1.3.3. Pluralist

Pluralist assumptions and values are halfway between unitarist and radical ones. Employers and employees have different interests and conflict is a natural, enduring, and

inevitable feature of the employment relationship (Lewin, 2001; 454). They have a number of common interests, like the long-term sustainability of the firm. Yet, some of their goals are different and often incompatible because employee income, security, satisfaction, development, etc., are not synonymous with shareholder profitability and management success. A persistent (although frequently latent) tension between managers and employees is inherent to the employment relationship (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004; 4).

However, it is possible for these actors to negotiate and come to an agreed and fairer solution that maximises their common satisfaction. In this sense, conflict is seen as positive—and even necessary—to the survival of the organisation. The potential for conflict serves as an incentive for managers to better handle work arrangements. At the same time, if employees voice their complaints and channel their diverging interests, their relationship with the organisation is more likely to survive in the long term. Hence, negotiation between managers and employees is an essential aspect of the employment relationship (Fox, 1974).

An important facet of pluralist thought is that the expression of employee voice is legitimate. Workers are citizens of the organisation. Although they accept to submit themselves to managerial prerogative to a certain extent, they do not surrender their rights (Coats, 2004). In addition, the pluralist view highlights that employers have a power advantage over employees. This means, for instance, that employers may use environmental circumstances to their advantage (high unemployment, weak unions, loose legislation, etc.) to establish working conditions that meet organisational rather than employee goals (Rubery et al., 2005).

In contrast to the unitarist approach of HRM research, industrial relations (IR) studies tend to see work relationships from a pluralist perspective. These studies view the employment relationship as “a bargaining problem between stakeholders with competing and shared interests” (Budd et al., 2004; 202). They pay attention to the aspects that enable a balanced and durable relationship, that contribute to solving conflicts of interest to achieve mutual gains (Kochan, 1998).

1.3.4. Pluralism as an alternative approach to flexibility

The unitarist, radical, and pluralist perspectives on the employment relationship provide different frameworks to explore flexibility. To date, most of the HR literature that this thesis aims to contribute to, has generally followed unitarist assumptions and values to understand flexible working.

Managerialist definitions of flexibility describe it as a practice designed and established by management that serves the interests of both the organisation and its employees. For instance, Piore and Sabel (1984) propose that the flexible specialisation thesis offers a “new basis for a mutuality of interest between management and workers” (Wood, 1989; 14). More recent studies of flexibility are framed under the HRM paradigm (Bryson et al., 2005; McNabb and Whitfield, 1997; Michie and Sheehan, 2001; Verburg et al., 2007). Indeed, Reilly (1998, 11) states that “a flexible and adaptable workforce is a central feature of the HRM vision” and MacDuffie (1995) argues that flexible systems help create the conditions under which other innovative HR practices can yield organisational performance. These studies follow a unitarist logic.

Studies adopting employee-oriented definitions of flexibility also take a unitarist stance by arguing that there is a business case for flexible work arrangements (Konrad and Mangel, 2000; Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2007; Perry-Smith and Blum, 2000). These studies construct their hypotheses building on the *win-win* logic: flexibility encourages positive employee outcomes, which in turn lead to better organisational outcomes. In this sense, employer and employee objectives are served by the same practices.

As noted earlier, unitarism is unable to explain the contrasting definitions of flexibility at once. It either focuses on one side (employer) or the other (employee) but given its assumption that interests coincide, it disregards looking at both perspectives simultaneously. Flexibility refers to a practice or a set of practices defined by management that are clearly determined and delimited. There is no consideration of conflict or eventual negotiations between the two actors.

The radical approach would say that flexibility is meant to exploit employees and extract maximum effort from them. Following this line of thought, Fleetwood (2007) argues that flexible working is really a facet of neoliberalism that has been “discursively rehabilitated” (ibid., 388) to be generally accepted as universally positive. He states that although many flexible working practices are employee-unfriendly and even exploitative, actors such as governments and professional organisations (i.e. CIPD), have recently promoted flexibility discourses that focus merely on work-life balance, masking the reality these practices and eliminating all negative connotations. Although the radical approach may be able to explain the employer-oriented perspective of flexibility, it is unable to justify and analyse the implementation of employee-oriented flexible options, where employees make choices to tailor work to their personal needs.

Following Lewin (2001)—who argues that HRM can learn much from IR in analysing and dealing with the impact of organisational practices—the work in this dissertation draws on the pluralist perspective of the employment relationship. Adopting pluralist assumptions and values to look at flexibility in comparison to the mainstream unitarist ones, has four major advantages. First, this perspective acknowledges that employees’ perceptions of HR practices are what really matter in the study of workplace phenomena (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000). “Workers needs should be systematically assessed in order to reduce conflict, improve management and shape HR practices” (Lewin, 2001; 462).

Second, assuming that employers and employees can have different interests and views on flexibility, and that a negotiation (either explicit or implicit) needs to take place, can shed light over the definitional conundrum of the term flexibility. The extended unitarist paradigm overlooks the eventual incompatibilities between managerial and employee interests with regards to flexibility. Conversely, the pluralist view allows to reconcile the opposed understandings of the term and to describe it as the result of balancing interests. Indeed, in this thesis I will argue that one does not need to see flexibility as a delimited practice, either oriented to the firm or the employee, but as a changing and negotiated agreement. Devoting more attention to underlying tensions at work should help further the understanding of flexible working and its consequences for employees (Delaney and Godard, 2001). This paradigm “recognises that the employment relationship is complex” (Budd et al., 2004; 218) and so is the use of flexible working.

Third, the pluralist frame of reference is compatible with economic and psychological theories on the employment relationship. Budd et al. (2004) note that “pluralist theory implies not only that a lack of balance in the employment system creates suboptimal outcomes but that unbalanced outcomes are ultimately unstable and short-lived”. In a similar manner, Simon’s (1957) theory of the employment relationship understands that a situation of imbalance between contributions demanded from the employee and inducements offered to the employee cannot endure, because it will push the organisation to change the arrangement or the employee to quit. Rousseau’s (1995) psychological contract theory also posits that if the employee does not perceive reciprocity and balance, the employment relationship will not last. As will be discussed in chapter two, Simon’s (1957) and Rousseau’s (1995) perspectives on work contracts and relationships pay particular attention to the idea of balancing interests—implicitly assuming that employer and employee interests do not naturally coincide. Because these two theories and pluralism share this basic premise, they can be used together to develop an understanding of flexibility as a negotiated concept, which balance (or lack thereof) influences outcomes.

Fourth, the pluralist approach allows looking at flexibility with a wide lens and to focus on individual, organisational, and societal outcomes beyond economic efficiency and performance (Budd et al., 2004). Conversely, HRM studies have been criticised for being too prescriptive and instrumental (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004). They are generally concerned with the impact of HR practices—including flexibility—on performance and on possible mediating variables that in turn lead to performance (Pfeffer, 2010). A systematic literature review conducted by de Menezes and Kelliher (2011), shows that the vast majority of studies focuses on the association between flexible work and organisational performance, or individual performance, or other outcomes (such as job satisfaction, absenteeism or turnover) that have been proven to impact organisational performance elsewhere. Only a minority stream of the flexibility literature is specifically concerned with employee health and well-being. For Delaney and Godard (2001) HRM has only paid attention to well-being as a means to achieve performance, downplaying its inherent value. They argue that, on the contrary, IR studies, that usually take a pluralist stance, look at well-being as an end in itself.

As opposed to unitarist or radical perspectives, from a pluralist view management is not assumed to be solely responsible for the design of workplace flexibility. Flexibility is the result of a complex entanglement of interests. It is a bargained arrangement that should meet, to a certain extent, the divergent needs of employers and employees. As such, it cannot be assumed to have a straightforward positive impact on individual outcomes, which have so far been largely disregarded by HRM scholars. In this dissertation I will draw on pluralist assumptions and values to better understand the meaning of flexibility and to explore its impact on well-being as a major employee outcome. The following section discusses the literature on well-being to present this thesis' understanding of the concept.

1.4. Well-being

According to Gillet-Swan and Sargeant (2015; 136), “The key elements of wellbeing have been extensively debated in the philosophical, health, psychological and economic literature and in the absence of an agreed definition for wellbeing (...) researchers apply definitions based on their discipline imperatives”. As a result, there is no generally accepted definition of well-being (King et al., 2014).

Following the general trend in the HRM literature, this thesis focuses on well-being within the domain of work. Warr (2007; 14) indicates that well-being can be considered as context-free (influenced by all aspects of life), domain-specific (focused on experiences linked to one aspect of life, such as work or family), or facet-specific (concentrated on one aspect of a certain domain, such as spousal relationship in the family domain). He defines work related employee well-being as the general quality of an employee's experience at work (Warr, 1987). Well-being at work has been argued to be the outcome of “a complex interaction between personal variables, job characteristics, and wider organisational factors” (Cartwright and Cooper, 2008; 2).

In addition, this thesis understands employee well-being as a dynamic, multidimensional, and relative perception. First, an important aspect for this research is that the factors affecting well-being interact in time, making well-being “dynamic”, the result of an ongoing process. Headey and Wearing (1989) propose that well-being is the product of

combined stocks and flows. Stocks are individual characteristics like personality or gender that provide a sense of stability. Flows are the result of events that may be favourable or adverse, yielding satisfaction or distress. The interaction between stocks and flows determines both cognitive and affective aspects of well-being. Although this theory may be criticised for considering aspects like social networks and socio-economic status as stable stocks—social positions can change both for better and worse (Goldthorpe et al., 1967) and social networks evolve rapidly—it considers well-being as something that is not set in stone and changes over time.

Cummins (2009) finds that well-being is generally stable, yet he sees it as something that behaves like a process because it evolves with arising challenges. He puts particular emphasis on the idea of homeostasis, arguing that individuals, like cells, continuously struggle and adapt to maintain their sense of well-being unless the strength of the challenging agent is overwhelming, making well-being decrease. In his view well-being is a sort of floating balance that is rocked by challenging experiences. Aligned with Cummins (2009), MacIntosh and colleagues (2007) suggest well-being should be studied as a continual dynamic fluctuation, stemming from the individual's effort to coordinate with their environment.

Second, well-being has three main dimensions that are distinctive but interconnected: physical, mental, and social. Some authors have equated these to health, happiness, and relationships (Grant et al., 2007; van de Voorde et al., 2012). These physical, mental and social dimensions are not objectively measured, but subjectively evaluated by the individuals (Warr, 1987). Following the Aristotelian thought, well-being has been argued to include cognitive aspects (such as life satisfaction or judging one's life as meaningful) and affective aspects (the experience of frequent positive emotions and infrequent unpleasant emotions) (Diener et al., 1999). Warr nuances the understanding of affective well-being by proposing the existence of two orthogonal dimensions: pleasure and arousal. These serve to depict three axes across which every individual's affective well-being can be located: a) displeased-please, b) anxious-contented, c) enthusiastic-depressed (Warr, 1987, 1990). Most researchers agree that well-being is not a simple, one-sided concept, but the result of a complex interaction between interconnected dimensions (La Placa et al., 2013; King et al., 2014).

Third, well-being is not absolute, but involves satisfying demands of life, which are different to every actor. This thought is incorporated in Headey and Wearing's (1989) model as part of stock factors, which vary between individuals. These factors, in connection with similar flows, will lead to different well-being outcomes. However, Headey and Wearing or Cummins' models base their explanations on exogenous change (favourable or adverse events for Headey and Wearing, challenging agents for Cummins), yet changes in well-being can be propelled internally by the actors themselves. People strive towards increasing their own well-being. They are not passively waiting for events to take place but actively look to become "fully functioning person[s]" (Rogers, 1961; 187). In sum, individuals are able and willing to shape their own well-being. Some even argue that being well involves having the ability to contribute to the community (Shah and Marks, 2004), making action an integral part of well-being (Gillet-Swan and Sargeant, 2015). This is related to the cognitive aspects of Diener and colleagues' (1999) definition: being able to act seems to be a part of life satisfaction and finding life meaningful.

It must be noted that the concept of well-being has evolved from being merely a dimension of health, to being a widely discussed topic in its own right. Well-being is now a regular theme in news and media and it raises much more political and social interest than health (Carlisle and Hanlon, 2008). Nevertheless, the terms health and well-being are strongly connected. The most widely spread definition of health—that of the World Health Organisation (WHO)—exemplifies their unity. The WHO (1948; 100) describes health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" suggesting that health and well-being are two sides of the same coin. Some authors use the terms 'health' and 'well-being' interchangeably, without really specifying any difference between the two (Macik-Frey et al., 2007; MacIntosh et al., 2007; Nielsen et al., 2002; Nijp et al., 2012; Volery and Pullich, 2010). With similar assumptions, Bircher (2005; 336) describes health as "dynamic state of well-being characterised by a physical, social and mental potential, which satisfies the demands of life commensurate with age, culture and personal responsibility." This definition is eminently applicable to this thesis because it incorporates a process view and sees well-being as multidimensional and relative notion.

However, in this thesis the concepts of health and well-being will not be used interchangeably, to focus solely on well-being instead. On the one hand, the term is more appropriate for the literature this work aims to contribute to. Authors in different knowledge areas have given more importance to one concept or the other depending on their disciplines' specific assumptions. Overall the terms 'health' and 'illness' tend to appear in the occupational health, public health, economic, and industrial relations literatures (Akerlind and Schunder, 2007; Askenazy, 2001; Lindberg and Vingard, 2012, Toomingas, 2005), and "well-being" is more common among organisational behaviour and human resource management studies (van de Voorde et al., 2012; Wood, 2008).

On the other hand, although many argue it should not be (Macik-Frey et al., 2007; MacIntosh et al., 2007), health is still highly associated to the pathological model (La Placa et al., 2013). For a long time, occupational health research was conducted within the pathological perspective, under which health is synonymous with the absence of illness and attention is paid solely to what is wrong with employees (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000). Some argue that the use of the word well-being has allowed researchers to dissociate the ideas of illness and quality of life by "de-medicalis[ing]" the concept of health (Stratham and Chase, 2010; 5). For Ryff and Singer (1998), latent to the concepts of health and well-being is a metaphysical understanding of what it means to lead a good life, instead of a strictly biomedical observation. However, the word well-being seems to better transmit this understanding (La Placa et al., 2013).

In addition, in the HRM and OB literatures, most take a biomedical approach to health and interpret the concept solely as the physical aspect of well-being (Grant et al., 2007; van de Voorde et al., 2012). The term health is also associated to the study of populations (public health) whereas studies of well-being have been carried out "primarily by psychologists, who focus on individuals rather than populations" (Carlisle and Hanlon, 2008; 265).

1.5. Goals and structure of the thesis

The overarching goals of this thesis are: 1) to develop a novel understanding of flexible working, which does not adhere to the existing employer centric or employee centric

flexibility approaches described in section 1.2., and 2) to investigate the relationship between flexible working and employee well-being and develop theory.

Meeting these objectives requires taking a step back from the idea that flexibility is necessarily a *win-win* or a *win-lose* practice and observing it as an individually constructed and negotiated phenomenon with multiple and potentially contrasting outcomes. For these reasons, this thesis undertakes an individual-level study of workplace flexibility that considers employees in context.

This thesis has been written following a three-paper model. Each of the papers is presented as a chapter and responds to one particular research question. Even though every paper is self-contained in the sense that it represents an independent research output, each chapter builds on the previous ones. Their overall purpose is to contribute to a larger research question, which, for pragmatic reasons, had to be divided into three coherent investigations. Each chapter adds a layer of nuance to the understanding of flexible working that, together, provide a more holistic comprehension of the phenomenon. In general terms, I find that flexibility is an unwritten, perceptual and individually constructed concept, that employees try to make sense of in time, and is subject to interpretation. Such interpretations are not only related to employee well-being, but also entangled with it. Well-being is not just a passive state but appears to play a significant role in the construction and negotiation of flexibility. With these findings, this thesis moves away from the mainstream unitarist paradigm and develops a more pluralistic understanding of flexible working.

The thesis is structured in the following way:

Chapter two studies how unfolding events in employees' daily lives play a part in the construction of workplace flexibility. It looks to answer one seminal question for this dissertation: *How do employees experience and define what working flexibly means?* To do this, the term flexibility is examined and discussed, showing the degree of ambiguity in its meaning. The chapter uses two complementary theories on the employment relationship as a heuristic framework of analysis of interview data. One is Simon (1951) and Barnard's (1938) economic-administrative perspective; the other is the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995; Conway and Briner, 2005). The findings show that work-

place flexibility is a dynamic practice that employees enact as a combination of two dimensions: perceived flexibility as an inducement and perceived flexibility as a contribution. Instead of being stable and serving one party or the other (firm or employee), flexibility fluctuates in order to be perceived as reciprocal.

This chapter advances a perspective of flexibility based on the idea of exchange. This perspective is the underlying thread of the thesis and represents a key assumption for the analysis of the relationship between flexibility and well-being (c.f. chapters three and four) and of the evolution and negotiation of flexible work arrangements (c.f. chapter four).

Chapter three draws on the understanding of flexibility developed in chapter two to explore its relationship with well-being. Relying on one of the dominant theories in occupational health psychology, Karasek's (1979) job-demands-control model, it develops a framework linking employee perceptions of flexibility and well-being. The chapter looks to answer two complementary questions: *Are perceptions of flexible work related with employee well-being? Do different interpretations of flexibility have a different connection with well-being?* These questions are explored quantitatively by surveying employees. Results show that perceived flexibility is significantly related to well-being and that such relationship depends on how employees interpret flexibility.

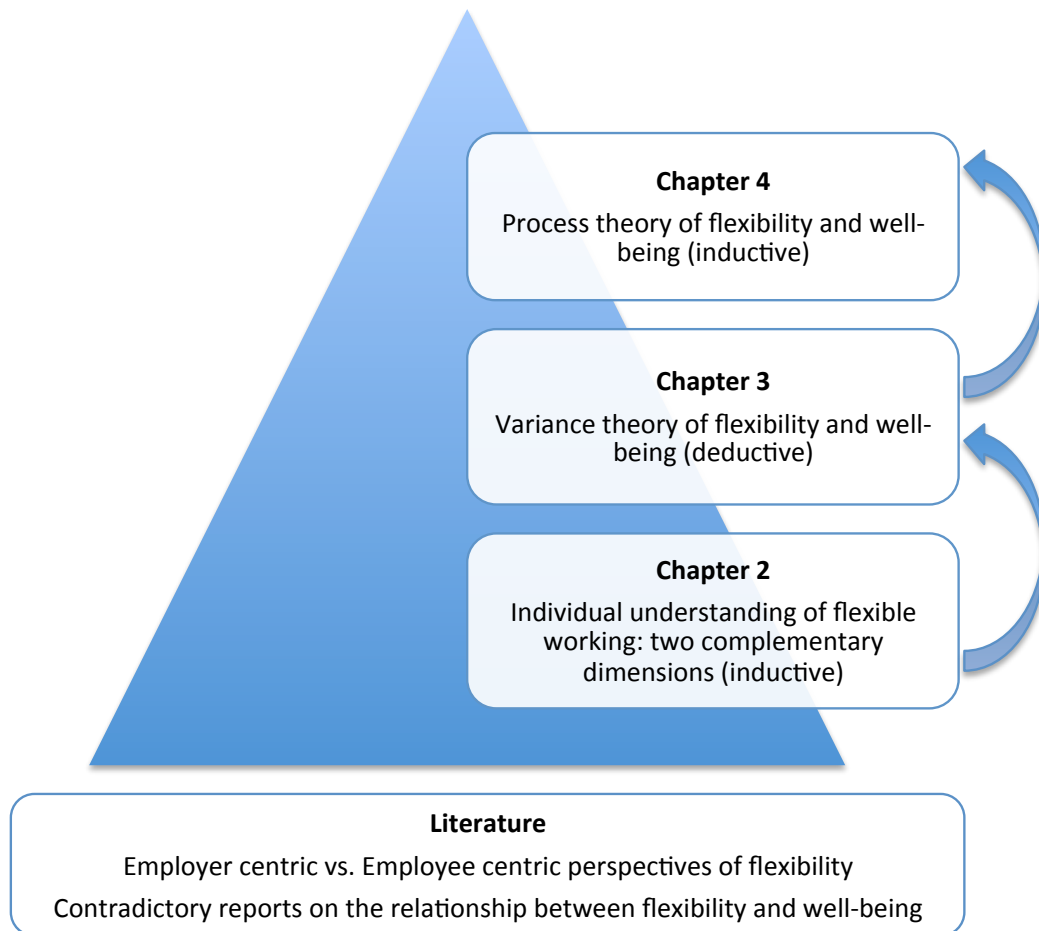
This chapter builds on the previous chapter by operationalizing the dimensions of flexibility identified by means of the qualitative study. Using Mohr's (1982) nomenclature, it presents a variance theory that explains the extent to which the dimensions of flexibility and their interaction are connected to well-being.

Chapter four elaborates on the findings of chapter three by developing a process theory (Mohr, 1982) of the flexibility-well-being relationship. It seeks to order variables in time and provide richer information on the succession of events that connect flexibility and well-being. It uses qualitative data to explore *how well-being is integrated into the continually shifting construction of the flexible work arrangement*. To explore continuous change, the chapter draws on the literature on psychological contract change and finds that flexibility evolves through two main mechanisms: adaptation and transformation. To explain how this evolution is connected to well-being, the propositions of

two occupational health theories (job-demand-control and effort-reward imbalance) are used as a starting point. Going beyond their conclusions that well-being is the result of an equilibrium, a process perspective is proposed showing the complex entanglement between flexibility and well-being. Rather than just a passive object, employee well-being emerges as a trigger to the re-evaluation of flexible work.

This chapter advances a pluralistic understanding of flexibility, which deployment and evolution relies on both tacit and formal negotiation processes between the employee and the firm. Moreover, it proposes a theory on the co-evolution of flexibility and well-being.

Figure 1.1 Overview of theoretical development per chapter



Chapter five concludes the thesis by highlighting the connection between the three empirical chapters, bringing together all their contributions and discussing how they conjointly advance the field of knowledge. This is shown in Figure 1.1 which depicts the

theoretical contributions of each of the chapter and how they build on one another. Chapter two proposes a different conception of flexibility based on the employees' perception of their experience and identifies the existence of two different dimensions to the concept (i.e. flexibility as an inducement and flexibility as a contribution). Chapter three uses this understanding to develop a variance theory of the relation between flexibility and well-being. It identifies that the two dimensions of flexibility defined in chapter two account for significant proportions of the variance of flexibility and are therefore seen as necessary and sufficient conditions for well-being (Mohr, 1982). Chapter four builds on the identification of this relation and theorises how it unfolds in time, proposing a process theory on flexibility and well-being (ibid). This overall construction relies on Langley's (1999; 693) call to develop theory that combines variables and events, because it is important to "understand the effect of events on the state of an entity (a variable) or to identify the effect of a contextual variable on the evolution of events". In addition, to contribute to the HRM literature, this chapter brings the discussion back to the unitarist vs. pluralist debate presented in chapter one. The concluding chapter ends with a description of the thesis' practical implications, limitations, and avenues for further work.

The following section provides an overview of the rationale behind the methodology employed in this thesis and the combination of inductive and deductive logics. In subsequent sections a detailed description of the research setting and an overview of the data collection methods employed to address the research questions are given.

1.6. Rationale behind the research design

This section focuses on explaining the rationale behind the chosen research methodology. Section 1.8 provides a detailed explanation of the data collection procedures. Each of the subsequent empirical chapters contains a further description of the analytical methods specific to the studies reported.

To answer the research questions, a longitudinal case study was conducted to investigate workplace flexibility and employee well-being in the unfolding context of a specific organisation. Case studies are a useful research tool to analyse a contemporary phe-

nomenon in its real context, when the frontier between the phenomenon and the context is not clear and where several sources of information are used (Hartley, 2004; Yin, 1989). Studying a case is considered an appropriate research technique for capturing knowledge from practitioners, investigating complex and new events and building theories in which the intangible and dynamic elements play a crucial role (Cepeda and Martín, 2005). The approach was designed as exemplified by previous case study research (Gratton et al., 1999; Robertson and Swan, 2003; Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004; Hailey et al., 2005; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007) to better understand the complex links between workplace flexibility and employee well-being.

Data were collected using a mixed methods design. Mixed methods research (MMR) involves the combined use of quantitative and qualitative methods in the same study. Creswell (2014) describes three basic types of MMR designs (concurrent, explanatory or exploratory) and three advanced ones (embedded, transformative and multi-phase). This dissertation takes a longitudinal multi-phase sequential approach. It goes back and forth between qualitative and quantitative data to build on each other, to address each of the research questions and to follow a common programme objective (ibid, 228).

The use of MMR relies on *methodological eclecticism* (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2012) and the belief that in combination, quantitative and qualitative approaches may provide complementary answers to research questions than each individual approach (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). The selection of MMR was driven by the research questions discussed in the previous section (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011), taking a pragmatic position.

Pragmatists believe that research approaches should be tailored to offer the best opportunity for answering questions (Onwueguzie and Leech, 2006). A pragmatist worldview bypasses the debate regarding the appropriateness of combining methods that are based on different paradigmatic assumptions (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Positivist theories specify relationships between concepts and generate hypotheses for research. Interpretive or constructivist theories assume emergent realities, indeterminacy and social life as processual (Charmaz, 2006). Pragmatism rejects a forced choice between positivism and constructivism (Creswell and Creswell, 2005; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003) and highlights the need to focus on using all available methods to answer a research question.

According to Johnson and Onwueguzie (2004; 17) “pragmatism (...) offers an immediate and useful middle position philosophically and methodologically; it offers a practical and outcome orientated method of inquiry (...) it offers a method for selecting methodological mixes that can help researchers better answer many of their research questions”.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010; 16) highlight two fundamental methodological principles of MMR: (1) it subscribes to the iterative, cyclical approach to research and (2) it eludes the either-or need to adhere to quantitative or qualitative methods at all levels of the research process.

MMR is characterised by a cyclical approach to research, which combines inductive and deductive logics in the same research inquiry (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). This enables researchers to generate theory and test hypotheses in a single study without compromising one for the other (Jogulu and Pansiri, 2011). According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2012; 781) “all mixed single studies or programs of inquiry go through the full cycle at least once, regardless of their starting point”. Different approaches for data collection and analysis can be added, mixed and integrated in different stages of the study, for which there is no standardised model (Creswell, 2014). Figure 1.2 (see page 50) summarises the different data collection and analysis phases carried out in this thesis, highlighting its fit with this cyclical approach.

This study was initiated with an inductive logic aiming to grasp the complexities of the flexible working phenomenon from individual employees’ perspectives. To do so, it relied on interviews and document analysis to generate theory on flexible working at the individual level (see chapter two). Having developed a working model, the study adopted a deductive logic to generate hypotheses based on existing theory and then tested such hypothesis by collecting quantitative data (see chapter three). However, additional questions emerged that required further theory generation, opening the door a reiteration of the research cycle and further qualitative data collection (see chapter 4).

Quantitative and qualitative methods have both strengths and weaknesses. In general, qualitative methods have been used to answer questions starting with *what*, *why* or *how* and quantitative methods have been used to find causal relationships or to answer ques-

tions like *how many* or *how often* (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). However, MMR provides an opportunity to address exploratory and confirmatory questions simultaneously (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Rather than forcing a choice, it can leverage the advantages of both methods to provide greater insight on a phenomenon (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Johnson and Turner, 2003). MMR allows for a wide range of divergent and complementary views, which enable a rich understanding of a phenomenon and its boundaries to develop substantive theory (Venkatesh et al., 2013; 25). Triangulating allows building more reliable knowledge (Jick, 1979).

Given that the research in this dissertation is interested in understanding workplace flexibility and assessing its impact on employees, it is useful to design the study using methods allowing both for theory building and theory testing. Flexible work arrangements evolve through repeated interactions between the employer and the employee (Rousseau, 1995; Simon, 1957) and well-being, rather than a fixed state, is a dynamic feature affected by a large number of variables that are difficult to apprehend (Bircher, 2005). At the heart of what is being studied here are the complex personal experiences of employees. MMR was a good fit for this study because it enabled the collection of complementary data and allowed examining these experiences from diverse angles. In addition, a case study approach provides the opportunity to study these human events in their natural setting (Yin, 1989).

1.7. Research setting

1.7.1 Management consulting

HRM studies take a unitarist stance in understanding flexible work arrangements as a managerially developed set of practices that are equally beneficial for employers and employees. Conversely, this thesis argues that adopting a pluralist approach to observe flexibility at work, that is assuming a bargaining process between the actors of the employment relationship, can shed light over the flexibility debate.

To view flexibility as a bargaining issue between stakeholders with competing interests, a case must be chosen where stakeholders are likely to have bargaining power. Management consultants are often considered the archetype of knowledge workers, having a

strong influence over their jobs, their careers, and the success of their firms (Fincham, 1999; Swart, 2008), the growth of which can be linked to the increasing reliance on flexibility and knowledge (Donnelly, 2008).

Knowledge workers hold jobs in which particular “emphasis on information processing, problem solving and the production of knowledge” is made (Benson and Brown, 2007; 122). Knowledge intensive firms (KIF) are hence defined as “companies where most work can be said to be of an intellectual nature and where well-educated, qualified employees form the major part of the work force” (Alvesson, 2000; 1101). These firms have distinctive features because of the people they employ and the work they do (Robertson and Swan, 2003). The study of HRM and the employment relationship within management consulting firms, as an example of knowledge intensive firms, has drawn particular attention (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2008; Robertson and Swan, 2003) because their nature poses a challenge to finding, organising, managing and retaining the best employees.

Acknowledging the fact that employee knowledge and abilities are the organisation’s major assets, makes the success of these firms dependent upon the uniqueness and the preservation of their human resources (Barney, 1995). KIFs face strong competition both in the output market (to obtain clients for its services) and the labour market (for attracting and retaining a very specific workforce) (Maister, 1993). Keeping employees loyal and committed is a critical management problem (Alvesson, 2000). For all these reasons, management consultants can be argued to hold bargaining power and to be capable of shaping their employment arrangements to a large extent. As such, management consulting constitutes a critical case for the study of flexibility as a constructed and bargained practice (Goldthorpe et al., 1967). If a negotiation process does not take place in this particular context, it is highly unlikely it will in other sectors and occupations.

In addition, the management consulting industry is particularly appealing for the study of flexibility and workplace well-being. A controversy appears to exist with regards to how flexibility is understood in consulting (Donnelly, 2015). Some claim that professional image and career progress in professional services such as consulting are associated to employees being highly flexible towards the firm (Smithson et al. 2004). The

boundaries of consulting jobs are often described as fuzzy and imprecise (Leonard and Sensiper, 1998), leaving a door open to eventual exploitation. For instance, there is a high level of discretion regarding working hours, making overtime a common practice (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2008). A certain normative acceptance of very high work intensity can be argued to exist (Gallie, 2005), through cultural control (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007; Karreman and Alvesson, 2004; Robertson and Swan, 2003).

At the same time, consultants appear to enjoy high levels of autonomy (Frenkel et al., 1999; Swart, 2008). As scarce assets, they can better manage their work arrangements because of their capacity to bargain. Indeed, some authors believe that knowledge work is characterised by more progressive forms of work that enable flexibility for employees (Perrons 2006; Huyer and Hafkin 2007).

This uncertain situation with regards to the nature of flexibility is likely to raise particular tensions for the individuals, setting an interesting scenario in which to develop a better understanding of the flexible working experience and in which to build theory on the connection between flexibility and well-being.

Moreover, according to Sturdy (2011; 527) “consultancy has not simply shaped the form and methods of organisational change (...) but management practice more generally”. Consulting firms are highly present in the business media (Sturdy et al., 2009) and have had an undeniable impact on their clients, their employees, and society (O’Mahoney, 2010). The study of HR policies within management consulting firms has drawn significant attention (Armbrüster, 2004), because of these firms’ capacity to spread their knowledge and practices on to their clients (O’Mahoney, 2010).

Management consulting firms seem to have complementary roles being both knowledge brokers and integrators, and standard setters (Canato and Giangreco; 2011). Indeed, management consultants are often characterised as change agents (Wright et al., 2012), being even described as disruptors of “dominant orders” (Clegg et al., 2004; 36) or essential actors to generate and distribute new knowledge (Thrift, 2005). They are able to encourage their clients to use existing solutions in an innovative manner (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997) but also to provide new knowledge and facilitate their client’s organisational learning (Bessant and Rush, 1995). However, “while normative conceptions of

management consultancy stress a discourse of creativity, customisation and novelty (...) standardisation is an important part of the practice of consultancy” (Wright et al., 2012; 654). As a result, management consultants are often responsible for the promotion and implementation of both new and isomorphic organisational practices. As such, the explanations of flexibility derived from a management consulting case, could be found applicable to other contexts that may have mimicked its practices.

In sum, consultants play an important role in the knowledge economy and contribute to the diffusion of work practices. They are not only the archetype of knowledge workers but, most importantly, they have potentially controversial flexible work arrangements and hold bargaining power to influence them. For these reasons, studying consultants can provide insights to better understand the meaning, evolution, and relationship of flexible working with well-being, that are potentially applicable to a number of other contexts.

1.7.2 The case: “Minerva” consulting

The present study has been conducted in the Spanish division of a worldwide consulting company. To preserve the confidentiality of the firm and its employees, the pseudonym “Minerva” is used throughout this thesis. While 90% of the businesses in Spain are small and tend to stick to a traditional way of working, making use of limited innovative practices (Flórez-Saborido et al., 1992), the foreign inward investment nurturing multinational companies in the early 90’s ensured that the management of people acquired greater importance. Spanish subsidiaries of international firms became essential for the implementation of new work practices (Rodriguez-Ruiz and Martinez-Lucio, 2010), some arguing that they have been “a strategic test bed for the implementation of innovative HR practices” for the wider multinational firm (Wächter et al., 2006; 255).

Moreover, Rodriguez Ruiz and Martinez Lucio (2010; 135) note that the current foremost objective of the Spanish HR function is to search for legitimacy. In this sense, it seems logical to believe that the human resource practices implemented in this cutting edge organisation (in general) and the flexibility arrangements set with its employees (in particular) should inspire other organisations and may be imitated and spread over this

and other industries in the near future, reinforcing for Spain the mimicking argument posited in the previous section.

A big organisation was selected because, according to Hyman and Summers (2004), organisations with more than 500 employees are more likely to have flexible working policies. Minerva Consulting has had these policies in place for some time, which is advisable to explore reciprocation between employers and employees (Haar and Spell, 2004).

It must be noted that the rich and vast amount of data this organisation has provided access to, makes this case appropriate for inductive theory generation. It has allowed for a rich description of the construction of flexible work arrangements and the processes that link them to employee well-being. It is “suitable for illuminating and extending relationship and logic among constructs” (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; 27). As pointed out by Sturdy and colleagues (2009) or Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) gaining access to management consulting firms is a difficult task. Most organisations are rather private about their workforce’s health and well-being, which makes this case an interesting opportunity for unusual research access.

Minerva has almost 200000 employees globally (approximately 10000 in Spain) and provides technological and business consultancy services. At the international level, its customers include large private businesses (75% of Fortune 500 companies are clients of this firm), and the government sector (at local, regional and national levels). In Spain, this firm provides services to over 1000 clients, including 80% of the organisations of the IBEX-35², and has been awarded a number of prizes over the years for its ability to innovate, and to generate and diffuse new ideas and knowledge. More precise details cannot be provided in order to protect the firm’s anonymity.

The Spanish branch of the corporation is divided into four groups and subsequent multiple divisions. Three of these groups are client facing and represent the core of the firm’s activity. The fourth group includes the support divisions and provides services to

² Iberia Index 35.

the other three. The studies in this dissertation focus on one of the client facing groups (labeled *management consulting*) and the support group (labeled *back office*).

The *management consulting* group represents the crux of the firm's business. It is one of the pillars of the organisation, and has been selected because it is the most characteristic. It represents the core of the organisation's competences and market position; hence this area should be particularly concerned with its human resources generating competitive advantage. This group helps its clients by providing the necessary knowledge and tools to confront strategic, competitive and organisational demands and changes. It contributes to the identification of key success factors and their development (Minerva Annual Report, 2010).

The *back office* group is responsible for efficiently managing and supporting the firm's business. It enables the organisation to provide the capabilities and expertise required to help clients become 'high-performance businesses' (Minerva Annual Report, 2010). This group has been selected because its responsibilities are somewhat standard for any organisation, therefore its functioning and characteristics should be more consistent and comparable across organisations³, even outside the consulting industry.

1.8. Overview of data collection procedures and timings

This section provides an overview of the methods employed to collect data in this thesis. It only focuses on general aspects because more specific details on these procedures and the analytical methods applied will be described in each of the subsequent empirical chapters.

In MMR "methods intentionally interact with one another during the course of the study [to] offer more varied and differentiated design possibilities" (Greene, 2007; 125). The empirical work for this dissertation involved different data collection phases connected through a longitudinal program of research (Creswell, 2014). I set out on the empirical data collection journey in January 2010 and collected my last data in December 2011. The collection process was structured along three phases, which included document

³ This may also allow for comparisons with other organisations in future studies.

analyses, semi-structured interviews, company meetings attendance, workplace observations and a randomly distributed survey. The following subsections describe the details of each data collection phase.

1.8.1. Phase 1

In this phase I collected qualitative data. I started familiarising myself with the organisation by using three parallel data collection methods: document analysis, interviews, and participant observation. First, I was provided with a vast amount of official written material including annual reports, HR policies and internal HR communication documents. I also consulted publicly available information such as the website and newspaper articles that mentioned the firm's HR practices (for example an interview with the HR Director). None of these documents can be quoted directly in order to preserve the firm's anonymity, but they were useful to understand the work that is done in this firm and the HR necessities that arise from it.

Second, I conducted 17 interviews including two HR managers (the director and a member of her team) and 15 employees from a range of areas and departments with different personal characteristics. I used purposive sampling to select participants who would provide diverse perspectives on the research questions. The focus of the first two interviews was to discuss the existing human resource practices, the issue of flexible working, and the firm's HR perspective of employee well-being. The other interviews looked to collect data on the employees' experiences on flexibility. Overall the interviewees were asked to describe their own particular, context-dependent experiences.

I also attended two meetings of the Employee Forum for the *back office* group. The objective was to get some contextual data on the influence employees have in the shaping of work practices. The Forum is an employee direct participation group focused on gathering employee experiences and improving working conditions. Given the absence of unions at Minerva, this is a very relevant employee voice mechanism. Participants are on the one hand volunteer employees and, on the other hand, HR representatives and upper management. The employees act as delegates of their colleagues by speaking to them informally and collecting concerns. Those concerns and potential solutions are then discussed during the employee forum meeting (approximately once a month) with

HR and upper management.

1.8.2. Phase 2

This phase focused on collecting quantitative data on the employees' perception of flexibility, different aspects of employee well-being and demographic variables. In preparation for the survey, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot used a convenience sample to help calculate the timing of the questionnaire and to assess comprehension of the questions.

The full and final questionnaire (see appendix C) was first sent in October 2010. To launch the survey, the HR director of the organisation sent the recruitment e-mails to a stratified random sample of 1800 employees within the two working groups of interest, informing them of the nature of the study and requesting their voluntary participation. The sample was stratified to ensure covering all departments within the chosen working groups, as well as professional categories and tenure. When the survey was distributed, the two workforces under examination had a total of 2935 employees. I received 628 valid responses, that is 34.88 % of the employees in the sample (21.4% of the population).

1.8.3. Phase 3

This final phase focused again on collecting qualitative data. The purpose here was twofold. First, I looked to refine the understanding of flexibility and its construction process, gained after the previous phases. Second, I gathered data on the employees' perception of their well-being and its connection to flexibility.

I conducted three rounds of interviews with a total of 24 employees in April 2011 (8 interviews), October-November 2011 (10 interviews) and December 2011 (6 interviews). To contact these employees I used a snowballing system, asking each person to provide the name of two or three colleagues preferably working in a different department and with different personal characteristics who could provide additional insights to the topic of research. The data gathering process finished when I reached the theoretical saturation point (Locke, 2001).

In addition, I held informal talks with more than 10 former employees of the firm. These talks were informal because they were opportunistic and, most of the time, unplanned. Most of these people were personal acquaintances who provided highly personal accounts of their experiences, the reasons why they quit the organisation and how they had experienced flexibility at Minerva. These talks contributed to diversifying the sample by adding some individuals who were unsuccessful at maintaining a good deal with the firm and chose to leave.

During this phase, I also spent two days at the two main offices of the firm in Madrid – one and a half day in the largest one (in terms of number of employees), and half a day in the headquarters. My intention with these observations was not to conduct a full ethnography but rather to have some context to place and better understand the experiences participants described in the semi-structured interviews. During those days, I held some of the above-described interviews and I spent time in the common areas (coffee break rooms, open office spaces, and corridors) observing ordinary work life at Minerva. While observing I also held conversations with some of the people present, to discuss their interpretation of some of the events I observed.

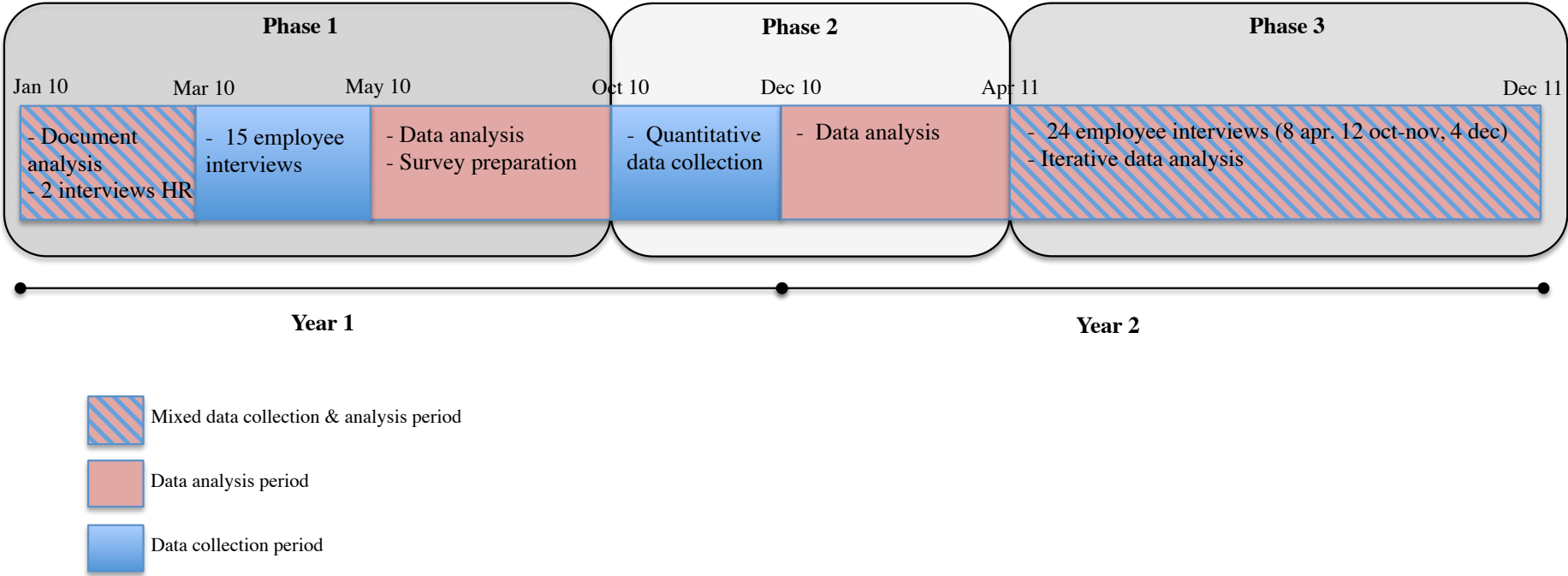
1.8.4. An overall picture of the research design

Figure 1.2 summarises this multi-phase MMR design and provides a timeline for the data collection. As proposed by the MMR method, this data collection approach was designed with a pragmatic view to answer the research questions. Table 1.1 summarises some features of each of the empirical chapters: the research questions, the research design and the collection phase from which the data are drawn.

Table 1.1. Research questions, design and data collection phase per chapter

Chapter	Research question / Purpose	Research design	Data collection phase
2	How do employees experience and define what working flexibly means?	QUAL	Phase 1
3	Are perceptions of flexible work related with employee well-being? Do different interpretations of flexibility have a different connection with well-being?	QUAN	Phase 2
4	How do flexible work arrangements evolve over time? Are flexibility and well-being interconnected processes? Do they play a role in each other's evolution over time?	QUAL	Phases 1 & 3

Figure 1.2. Multi-phase MMR design and data collection and analysis timeline



1.9. Summary and Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to introduce and contextualise the research presented in this thesis. In so doing, the general topic, the concepts, and their place within the literature have been set to identify the overarching goal of the dissertation: *better understanding the concept of flexible working and its relationship with employee well-being*. This large area of investigation has been divided into particular research questions that are each tackled in one empirical chapter. These chapters are presented as independent but complementary papers. They have their own literature review and research design yet build on one another to contribute towards the overall research question.

To analyse the phenomenon in its real context, a longitudinal case study investigation into flexibility and well-being was carried out in the Spanish division of one of the major international consulting firms worldwide. The rich and extensive amount of data provided by this organisation made this case particularly appealing for theory development. Taking a pragmatic position, a mixed methods research design was adopted, using the most suitable method to answer the questions in each chapter. Collecting different types of data from one single case provided an interesting opportunity to triangulate and find deeper and more holistic answers.

Drawing away from the mainstream unitarist approach of the HR literature, the studies presented in the following chapters rely on the perception of employees and how they come to understand their flexible work arrangements. In this sense, a more pluralist stance is taken, accepting the potential for conflict and negotiation, to see flexibility as a bargained and evolving agreement. In addition, this perspective allows seeing well-being as an inherently valuable outcome, rather than a mere instrument for greater performance. Adopting this point of view should make for a novel and relevant contribution to the HR literature.

Chapter 2. Understanding flexibility as an evolving phenomenon: The importance of employee experience

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2.0. Objective and overview

An overarching argument of this thesis is that flexibility does not exist as an accepted notion, but rather as a negotiated term with a complex nature, moving away from the mainstream HRM view dominated by a unitarist paradigm. This chapter focuses on one seminal question: How do employees experience and define what working flexibly means?

Regardless of large amounts of research, a conceptual examination of the term “flexibility” highlights that it is deceptively ambiguous. So far, the literature has looked at this concept from a bipolar perspective, either focusing on the organisation or the employees’ point of view, finding contradictory and opposed results. I argue that by viewing flexible work with an “either / or” lens, most studies fail to depict a comprehensive picture of the employee’s experience and that a process and holistic perspective ought to be developed.

To that end, this chapter analyses the interviews undertaken in the first phase of the data collection process. Two complementary theoretical perspectives on the employment relationship (ER) provide an overall orienting lens for approaching this analysis and constructing theory. The economic-administrative perspective highlights that a balance between inducements and contributions must exist for the ER to be sustainable. The psychological contract perspective posits that such balance relies on employee perceptions and expectations rather than on objective and measurable facts.

The findings indicate that workplace flexibility is not a static object that serves either the individual or the firm. Instead, employees enact the concept of flexibility as a combination of inducements and contributions, making flexibility a matter of exchange and bargaining. Perceived flexibility is the result of the interpretation of cumulative varying experiences. Two main mechanisms are identified as creating a sense of balance in this perception: workflow variance and fulfilled expectations. Understanding how flexible work arrangements evolve over time, what happens if balance is ruptured, and how flexibility is connected to well-being is beyond the scope of this chapter and will be tackled in subsequent chapters.

The chapter is organised into five sections. The first section reviews the literature on workplace flexibility to highlight the limitations of the current conceptualisation of the concept. The second section presents two theoretical perspectives on the employment relationship providing an orienting analytical lens. The third section describes the methods employed for this research and, in the fourth, the findings are interpreted and analysed. The last section provides a succinct discussion and some theoretical implications.

2.1. Bipolar perspectives on flexibility

Regardless widespread interest on the topic of flexibility, a systematic review of the literature indicates diverse and controversial outcomes. In this section, I will first argue that this is caused primarily by the varying understandings of flexibility present in different studies, specifically on the fact that some give the term an employer-oriented focus and others an employee-oriented one. Second, I will posit that this bipolar approach can lead to reductionist understandings of the notion of flexibility. By categorising it as a one-sided, stable, environmental attribute these approaches ignore the employees' role in the construction of flexible work arrangements.

Some studies have found evidence that flexibility leads to positive individual and organisational outcomes such as increased engagement and commitment (Richman et al. 2008; Sivatte and Guadamillas, 2013), better work-life balance (Hill et al., 2001), lower work-family conflict (Sivatte and Guadamillas, 2013), reduced exhaustion (Sardeshmukh et al., 2012) and increased productivity and firm-level performance (Bhattacharya et al., 2005), particularly for organisations employing larger proportions of women (Konrad & Mangel, 2000, Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000).

At the same time, other studies report negative and non-significant impacts. Caillier (2012) found that telework had no consistent impact on motivation in a U.S. Federal Government Agency. After conducting an extensive literature review on this issue, de Menezes and Kelliher (2011) state that studies fail to demonstrate a business case for the implementation of flexible work arrangements. Sardeshmukh and colleagues (2012) find telework to be negatively related to job engagement while Sivatte and Guadamillas

(2013) find no link between flexible work arrangements and employee retention. Van der Meer and Ringdal (2009) report a negative association between functional flexibility and wages and productivity per employee. In a comparative study in three clusters of countries, flexitime had a positive impact on job satisfaction for the Anglo-Saxon cluster, but not for the Latin-American and Asian clusters (Masuda et al., 2011).

Setting aside methodological limitations such as focusing on divergent levels of analysis, relying on cross-sectional data and using heterogeneous samples, conceptual issues also contribute to this lack of consistent findings (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). First, flexibility is sometimes studied as a bundle of practices (Sivatte and Gudamamillas, 2013), while other times its definition is restricted to a particular work arrangement such as telework (Maruyama and Tietze, 2012) or flexitime (Eldridge and Nisar, 2011). Second, and most importantly, the study of flexibility has been approached from dissimilar angles with contrasting theoretical assumptions. Some observe flexibility as a characteristic of competitive firms that adapt to their environment and suggest it helps achieve organisational competitiveness by putting pressure on employees (Blyton, 1992). Others assume employers and employees can equally benefit from flexibility and see it as an organisational must to increase performance and innovation (Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2009). For the growing literature on the relationship between work and personal life, flexibility is contemplated as a ladder towards balance and employee autonomy (Hill et al., 2008a). These contrasting perspectives conceptualise flexibility differently because they look at it from the angle of different actors: the firm or the employees.

Indeed, some definitions, adopt a “managerialist” nuance (Brewster et al. 1997; 134). They depict flexibility as one of the keys to success and survival in competitive and technologically challenging environment, as a tool to be deployed by the organisation to match its changing needs. In this context, flexibility is a practice or a set of practices that allows organisations to adapt to changes in their environment, with only minor regard to workers (Dastmalchian and Blyton, 2001, 1). For decades the flexibility debate was dominated by employer concerns, rather than by workforce needs (Blyton, 1992). More recently a growing stream of research, which exists mainly as a subset of the work-life balance literature, has looked at these practices from an employee-centred perspective (Russell et al., 2009; Pitt-Catsoupes and Matz-Costa, 2008; Grzywacz et

al., 2008). It argues that flexibility involves empowering employees and giving them control over certain aspects of their jobs (particularly working duration, timing and location). These studies normally use the term “flexible work arrangements” and conceptualise flexibility as “the degree to which workers are able to make choices to arrange core aspects of their professional lives, particularly regarding where, when, and for how long work is performed” (Hill et al., 2008a; 151). In sum, two separate accounts or understandings of flexibility coexist: in one the firm seeks flexibility to increase adaptability to market conditions and ultimately performance, in the other the workforce uses flexibility to achieve work-life balance or improve their wellbeing (Reilly, 1998).

For example, generally speaking temporal flexibility enables adapting working hours within the organisation (Grenier et al., 1997) both in terms of duration (ability to enlarge or reduce working hours on the basis of established daily, weekly or annual minimums and maximums) and timing (possibility to change when, during the day or the week, work is executed) (Berg et al., 2004). However, it has been defined alternatively as a practice that allows employers to arrange work patterns to adapt to demand fluctuation and as a practice that enables workers to adapt their schedule to their personal requirements (Blyton, 1992; 28). Even if the practice stays the same on the surface (variable work hours) the orientation towards the employer or the employee dramatically changes the attributes and characteristics ascribed to the term “flexibility”.

The literature is bipolar because most research considers only one of these two perspectives, which results in observing flexibility as a continuum (varying from low to high), rather than as a complex experience. This results in a limited framework when it comes to analysing the effects of flexibility on employee outcomes. There is still much to be learnt about employees’ actual perceptions of flexible work and whether they understand flexibility as an employee or a firm oriented practice, as both or as neither. According to Roehling, Cavanaugh, Moynihan and Boswell (2000; 313) reciprocal flexibility is a key element of new employment arrangements. After analysing the content of academic and practitioner literature on the changes the employment relationship is undergoing, they conclude that “a desire for flexibility can be found on both sides of the employment relationship”. These authors advocate that flexibility is best viewed as a “two-way street” (Ibid, 313). However, grounded examinations of employees’ experi-

ences are necessary to understand how this street is constructed and how people move around it.

Authors like Kerkhofs et al. (2008) have partly addressed the duality of flexibility at a macro level. Using data from the European Establishment Survey of Working Time, they discern six flexibility profiles characterised by different bundles of flexible working practices. Those profiles are built by categorising the level of flexibility (high, intermediate and low), and the content of the practices implemented by the firms (worker oriented or firm oriented). Their analytical procedure goes in line with Fleetwood's (2007; 387) argument that "some flexible working practices are employee friendly and sought by employees (...) [whereas] other practices are employer friendly sought by employers, primarily to pursue profit".

However, these studies categorise flexibility practices as stable and determined objects, which are either "flexible" or "not flexible", either "for the employee" or "of the employee". They disregard the employees' role in the making and the enacting of these practices on a continuous basis. Because employees are full-fledged actors of flexible working practices they must have the capacity to alter the meaning of such practices. Their understanding, their experience, their perception of flexibility are essential to portray a holistic picture of flexible work. Flexibility is not just an environmental attribute but, most importantly, "a phenomenological experience" (Grzywacz et al. 2008; 209). Elements of context such as strategic orientation behind the design and implementation of the practices affect the outcomes they bring about (Lee and DeVoe; 2012). By sorting each practice as *either / or* the literature imposes a narrow view of a complicated phenomenon.

This study advances the existing literature in two ways. First, by delving into the employees' multifaceted experience of flexible work, it explores and develops a better understanding of the complex realities in play. How are the dual, seemingly contradictory images of flexibility lived, processed and integrated by individuals? Second, it explores flexibility as an evolving phenomenon and rejects the idea that it is a stable delimited object with a clear-cut orientation and interpretation. How do unfolding events in employees' everyday life contribute to the construction of workplace flexibility?

2.2. Theoretical frame

Two complementary frameworks in the employment relations and human resource management literatures inform this study: the theories of the employment relationship (Simon, 1957; Barnard, 1938) and of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995; Conway and Briner, 2005). Both frameworks are aligned with pluralism (Fox, 1974) in the sense that they understand that employer and employee interests are not equal. Instead, they help see the employment relationship as a bargain, a balance between inducements and contributions.

2.2.1. An economic-administrative perspective

Simon's (1951) "Formal theory of the employment relationship" builds upon economic and administrative theories to analyse the relationship between employees and organisations. According to Simon, an employment relationship exists whenever an employee accepts the authority of their employer in shaping their behaviour in return for the employer's agreement to pay the employee a stated wage. This agreement is legally bound by a labour contract.

However, no employment contract can specify the exact list of tasks to be carried out or the amount of effort to be exerted; they have gaps (Edwards, 1986; Guest, 1998). For this reason employment contracts are sometimes labelled as incomplete or unspecified. The detailed terms of the contract cannot be clearly set out because of the complexity of the work process and the unpredictability of certain key variables (Hodgson, 1999). Managers issue their specific requests during the course of the relationship, after the contract is negotiated (Simon, 1951). Actually, the contract's incomplete and therefore flexible nature is what drives firms to build employment relationships: they choose to hire employees when they are unable to properly predict the amount or characteristics of the work to be done (ibid). Because rationality is bounded, when tasks are uncertain, complex or dependent on complex organisational circumstances, not having to codify work obligations precisely makes firms more adaptable and efficient than markets (Williamson, 1975). Schmid (2010; 23) argues that employers are "interested in postponing decisions as a kind of liquidity preference". To him, workforce liquidity involves defer-

ring decisions with regards to working times and delaying to choose the responsibilities or functions employees should accomplish. In that sense, liquidity is very close to the organisation-centred view of flexibility discussed in section 1.

A central feature of the employment relationship is control. Managers legitimately exercise control on the basis of the employment contract and other aspects of the law (Spooner and Haidar, 2006). According to Simon (1957), employees place their time and effort at the disposal of managers for them to use as they see fit. As a result, specific employment-related agreements tend to be made on an ad hoc, on-going and often informal basis between managers and employees (Cooke et al., 2004). For employees, entering an employment relationship involves accepting an authority relation with their organisation. In this relation, the employee (subordinate) accepts to behave as guided by the employer's (superior) decisions (Simon, 1957).

Indeed, Simon argues that employees enter the employment relationship if they are not concerned with the precise duties that will be asked of them. However, this does not mean that employees give managers *carte blanche* to direct their work: they agree to be managed within certain limits. Indeed, setting the limits to what management can ask is a major issue, since no individual would agree to work as an employee otherwise (Marsden, 1999). These limits, labelled "area of acceptance" (Simon, 1951), or zone of indifference (Barnard, 1938) will determine the firm's adaptability and responsiveness to environmental changes and market requirements. They may relate to the duties and responsibilities managers assign to employees, but also to the prioritisation of tasks or the variation in working time and location to respond to managerial needs (Marsden, 2007). The boundaries of the area of acceptance will depend on the characteristics and the quantity of incentives the organisation offers its employees (Simon, 1957), and the existing balance between such incentives and expected contributions.

Following on the idea that the employment relationship is a cooperative system (Barnard, 1938), administrative theory posits that organisational equilibrium is achieved through the combination of inducements and contributions (March and Simon, 1958; Simon, 1957). Such equilibrium discourages opportunistic action by both employees and organisations (Williamson, 1975).

Behind the employee's will to cooperate is the elaborate balance of employee perceived incentives and demands. For Simon (*ibid*), an individual's will to belong to an organisation depends on their perception that such relationship contributes to their personal ambitions. According to Barnard (1938, 835) "willingness to cooperate is the net effect, first of the inducements to do so in conjunction with the sacrifices involved, and then in comparison with the practically available net satisfaction afforded by alternatives." Both authors argue that equilibrium between the quantity and kinds of contributions and inducements is essential for the organisation to survive and prosper. In other words, they propose that employees conduct a cost/benefit analysis to decide whether to stay in the employment relationship: the benefits of accepting the authority relation have to outweigh the costs for the relationship to be sustainable (Mitchell and Scott, 1988).

March and Simon (1958; 85) assume participants in organisations make certain contributions or "payments to the organisation". Contributions expected from employees can be organised as in-role and extra-role behaviours/performance. In-role performance includes basic expectations such as minimal work absenteeism and satisfactory performance in executing job tasks (*ibid*). Extra-role performance behaviours (or organisational citizenship behaviours) normally fall outside of formal job requirements but are nonetheless expected from the employee because they contribute to a better functioning of the organisation (Bateman and Organ, 1983). Of course, defining what extra-role performance is in a Tayloristic system—characterised by narrow and specific jobs—is much more straightforward than in a knowledge intensive firm. In general, behaviours such as accepting managerial prerogative without complaints, collaborating with co-workers or conserving organisational resources are labelled as extra-role because they are commonly expected but rarely specified contributions. Accepting to be flexible to adapt to changing environmental circumstances and being available to work whenever and wherever necessary is an increasingly extended but rarely specified managerial expectation (Roehling et al., 2000).

Kalleberg and Reve (1993; 1113) define incentives as "job rewards available to workers". These rewards are primarily meant to provide workers with a stream of income (wages) that is stable (through job security) and are sometimes designed to elicit individual performance (for example profit-sharing or other performance related pay schemes). They can also include social, intrinsic and intangible elements (meaningful

inherently rewarding work, voice, personal development, status, career opportunities, work life balance, etc.) Given the latest changes in workforce demographics and work values, offering employees flexibility to meet their personal and work goals simultaneously, is nowadays a very relevant incentive (Roehling et al., 2000). Balanced levels of inducements should make the employee loyal to the employer and avoid they exit opportunistically (Hirschman, 1970).

These inducements and contributions are not formally spelt out in detail. Employment contracts incorporate some detail of what is explicitly required, for instance, certain aspects of in-role performance are normally present in the contract and extrinsic rewards are at least partially specified. However, many things can be “legitimately expected or fulfilled by the contracting parties” (Cooke et al., 2004; 280) that are not explicitly written in the contract. It is the individual’s area of acceptance that determines the boundaries of that which is accepted as reasonable and valid and that which is not.

2.2.2. Psychological contracts

The literature on psychological contracts (e.g. Rousseau, 1995, Conway and Briner, 2005) builds upon reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and considers the employment relationship as a bundle of mutual obligations as perceived by the employee that elicit reciprocation (Seeck and Parzefall, 2008). The psychological contract encompasses the employee’s “individual beliefs, shaped by the organisation, regarding terms of an exchange agreement (...) [and] is potentially idiosyncratic and unique to each person who agrees to it ” (Rousseau, 1995; 9-10). It can be characterised as the employee’s mental score of the employment relationship; it is the mechanism that helps them keep track of their contributions to their organisation and the organisation’s inducements to them (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994). Psychological contracts are restricted to individuals; organisations cannot have a psychological contract of their own and are merely the frame within which employees form theirs (Rousseau, 1989).

Guest (1998) states that in the context of the recent changes in the employment relationship (the individualising of negotiations to the detriment of union representation and collective bargaining; the growing number of idiosyncratic deals and potential power inequalities), the “psychological contract provides a potentially useful framework

around which to organise thinking and research” (p. 663) because it contemplates the vast choice and complexity of contracts in organisations. Psychological contracts have been described as a particularly useful perspective to analyse how highly skilled flexible workers make sense of their work arrangements and understand their relationship with their employer (Wilkins et al., 2011).

Rather than a clear theory, the psychological contract is a useful explanatory framework to address questions pertaining to expectations and perceptions of the employment relationship (Kalleberg and Rognes, 2000). Most inducements and contributions are not clearly written and spelt-out, which means that there is room for employees to have different understandings regarding HR practices and the terms of the employment relationship (Boon et al., 2011; Wright and Nishii, 2007).

Nevertheless, employees’ psychological contract is dependent on their social context. Members of the same organisation or social group tend to incorporate group norms to their psychological contract. For example Hill and Trist (1955) show that depending on how much absenteeism and what types of absences are tolerated by the employer, a different culture emerges that affects the employees’ behaviour and understanding of their work relationship. Brown (1973) found that errors of omission by management in enforcing work rules made workplace norms evolve, because employees incorporate what has been allowed to one colleague into their legitimate expectations.

Building upon social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the psychological contract perspective suggests that tenure and the development phase of the employment relationship impact the cognitive construction of the contract. “Long established relationship partners are more likely to have developed trust and less likely to look out for the “tit-for-tat”, or direct, payoff for each exchange transfer” (Jepsen and Rodwell, 2010; 21). These authors argue that instead, individuals in long term relationships look at the overall picture to evaluate balance rather than at one specific event. In this sense, the interpretations of events and the perception and construction of balanced exchanges is time dependent.

Employees continuously perceive and process messages sent by the organisation, pertaining to obligations they owe their employer and to the incentives they will receive in

return for fulfilling these obligations (Tietze and Nadin, 2011; 319). This study's interest in the psychological contract resides in this dynamic essence (Schein, 1980). Individuals develop their psychological contracts through the interaction with their organisation (Rousseau and McLean Parks, 1993; Westwood et al, 2001), which means the contracts are in a constant state of becoming. They form and evolve through the occurrence of unfolding events and the interpretation of such events. This intrinsic "ongoingness" is a distinctive and essential part of their nature (Conway and Briner, 2005; 32). The psychological contract thus provides a rich framework to analyse flexible working arrangements as fluctuating and on-going individual experiences.

2.3. Methods

This chapter draws on the data gathered from 17 semi-structured interviews conducted with Minerva employees (c.f. Table 2.1), in phase one of the case study (c.f. chapter one, section 1.8). I first interviewed the HR Director and a member of her team. The interviews were open-ended but, to get the conversation flowing, they started with a questionnaire the interviewees had received in advance. This questionnaire included general questions on the firms' HR policies, its perception of human capital, the challenges faced by the HR team and the concern for employee well-being. These interviews were the longest I held (four hours and two hours and a half, respectively) and focused on discussing the firm's human resource practices, specifically the issue of flexible working and HR's perspective of employee well-being.

Then, I conducted fifteen interviews with employees. These were semi-structured and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. They looked to collect data on the employees' experiences of workplace flexibility and their perceptions of well-being. A list of open questions was tailored to have a starting point (see appendix 1) but each interview followed a fairly different path depending on the interviewee's experiences. By using open questions, informants were invited to give spontaneous descriptions of their experience of flexible working that were only minimally influenced by the researchers' preconceptions (Kvale, 1996). These descriptions reveal thoughts, feelings, and actions that are sometimes hidden in ordinary discourse (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, spontaneous statements made it possible to go beyond both the researcher's expectations and the reasoning of

informants. The parts of the interviews that are reported on in this chapter, focus on three main questions:

1. What does flexible work mean to you?
2. What is your experience of flexible work in this firm?
3. How would you characterise it?

To mitigate the bias inherent to interview data, Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007; 28) suggest using “informants who view the focal phenomenon from diverse perspectives”. Following their advice I interviewed employees from different functional areas, teams and hierarchical categories in the two selected working groups (*management consulting* and *back office*). In addition, the personal characteristics of the participants (gender, marital status, parenthood, etc.) differed. This diverse sample allowed me to hear different views on the construction of flexible working, as these individuals had varying experiences and backgrounds.

Given the necessity to consider context for this research and the exploratory nature of the study, I used purposive sampling to select participants that would have valuable and diverse appreciations on the phenomenon under investigation. The HR director provided a preliminary list of potential participants, then, using snowball sampling, each interviewee gave the names of at least three colleagues that could provide new and possibly contradicting insights to the research. To mitigate self-selection bias and avoid having solely participants that were highly interested in the research, I requested my interviewees to send an introductory e-mail to these colleagues, asking them to participate in my study. This helped achieve a very high rate of positive responses. Out of all the potential participants, I chose to interview people considered more likely to ensure that emerging issues of interest were further explored.

Table 2.1. Characteristics of participants

ID	Work group (department)	Rank	Gender
1	Back office (HR)	Senior Executive	F
2	Back office (HR)	Manager	F
3	Management consulting	Senior Manager	M
4	Management consulting	Analyst	M
5	Back office (IT)	Manager	M
6	Management consulting	Specialist	M
7	Back office (Finance)	Specialist	F
8	Management consulting	Specialist	M
9	Back office (Finance)	Analyst	M
10	Consultant	Senior Manager	F
11	Back office (Services)	Specialist	F
12	Management consulting	Senior Manager	F
13	Back office (Research)	Specialist	M
14	Management consulting	Analyst	F
15	Management consulting	Senior Manager	F
16	Back office (Finance)	Manager	F
17	Management consulting	Manager	F

At the beginning of each interview I introduced myself and guaranteed personal anonymity. I also explained the aim of my research and assured the participants that I had no interest in making judgments about the firms' management of employee well-being. This approach was well accepted by the participants, to the extent that the managerial interviewees seemed to be forthcoming about the challenges involved in serving clients while attending to employees' needs, and participants in lower categories shared their experiences with regards to flexibility and well-being very naturally.

The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. They all took place in Spanish. To be as accurate as possible in the translation of the quotes that are reported in this chapter, I asked two people (a native English speaker with fluent Spanish and a native Spanish speaker with fluent English) to review the translations.

Since the aim was to create theory from empirical evidence through inductive analysis, these data were coded following some of the recommendations of grounded theory methods (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). According to Glaser (1978) the systematic application of certain coding techniques allows the generation of valid theory. The use of literature in conjunction with these techniques is highly controversial (Charmaz, 2006).

Some authors believe that researchers must approach the field without any theoretical foundations or preconceived hypotheses in order to be free of prejudgments (Glasser, 1978). Others suggest developing a preliminary theoretical framework, in order to avoid a confusing excess of unconnected data (Yin, 1989; Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

The coding process was supported by the use of the qualitative data management software package QSR NVivo. In my analysis, I tried to remain open to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities could be discerned in the data (Charmaz, 2006; 47). To make sense of the distinct accounts of flexibility, I followed an open coding logic and used codes reflecting action (e.g. working from different premises; taking time off). I used mostly the gerund form of verbs (e.g. choosing, working, being), which are helpful for detecting processes and grounding analysis in the participants' perspectives (Charmaz, 2006; 49). In total, 11 codes reflecting different accounts of the flexible working experience emerged. These codes were then synthesised into themes, explaining larger portions of data.

It must be acknowledged that keeping initial coding open-ended does not mean that the researcher holds no prior ideas and skills (Dey, 1999). The theories on the employment relationship informed the analysis but were not imposed on the data *a priori*. They were used to construct dimensions and themes after the initial open-coding process was complete. In that sense I followed Dey's (1993) middle-range approach to coding: in a first-step the data suggested the open codes; when linking those into larger categories or themes, such themes were derived from both the data and the literature.

Taking the initial open code "working time" as an example, the following account exemplifies the codification process I went through. Time at work was one of the core ideas that interviewees discussed when asked about the meaning of flexibility. It was therefore a major aspect of the grounded theory analysis. At first, participants' accounts were coded as "working time", for example, when interviewee 12 said: "*At 10pm I am talking with the US. No one likes to work from 10pm to midnight but I do the math and I say even if I work at 10pm it gives me the flexibility to leave the office at 6pm because I have my own things to do or pick up my son*". As the coding progressed I realized the "working time" code had to be split into a number of different codes to really capture the full meaning of the interviewees' experiences. In that sense, the previous quote was

recoded into two separate codes: “working overtime” (“*At 10pm I am talking to the US*”) and “autonomy over work hours” (“*if I work at 10pm it gives me the flexibility to leave the office at 6pm because I have my own things to do...*”).

At the same time with this analysis, relations between codes started emerging. In this particular case there seemed to be an exchange between overtime work and autonomy over work hours. This coding refining process, lead to the development of 6 codes related to working time, namely, working overtime, adapting to changes in schedule, being available, changing start and finish work hours, autonomy over work hours, and taking time off (for specific examples of verbatim quotes for each of these codes, see *Flexibility as an inducement*

In parallel, participants also provided examples of flexibility that is offered to them. In that sense, they described flexibility as an inducement. It is a tool enabling better work-life balance and granting agency to manage work responsibilities autonomously. Employees enact flexibility by making choices related to where and when they work. Time related choices comprise being able to change start and finish work hours, deciding on work hours autonomously and on when to take time off. Location related choices encompass being able to work from home when desired and choosing from where to work independently. Illustrative quotes for each of these codes can be found in Table 2.3.

Table 2.2. Flexibility as a contribution: open codes and quote samples and Table 2.3). While all these codes were related to the idea of time at work, they reflected highly different experiences of flexibility. The first three reflected experiences of flexibility that employees understood as demands that the firm placed upon them. Conversely, the last three were impressions of choices around working time made by employees. As such, these six open codes were organised into two dimensions: time demands and time choices.

These grounded codes were at the beginning difficult to make sense of because they showed a picture inconsistent with accounts of flexibility in the literature. Flexibility was not described as a firm oriented or an employee oriented practice exclusively but rather, as a dual experience and an exchange. Drawing from the theory of the employment relationship and its premise that such relationship consist of an exchange of inducements and contributions, allowed to frame and organise the open codes and the dimensions into two larger themes: flexibility as a contribution and flexibility as an inducement. Figure 2.1 provides a visual summary of this coding process.

2.4. Analysis

Flexibility is a major element of the employee-organisation relationship in Minerva. Both HR and individual respondents underlined the role it plays in initiating and maintaining the employment relationship. An HR manager acknowledged that flexibility is one of the features that is monitored and systematically looked for in the recruitment and selection process: *“This is a company that looks for flexible people. It is a necessity we have. We try to recruit people who accept changes in working hours and patterns, so that we can adapt to clients, and organisational and market changes”* (E2). Similarly, a consultant linked flexibility to the organisation’s identity by portraying it as being *“in the firm’s DNA”* and highlighting that *“all employees are familiar with flexible work”* (E10). This means that it is present in their everyday jobs as a core way of doing business.

However, the precise content of flexible work seems to be elusive and volatile. The next sections report on how employees at Minerva perceive flexibility in order to understand

what “being flexible” and “working flexibly” mean.

2.4.1. Understanding flexibility

The questions “what is your experience of flexibility?” and “what does working flexibly mean to you?” prompted very different types of answers, that illustrate the ambiguity and slipperiness of the term “flexibility”: each individual seemed to have a somewhat unique understanding of it.

First of all, workplace flexibility is not a compilation of straightforward practices with a definite beneficiary. While some participants recalled isolated policies like reduced work hours for mothers⁴, flexible hours to start and finish work or home-based work, most interviewees were not able to name specific flexible working options occurring in the organisation. However, they all had much to say on the issue of flexible work, which they depicted as an inherent part of Minerva employees’ work-life. For example, I held the following conversation with a senior manager:

“Researcher: What does flexible working mean in Minerva?”

E3: (...) If you want a complete inventory you need to ask human resources because the truth is we get a thousand e-mails and I don’t know anymore what things we have and what things we don’t.

Researcher: What I want is to talk about your day-to-day experience, more than about what HR says. What does flexible working mean to you? How do you experience it?

E3: Let’s see, in that case, the concept of flexibility from my point of view, I think there is an explicit flexibility, that is those HR practices, and there is another flexibility which is implicit and that we live through every day in the way we work.”

From his point of view, flexibility is quite abstract and hard to grasp. The senior manager used the word “implicit” to depict how flexibility is instilled into his work experience. It is intertwined with job characteristics and difficult to present as a defined ob-

⁴ This is a legal right in Spain available to all parents whose children are under 8. It is relevant to note that although the practice is available to all parents (male and female), none of the interviewees mentioned this practice for fathers. In fact, the HR team said that no father has applied for it, indicating that childcare is still primarily a female prerogative in Spain.

ject. His words are a typical example of how participants explained flexibility. Rather than describing distinct practices that are benefited from or not, or that are flexible or not flexible, flexibility is depicted as a multifaceted experience with a recurrently swinging orientation: sometimes it contributes towards the functioning of the organisation; other times it allows employees to make choices. Accounts of flexible working can therefore be structured according to their input into the employment relationship: as a contribution or as an inducement.

Figure 2.1 illustrates how the findings were organised and provides a visual summary of my interpretation of what flexible working means for Minerva employees. The following subsections explain the figure in detail.

Flexibility as a contribution

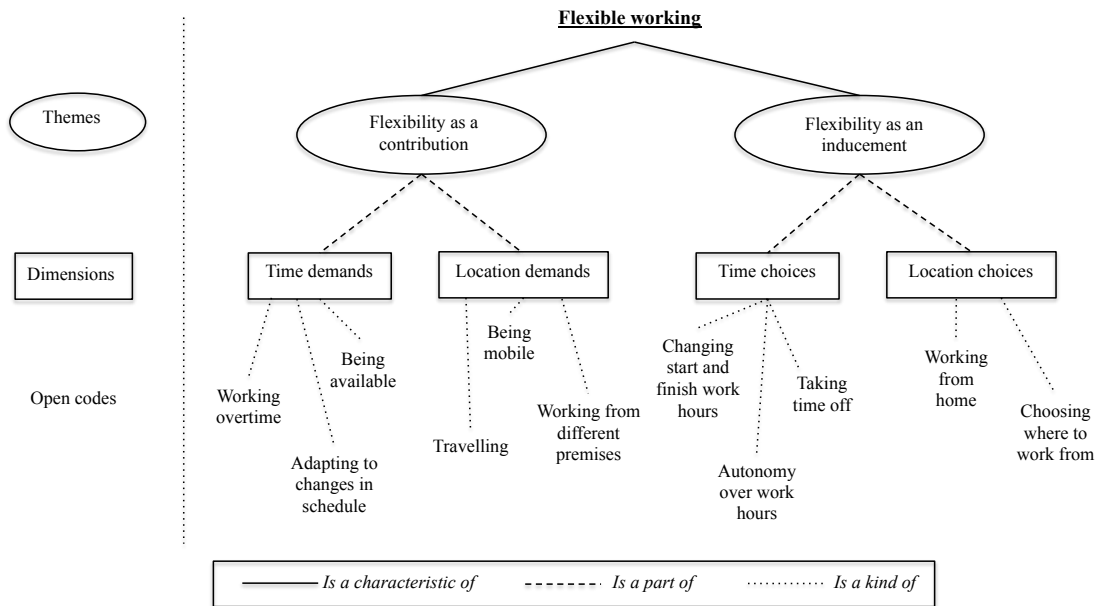
Participants explained that the organisation needs flexibility for its functioning. Their accounts illustrate how they understand flexibility as a contribution they are expected to provide. It can take the form of time related demands which include experiences such as staying at work longer than official working hours, being constantly accessible and available to attend to work issues and adapting to recurrent changes in the way work is organised. It can also take the form of regular business travelling, itinerant workplaces and mobility to relocate upon request, which can be labelled as location related demands. To illustrate these understandings concisely, representative examples of quotes for each of these understandings of flexibility are provided in

Flexibility as an inducement

In parallel, participants also provided examples of flexibility that is offered to them. In that sense, they described flexibility as an inducement. It is a tool enabling better work-life balance and granting agency to manage work responsibilities autonomously. Employees enact flexibility by making choices related to where and when they work. Time related choices comprise being able to change start and finish work hours, deciding on work hours autonomously and on when to take time off. Location related choices encompass being able to work from home when desired and choosing from where to work independently. Illustrative quotes for each of these codes can be found in Table 2.3.

Table 2.2.

Figure 2.1. Integrative diagram on the meaning of flexible working for Minerva employees



Flexibility as an inducement

In parallel, participants also provided examples of flexibility that is offered to them. In that sense, they described flexibility as an inducement. It is a tool enabling better work-life balance and granting agency to manage work responsibilities autonomously. Employees enact flexibility by making choices related to where and when they work. Time related choices comprise being able to change start and finish work hours, deciding on work hours autonomously and on when to take time off. Location related choices encompass being able to work from home when desired and choosing from where to work independently. Illustrative quotes for each of these codes can be found in Table 2.3.

Table 2.2. Flexibility as a contribution: open codes and quote samples

Dimension: Time related demands	
Open code	Verbatim quotes
Working overtime ⁵	<i>"We have working time flexibility because really this is a consulting firm, we work a lot (...) we work extra hours, outside of regular working time and that sort of thing" (E7).</i>
	<i>"Flexibility sometimes enables overtime. I come in at 8 to leave early but at the end I don't leave early. The fact of having a flexible schedule can intensify the work day" (E10).</i>
	<i>"The most evident aspect is longer workdays" (E8).</i>
Being constantly available	<i>"To have flexibility means to be ready to jump. I remember giving birth to my daughters and hiring a live-in maid and coming to work after 3 months because I was asked to for x or y circumstances and I came on the spot" (E15)</i>
	<i>"If there is a meeting at 10pm with Americans that is going to take 2 hours, I have to do it, wherever I am, even if I am on vacation". (E17)</i>
	<i>"I work with people in very different locations. For Mexico and Brazil I need to be there in the evening, then South Africa in the mornings. It's a sort of always on call thing" (E6)</i>
Adapting to changes in schedule	<i>"We deal with a lot of last minute things and you need to adapt. Client is first. Flexibility is there to serve him: if there are changes you absorb them, reconfigure and continue. I may come in thinking that I'll do X in the morning, then meet a colleague for lunch then work until 8. But at 10 something happens so I have to skip lunch, meet my colleague at 7 then work from home until late." (E13)</i>
	<i>"We can keep to the work timetable and leave on time unless something comes up. The thing is something comes up very often" (E10)</i>
Dimension: Location related demands	
Open code	Verbatim quotes
Travelling	<i>"The firm does not demand a lot of flexibility from me. You have to realise that I don't have to travel. I travel only occasionally. The last trip I had to take was over a year ago, for 4 or 5 days" (E11)</i>
	<i>"To me what requires more flexibility are trips. So far this month I've been on 14 flights". (E3)</i>
Working from different premises	<i>"The firm expects me to serve the client and work wherever the client thinks necessary. This means that I rarely work in the same office for more than a couple of months. (E4)</i>
	<i>"Flexibility also has a location thing, you know. Being able to work wherever and however. I have worked from home, in planes, trains, airports, public libraries, cafés, a bench at my daughter's school... I think that is flexibility as well" (E3)</i>
Being mobile	<i>"From one day to the next I was sent to South America for three months. No questions asked, no time to plan. My understanding of flexibility is basically be ready to get on a plane anytime" (E16)</i>
	<i>"A problem that a lot of people have with this job is mobility. You have to have mobility. Being flexible is not simply pushing yourself harder than anyone else and slaving at the desk until 11pm. Many times, it requires following your client wherever they go. For example I was in Chile for a while and that's not something everybody copes with well because with families and mortgages and all of that, it's not easy at all" (E12)</i>

⁵ Although many interviewees did not explicitly say so, their accounts of overtime work indicate that is it unpaid.

Table 2.3. Flexibility as an inducement: open codes and quote samples

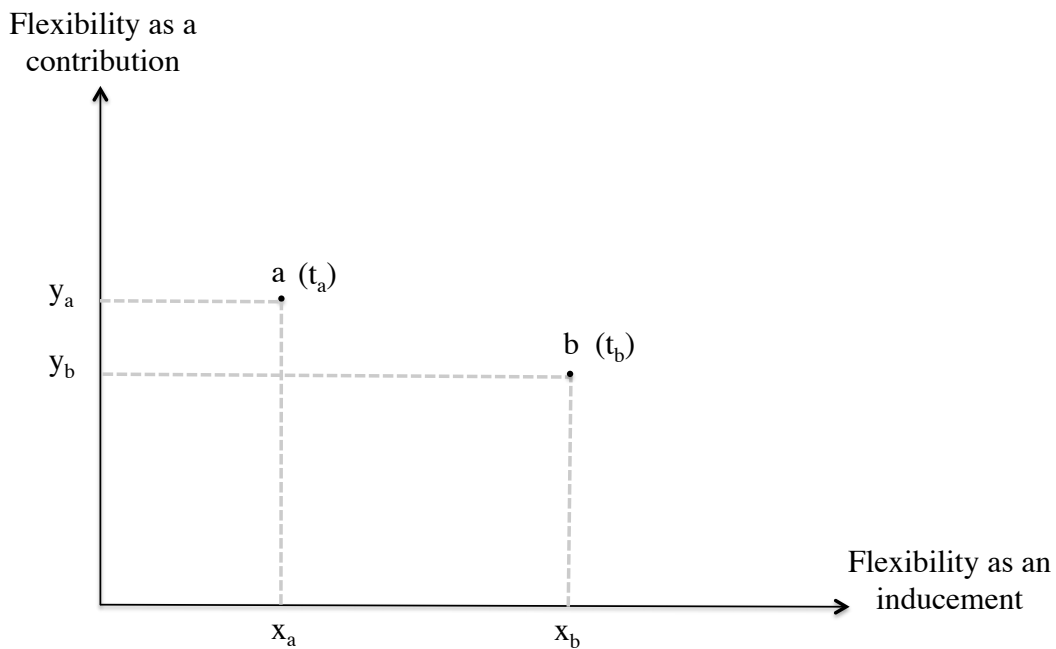
Dimension: Time choices	
Open code	Verbatim quotes
Changing start and finish work hours	<i>“One of the things that we have is flexible working time, which means that we can chose when to start work, between 8 and 9.30am, and when to leave, between 6 and 7.30” (E2)</i>
	<i>“My working time is flexible. I drop my daughter at school at 9am, I drive my wife to her job which is fairly close and make it to work myself around 9.20 – 9.25 and there is absolutely no problem with that. This is basically the only flexible working measure that I use. What I value most in the world is being able to drop my daughter at school. To me this is a huge incentive”. (E5)</i>
Autonomy over work hours	<i>“I have flexibility because two days a week I leave work at 6 to take my daughter to her dance class. Then, if I need to I work from 9 to 11pm (...) This is not in my contract of course but my boss only cares that the job gets done and I manage my time” (E11)</i>
	<i>“Personally, I have total flexibility to manage my schedule. I don’t leave very late. On my own account, I work on the weekends. If I am not very tired and I don’t need to, I don’t go on holiday (...) I have a lot of responsibilities (...) I decide how to organise myself” (E5).</i>
Taking time off	<i>“My father passed away four years ago. Legally I had 2 days off but I took 4 and no one said anything to me” (E8)</i>
	<i>“Children get sick eventually and that’s inevitable. Working flexibly means that if one day I miss work to stay with them, no one makes a big deal. They know I work a lot that I will make up the time by far” (E17)</i>
	<i>“Summer leaving is another opportunity for employees. If you wanted to extend your vacation period instead of one month you could get three to spend with your children or to solve an unusual problem” (E3)</i>
Dimension: Location choices	
Open code	Verbatim quotes
Choosing where to work from	<i>“Today’s situation is a good example of flexibility. I told my supervisor I had this interview at this location, which is not my regular work establishment; therefore I decided to work at home in the morning, and will work remotely but from this office after we finish.” (E13)</i>
	<i>“Some days I have worked from home because it suited me: one day I had to receive a new washing machine, others I wasn’t feeling very well and I’d rather not risk getting worse or passing it on to my colleagues... In that sense I think the firm has good flexibility. It’s something in the air, it’s not formalised in any way, we just speak to our supervisors and that’s it” (E7).</i>
Working from home	<i>“I have option to telework and I do so. I have flexibility to do it whenever I want. The truth is I do most of my work in the office, but I have the possibility to manage my agenda so that I only come to the office when it’s necessary” (E10).</i>
	<i>“Teleworking is the big flexibility thing these days. The company offers me to telework 2 days a week. This allows me to avoid traffic and to have time to go to the gym twice a week” (E9)</i>

Combination of inducements and contributions

What is interesting is that these two themes are not watertight compartments. On the contrary most participants portrayed flexibility as an ambivalent experience. For the same person, flexible working is sometimes associated with high demands that they need to abide by. Other times, it elicits comments related to making choices to match employees' needs. For instance, when asked about what working flexibly meant for him, an IT manager said: *“This is a global firm. If I have a call at 10pm, I have to take it”* (E5). A little later in the conversation, the same manager added: *“I drop my daughter at school at 9am, I drive my wife to her job which is fairly close and make it to work myself around 9.20 – 9.25 and there is absolutely no problem with that. This is basically the only flexible working measure that I use. What I value most in the world is being able to drop my daughter at school. To me this is a huge incentive”*. (E5). This employee's characterisation of flexibility shows it is not a straightforward single-handedly oriented practice. In the first quote, flexible working time takes a firm-oriented perspective concealing an underlying demand to be available to answer work related calls any time of the day. At the same time, in the second quote, he depicts flexibility as a practice enabling choice and a valuable incentive. Overall, flexibility seems to be essentially ambiguous and ambivalent. It can only be categorised as an inducement or a contribution through the lens of experience.

These findings indicate that, instead of looking at flexibility as a continuum ranging from employer oriented to employee oriented, it can be described as a dual experience. In so doing, it can be understood as a combination of inducements and contributions. Figure 2.2 depicts these two facets of flexibility as two axes: axe x represents flexibility as inducement and axe y flexibility as contribution. Points a and b represent different experiences of flexibility at times t_a and t_b as perceived by an employee. These points are the result of combined x_a and x_b perceived inducements and y_a and y_b perceived contributions respectively.

Figure 2.2. Flexibility a combination of perceived inducements and contributions



2.4.2 Flexibility as exchange

Given the dual nature of flexibility, ideas of exchange and reciprocity are recurrent in the interviewees' narratives. The exchange is described in a prescriptive manner as a trade that should be balanced. A female senior manager explained: *"In all the positions I have held, I have had flexibility but it must be a fair exchange of flexibility for flexibility"* (E15).

This exchange involves trading inducements and contributions that are either equal or perceived as equivalent by the employees. The following quote illustrates an equal exchange as described by one of the interviewees: *"If one day you need to stay longer, if the firm requires that you stay longer, we must try that that time is compensated. The extra time must be recorded and compensated, compensated with free time. What I understand is that, if you are putting extra effort, that extra effort needs to be compensated. That person has to get time."* (E14). In this person's understanding, flexibility must entail an egalitarian experience that involves trading time, putting the firm at the same level as the employees. The interviewee recognises that work time flexibility should level the difference of treatment between herself and the firm: free time has to be compensated through free time.

For others, flexibility entails an exchange of equivalent but not necessarily equal inducements and contributions. If the employees are to be flexible, then so too should the firm, but flexibility is no longer mediated through a proxy (as was free time); it is its own currency. For example, a specialist stated the following: *“I have friends in the executive team. In December we attend a pig slaughter, and in the middle of the pig slaughter he has taken his laptop and 200 meters away has answered a call from an American, on a Saturday, wearing an overall, with a knife in his hand. That is flexibility, you know that is what the company demands but at the same time if you need time for personal issues you are going to have it”* (E13). This person’s words illustrate that the firm asks its employees to contribute by making themselves available anytime, anywhere, but that they are compensated with the ability to organise their working time as they see fit.

A manager described a similar exchange of dissimilar inducements and contributions: *“We all need to be aware of what the company gives us and what we need to give in exchange. In general I can choose how, when and from where to work and I can’t abuse this situation. I must give back time, responsibility, availability, etc.”* (E5). This quote describes an equivalent exchange that is initiated by the firm instead of the employee: the firm offers flexible work and the employee must reciprocate.

These employees’ words exemplify how they understand flexibility as an exchange requiring balance, but with different meanings. The first interviewee understood balance as an equal amount of hours asked vs. hours received. The second and third interviewees saw a qualitative trade, which invites a much broader definition of flexibility, one where inducements and contributions can be of different nature and in different proportions. In all cases, balance in the exchange is a matter of perception that employees construct through the interpretation of cumulative experiences.

The next section discusses the mechanisms that contribute to this construction of balance.

2.4.3 Balancing mechanisms

Employees seem to keep a sort of mental score of incidents and events to elucidate their flexible relation with the firm. Perceived balance appears to be achieved through two complementary mechanisms: workflow variance and fulfilled expectations.

2.4.3.1. Variance

The experience of flexibility seems to be divergent over time due to the changing mix of perceived demands and choices. This mix is primarily linked to the workflow. At certain times of the year or the month, the demands to work flexibly are particularly high, depending on departments and roles. Granting employees flexibility to make choices, at other less busy times, redresses this imbalance.

For example, as explained by a manager, in finance, the monthly closings involve 4 or 5 days of especially long work hours that she tries to compensate by accepting employee requests for time off: *“Because of the work we do, at the end and the beginning of every month, we are required to do more hours because it is a peak workload period. The closings require that flexibility but on the contrary, if someone tells me at some other point in time, look I need to take this day off, I say “ok, take it” (E16).* An analyst in this department corroborated the idea that workflow tips the scale towards flexibility being perceived more as an inducement or as a contribution:

“There are many peaks, starting the year tariffs are negotiated, there are lots of pending decisions, at the beginning of the year there are always more peaks and then monthly closings approach, the first days of each month there may be lots of peaks so people in general work overtime like even from 8am till midnight or 1am (...) That is one side of flexibility but outside of those days, we can take things slowly and have time for ourselves if we need to (...) sometimes get in late to do paperwork or leave a bit earlier to go to the gym or stuff like that” (E7).

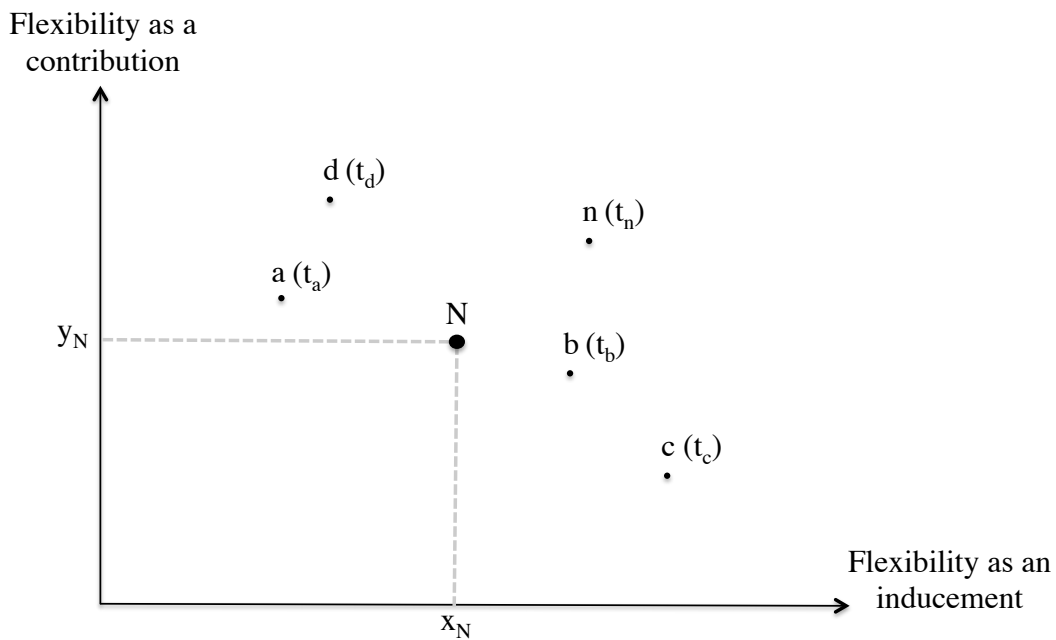
For client facing consultants, there is variance within projects (combining days that require absolute availability before delivering results to the client and relatively off-peak periods) and variance among projects (an employee that had a client requiring high lev-

els of flexibility for 6 months, goes back to the office for a little time afterwards). For instance an analyst described her experience of flexibility as follows: *“Maybe I’ve exerted extra effort for a week or a few days or whatever because we had to deliver something and my bosses have told me not to come in on Friday, to stay at home, but I still charge it into my charge account, as if I had worked that day”* (E14).

Another employee, expressed the following about peak times: *“There are periods in which you live for the client and of course there flexibility doesn’t benefit me because it only serves to attend to the client: I get called? I take it. I don’t get called? I’m alert in case I do. But this is not like that all the time”* (E6). Conversely, during off-peak time, employees describe balance as leaning towards inducements. For instance, a consultant said: *“When things are not too busy I sometimes work from home because it suits me. One day I had to receive a new washing machine, others I wasn’t feeling very well and I’d rather not risk getting worse or passing it on to my colleagues. In that sense I think the firm has good flexibility”* (E4).

The experiences described by these employees indicate that recurrent fluctuations create a feeling of balance that is not the result of a formalised transaction or arrangement but of the accumulation of compensating circumstances. Individuals seem to construct their overall perceived work flexibility as a compendium of these varying experiences. Figure 2.3 illustrates this idea using the same axes described in Figure 2.2. Small dots a, b, c, d and n represent various experiences of flexibility over time as perceived by an employee. Each of these experiences results from the combination of perceived flexibility as an inducement and as a contribution at different moments in time. This employee internalises such multiple experiences to construct an overall perception of their flexible work arrangement, depicted by the larger dot N. While individual experiences change frequently, the overall perception is more enduring in time.

Figure 2.3. Overall perceived flexibility as a compendium of varying experiences



The construction of overall perceived flexibility is very heterogeneous. It is possible for individuals having very different experiences to share similar overall perceptions. Figures Figure 2.4, Figure 2.5, Figure 2.6 show the situation of three different archetypes of employees. The collection of experiences in different moments in time (each represented by a small dot) takes a notably different shape in each of these ideal types, however their overall perceived flexibility (represented by the large dot N) is similar. This illustrates that similar overall perceptions are attained through substantially different compendia of experiences.

It must be noted that because workloads and peaks have commonalities for employees within the same department (finance has the monthly closing, consulting teams deadlines with clients, etc.) individuals in the same department share similar perceptions and tend to be close to the same archetype.

Figure 2.4 depicts the situation of an individual whose experiences tend to be balanced and consistent. However, some extreme events place on the individual a burden of contribution that is compensated by increased inducements at other moments in time. This is for example the situation of interviewees in the finance department.

Figure 2.4. Archetype of consistent flexibility experiences

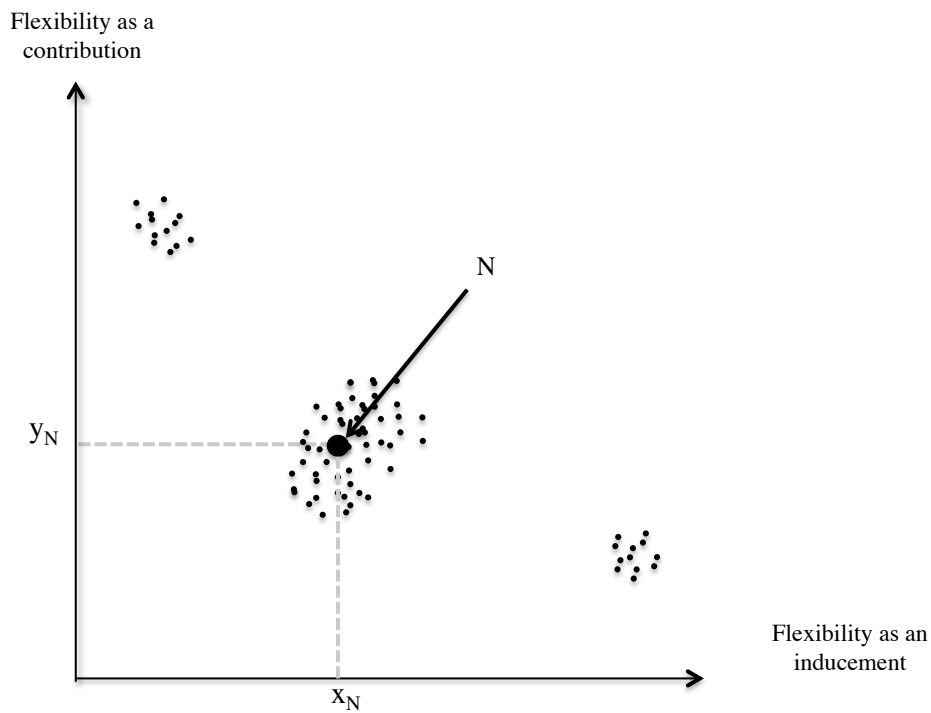
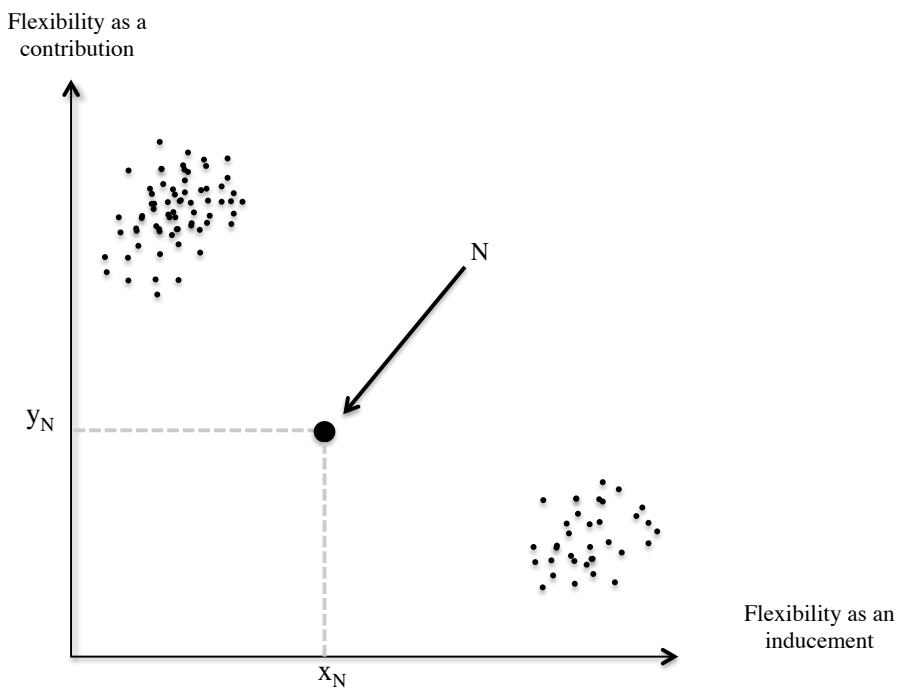


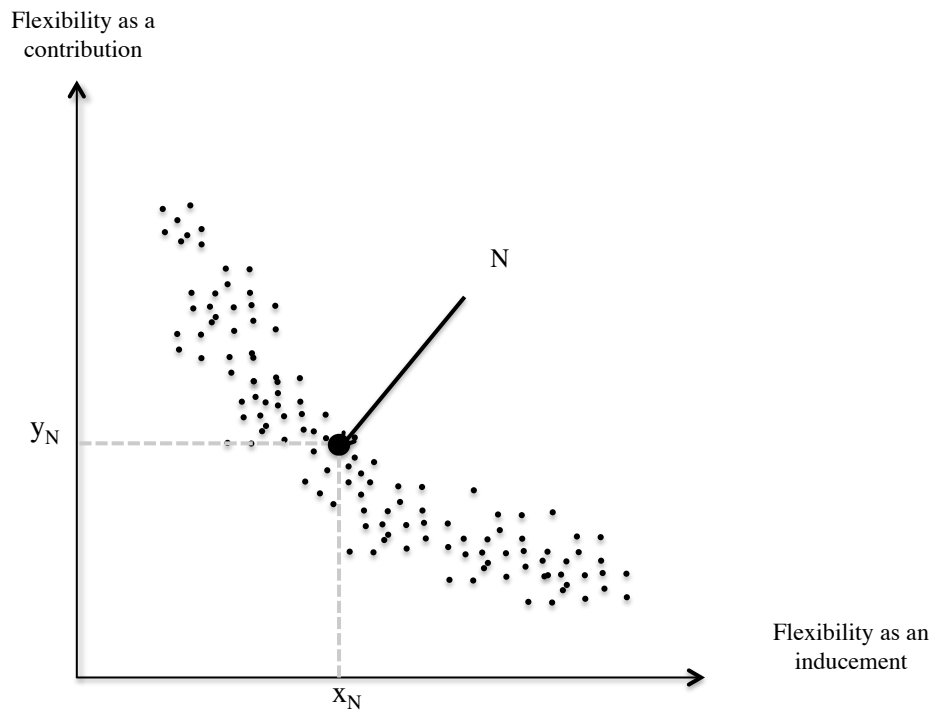
Figure 2.5 reflects an individual facing continuous extreme experiences, which nonetheless average to a similar overall perceived flexibility. This type of configuration is closer to the situations described by some of the participants in the consulting division.

Figure 2.5. Archetype of extreme flexibility experiences



Other participants in the *management consulting* group have more volatile but less extreme experiences that are better illustrated by Figure 2.6. Again, overall perceived flexibility is similar to the previous situations but there is less symmetry in the distribution of experiences.

Figure 2.6. Archetype of spread flexibility experiences



These figures show archetypes. They do not intend to provide a comprehensive image of all possible situations but exemplify how heterogeneous and dependent on individual workload the process of constructing flexibility is.

2.4.2.2. *Fulfilled expectations*

The construction of balance in overall perceived flexibility does not only depend on workflow and periodical variance. The fulfilment of expectations in more or less exceptional circumstances also plays a crucial role.

Some employees describe their experience of flexibility primarily as a contribution. For example a senior manager said: “*In this firm flexible work means total dedication. Total means that you can work any weekend, any Christmas holiday, at 1am you may be send-*

ing e-mails and a colleague replies and you get online [on the internal communication system], and everybody is there!” (E12). According to this participant, this is not compensated with regular flexibility for the employee but with major inducements provided at key moments in time. She explained: “For me, things are not like I’ve been working like a dog so now I take 3 days off or I work from home because I want to or something like that, but if I really need flexibility for me at some point, the firms responds (...) Years ago I went through a very bad emotional period but here no one side-lined me. I didn’t need to get a sick leave, I made use of a programme to extend holidays from 1 to 3 months and I kept a large part of my salary all the time” (E12)

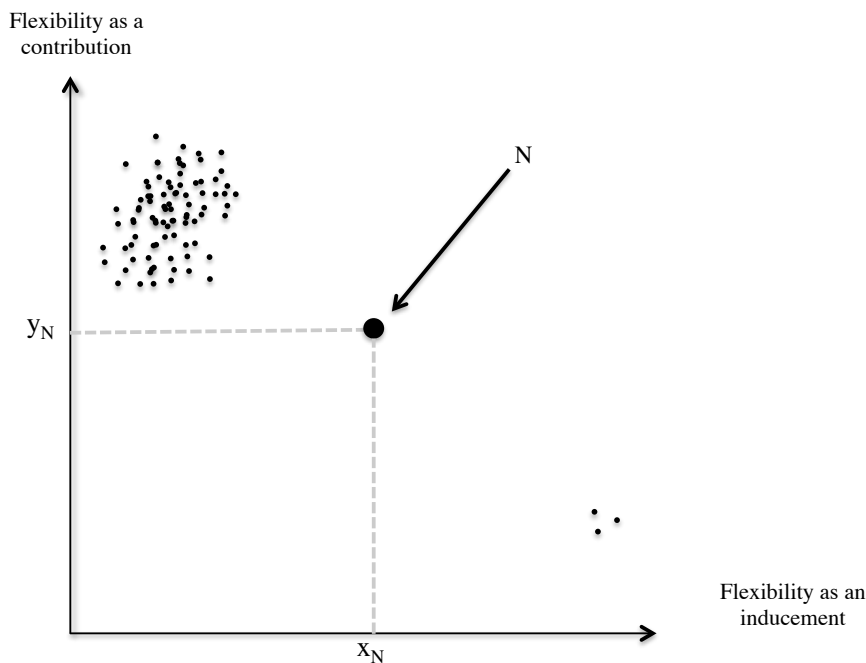
This woman’s story shows how employees come to hold certain expectations that, under special and possibly unforeseen circumstances, the firm will be particularly flexible with them. People absorb the demands of the organisation because they have an emotional confidence that they will get reciprocity. Meeting these expectations has a relevant impact on perceived overall flexibility, creating a sense of balance. A consultant provided another example: *“My father passed away fours years ago. Legally I had 2 days off but I took 4 and no one said anything to me. I didn’t have to discount it from my holidays. This was very meaningful for me (...) Believing that you’ll get what you need when you need it is one thing, but actually getting it (...) you see that flexibility is not just a myth (...) They demand dedication but then they rise to the occasion. (...) Weighing everything up, it balances out” (E8). Being granted flexibility to attend to exceptional events is perceived as a major inducement and therefore plays a significant role for employees in constructing their perception of workplace flexibility.*

Beyond the mere fact of getting free time, a leave, the possibility to work from home, etc., it is the fulfilment of expectations that appears to be a powerful mechanism. Individuals are flexible for the firm, hoping that in exchange they will get flexibility when necessary. Events confirming this assumption, by enacting reciprocity, shape the overall perception of flexibility. An interviewee expressed the idea of reciprocity in the following terms: *“In my department everybody works outside of official working hours and that is something we are informally asked to do but we are also given flexibility when we need it. It’s a fifty-fifty exchange: I give today and you will give to me tomorrow” (E7).*

Fulfilled expectations of flexibility strengthen the employees' trust towards the firm and encourage them to contribute further. Moreover for some, observing how their colleagues' expectations are fulfilled is enough to create a feeling of balance because it reinforces their belief that, if necessary, they would be offered the same. A consultant provided an example: "*My manager had a rough family time last year and he worked remotely a lot. I've never done it but seeing how things worked out for him I know could do it too if I needed to*" (E6). This shows that perception is influenced by other people's experiences as well, particularly by those of team or department colleagues.

Figure 2.7 shows a fourth archetype illustrating how the experience of flexibility as an inducement, even if infrequent, when occurring at specific crucial occasions for the individual, can highly influence the overall perception of flexibility. Despite the experiences being so skewed towards contribution, the importance of the three experiences with higher perceived inducements, strongly affects the position of N. The point is that all experiences are not equal to the construction of the overall perception.

Figure 2.7. Archetype of fulfilled expectations of flexibility experiences



2.4.2.3. Perceived balance and context

Individuals appear to build their overall perceived flexible work arrangement as a com-

bination of varying experiences. Overall, it seems they can develop a sense of balance in their flexible work arrangement, which is not derived from a formal transaction with their employer. This sense of balance depends on the employees' understanding of the context. Three contextual characteristics featured prominently in the interviews: urgency, saliency, and frequency.

Urgency refers to resorting to flexibility because of time constraints. Employees interpret that flexibility as a contribution is legitimate when there is an urgent need to finalise a certain task. For example one of the consultants said: *"If my client needs a deliverable by Monday, for example because a platform is being launched, and it is not ready on Friday evening, I may be annoyed but it's reasonable that we work over the weekend to get things done"* (E14). In the IT department, an incidence that would negatively affect other employees' ability to do their jobs is also perceived as an urgent matter, requiring flexibility: *"As part of the support team, my colleagues depend on me to be able to serve their clients. If one of the systems goes down it is indispensable that we fix it as quickly as possible, working evenings, weekends or whenever necessary"* (E5)

Similarly, flexibility as an inducement particularly contributes to creating a sense of balance under urgent circumstances, such as a child sickness or a family emergency. *"I have three kids so at least once a month I need to leave work in a hurry in the middle of the day to pick one of them up from school: a broken ankle, a high fever, buf, you name it! Minerva has never given me any trouble (...) and I truly appreciate it."* (E17)

Saliency indicates how relevant the situation or the task is perceived to be. When employees are demanded to be flexible, a sense of balance is more likely to exist if they understand the job that needs to be done is important or the situation requires it. *"The atmosphere at work is one of underlying economic crisis, some people are being fired, we've lost clients, and it is very important we all to do our fare share to keep the company afloat, which means that sometimes we have to at the firm's disposal all the time"* (E16). Likewise, when employees face a situation they understand as highly relevant, being offered flexibility to address it, particularly influences their sense of balance as well. This is the case of an employee who worked remotely while his father was hospitalized so that he could be by his side.

Frequency is closely linked to the above-discussed mechanisms of variance and fulfilled expectations. When a fluctuation in flexibility is perceived as routine and connected to the nature of the job, employees tend to interpret it as balanced. If flexibility recurrently swings between unbalanced situations, the result is an overall sense of balance. For instance, a senior executive said: *“Flexibility changes every day. Some days I take and others I give, but in average I think I have a general feeling that things are balanced”* (E1). The opposite is also true: when something is regarded as an exceptional circumstance requiring exceptional measures, providing or being offered flexibility is also likely to contribute substantially to perceived balance. As discussed earlier, when interviewee 8 lost his father, being able to take more days off than officially established, contributed significantly to his perception of flexibility as a balanced phenomenon: *“They demand dedication but then they rise to the occasion. (...) Weighing everything up, it balances out”*, he said.

These contextual circumstances are related, many situations being interpreted as urgent, salient and frequent or exceptional at the same time. In sum, perceptions of balance appear to result from the compendia of compensating circumstances that employees interpret depending on their context.

2.5. Discussion

This chapter has begun to explore how employees understand and experience flexible working at Minerva. The analysis has several theoretical and practical implications that pertain to the construction and stabilisation of individual flexible working arrangements in organisations.

For a long time, the flexibility debate was dominated by employer concerns (Blyton, 1992). Flexibility was defined as something employees were subjected to with no regard to their needs. It focused on changing rigidities in employment patterns to allow organisational adaptation and survival (Wood, 1989). Since the beginning of the 21st century, the exponentially growing literature on work-life balance has radically changed the understanding of the term flexibility. Looking at it from an employee-centred per-

spective, flexibility is now considered as a set of practices allowing choices to employees and a genuine contributor to work-life balance (Russell et al., 2009; Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa, 2008; Grzywacz et al., 2008). Minerva’s case suggests a third more complex middle-ground perspective, where individuals elaborate a mixed mental picture of flexibility at work. The participants in this study did not seem to understand flexible working practices as clearly defined objects that either support operational needs or individual’s work-life balance (Reilly, 2001). Instead, it was apparent in this case that flexibility was a perception that employees constructed through their interpretation of unfolding experiences.

Figure 2.8. Three approaches to flexibility

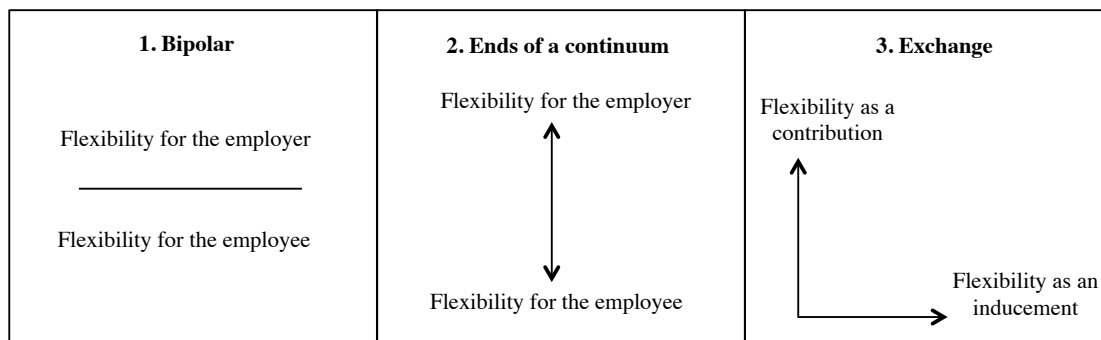


Figure 2.8 depicts three different approaches to understand flexibility. The first two are present in the literature. The bipolar approach looks at flexibility either from the perspective of the employee (e.g. in Hill et al., 2008a) or of the employer (e.g. in Wood, 1989) making the two independent of one another. The second approach sees flexibility as a continuum that can lean towards the interest of the employer or the employee, and takes the two options as opposed and incompatible (e.g. in Fleetwood, 2007). The findings presented in this chapter allowed building a third and more complex perspective, describing flexibility as an exchange of contributions and inducements.

The postulates of the psychological contract are useful to explain this third perspective. The empirical findings indicate that, like the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995), flexibility is unwritten, perceptual, individual and subject to interpretation. In broad terms, employees in Minerva interpret it as a contribution they bring into the employment relationship and as an inducement they are provided with. Their perception chang-

es depending on the interactions they have with the organisation, and their everyday experiences. It is also influenced by their colleagues' experiences—an employee being granted flexibility under exceptional circumstances not only redresses his balance, but other employees' as well—underlining the importance of social norms and organisational habits (Hill and Trist, 1955; Brown, 1973). Employees stabilise all those experiences to build a mental picture of their work arrangement. By compiling these opposed interpretations, they construct an overall perception of flexibility. Therefore, flexibility is more finely grained than over-encompassing concepts; it is not a delimited environmental object but more of a phenomenological experience (Grzywacz et al., 2008).

The findings presented in this chapter also suggest that, rather than as a stable notion, flexibility should be described as a fluctuating and on-going process, the meaning of which can only be understood through experience. These findings are aligned with cognitive appraisal theory which argues that “evaluations and interpretations of events, rather than events *per se*, determine whether an emotion will be felt and which emotion it will be” (Roseman et al., 1990; 899). Perceptions of balance appear to be dependant on contextual factors such as urgency, saliency, and frequency, which change the employee's evaluation of flexible working practices. If stability is seemingly achieved—at least in the eyes of the employees—it is because they create an arrangement that operates as a psychological contract. Overall perceived flexibility can be understood as the employee's belief of exchanged contributions and inducements. However, unfolding events continuously reshape it. Conway and Briner (2005; 132) argue that psychological contracts are “always in a state of ongoing formation”. In a similar way, the flexibility contract fluctuates through the succession of events, both ordinary and extraordinary. Therefore, one cannot use a single established definition as binding future behaviour.

In this sense, flexibility is inherently and necessarily uncertain. A shared tacit understanding exists that is in neither the firm's nor the employee's interests to codify. Even if some written parameters may exist, specifying the details of the exchange would deprive it of its malleable nature, turning flexibility into rigidity. To reduce uncertainty, individuals construct a picture of their flexibility related obligations and entitlements over and above their formal contract based on experience, in a process similar to that described by Shore and Tetrik (1994).

It might be suggested that uncertainty and tacitness imply instability: the fluctuating nature of flexibility makes it more difficult to grasp, measure and generalise. Nevertheless, balancing mechanisms were identified that enlighten the process by which the exchange is perceived as egalitarian and therefore endures (Barnard, 1938; Simon, 1951). On the one hand, reciprocity has been incorporated into the workflow. The perception of flexibility regularly swings between unbalanced situations with peak contributions and inducements that are linked to the nature of the job, creating balance by variance. On the other hand, regular peak contributions can be compensated by punctual inducements if those are understood as fulfilled expectations. Under unusual circumstances (the days off after the loss of a loved one, reacting to someone's depression, etc.), the individual nature of the flexible work arrangement allows for a sort of 'human touch', which is interpreted by employees as the fulfilment of an obligation by the firm, hence reinforcing future action (Blau, 1964).

Overall, this chapter has advanced a perspective of flexibility based on the idea of reciprocity and exchange of perceived inducements and contributions (Blau, 1964). This perspective offers a more comprehensive understanding of the concept than the exclusive focus on either employer or employee-centred flexibility. It also fits well with the view of the employment relationship as an agreed or bargained framework, which has therefore to satisfy both employers and employees (Simon, 1951). This understanding of flexibility will be further developed in subsequent chapters by looking at how it evolves over time, what happens if balance is ruptured, and how flexibility is connected to well-being.

2.6. Summary and conclusion

This chapter has looked to understand how flexibility materialises in everyday individual experience by stepping into the employees' shoes to grasp their interpretation of the phenomenon. This step was deemed necessary as the starting point to explore the relationship between flexibility and well-being in subsequent chapters. It helps overcome the bipolar perspectives of flexibility in the literature; it offers a potential explanation to the inconclusive results on the impact of flexibility on well-being in previous studies; it provides a conceptual framework from which to theorize.

Analysing the employees' accounts of flexibility indicates that it is not a stable, well-delimited object that either exists or not: it is built, developed, transformed and revised in a continuous manner (within limits), through unfolding situations. Those situations are understood and interpreted by employees simultaneously as contributions they provide to the organisation and inducements they receive, making flexibility a multidimensional notion that is strongly connected to the ideas of exchange and balance typical of the employment relationship. The following chapter builds on this novel understanding of flexibility to investigate the influence of flexible work arrangements on well-being. It operationalizes the two identified dimensions of flexibility and hypothesizes on their connection with employee well-being.

Chapter 3. Exploring employee perceptions of flexibility and well-being: a quantitative approach

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3.0. Objective and overview

This chapter is concerned with examining the relationship between flexibility and well-being. As discussed in the first chapter, flexible work has been an academic topic of interest since the 80's (Wood, 1989; Pollert, 1991; Reilly, 1998; de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). Behind this interest lay an increasing diffusion of requirements for flexibility—both individual and organisational—that have been changing the management of employees and the employment relationship (Allvin et al., 2011; Höge and Hornung, 2015; Roehling et al., 2000). However, the extent to which these changes are beneficial for employee well-being is a controversial issue.

A significant number of articles provide evidence to support a positive connection between flexibility and well-being. For example, Almer and Kaplan (2002) or Sardeshmukh et al. (2012) found flexible workers report lower levels of emotional exhaustion. Other studies have also found that employees who have, or who perceive they have, more flexibility options available to them display lower levels of work stress (Barney and Elias, 2010; Halpern, 2005; Nadeem and Metcalf, 2007), better work-life balance (Hill et al., 2001) or increased happiness (Atkinson and Hall, 2011).

A number of other studies have been unable to draw straightforward conclusions. Eldridge and Nisar's (2011) analysis of the data from the British Workplace employment relations survey showed no evidence that establishments with flexitime arrangements had less stressed employees. After analysing over 50 studies on the topic of work-time flexibility, published between 1995 and 2011, Nijp et al. (2012) state that the evidence allows very limited causal inferences regarding the relationship between such practices and employee health and well-being.

One part of the literature indicates that flexible working can have negative consequences for employee well-being (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). For instance, Twina et al. (2006) showed that flexible working increases pressure for both core and non-core workers and Russell et al. (2009) found this to be the case for people involved in homeworking. Harris' (2003) case study reports one-third of employees felt homeworking had increased rather than reduced their stress levels. Kelliher and Anderson

(2010) showed that flexible working can generate work intensification. Bamberg et al. (2012) showed that flexible work schedules can have negative consequences for employee well-being because the possibility of being disturbed at any time is unsettling.

These inconsistent findings result partly from the contrasting assumptions underlying the studies. The human resource management (HRM) literature provides two antagonistic approaches to explain the connection between employee management practices and individual well-being (van de Voorde et al., 2012). The predominant “mutual-gains” perspective builds on unitarist assumptions to posit that the correct HRM practices should have a positive impact on employee well-being, because they are inherently equally beneficial to employees and organisations (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Drawing on labour process theory, the “conflicting-outcomes” perspective argues that HR practices raise organisational performance to the detriment of employee well-being, because they are designed to intensify work (Gallie, 2005; Green, 2001; Ramsay et al., 2000).

This chapter does not follow either of the existing approaches. Drawing on pluralistic assumptions, it posits that the relationship between flexibility and well-being depends on whether employees understand flexibility as a contribution they provide to their employer or as an inducement they receive from their employer. This chapter relies on chapter two’s finding that workplace flexibility is interpreted both as an inducement and a contribution, and on the premises of the job-demands-control model (Karasek, 1979; Karasek and Theorell, 1990), to hypothesise about the relationship between perceived flexibility and well-being.

The chapter is organised into six sections. The first section reviews relevant research on the two contrasting HRM theoretical perspectives. The second section presents the job-demands-control theory, a clarification of the main concepts in the chapter and the hypotheses to test. The third section describes the methods employed for this research. The fourth section presents the results. The chapter concludes with a discussion of results, the limitations of the study and avenues for further research.

3.1. HRM and well-being: contrasting theoretical perspectives

Occupational health and well-being have been mostly absent from the mainstream HRM and management journals (Boyd, 2003; Zanko and Dawson, 2012). The HRM approach to well-being has been fundamentally instrumental (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004) and little interest has been paid to well-being *per se*, as a variable relevant to human and social sustainability (Pfeffer, 2010; Zanko and Dawson, 2012). Interest in well-being has become more prominent on the business agenda because employers increasingly believe that it contributes to organisational performance (Tehrani et al., 2007). The literature studying the link between HRM practices and organisational performance concurs that employee outcomes—such as employee well-being—mediate this relationship (Atkinson and Hall, 2011; Boselie et al., 2005). Nevertheless, there are two opposed approaches to the mechanisms underlying this link: mutual-gains and conflicting outcomes (van de Voorde et al., 2012).

The mainstream “mutual-gains” perspective follows a unitarist approach defending the argument that HRM practices, including flexible work, engender reciprocal benefits for employers and employees. Some researchers have adopted a human capital and resource-based perspective, stating that HRM practices foster employee knowledge, skills, motivation, abilities and opportunities to participate, hence boosting organisational performance (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Boxall and Purcell, 2011). Alternatively, other researchers have taken a behavioural perspective to argue that HRM practices affect organisational outcomes by directing and eliciting employee behaviours (Jiang et al., 2012; Wright and MacMahan, 1992).

In both cases, the assumption is made that the right HRM practices benefit employees and foster their well-being. In turn, employees perform better, creating a win-win relationship with the organisation (Delery and Doty, 1996). Social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity are the main theoretical umbrellas for this argumentation. Employees are presumed to interpret HRM practices as a benefit the organisation offers (i.e. they perceive increased well-being), which makes them feel the obligation to reciprocate and to respond in kind with attitudes leading to better performance (Settoon et al., 1996; Whitener, 2001; Tsui et al., 1997). In this sense, conflict or negative individual

effects are just the result of poor management and can therefore be resolved by improved management (Lewin, 2001).

The competing “conflicting-outcomes” perspective relies on labour process theory arguments (Braverman, 1974) and partly follows a radical approach (Fox, 1974), to claim that HRM practices increase organisational performance at the expense of employee well-being (Orlitzky and Frenkel, 2005). This perspective argues that management uses its power to impose working practices on employees that enhance productivity but are detrimental to the individuals’ well-being: HRM practices increase work intensity (Gallicie, 2005; Green, 2001) leading to stress (Tarafdar et al., 2007), job strain (Ramsay et al., 2000) or occupational hazards (Askenazy, 2001). MacIntosh et al. (2007; 207) believe that organisational prosperity is often invoked to justify or vindicate organisational practices that may actually harm individual well-being outcomes.

Looking specifically at the implementation of flexibility, Fleetwood (2007; 396) argued that it “has been discursively rehabilitated” to give this impression of mutual interest, which is actually non-existent. In line with this, Mayurama et al. (2009; 77) maintain that “wielding flexible human resources [...] and imposing employment costs on employees [...] are major motivations for employers to implement flexible work”. In this sense, flexibility practices are believed to be inherently exploitative (Legge, 1995): they create an unavoidable trade-off between firm performance and employee well-being.

The mutual-gains and conflicting-outcomes approaches both suffer from important limitations. First, some authors argue that the mutual-gains approach to well-being is merely a re-branding of absence management, with no actual intention to genuinely promote employee outcomes (Torrington et al., 2010). Others believe an instrumental vision downplays the inherent societal value of well-being (Delaney and Godard, 2001). Most importantly, employee well-being and organisational performance are different goals that are maximised through different types of employee management practices (Boxall and Purcell, 2011; Peccei, 2004). In this sense, the mutual-gains perspective has been accused of being simplistic and somewhat uncritical (Fleetwood, 2007). Due to its unitarist stance, this approach is unable to justify conflict (Lewin, 2001). Moreover, it disregards diverging employer and employee interests, which is the basis of the theory of the employment relationship (Simon, 1951) (c.f. chapter 2).

Second, the conflicting-outcomes perspective argues that HR practices are meant to exploit individuals and to push them to exert maximum effort. This vision is unable to explain why firms implement practices that employees perceive as beneficial to their well-being (Hill et al., 2001) or to justify the results of studies finding a positive relationship between employee management practices and well-being (Atkinson and Hall, 2011). In addition the conflicting-outcomes approach is not compatible with Simon's (1951) theory of the employment relationship either. Simon argues that the employment relationship is a cooperative system that requires balanced inducements and contributions to endure. The area of acceptance, which limits the employees' compliance with managerial prerogative, restricts what can be asked of employees. Even if management can act opportunistically (Williamson, 1975), beyond certain boundaries employees would quit the organisation, limiting management's ability to exploit them.

In sum, the HRM literature does not seem to take into consideration that the employment relationship is a matter of bargaining, involving both inducements and contributions between actors who have both competing and shared interests (Barnard, 1938; Budd et al., 2004; Simon, 1951). In this sense, the mutual-gains and conflicting-outcomes approaches overlook that the impact on well-being of HRM practices in general, and flexible working practices in particular, is not straightforward. Indeed, some authors in the discipline believe that the impact of HRM practices depends on how employees perceive and decode them. "The signals of the HR system are (...) often not interpreted similarly or reacted to in a similar way by each individual due to differences in experience, values or preferences" (Boon et al, 2011; 141). Wright and Nishii (2007) propose that the relationship between HR practices and employee outcomes is mediated by the employees' perceptions of HR practices. In that sense, it is the employees' understanding of the practices that matter, rather than the practices as designed by HR practitioners. This understanding is supported by the findings of chapter two which showed how employees tend to interpret flexibility both as a contribution they are expected to make to the organisation and as an inducement that the firm offers to them.

3.2. Perceived flexibility and well-being

The remainder of this chapter analyses the relationship between workplace flexibility and employee well-being in the context of a large consulting firm. It seeks to advance the literature by adopting a viewpoint that does not adhere to either the mutual-gains or conflicting-outcomes approaches. Instead, it draws on the findings presented in chapter two, to understand flexibility as an individually-perceived HR practice, as a constructed notion that can be interpreted both as an inducement and a contribution. Relying on Karasek and Theorell's (1990) job-demands-control model and its distinction between job demands and job discretion, this chapter hypothesises that depending on employees' interpretations of flexibility, the relationship between flexibility and well-being will be different.

3.2.1. Concepts and theory

The tacit and unwritten nature of flexibility makes it a matter of perception. Drawing on the findings presented in chapter two, a new framework—the perceived flexibility framework—is proposed relying on one main idea: that perceived flexibility has two complementary domains, (1) flexibility as a contribution, and (2) flexibility as an inducement (c.f., Figure 2.1, p.72). *Flexibility as a contribution* (FC) can be defined as an employee's perception about specific contributions that the organisation requires from them in terms of working time and location arrangements. These demands result from the organisation's need for adaptability to stay competitive. *Flexibility as an inducement* (FI) is defined as an employee's perception of the incentives provided by the organisation allowing them to make choices to arrange where, when, and for how long they work, in order to meet their personal needs.

The two domains of flexibility are neither independent of one another, nor the ends of a continuum, but two different intricately linked dimensions that are exchanged to build an overall perception of workplace flexibility. I argue that the analysis of flexibility should include the two domains. Analysing them as separate constructs within a single study can provide new insights on the mechanisms lying behind the relationship between flexibility and employee outcomes. In particular, this chapter focuses on answer-

ing the following question: Are flexibility as a contribution and flexibility as an inducement related to well-being? If so, how?

In order to answer these questions, the occupational health literature was explored in search of a suitable conceptual model. The job-demands-control model (JDC) is one of the foremost theoretical contributions to scholarship on the relationship between work and well-being (Fila et al., 2014). Over the course of three decades, more than 250 studies utilising the JDC have been published (Luchman and González-Morales, 2013). Some believe it has been the most influential work and well-being model in occupational psychology since the 1980s (De Lange et al., 2003).

The JDC was deemed the most appropriate framework for this study because, in analysing the work-well-being relationship, it distinguishes discretion (the extent to which employees have the potential to control the tasks they conduct throughout the working day) and demands (stressors existing in the workplace) associated with jobs. Specifically, Karasek (1979; 286) argues that “the empirical association between job conditions and mental strain (...) disappears in some well-known research findings (...) [because studies] fail to distinguish between demands and discretion and add the measures together” cancelling the relationship out. In chapter two it was shown that individuals similarly understand flexibility in a twofold way, underpinning my argument that research findings regarding the relationship between flexibility and well-being are mixed (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011) because: a) the literature does not differentiate between flexibility as a contribution and flexibility as an inducement; and b) each of these constructs is related to well-being in a different way. Moreover, as discussed above, these flexibility domains are not independent of one another but interact. For Karasek (1979) the dimensions of job demands and job control also interact, creating non-additive, nonlinear associations with mental strain.

Using the postulates of the JDC thus provides a starting point to understanding the relationships between the two domains of flexibility and well-being. This doesn't mean that job demands and job control are being equated to flexibility as a contribution and flexibility as an inducement. Rather, the perceived flexibility framework uses the general relationships posited by the JDC model to propose a more specific model concentrating on flexible working.

Job demands are stressors existing in the workplace (Karasek, 1979; Karasek and Theorell, 1990). They are normally regarded as physical, social, or organisational aspects of the job requiring physical or mental effort (De Jonge and Dormann, 2006). As discussed above, the concept of flexibility as a contribution concentrates specifically on the employee's perceptions on the requirements regarding working time and location.

Job discretion, also referred to as decision latitude, comprises decision authority (the extent to which employees have the potential to make independent decisions and to control how they conduct their work day) and skill discretion (the extent of skills that employees use on the job) (Karasek, 1979; Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Numerous studies have focused exclusively on the decision authority component and labelled it job control (Fernet et al. 2004; Wall et al., 1996). Control refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to affect a desired change on their work environment (Greenberger and Strasser 1986). The concept of flexibility as an inducement has similarities to that of control, but focuses exclusively on the employee's perceptions of the incentives provided by the organisation that allow making choices regarding where and when to work.

Therefore, the JDC model focuses on general job characteristics while the perceived flexibility framework concentrates on the employee experience of one particular HR policy. Resting on the JDC model, the perceived flexibility framework is able to provide a more specific understanding of a complex phenomenon. This is important because flexibility as an HR policy is growing substantially (Kersley et al., 2006; Zeytinoglu et al. 2009), but there is still much to be learnt about its consequences (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). As noted by Siegriest (2008, 2), "There is always a trade-off between the limitations of a conceptual focus that is inherent in a theoretical model and the desire to understand the complexities of reality. Therefore, different "middle-range theories" do not exclude each other, but may be successfully combined to further advance our knowledge". The perceived flexibility framework can be considered as a middle-range theory that builds on the JDC to arrive at a more precise understanding of the relationship between flexibility and well-being.

Developing this middle-range theory is particularly relevant in the context of the case study analysed in this thesis. The characteristics of consulting jobs make flexibility a crucial aspect of HR management (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2008). In addition, a

controversy appears to exist with regards to how flexibility is understood (Donnelly, 2015). On the one hand, some claim that professional image and career progress in professional services, such as consulting, are associated to employees being highly flexible towards the firm (Smithson et al. 2004). On the other hand, some argue that knowledge work is characterised by more progressive forms of work that enable flexibility for employees (Perrons 2006; Huyer and Hafkin 2007). In this context, acquiring a better understanding of the meaning of flexibility and theorising its connection to well-being can potentially provide insights relevant to a range of professions and knowledge focused occupations. As a complement to the JDC model, the perceived flexibility framework allows additional sensitivity regarding the issue of flexibility instead of looking at job demands and discretion as an undifferentiated amalgam.

3.2.2. Hypotheses

Prior to establishing the hypotheses, it must be noted that, following most studies driven by the JDC model, this chapter focuses exclusively on individuals' psychological well-being (Haüsser et al., 2010). Although an assessment of available literature suggests that well-being is a multidimensional concept (Grant et al., 2007), the contribution of psychological aspects to overall well-being at work is assumed to outweigh the contribution of the other dimensions, particularly in the context of knowledge jobs (Siegriest, 2008).

The hypotheses of the JDC model can be divided into three sub-hypotheses (de Witte et al., 2007). First, an increase in job demands increases psychological strain. Second, a decrease in control similarly generates greater strain. Third, job demands and control have joint effects that affect psychological strain. Drawing on this model, the perceived flexibility framework proposes that flexibility as a contribution will have a negative relationship with well-being, whereas flexibility as an inducement will have a positive one. In addition it postulates that well-being depends on the interaction between these two domains of flexibility.

3.2.2.1 Main effects

Following the JDC model, a first hypothesis is made that flexibility as a contribution will have a negative association with well-being. Drawing on the findings of chapter two, flexibility as a contribution can take various forms. These are related to time-demands—experienced by the employees as, for example, staying at work longer than officially required or being permanently on-call in case work issues arise—or to location-demands—for instance itinerant work and mobility. In this sense, flexibility is experienced as a required organisation-oriented practice allowing employers to change working conditions as they see appropriate to satisfy organisational goals.

According to the literature, “This kind of flexibility implies increased uncertainty and greater difficulties in coordinating working lives and private lives” (Askenazy, 2004; 603). Indeed, perceived flexibility as a contribution could imply that employees are not certain whether work-related needs may arise, how demanding they may be and how long they may last. Such uncertainty has been argued to create stress and decreased employee well-being (McGrath, 1976). For example Bamberg et al. (2012) found that on-call employees, who had to be available outside of regular working hours, experienced higher irritation and negative mood. Moreover, being required to work while on-call did not have an additional negative impact on well-being; it was the mere fact of having to be available that was detrimental because it created uncertainty, which in turn generated anxiety.

Beyond dealing with uncertainty, having to be flexible towards the firm can create restrictions for employees on their location and may reduce leisure and social activities (Bamberg et al., 2012). This situation can be argued to render detachment more difficult. Detachment is a protective mechanism that allows individuals to recover from stressful situations. It is essential to preserve employee well-being because without it employees are unable to experience distance from work, switch off and relax (Siltaloppi et al. 2009; Sonnentag, 2003). In addition, constant availability can generate difficulties to balance work and private lives (Askenazy, 2004) and variability in work hours can lead to a higher risk of illness than working a regular eight-hour day (Askenazy, 2001).

Flexibility as a contribution could also be interpreted as a source of work intensity. For Askenazy (2001; 490) “the logic of flexibility is (...) to maximise the use of production factors, notably labour, so as to reduce downtime and enhance the pace of work”. Exposure to demands requires employees to exert more effort in order to meet those demands (Sonnetag and Zijlstra, 2006). Perceived requirements can therefore push employees to work longer and with added cognitive dedication (Hoge and Hornung, 2015; Ichniowski et al., 1996), which—in turn—have been associated with stress, fatigue, diminished alertness, disturbances in mood (Burchell and Fagan, 2004; Gander et al, 2000; Sonnetag and Zijlstra, 2006) or even exhaustion, which occurs when employees feel unable to cope with the demands placed upon them (Hobfoll, 1989).

For these reasons, flexibility as a contribution is expected to operate similarly to Karasek’s (1979) concept of job demands. Therefore the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: The perception of flexibility as a contribution will be negatively associated with employee well-being.

The JDC model posits that job control is connected to greater well-being. Similarly, a second hypothesis is made that flexibility as an inducement will be positively related with well-being. Chapter two’s findings indicate that employees understand flexibility as an inducement that is offered to them by the firm. Flexibility is interpreted as an inducement when it grants employees agency to make autonomous decisions regarding work time and location, for example, about changing where to work from or modifying start and finish work hours. In this sense, the interviews show that flexibility can be perceived as a source of employee autonomy and control.

This interpretation fits with the existing literature: Glass and Finlay (2002) concluded from their meta-analysis of workplace flexibility outcomes, that flexibility operates predominantly through enhancing employees’ perceptions of control. Such perceptions of greater autonomy and control have been linked to increased well-being (Ganster, 1989). On the one hand perceived lack of control has been linked to decreased well-being (Kahn and Byosiere 1992; Spector 1986; Hausser et al, 2010). On the other hand, studies operationalizing flexibility as workers’ control over working conditions have found that flexibility is connected to positive employee outcomes (Hill et al., 2001; Kauffeld

et al. 2004; Lyness et al., 2012). The mere illusion of having control seems to increase well-being (Friedland et al., 1992). When looking specifically at work-time control, similar effects have been noted. For example, several studies have shown that low control over work hours increases psychological distress and sickness absenteeism (Alamursula et al., 2002, 2004). Conversely high work-hour control appears to be related to lower work-family conflict (Jansen et al., 2004). Therefore, the following hypothesis is established:

H2: The perception of flexibility as an inducement will be positively associated with employee well-being.

3.2.2.2 Combined effect

A central tenet of the JDC model is that what is really detrimental for well-being is a combination of high job demands and low job control. In Karasek's (1979; 287) words, "The model postulates that psychological strain results not from a single aspect of the work environment, but from the joint effects of the demands of a work situation and the range of decision-making freedom (discretion) available to the worker facing those demands". However, the specific meaning of such "joint effects" is imprecise (de Lange et al., 2003).

A distinction has been drawn between three interpretations related to these joint effects, (van der Doef and Maes, 1999; Häusser et al., 2010). One interpretation is that demands and control combine additively, so that high job demands and low control bear the worst effects on well-being. A second interpretation proposes the existence of a multiplicative effect between high demands and low control that results in more strain than the addition of individual effects (de Witte et al., 2007). A third interpretation suggests a buffer effect whereby job control moderates the negative impact of job demands on well-being. In this sense, high job control is argued to attenuate the negative effects of high job demands on well-being (Häusser et al., 2010). The rationale behind this interpretation is that demands increase arousal levels among employees, which only leads to decreased well-being if low control over the job hinders the release of such arousal (Jex and Beehr, 1991). In other words, "increased control reduces the effects of stressors by allowing individuals to face demands when they are best able to do so and in ways they

find most acceptable” (Wall et al. 1996; 155). It must be noted that both the multiplicative and the buffer effects are empirically tested in the same way, that is by including an interaction variable in the regression. Thus, the difference between the two is a theoretical one and depends on the researcher’s assumptions.

All these interpretations are accepted within the literature. Consecutive review studies conducted in 1999, 2003 and 2010 generally report consistent findings regarding the additive interpretation but support provided for both interaction hypotheses (multiplicative and buffer) is less convincing and reliable (van der Doef and Maes; 1999; De Lange et al., 2003; Hausser et al. 2010). In all cases, negative well-being outcomes are likely in contexts characterised by high job demands and low job control (Karasek, 1979; Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Therefore, employees having jobs that are high on demands and low on control—labelled “high strain jobs”—are likely to suffer well-being problems, whereas individuals holding jobs with low demands and high control—labelled “low strain jobs”—bear the lowest well-being risks.

As discussed above, the two domains of flexibility are not independent of one another. The findings presented in chapter two indicate they are intricately linked dimensions and that perceived flexibility results from a combination of the two. In this sense, it is justifiable to postulate that an interaction between flexibility as a contribution and flexibility as an inducement exists that influences employee well-being, so that the lowest levels of well-being will occur when perceived flexibility as a contribution is high and perceived flexibility as an inducement is low.

Indeed, drawing on the buffer postulate of the JDC model, the hypothesis can be made that the negative relationship between perceived flexibility as a contribution and well-being is mitigated by perceptions of flexibility as an inducement. If employees perceive they have control over their work location and time arrangements, they are more likely to cope better with high demands for flexibility since they can organise their schedule along timeframes and locations that suit them. In investigating the impact of worktime demands and control, several studies in the work-family literature have found that allowing employees to make choices regarding starting and finishing worktime can buffer the adverse effects of long contractually demanded work hours (Geurts et al., 2009; Hughes and Parkes, 2007). In addition, studies looking at locational flexibility have also

posited it protects individuals from the resource depletion associated to work demands (Golden, 2006), hence mitigate their impact on employee well-being. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The perception FI will moderate the relationship between perceived FC and well-being. A high level of perceived FI will reduce the negative relationship between FC and employee well-being.

3.3. Method

3.3.1. Participants

The study was conducted among employees working for the Spanish division of a large consultancy firm whose workforce is divided into four divisions (three are client facing and one provides structure services to the other three). I surveyed one of the client oriented division (“*management consulting*”) and the “*back office*” group. When the survey was distributed, these two work groups had 2,935 employees. The firm had a strict policy that does not allow sending surveys to entire divisions. Therefore, a link to access the online questionnaire was sent to a sample of 1,800 employees. The sample was stratified to ensure diversity among respondents in terms of working group, department, professional category and tenure. The survey was available online for a total of 9 weeks between October and December 2011. It received 628 valid responses (34.5% response rate), 474 from employees in the “*management consulting*” group and 154 from employees in the “*back office*” group. In terms of gender, 47.6% of respondents were female, 52.4% were male; ages ranged from 23 to 57 years old ($M = 34.10$, $SD = 6.067$). In terms of staff category, one fifth of the participants (20.1%) were junior, 38.9% were consultants, 23.9% managers and 17.2% held senior manager or executive roles. Tenure ranged from less than a year to 25 years ($M = 8.12$, $SD = 5.424$). The samples for both working groups are representative of the general population in each group. Table 3.1 summarises the sample demographic characteristics per work group.

Table 3.1. Demographic characteristics of the sample per work group.

	Management consulting		Back Office	
	N (474)	%	N (154)	%
Gender				
Female	184	38.8%	115	74.7%
Male	290	61.2%	39	25.3%
Age:	M: 32.46	SD: 4.823	M: 39.14	SD: 6.713
< 30	142	30.0%	5	3.2%
30-35	209	44.1%	44	28.6%
36-41	106	22.4%	58	37.7%
42-49	15	3.2%	32	20.8%
<50	2	0.4%	15	9.7%
Category				
Junior	72	15.2%	54	35.1%
Consultant	187	39.5%	57	37.0%
Manager	124	26.2%	26	19.9%
Senior	91	19.2%	17	11.0%
Tenure:	M: 7.04	SD: 4.64	M: 10.90	SD: 5.727
< 5	156	32.9%	27	17.5%
5-9	179	37.8%	31	20.1%
10-14	119	25.1%	54	35.1%
15-19	14	3.0%	20	13.0%
<20	6	1.3%	22	14.3%

Two individuals had not responded to the questions for the well-being scale. These cases were excluded, leaving a final sample size of 626. There were no other missing data.

3.3.2. Measures

Perceived flexibility as a contribution (FC) is defined as the employees' perception about specific contributions that the organisation requires from them in terms of working time and location arrangements. It was measured with a 9-item scale, specifically developed in this study, rated in 5-point Likert scale (1=never, 5=very often).

The items were derived from the interviews conducted in phase one of the study (c.f. chapter 2), using an inductive logic (Hinkin, 1998). The items were developed from the verbatim quotes of each of the open codes included in the theme "flexibility as a contribution" (c.f. Figure 2.1). Table 3.2 provides some examples of this process.

Table 3.2. Flexibility as a contribution: open codes and quote samples

Open code	Verbatim quotes	Items
Being constantly available	<i>“To have flexibility means to be ready to jump. I remember giving birth to my daughters and hiring a live-in maid and coming to work after 3 months because I was asked to for x or y circumstances and I came on the spot” (E15)</i>	Be available outside of official working hours
	<i>“If there is a meeting at 10pm with Americans that is going to take 2 hours, I have to do it, wherever I am, even if I am on vacation”. (E17)</i>	Have my cell phone on outside of official working hours
	<i>“I work with people in very different locations. For Mexico and Brazil I need to be there in the evening, then South Africa in the mornings. It’s a sort of always on call thing” (E6)</i>	Constantly watch for e-mails
Adapting to changes in schedule	<i>“We deal with a lot of last minute things and you need to adapt. Client is first. Flexibility is there to serve him: if there are changes you absorb them, reconfigure and continue. I may come in thinking that I’ll do X in the morning, then meet a colleague for lunch then work until 8. But at 10 something happens so I have to skip lunch, meet my colleague at 7 then work from home until late.” (E13)</i>	Change my schedule and work time regularly
Travelling	<i>“The firm does not demand a lot of flexibility from me. You have to realise that I don’t have to travel. I travel only occasionally. The last trip I had to take was over a year ago, for 4 or 5 days” (E11)</i>	Travel
Working from different premises	<i>“The firm expects me to serve the client and work wherever the client thinks necessary. This means that I rarely work in the same office for more than a couple of months. (E4)</i>	Work outside of the office
Being mobile	<i>“Flexibility also has a location thing, you know. Being able to work wherever and however. I have worked from home, in planes, trains, airports, public libraries, cafés, a bench at my daughter’s school... I think that is flexibility as well” (E3)</i>	Deal with work issues when I am not at the office

Originally, a list of 20 items was elaborated which can be found in Table 3.3. To reduce this list of items I held a focus group with experts to assess content validity of the new scale. A group of 6 academics in the HRM and OB field reviewed and evaluated the construct definition and the pool of items. On the one hand, I sought their advice to ensure readability, clearness and pertinence of the items. On the other hand, I asked them

to match a list of items to a list of constructs. The items that were assigned to the appropriate construct by at least five of the six judges were retained (Delmotte et al., 2012).

Table 3.3. Items developed for the FC scale for each of the open codes

Open code	Items
Working overtime	Work overtime Work long hours Work outside of working hours* Dedicate time to work during the weekends*
Being constantly available	Be available outside of official working hours* Be permanently accessible Have my cell phone all the time* Be open to receive work calls any time Constantly watch for e-mails* Deal with work issues when I am not at the office* Be ready to work at any moment
Adapting to changes in schedule	Change my schedule and work time regularly* Adapt my working time arrangements
Travelling	Travel * To move about outside of my city to work
Working from different premises	Work outside of the office * Change work location regularly
Being mobile	Deal with work issues when I am not at the office* Work when I am not at work Work from home

As a result of this process the pool was reduced to 9 items, two of which were rephrased from their initial wording (namely FC4 and FC7). The final list of items used to measure the flexibility as a contribution construct can be found in Table 3.4..

Table 3.4. Items used to measure perceived flexibility as a contribution.

Item code	Item phrasing
FC1	Be available outside of official working hours
FC2	Work outside of the office
FC3	Travel
FC4	Work outside of official working hours
FC5	Change my schedule and work time regularly
FC6	Deal with work issues when I am not at the office
FC7	Have my cell phone on outside of official working hours
FC8	Constantly watch for e-mails
FC9	Dedicate time during the weekends

Item 3 was finally eliminated from the scale to increase reliability (c.f. exploratory factor analysis and scale reliability results in appendix D).

Perceived flexibility as an inducement (FI) was assessed with a scale adapted from Eaton (2000) consisting of six items (c.f. Table 3.5). These items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree).

Table 3.5. Items used to measure perceived flexibility as an inducement.

Item code	Item phrasing
FI1	The firm gives me the flexibility I need
FI2	My supervisor gives me the flexibility I need
FI3	I feel free to use the flexibility programmes available in the firm
FI4	Using flexibility won't affect my career progress
FI5	If I use flexibility I can complete my work on time
FI6	I have the work flexibility I need

Well-being (WB) was assessed with the World Health Organisation's 5-item well-being index. Employees were asked to rate on a 6-point Likert scale (1=never, 6=all the time) to what extent, over the previous two weeks, they had felt a number of emotions (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.6. Items used to measure well-being.

Item code	Item phrasing
WB1	I have felt cheerful and in good spirits
WB2	I have felt calm and relaxed
WB3	I have felt active and vigorous
WB4	I woke up feeling fresh and rested
WB5	My daily life has been filled with things that interest me

The dimensionality of these variables was verified by factor analysis. The items measuring flexibility as a contribution, flexibility as an inducement and well-being loaded on three factors exactly as suggested (c.f. exploratory factor analysis and scale reliability results in appendix D). The dependent and independent variables used in the regression were computed based on these factor analysis results.

Control variables. The following control variables were included in the study: age, gender, having children and professional category (junior, consultant, manager, senior). For the latter I used dummy variables (Cohen and Cohen, 1983) for each of the four categories in the sample. Additional control variables such as salary, tenure or marital status, were explored but not included in the final analysis because they caused multicollineari-

ty with other control variables (such as professional category and having children). The full questionnaire is provided in appendix C.

3.4. Results

Table 3.7 presents means, standard deviations, and correlations for the variables. Control variables having children and age were highly correlated. I tested for multicollinearity by examining the bivariate correlation coefficients and the variance inflation factors (VIF) of the variables (Hair et al., 1998) and found that multicollinearity was not an issue. A significant correlation was also found between the two independent variables measuring flexibility ($r = -.32, p < .0005$). This makes sense given the assumption that the two domains of flexibility are different but connected linked dimensions that are exchanged to build an overall perception of workplace flexibility.

To test the hypotheses, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted in three steps. In the first step, the control variables were entered. Findings indicate that the only significant control variable is *having children* ($\beta = .32, p = .001$) and that together, all the control variables explain 3,8% of the variance of well-being.

Flexibility as a contribution (FC) and flexibility as an inducement (FI) were entered at the second step to test for their main effects (H1 and H2). In this model the control variable *having children* was no longer significant. However, FC had a significant negative relationship with well-being ($\beta = -.25, p < .0005$) and FI had a significant positive relationship with well-being ($\beta = .34, p < .0005$). The change in variance explained from model 1 to model 2 is also significant ($\Delta R^2 = .19, p < .0005$) and model 2 explains 22.5% of the variance of well-being. These findings support hypotheses 1 and 2. In the third step the product term variable of FC and FI was entered to test for the interaction hypothesis. While the direct effects of FC ($\beta = -.25, p < .0005$) and FI ($\beta = .34, p < .0005$) remained significant, the interaction variable was not ($\beta = .04, p = .18$). Detailed results can be found in **Table**

Table 3.8.

In order to explore the possibility of an interaction further, both scales (FC and FI) were split into two, creating two dichotomous scales that were then cross-tabulated. A median split was used, this method being the most common to dichotomize continuous variables as discrete factors in standard ANOVAs (Iacobucci et al, 2015a; Iacobucci et al, 2015b; Rucker et al., 2015). The discrete factors result in four categories of perceived flexibility: mutual, firm-oriented, employee-oriented and low. Figure 3.1 reports the percentage of respondents within each these four categories and their average well-being.

Figure 3.1. Perceived flexibility categories and mean well-being.

Flexibility as an inducement	High	<i>Employee-oriented Flexibility</i> N = 197 31,5% M WB = 0.4706	<i>Mutual Flexibility</i> N = 117 18.7% M WB = 0.1778
	Low	<i>Low Flexibility</i> N = 116 18,5% M WB = -0.0849	<i>Firm-oriented Flexibility</i> N = 196 31,3% M WB = -0.5289
		Low	High

Flexibility as a contribution

A one-way ANOVA was then conducted to determine if well-being was different for each of the categories of perceived flexibility. Five outliers were identified, as assessed by boxplot. To identify their impact on the results, analyses were run with two data sets (one including the outliers and another one without the outliers). Similar results were obtained showing that the outliers did not have an appreciable effect on the analysis. Therefore this chapter reports on the results including all 626 responses. Data was normally distributed for low, firm-oriented and mutual flexibility categories, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > .05$). Data for the employee-oriented flexibility category was not normally distributed ($p < .001$). The decision was taken to run the test regardless be-

cause the one-way ANOVA is fairly "robust" to deviations from normality, particularly if the sample sizes are nearly equal between groups (Lix et al., 1996). If sample sizes are not small ($N < 50$), even fairly skewed distributions—as long as the groups are similarly skewed—are not necessarily problematic (Sawilowsky and Blair, 1992). Coakes and Steed (2003) agree that the ANOVA assumptions of normality are of little concern when cell size is greater than 30. There was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ($p = .365$).

Average well-being was statistically significantly different between categories of perceived flexibility, $F(3, 622) = 40.9, p < .0005$. The well-being score⁶ increased from the firm-oriented flexibility (-0.5289 ± 0.95), to low flexibility (-0.0849 ± 0.96), to mutual flexibility (0.1778 ± 0.98) to employee-oriented flexibility (0.4726 ± 0.87), in that order. Tukey post hoc analysis revealed that the increase from firm-oriented to low flexibility ($0.44, 95\% \text{ CI } (0.17 \text{ to } 0.72)$) was statistically significant ($p = .001$), as well as the increase from mutual to employee-oriented flexibility ($0.29, 95\% \text{ CI } (0.02 \text{ to } 0.57)$, $p = 0.032$). However, the increase from low to mutual flexibility ($0.26, 95\% \text{ CI } (-0.05 \text{ to } 0.57)$, $p = .128$) was not statistically significant (see tables in appendix F).

Although the interaction hypothesis was not confirmed by the regression analysis, the results of the one-way anova appear to support hypothesis 3. The lowest well-being occurred when FC was high and FI was low (firm-oriented flexibility) and the highest well-being occurred when FC was low and FI was high (employee-oriented flexibility).

Since these analyses on the interaction hypothesis are inconclusive, an additional analysis was carried out to explore if similar results were achieved when considering different levels of flexibility as an inducement. The hypothesis was made that the negative relationship between FC and well-being would only be mitigated for high levels of FI. To test this additional hypothesis, a second hierarchical regression analysis with dichotomous moderators was conducted. To this end, respondents were ranked on the basis of their FI levels to cluster them into four groups and four dummy variables were created drawing on Gelman and Park's (2009) method:

⁶ Data is presented as mean \pm standard deviation.

- For the variable low flexibility as an inducement (LFI) respondents in percentiles 24.99 and under were assigned a value of 1 and all other respondents a value of 0.
- For the variable medium-low flexibility as an inducement (MLFI) respondents in percentiles 25 to 49.99 were assigned a value of 1 and all other respondents a value of 0.
- For the variable medium-high flexibility as an inducement (MHFI) respondents in percentiles 50 to 74.99 were assigned a value of 1 and all other respondents a value of 0.
- For the variable medium-high flexibility as an inducement (HFI) respondents in percentiles over 75 were assigned a value of 1 and all other respondents a value of 0.

The only model in which the interaction hypothesis was found significant was the one testing the interaction between FC and HFI. Results can be found in Table 3.9. Control variables were entered in the first step of the regression (model 1b). FC and HFI were entered at the second step (model 2b). The relationship of FC and well-being was negative and significant ($\beta = -.32$, $p < .0005$). HFI had a significant positive relationship with well-being ($\beta = .55$, $p < .0005$). Both β coefficients were larger than those of FC and FI in model 2 but the signs and significance of the relationships remained equal.

In the third step (model 3b), the product term variable of FC and HFI was entered to test for the interaction hypothesis. In this case, the interaction variable was positive and significant ($\beta = .2$, $p = .02$) and the main effects of FC ($\beta = -.37$, $p < .0005$) and HFI ($\beta = .62$, $p < .0005$) remained significant. This means that when introducing the interaction term for high values of FI, FC significantly increases its effect on well-being. Although the product variable only contributes to explaining an additional 0.7% of the variance in well-being, the change in variance explained from model 2b to model 3b was significant ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p = .02$). Figure 3.2 shows the existence of interaction between the binary factor HFI and the continuous variable FC. Looking at the graph, the two regression lines are not parallel and the line of HFI falls above the line of other cases (LFI, MLFI and MHFI). These results indicate that, as expected, high levels of FI are required to amplify the effect of FC on well-being. Since none of the other models (testing the interaction between FC and LFI, MLFI and MHFI) yielded significant findings, result tables for these models can be found in appendix E.

Figure 3.2. Interaction between FC and HFI in predicting well-being.

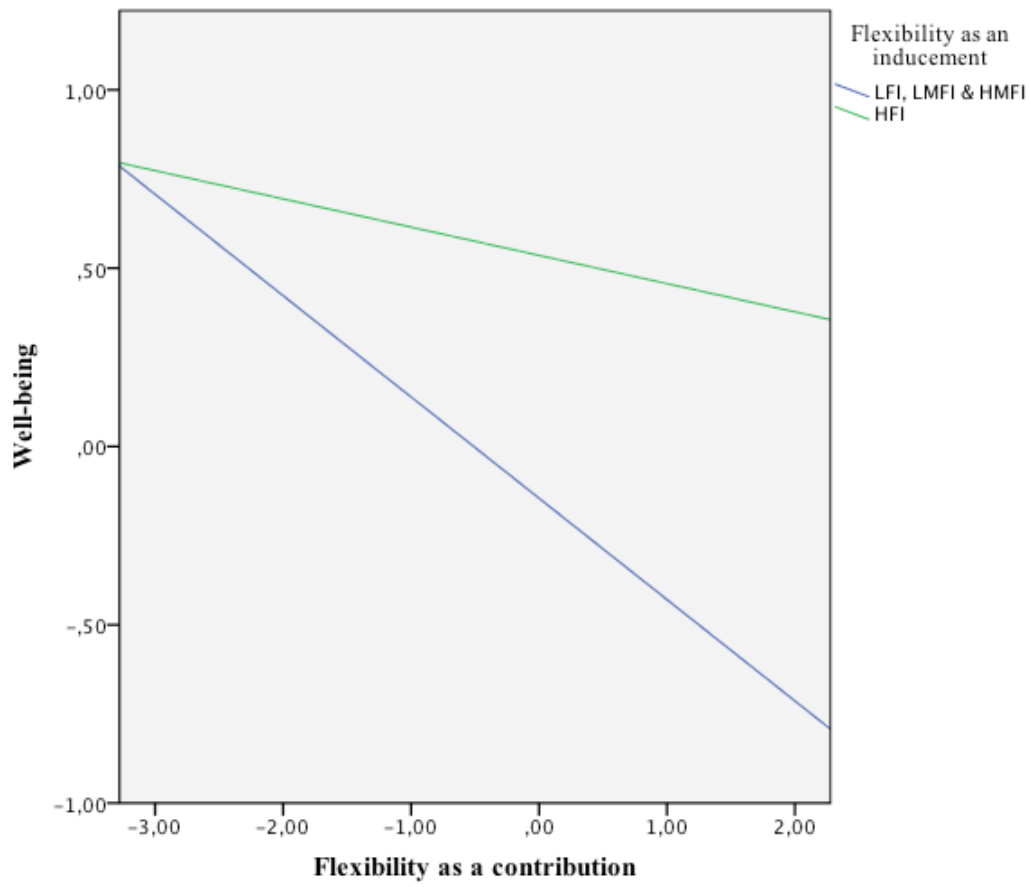


Table 3.7. Correlations, means and standard deviations.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. WB	0	1	(0.86)								
2. FC	0	1	-0.30**	(0.95)							
3. FI	0	1	0.43**	-0.32**	(0.88)						
4. Gender	0.48	0.5	0.01	-0.23**	0.1**						
5. Children	0.35	0.48	0.16**	-0.07*	0.28**	0.09*					
6. Age	34.09	6.07	0.12**	0.00	0.23**	0.13**	0.57**				
7. Junior	0.2	0.40	0.02	-0.46**	-0.05	0.17**	-0.19**	-0.25**			
8. Consultant	0.39	0.41	0	-0.11**	0	-0.04	-0.16**	-0.18**	-0.4**		
9. Manager	0.24	0.42	-0.02	0.26**	-0.01	-0.04	0.09*	0.1**	-0.28**	-0.44**	
10. Senior	0.17	0.38	-0.01	0.32**	0.07*	-0.08*	0.29**	0.39**	-0.23**	-0.36**	-0.25**

Table ** p < .01 ; * p < .05 ; N = 626; M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation.
 Gender was coded 0 for men, 1 for women; Children was coded 0 for no children, 1 for one or more children.
 Alpha reliabilities for scales extracted from PCA are in parentheses.

Table 3.8. Results of hierarchical regression analysis (Dependent variable = well-being; interaction variable = FC x FI).

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Constant	-0.52	(0.27)	0.14	(0.25)	0.03	(0.25)
Children	0.32***	(0.10)	0.08	(0.09)	0.08	(0.09)
Age	0.01	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)
Gender	-0.05	(0.08)	-0.14	(0.07)	-0.13	(0.07)
Junior	0.10	(0.11)	-0.08	(0.11)	-0.09	(0.11)
Manager	-0.12	(0.10)	0.11	(0.10)	0.10	(0.10)
Senior	-0.24	(0.12)	0.10	(0.13)	0.09	(0.13)
Flexibility as a contribution (FC)			-0.25***	(0.05)	-0.25***	(0.05)
Flexibility as an inducement (FI)			0.34***	(0.04)	0.34***	(0.04)
FC x FI					0.04	(0.03)
Degrees of freedom		619		617		616
R-squared (overall)		0.04		0.22		0.23
R-squared (change)		0.04***		0.19***		0.00

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05. Standard errors are in parentheses. Consultant dummy variable was used as a base variable.

Table 3.9. Results of hierarchical regression analysis (Dependent variable = well-being; interaction variable = FC x HFI).

Variables	Model 1b		Model 2b		Model 3b	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Constant	-0.52	(0.27)	-0.72	(0.25)	-0.04	(0.25)
Children	0.32***	(0.10)	0.01	(0.09)	0.11	(0.09)
Age	0.01	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.01)
Gender	-0.05	(0.08)	-0.17	(0.08)	-0.17	(0.08)
Junior	0.10	(0.11)	-0.15	(0.11)	-0.16	(0.11)
Manager	-0.12	(0.10)	0.17	(0.10)	0.15	(0.10)
Senior	-0.24	(0.12)	0.20	(0.13)	0.18	(0.13)
Flexibility as a contribution			-0.32***	(0.05)	-0.37***	(0.05)
High Flexibility as an inducement			0.55***	(0.09)	0.62***	(0.1)
FC x HFI					0.2*	(0.09)
Degrees of freedom		619		617		616
R-squared (overall)		0.04		0.18		0.19
R-squared (change)		0.04***		0.14***		0.01*

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05. Standard errors are in parentheses. Consultant dummy variable was used as a base variable.

3.5. Discussion

This chapter has tested the relationship between workplace flexibility and well-being. It has attempted to contribute to the literature in two ways. First, it has developed a new framework of perceived flexibility to explore employees' experiences of flexible work through two separate constructs. Second, using the lens of the JDC model, a well-established theory in the occupational psychology literature, it has examined whether these constructs are related with employee well-being.

To the best of my knowledge, no previous study has examined the applicability of the JDC model for understanding the relationship between flexible work and employee well-being. Karasek's (1979) JDC model posits that the lowest well-being is experienced in contexts characterised by high job demands and low job control. In line with this theory, this chapter expected that flexibility as contribution and flexibility as an inducement would have both a direct and an interactive relationship with well-being. Although the results of this chapter are exploratory and cannot be interpreted to indicate causality due to a cross-sectional design, four relevant findings can be highlighted.

First, results showed that flexibility as a contribution has a negative relationship with well-being. This indicates that when employees interpret flexibility as a contribution they provide to the organisation (for example by being constantly available, working overtime or changing work locations) their well-being appears to suffer. This finding is in line with previous research showing that, for example, having to be available for on-call work (Bamberg et al., 2012) or working variable hours (Askenazy, 2001) are detrimental to well-being.

Second, the results indicated that flexibility as an inducement has a positive relationship with well-being. Matching previous findings, these results suggest that if employees interpret flexibility as a source of control to make decisions over working time and location, their well-being is positively influenced (Ganster, 1989; Lyness et al., 2012).

Third, the combination of the two first findings provides an explanation to the, to date conflicting results regarding the flexibility-well-being relationship (Barney and Elias, 2010; de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). Two main conceptualisations of workplace flexibility exist that lead to opposed research traditions. One understands flexibility a source of choice and autonomy for employees to decide on the place and time of their work (e.g. Hill et al., 2008a). The other defines flexibility as “work behavior-related requirements grounded in organisational practices” to increase organisational efficiency (Hoge and Hornung, 2015; 421). As noted by Karasek (1979; 285), “many contradictory findings in the literature can be traced to incomplete models derived from (...) mutually exclusive research traditions”.

The findings presented in this chapter confirm those of chapter two that flexibility is a twofold concept with two independent but interrelated domains. Employees can interpret flexibility both as an inducement they receive and as a contribution they are required to provide. These two interpretations of flexibility need to be explored simultaneously but as separate constructs, because they have opposed relationships with well-being. Similarly to what the JDC model suggests for job-demands and control (Karasek, 1979), the two domains of flexibility combine additively (Häusser et al., 2010) to generate negative well-being outcomes in situations characterised by high perceived flexibility as a contribution and low perceived flexibility as an inducement.

To explore this relationship further, four categories of perceived flexibility were created: low, firm-oriented, employee-oriented and mutual flexibility. Each of these categories is characterised by high or low levels of flexibility as an inducement and flexibility as a contribution. The results show that the average well-being level for each of these categories is significantly different. This finding suggests that the two domains of flexibility interact and that their combination leads to varying levels of well-being. These findings resemble the JDC model (Karasek, 1979; Karasek and Theorell, 1990) in the sense that well-being is lowest for the firm-oriented flexibility category and highest for the employee-oriented flexibility category.

Fourthly, however, in accordance with the literature (van der Doef and Maes, 1999), support for the interactive effect hypothesis is not straightforward. Initial results showed that the interaction between flexibility as an inducement and flexibility as a contribution

does not significantly affect well-being. Indeed, few studies exploring the interaction hypothesis for the JDC model have found significant results (de Witte et al., 2007). Difficulty in finding evidence of interactive effects is also common in other disciplines and theoretical frameworks (Ramos-Vielba et al., 2015), as is the interpretation of the results of interaction effects (Aiken and West, 1991).

Nonetheless, further analysis showed that a small multiplicative effect appears to exist when perceived flexibility as an inducement is particularly high. This finding suggests that only high levels of flexibility as an inducement have the potential to moderate the negative relationship existing between flexibility as a contribution and well-being. This specific finding could be tied to the particular characteristics of the sample: employees of a consulting firm. One could assume that for consultants, which are required to attend to the needs of their clients rapidly and efficiently, only being in total control of their work arrangement might mitigate the negative well-being impact of the flexibility they feel required to provide.

This finding holds a practical implication: if employees perceive high levels of flexibility as an inducement, well-being may be improved without necessarily reducing perceived flexibility as a contribution. In this sense, in designing flexibility policies, HR must be aware that half-measures—that do not create particularly high levels of perceived flexibility as an inducement—may be less effective because they are unlikely to moderate the negative impact of perceived flexibility as a contribution. Identifying which individuals have a higher risk of decreased well-being and offering them high control over their work arrangement might slow the decay of their well-being and avoid negative consequences such as potential employee burn-out. Notwithstanding the above, it must be noted that this interaction was able to explain a small additional proportion of the variance of well-being. Indeed, for most studies the multiplicative effect sizes are considerably lower than the additive effects (Häusser et al., 2010).

In studying the connection between flexibility and well-being, this chapter has shown the need to overcome the dichotomy between the mutual gains and the conflicting outcomes perspectives of HRM literature (van de Voorde et al. 2012). Flexibility does not have a straightforward positive or negative effect on employee well-being but a mixed and complex one. Instead of supporting one of the opposed HRM perspectives, the find-

ings give credence to research of a different approach relying on the theory of the employment relationship (Simon, 1951).

As highlighted by the perceived flexibility framework, flexibility is not a straightforward practice that all employees understand and react to in a similar way (Boon et al., 2011). Like other aspects of the employment relationship, employees perceive flexibility as an inducement and as a contribution and different combinations of these lead to diverse well-being levels. However, the use of the theory of the employment relationship raises a relevant question. The theory assumes that balance needs to exist in order to preserve the relationship. Yet, the findings indicate that many employees perceive unbalanced arrangements. Further research that studies this phenomenon qualitatively is required to understand the reasons behind these unbalanced perceptions. In addition, the findings presented in this chapter raise the question that, as argued by Wright and Nishii (2007), perceptions of HR policies may matter more than the policies themselves, suggesting the need to explore flexibility from a process-oriented view (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Piening et al., 2014).

This research has limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study relied on self-report data that may result in spurious relationships due to common-method bias. Using self-report methods to understand employee perceptions of flexibility, was meant to answer a call in the literature criticising that most studies have disregarded employee experiences, using organisations as their unit of analysis and largely ignoring the differences in individual perceptions (Green et al., 2006). Future work could try to use medical reports to assess the well-being variable. However, accessing such data is highly sensitive due to its confidential nature and may not provide information on relevant areas of well-being such as mood.

Drawing the sample from only one organisation, in one specific location, may be considered another limitation for restricting the generalizability of the findings. However, even if statistical sampling-based generalizability is not possible beyond this case, the findings presented in this chapter have been theorised into a framework (Lee and Baskerville, 2003), that links flexible working with well-being which applicability can be analysed in other organisational settings and cultural contexts.

In addition, the results of regression must be interpreted cautiously. The data is cross-sectional and this technique is unable to determine causality without longitudinal or experimental data. The fact that the postulated model was derived from theory and is consistent with the data does not ensure that causality flows as hypothesised (Weston and Gore, 2006); alternative models are possible and could be the focus of further research attention. The interaction between the two domains of workplace flexibility is an interesting arena for future research. Further quantitative work could make progress in the area of methodology by, for instance, using multiple-source or longitudinal data. In addition, further theoretical development could be achieved by examining workers in occupations other than consulting or by looking at individual differences with regards to socioeconomic status or coping and detachment strategies.

Moreover, further research is needed to understand the processes by which employees construct their understanding of flexible work. As will be discussed in the following chapter, well-being may also impact perceptions of flexibility and alter the employee's interpretation of flexible working. In particular, the use of qualitative methods to develop contextual and longitudinal understandings of these issues would be particularly enlightening. Inextricable relationships exist between organisational practices, individual factors, social norms and well-being (Akerlind and Schunder, 2007) that can only be contextually apprehended. The following chapter four represents a first attempt to shed light on these issues.

3.6. Summary and conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with examining the relationship between flexibility and well-being as perceived by employees. It has extended the literature in two ways. First it has found evidence to support the use of a new framework, inductively developed in chapter two, to study flexibility as a twofold interpretable concept with two complementary dimensions: flexibility as an inducement and flexibility as a contribution. Building on the premises of the job-demands-control model, it has found that each of these dimensions relate to well-being in a different way. Furthermore, it appears that their interaction has an additional connection with well-being, at least under certain circumstances, raising the need for further exploration. The following chapter four, delves

into this matter. It investigates the sequence of events that connect flexibility and well-being and how they evolve over time to generate rich explanations and a process theory on the phenomena, aiming to complement and clarify the theory developed in this chapter.

Chapter 4. Flexibility and well-being as interconnected processes: evolution and negotiation

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4.0. Objective and overview

This chapter is concerned with explaining the process whereby flexible work arrangements develop and change. It theorises that well-being plays a major role in such process, acting as an individual's trigger for action. Therefore, it analyses flexibility and well-being as interconnected notions that unfold, tangle and develop over time.

The chapter draws on the findings discussed in previous chapters. First, the literature generally describes flexibility as a stable practice, designed by the organisation, that is oriented towards the interest of the employer or the employee. Instead, the findings presented in chapter two indicated that flexibility is a constructed notion that employees build through the perception of combined inducements and contributions. In that sense, it is an unstable and evolving phenomenon that both the organisation and the employee contribute to, through a processual exchange. Building on these findings, this chapter poses the following question: How do flexible work arrangements evolve over time?

In addition, this chapter explores the role that well-being plays in this evolution. Chapter three showed that a relationship exists between flexibility and well-being and that such relationship is different depending on the employee's perception of flexibility. However, these findings are exploratory and do not show causality. They do not provide information on the impact of time and the unfolding processes that explain existing relationships. Thus, the following questions arise: Are flexibility and well-being interconnected processes? Do they play a role in each other's evolution over time?

The findings indicate that flexibility and well-being are indeed entangled processes. They suggest that well-being is a triggering factor for employees' to evaluate their flexible work arrangements and as such, it plays a major role in the ongoing construction of such arrangements. Flexibility and well-being are co-evolving phenomena.

This chapter is organised into five sections. It starts by discussing the two most widely referenced work and well-being theories in the literature. Their postulates are used as a springboard to propose a process view of flexibility and well-being and build the research questions. The second section discusses perspectives on how employment con-

tracts change and provides an overall theoretical heuristic to understanding the evolution of flexibility over time. The third section presents the methods employed for this research. In the fourth section the findings are interpreted and analysed. The fifth section discusses the findings to develop theory on the relationship between flexibility and well-being.

4.1. Literature review

In general, “flexibility” has a positive connotation, especially in comparison with “rigidity” (Rose, 1999). It seems that all that is flexible results in better outcomes for stakeholders and that flexibility programs create a win-win situation for organisations and their employees (Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2009). Indeed, numerous studies find that flexible working has a positive impact on well-being, for example by increasing work-life balance (Hill et al., 2001), or reducing exhaustion (Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). As a result, many assume that the flexibility-well-being relationship is universally positive.

However, some studies have identified that flexibility may have a negative impact on employee well-being, challenging the assumption of overall gains and the unitarist stance of the literature. Russell et al. (2009) find that people involved in home-working experience higher levels of work pressure. Harris’ (2003) case study reports one third of the employees felt home-working had increased rather than reduced their stress levels. Kelliher and Anderson (2010) show that flexible working can generate work intensification.

These opposed findings underline there is still much to learn on the processes by which flexibility and well-being are connected. This section discusses existing approaches to the link between work and well-being and their applicability to understanding the flexibility-well-being relationship.

4.1.1. Well-being at work: a static misconception

Researchers have developed a number of theories that attempt to model complex connections between work and well-being in a comprehensible way. This section discusses the two predominant models: job demands and control (JDC) and effort-reward imbalance (ERI). Both rely on the premise that a displacement in the equilibrium in the employment relationship is the inception of decreased employee well-being.

4.1.1.1. Job-demands-control model

JDC (Karasek, 1979; Karasek and Theorell, 1990) is one of the foremost theoretical contributions on the relationship between work and well-being (Fila et al., 2014). The model focuses on discretion (the extent to which employees have the potential to control the tasks they conduct throughout the working day) and demands (stressors existing in the workplace) associated with jobs.

One of the central postulates of the theory is that having a sense of control over one's life is a crucial need in building resilience and controlling the stress created by environmental demands. In line with this argument, the central tenet of this model is that employee discretion over work balances job demands and mitigates the negative effects they cause. As a result, for "high strain jobs" (high on demands and low on control) the occurrence of illness or negative well-being experiences is likely, whereas "low strain jobs" (low in demands and high on control) bear the lowest well-being risks. For instance, holding a "high strain job" has been confirmed as a risk factor for cardiovascular mortality (Johnson, et al., 1996; Theorell et al., 1998).

Further developments of the model argue that reduced well-being in "high strain jobs" can be the consequence of both additive and interactive effects. While the additive effects assumption has achieved significant support in numerous studies, evidence of multiplicative effects is rather scarce (Haüsser and colleagues, 2010).

4.1.1.2. Effort-reward imbalance

The effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996) expands the concept of job demands and focuses on rewards rather than control as their balancing counterpart to mitigate well-being problems. Effort results from the combination of extrinsic job demands and/or obligations that are imposed on the employee (i.e., time pressure), and intrinsic motivation to meet those demands and obligations. Rewards include both financial remuneration and some non-financial or intangible elements (esteem, status, job security or career opportunities).

In essence, the ERI model hypothesises three main relationships. First, that a perceived lack of reciprocity or imbalance between efforts and rewards will bring about increased arousal and stress levels, together with diverse well-being problems. Most empirical studies out of the 45 that van Vegchel and colleagues (2005b; 1126) review support the hypothesis that high effort paired with low reward lessens employee well-being. It has been associated with both physical well-being problems, such as cardiovascular diseases or even mortality (KiviMäki et al., 2006) and decreased psychological well-being, for instance emotional exhaustion or mental distress (Shimazu & de Jonge, 2009; de Jonge et al., 2000).

In addition van Vegchel et al. (2005a; 540) find that only low rewards intensify the impact of effort on mental strain. If rewards are medium or high, rewards do not moderate the effort-strain relationship. Moreover, it seems important to differentiate between types of rewards. The results of a 2002 study (van Vegchel et al, 2002) show that when esteem or job security are used as the reward indicators, the impact of effort-reward imbalance on well-being is higher than when salary is the selected indicator.

The second hypothesis focuses on the concept of “overcommitment”, defined as “a set of attitudes, behaviours and emotions reflecting excessive striving in combination with a strong desire of being approved and esteemed” (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; 310) and a difficulty in detaching from work (Siegrist et al., 2004). The assumption is that a high level of overcommitment shall increase the risk of poor well-being. In this sense, overcommitment is considered to be a risk factor for well-being independent of effort-

rewards reciprocity (Siegrist, 1996; Siegrist et al., 2004). According to van Vegchel et al.'s (2005b) review, most studies looking at this hypothesis find supportive evidence.

Thirdly, Siegrist (1996) posits an interaction hypothesis: overcommitted employees who also experience effort-reward imbalance are more likely to suffer well-being problems. The combination of the two generates the highest risk. Compared to the other two hypotheses, the third one has been scarcely explored (van Vegchel et al., 2005b) which means that no strong conclusions on it can be drawn relying on current findings (Feldt et al., 2013; 66).

4.1.2. A different approach: well-being as a process

These two theories on the relation between work and well-being follow a balance logic. They both posit that equilibrium (between demands and control or effort and rewards) entails better outcomes than imbalance. They have the advantage of seeing well-being as a multifaceted notion that does not depend on one clearly defined variable but on the interconnection between several variables—namely demands, discretion, effort and rewards. In the JDC model, equilibrium is primarily dependent on the employees' ability to achieve control over their environment. The ERI model pays particular attention to reciprocity in the work contract: well-being is the result of a balanced exchange of contributions and rewards. Conversely, perceived inequity is experienced as stressful and compromises long term health and well-being.

However, there are a number of limitations to be considered. First, both models obfuscate the individual's experiences shaping the meaning of job demand, control, and efforts and rewards, relegating them to secondary considerations. Nonetheless, the meaning of job demands and stressors has been argued to be socially constructed (Dick, 2000). Two employees may respond differently to the same demand, or one may consider a demand as 'part of the job', while the other considers it to be excessive and a source of distress. In other words, an increase of X in job demand may mean a linear deterioration for one employee, while having no impact to another. Besides, notions like demand, control, efforts, rewards and even well-being are devoid of context, and overlook individual experiences shaping their meaning. In addition, Polanyi and Tompa (2004; 15) have found that what employees understand as effort and rewards is chang-

ing. They propose “three emerging dimensions of work – social interactions, perceptions of the product or service of work, and the arrangement of work – that (...) extend beyond the scope of current models of work and health” by extending the conceptualisation of both effort and reward.

Second, neither model contemplates the possibility of a reversal in causality: well-being may trigger changes in efforts and rewards. An increase in well-being may make employees reconsider the mix between efforts and rewards, and reshape their understanding of what constitutes job demand, control, efforts, and rewards or even the meaning of well-being itself. Becoming conscious that their well-being is at stake may also push employees to strategize a change. Instead of depicting the relationship of these variables as linear, it may be more accurate to see them as circular, feeding onto one another in a processual manner.

Third, both theories assume implicitly that the state that is being sought is a state of equilibrium. However, that is not necessarily the case in every field of employment. In some areas, such as investment banking or consulting, one could argue that the return for contributions takes a long-term approach so present equilibrium is not pursued. Besides, assuming the existence of equilibrium can be judged as erroneous. The employment relationship is constantly changing and is therefore better analysed from a process perspective (Conway and Briner, 2005). In this sense, if some form of coordination or balance ever exists, it is not necessarily equilibrium between well-defined, objective variables, but the result of unfolding processes taking place over a long period of time with an undefined and uncertain trajectory.

These criticisms can be summarised into one major point: these are variance theories and lack a process perspective (Langley, 1999). None of these theories consider issues that are crucial to understanding the well-being of individuals. For instance, the sequence of events and how those events come to be interpreted and integrated into the individuals' reality will shape their understanding of effort, rewards and well-being. Time should be a central aspect of well-being theories, but it is generally overlooked (Langley et al., 2013).

This limitation originates in the definitions of health or well-being themselves. The most widely spread definition of health is the World Health Organisation's. It defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1948). Although this definition contemplates the multidimensional nature of health and overcomes the pathological perspective (Akerlind and Schunder, 2007) (c.f. chapter 1), it has not been exempt from criticism.

On the one hand the use of the word "complete" makes the definition more of an idealistic ambition than a realistic target, because it entails that a large proportion of the population should be classified as unhealthy. The notion of completeness is elusive. One person may be happy and content with their work and family life, yet have high cholesterol levels, overweight and low energy. Another person may be perfectly fit physically wise yet be anxious and depressed. Whose well-being is more complete? Individuals can experience positive and negative well-being simultaneously and trade-offs may exist between physical, psychological and social dimensions (Grant et al., 2007). Instead of being a universal notion, well-being is relative and the term "complete" proves to be extremely reductionist.

On the other hand, the definition refers to a static "state", neglecting that well-being is an on-going process in constant change. Understanding well-being as a state means that one could measure it and depict it at any point in time, thus failing to take into account any change. For instance, one may feel tired after a bad night but refreshed after coffee and an insightful meeting. A two-hour delay in measuring one's well-being may make a difference. In that sense, MacIntosh et al. (2007) propose to see well-being in a constant dynamic flux resulting from the individual's effort to achieve coordination between themselves and their environment. In this line Bircher (2005, 336) proposes that well-being is a "dynamic state (...) characterised by a physical, social and mental potential, which satisfies the demands of life commensurate with age, culture and personal responsibility". Behind the term "dynamic state" lays the idea that individuals accumulate successive well-being experiences that flow.

This is not only a measurement related issue, but an epistemological one. If the actors also understand well-being as a fluctuating process, then the theoretical constructs used

must cater for that fluctuation. Otherwise, the reality described by the actors may be artificially truncated. The relativity in the notion of well-being departs from an understanding of objective truth. Instead, well-being is constructed by the actors while they make and attribute meaning to the world, drawing upon their previous experiences (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant, 2015). Moreover, this construction does not depend only on the actors but also on the context and space in which they move, the things they see, the practices that surround them. Well-being is “socially contingent, a construct embedded in society and culture and prone to change and redefinition over time” (Fattore et al., 2007; 11).

Instead of looking at well-being as a relative and constructed notion, studies of well-being at work have tended to take an objectivist stance. Perhaps this is due to the limited interest that management scholars have devoted to well-being on its own, instead of as an instrument towards performance (Pfeffer, 2010). However, workplace practices and well-being are connected through complicated chains of causality (Askenazy, 2001), which can hardly be apprehended without following the actors who make sense of these connections (Latour, 2005).

4.1.3. Flexibility and well-being in motion

Chapter two showed that perceived flexibility is constructed as a compendium of perceived flexibility inducements and contributions (c.f. Figure 2.3, p.80). Therefore, the JDC and ERI premise that a balanced exchange entails higher well-being could well be applied to understanding the flexibility-well-being relationship. The hypothesis could be made that well-being is higher when perceived inducements and contributions are similar. However, this would assume that flexibility and well-being are both stable notions, distorting their intricate nature.

The findings presented in chapter two highlight that flexibility is not a constant well-defined practice, but a complex perceived exchange, dependent on individual experiences, that is constructed over time. The discussion in the previous section shows that well-being is also an idiosyncratic and developing phenomenon, which is incidental to experiences. MacInstosh et al. (2007) argue that well-being research should focus on the interactions that compose the process of well-being. They propose adopting a sustaina-

ble approach, turning “the emphasis away from often arbitrarily selected states, events and outcomes, and instead (...) [drawing] attention towards the temporal interconnections and interdependencies between them” (MacIntosh et al. 2007; 216).

Following these authors, focus should be on the mechanisms sustaining the flow of flexibility and well-being experiences, rather than on momentary snapshots. As a result, although the empirical support of JDC and ERI models is quite significant (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; van Vegchel et al., 2005a), the conceptualisations of work and well-being inherent to these theories, prevent them from offering processual explanations. To fill this gap, this chapter explores whether flexibility and well-being are co-evolving phenomena. In particular it is concerned with developing theory about the mechanisms through which flexibility at work and well-being are connected and how they change over time.

The findings presented in chapter two indicate that the psychological contract and the theory of the employment relationship are useful frameworks to understand workplace flexibility. To make sense of their reality, individuals create a mental picture of their flexibility arrangement—labelled overall perceived flexibility—which—mimicking psychological contracts—can be defined as the employee’s belief over exchanged flexibility contributions and inducements. Moreover, defining flexibility as an exchange points towards the existence of a bargaining process. The following section discusses how these two frameworks provide an overall heuristic that is also useful to understand how flexible work arrangements evolve over time and the role that well-being plays in this process.

4.2. Theoretical framework: Changing and evolving contracts

According to Simon (1951), firms build employment relationships because of their incomplete and malleable nature; therefore a successful relation is one capable of incorporating change. How this change unfolds is not easy to apprehend. While a formal work contract is explicit and can only be changed through mutual consent, the psychological contract can be quietly and arbitrarily altered (Guest, 1998).

The psychological contract is the mental picture that each employee forges of the mutual obligations that constitute their employment relationship (Rousseau, 1995). It helps specify the contributions that employees believe they owe to their organisation and the inducements they believe they are owed in exchange. Psychological contracts develop through the employees' unfolding daily experiences and interactions. As a result, they change and evolve contingent on events and on the individuals' understandings of such events. They are re-interpreted in time, therefore they are constantly shaped and re-shaped (Conway and Briner, 2005) and can change with or without formal acknowledgement (Morrison, 1994).

Grasping individual interpretations and responses to these changes is essential to understanding the continuance of the employment relationship. The literature proposes two broad ways in which contracts evolve over time: adaptation or transformation.

4.2.1. Adaptation

Adaptation happens when the terms of the psychological contract are modified, clarified, substituted or expanded in such a way that existing explicit arrangements persist regardless of changes. For instance, employees may accept to undertake new tasks or adapt their schedule to client needs, without renegotiating their work contract. The adaptability of agreements based on the authority relation—whereby employees accept managerial prerogative to organise work within certain limits—reduces the need for employment contracts to be renegotiated on a regular basis, as compared with other forms of contracts (Williamson, 1975; 72). This makes adaptation an essential feature of the employment relationship.

Rousseau (1995) explains two different mechanisms that allow the preservation of the original explicit deal, agreed upon hiring: contract drift and accommodation. The difference between the two resides in the origin of the change creating force. For the contract drift, change is internal and does not respond to any specific, determined plan of action, but to cognitive tendencies and a natural maturation process. The terms of the contract gradually come to be understood differently, without a specific conscious trigger. Change is brought about by individual interpretations of both one's own and others' jobs and by general life-cycle related experiences. For example, as employees' tenure

increases, they may come to accept more tasks to support their colleagues and become a source of information without being officially promoted. The accommodation process is prompted by an external change of working conditions (mainly what is done, where it is done, when, or how). These modifications originate from the organisation seeking to respond to competitive needs. They are considered adaptations when “successfully subsumed under the existing contract” (ibid, 153).

Both Barnard (1938) and Simon (1951) highlight that employees do not give *carte blanche* to their employer. The area of acceptance, which demarcates that which is perceived as reasonable and valid and that which is not, limits their acceptance of management and the authority relationship. If labelled as acceptable, changes are absorbed and internalised by the employee. If not, a different explicit contract must be tailored and negotiated, leading to the development of a new contract. Sometimes the limits are not well established. Fuzziness makes the interpretation of what falls within the zone of acceptance an intricate task. For example, while taking over a departing colleague’s full list of responsibilities without notice may not be well received, slowly adding new content to one’s role may be deemed acceptable. However, when the slow filling of a glass might start spilling over is difficult to say (Cooke et al., 2004).

As posited by cognitive appraisal theory, emotions do not directly depend on events but on the interpretation of such events, which is influenced by contextual factors (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The extent to which flexibility will be interpreted as part of the zone of acceptance may depend on both the employee’s personal evaluation of the situation and on his or her ability to cope with the situation (Lazarus 1991). Both of these cognitive appraisal processes are entangled with the context in which the employee is immersed (Roseman et al., 1999).

Simon (1951), and especially Williamson (1975), posit that actors are likely to behave opportunistically. One party will exert its power to improve its situation at the expense of the other. For example in an employer’s market—a situation in which work supply exceeds demand—organisations would impose worse working conditions to employees that would have difficulties in finding a new job if they decided to quit. Conversely, in an employee’s market employees would push to have better conditions because the firm

might be unable to replace them if they left. This means that context may strongly influence the zone of acceptance and the limits of adaptation.

In any case, adaptation requires the individual to accept changes in a way that preserves the existing work contract and avoids an explicit negotiation. It is the slow internalisation that progressively normalises new situations. However, this individual process may be strongly influenced by an incumbent structure of legitimisation, which holds sway over individual actions (Giddens, 1984). The generalised acceptance of evolving working terms makes it more likely that each individual actor will accept them. For instance, the fact that many employees accept to prolong their work hours to counteract the effects of increased competition provides a normative legitimisation of overtime and induces other employees to welcome similar conditions.

What stands out from an analysis of the drift and accommodation mechanisms is that the new does not replace the old; history remains (Rousseau, 1996; Conway and Briner, 2005), which means that successive experiences shape perceptions. A new employee will not judge a change in work arrangements in the same way an experienced one would, because the latter has been exposed to successive drifts and accommodations. Independently of any objective truth, individuals reason over their changing contexts. They understand and make sense of the changes they perceive *in time*. In other words, a previous change might have been accepted at the time, but becomes questioned in light of a new change. For instance, an employee may accept to take work home with him but reject to keep doing so if at the same time extending work hours in the office becomes the norm. Thus, change does not necessarily stack as equivalent units, one might prove more cumbersome over time than another: one more change might be all that it takes to tilt the balance in favour of a formal renegotiation of the work arrangement. When that happens, explicit changes in the contract—or in Rousseau's (1996; 50) words, 'radical surgery'—may need to take place.

4.2.2. Transformation

On occasion, the old deal must be extinguished to leave room for a new one. Such transformation requires an explicit renegotiation of the terms that are formally accepted by both parties. While adaptation preserves the explicit and psychological contracts, trans-

formation implies a major reshape of the latter and sometimes a redrafting of the former.

According to Rousseau (1995), this process is initiated by the firm willing to introduce major modifications to the terms of work. Requiring significantly different behaviours or notably enlarging job requirements may fall under this umbrella. From her perspective, it appears that transformation is brought about by radical change rather than by continuous little changes. However, one must also contemplate the option that the employee is not just a passive receptacle of change. Beyond being involved in the negotiation, employees could also be thought capable of triggering such change.

On the one hand, transformation may be the result of job creep, a slow but steady expansion of responsibilities “where discretionary contributions (...) become viewed as in-role obligations by supervisors and peers” (van Dyne and Ellis, 2004; 184). People may internalize increased contributions because others around them (supervisors and peers) come to see these contributions in-role obligations. As a result of these increased in-role obligations, the employee’s ability to adapt may come to a limit, prompting a reaction and request for renegotiation. Such renegotiation is not limited to a salary discussion. In question are all the elements that shape the individual’s perception of the zone of acceptance, for example aspects such as voice and performance management (Marsden, 2007). On the other hand, transformation may originate within the individual’s personal conditions. Although some of the aspects of the life-cycle may be absorbed through adaptation and gradual drift, certain changes might provoke the individual to demand a new deal. For instance, employees may adapt when they have their first child but explicitly demand changes once they have their second or third child.

In sum, this analysis highlights two main issues. First, most likely, at some point in the relationship, terms will need to be re-evaluated, rendered explicit and reshaped. Second, employees’ role in this process is not just that of internalising change (either within the old psychological contract or a new one) but also to induce and initiate such changes.

As noted above, the psychological contract provides a useful approach to the study of flexibility at work. This framework enables a dynamic view of the employment relationship and provides an individually centred understanding of how the relationship

evolves over time. Most importantly, it allows a diachronic approach where the interpretation of events feed onto the unfolding of further experiences. Specifically, this chapter uses the characteristics of contract change as a starting point to explore whether changes in perceived flexibility are tangled with well-being. In particular it explores to what extent well-being plays a role in how change unfolds. It contributes to this literature by looking to temporally order variables and explore mechanisms that trigger and influence changes in flexibility.

4.3. Methods

The analyses in this chapter rely primarily on 41 semi-structured interviews. The first 17 interviews were conducted in phase one of the data collection process (c.f. chapter 1, section 1.8). These are the same interviews that allowed depicting Minerva employees' understanding of flexible working in chapter two. The present chapter reports on questions focused on these employees' experience of well-being and its relationship to flexible work. In phase three of the data collection process another 24 interviews were conducted, using generally the same list of preliminary questions to initiate the conversation. These interviews confirmed the understanding of flexibility gained after the previous phases and provided additional insights on the employees' perception of their well-being and its connection to flexibility. All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately one hour. In some cases, they were complemented with telephone conversations with some of the interviewees to obtain some additional data or clear up certain doubts that arose during the coding process.

These 41 interviews include four members of the HR team and 37 employees from a range of departments and ranks, having different personal characteristics (c.f. Table 4.1). The people were selected to include as diverse a range of experiences as possible using the same snowball sampling logic described in chapter two.

In addition, this chapter draws from over ten informal conversations held with former Minerva employees and with employees I encountered during the two days I spent at the firm's premises. These conversations were opportunistic and took place in the context of activities with personal acquaintances; hence they were highly informal and not rec-

orded. Nevertheless, these talks diversified the sample and were useful to include the perspective of individuals having quit the organisation.

Table 4.1: Characteristics of participants

ID	Work group (department)	Rank	Gender
1	Back office (HR)	Senior Executive	F
2	Back office (HR)	Manager	F
3	Management consulting	Senior Manager	M
4	Management consulting	Analyst	M
5	Back office (IT)	Manager	M
6	Management consulting	Specialist	M
7	Back office (Finance)	Specialist	F
8	Management consulting	Specialist	M
9	Back office (Finance)	Analyst	M
10	Management consulting	Senior Manager	F
11	Back office (Services)	Specialist	F
12	Management consulting	Senior Manager	F
13	Back office (Research)	Specialist	M
14	Management consulting	Analyst	F
15	Management consulting	Senior Manager	F
16	Back office (Finance)	Manager	F
17	Management consulting	Manager	F
18	Back office (Services)	Analyst	F
19	Back office (HR)	Senior Executive	F
20	Back office (Research)	Specialist	M
21	Management consulting	Specialist	F
22	Back office (Finance)	Manager	F
23	Back office (HR)	Manager	F
24	Back office (Operations)	Specialist	F
25	Management consulting	Senior Manager	F
26	Back office (Operations)	Senior Analyst	F
27	Management consulting	Manager	M
28	Management consulting	Manager	F
29	Management consulting	Manager	F
30	Management consulting	Senior Manager	F
31	Back office (Services)	Senior Manager	F
32	Management consulting	Analyst	F
33	Back office (IT)	Senior Manager	M
34	Back office (Finance)	Analyst	F
35	Management consulting	Manager	F
36	Management consulting	Senior Executive	M
37	Management consulting	Analyst	M
38	Back office (IT)	Manager	M
39	Management consulting	Specialist	M
40	Back office (IT)	Senior Manager	M
41	Management consulting	Senior Executive	F

I coded the interview data using templates for thematic analysis (King, 2004). Template analysis is a technique whereby data are codified using themes that are reflected in a list of codes (“template”). Some of these codes are defined “à priori”, based on the literature, the theoretical underpinning of the study and the research questions. More codes and themes are added to the template as the coding progresses. As a result, this technique combines top-down and bottom up coding (Dey, 1993) with themes that come both from the data and the literature. Table 4.2 shows the initial template with the a priori codes, generated from the informing theories presented above and the findings discussed in chapter two. A middle ground coding solution was adopted to incorporate the literature, previous findings and emerging ideas.

Table 4.2: Initial coding template

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Perceived flexible work arrangements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Flexibility as a contribution 1.2. Flexibility as an inducement 1.3. Exchange 1.4. Balancing mechanisms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.4.1. Variance 1.4.2. Fulfilled expectations 1.5. Features of the arrangement other than flexibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.5.1. Inducements (Salary, job security, training, etc.) 1.5.2. Contributions (In role and extra role behaviours) 2. Change in perceived work arrangements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. Adaptation - Drift 2.2. Transformation 2.3. Formal / Informal changes 2.4. Individual characteristics and predispositions 2.5. Zone of acceptance 3. Employee well-being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Dimensions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1.1. Physical 3.1.2. Psychological 3.1.3. Social 3.2. Balance and well-being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.2.1. Demands and control 3.2.2. Efforts and rewards 3.3. Well-being management <p>- Codes in pink were derived from the coding process reported in chapter 2 - Codes in black were derived from the literature</p>

I analysed the interview data in three phases. First of all, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and read the transcripts to get a general picture of their content. Second, I used the initial template to code the interviews. In general, I coded full paragraphs to preserve the context of the comments and ensure they were self-explanatory and comprehensive (without having to return to the original interview for clarification). Since template analysis permits parallel coding (King, 2004), some paragraphs were classified within more than one code. In the process, a number of issues emerged from the data that required creating new codes and subcodes and changing some of the pre-existing codes, therefore I gradually revised and refined the template.

This iterative process continued until I had coded all the interviews. Then, I asked two colleagues to review the resulting template to ensure it was sufficiently clear and comprehensive to stop modifications (ibid; 263). Thirdly, I recoded all the transcripts using the final version of the template that appears in Table 4.3. The codes are hierarchically organised and similar subgroups are clustered together within a general higher order category (ibid; 258). This process was supported by the use of the qualitative data management software package QSR NVivo. “Recognising the fusion of theory and empirical material” (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011; 4), I combined inductive and deductive logics through several iterations between existing theory and data to generate what I understand is the most convincing interpretation of my findings. Given the longitudinal and multi-method nature of this case study, my interpretations are informed by different kinds of data but this paper reports solely on the interview material.

Table 4.3: Final coding template

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Perceived flexible work arrangements<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1. Flexibility as a contribution1.2. Flexibility as an inducement1.3. Exchange1.4. Balancing mechanisms<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.4.1. Variance1.4.2. Fulfilled expectations1.5. Features of the arrangement other than flexibility<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.5.1. Inducements (Salary, job security, training, etc.)1.5.2. Contributions (In role and extra role behaviours)2. Change in perceived work arrangements<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1. Adaptation (Informal - Tacit)2.2. Transformation (Formal - Explicit)<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.2.1. Negotiation<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.2.1.1. Promotion2.2.1.2. Change of work group2.2.1.3. Reduced work hours2.3. Formal / Informal changes2.4. Individual characteristics and predispositions2.5. Zone of acceptance2.6. Drift<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.6.1. Accepted drift2.6.2. Rejected drift2.7. Agency3. Employee well-being<ol style="list-style-type: none">3.1. Dimensions<ol style="list-style-type: none">3.1.1. Physical3.1.2. Psychological3.1.3. Social3.1.4. Trade-offs3.2. Balance and well-being<ol style="list-style-type: none">3.2.1. Demands and control3.2.2. Efforts and rewards3.3. Evolution over time<ol style="list-style-type: none">3.3.1. Process of decline3.3.2. Trigger for action3.4. Engagement<ol style="list-style-type: none">3.4.1. Quits3.5. Well-being management <p>- Codes in red are emergent codes (added to the template during the coding process) - Codes in blue are adapted codes (changed from the initial version of the template) - Codes in green were deleted (deleted from the template during the coding process)</p>
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4.4. Analysis

The interviews show that the processes by which flexibility at work and well-being evolve over time are inextricably tied. The following sections describe, first, how the two broad categories of contract change (adaptation and transformation) can be identified in the employees' descriptions of flexibility at work and, second, how well-being plays a major role in shaping that change.

4.4.1. Adaptation: a slow decay in well-being

One way in which flexibility arrangements evolve is through adaptation. Indeed, some changes in flexibility do not appear to be explicitly negotiated between Minerva and its employees but rather redrafted in everyday practice. Employees depict these changes mainly as unconscious, gradual and, most importantly, firm oriented. Two interviewees described their experience of flexible work in the following terms:

"I think the company gradually demands more flexibility. They require us to have that flexibility and to give a little more every day and I think that unconsciously you let yourself go and you don't even notice". (E8)

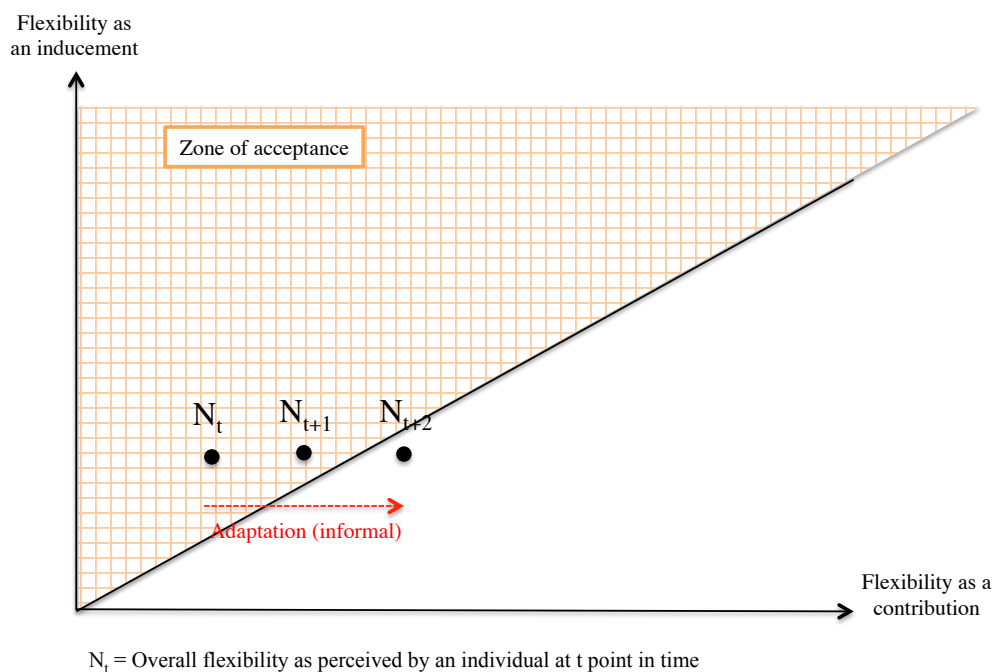
"Objectives have to be met, working 9 to 2 and 3 to 7, 10 to 8, or whatever. Each year objectives get tougher and people need to give a little more and be more flexible with their time to meet them but that is not like a formal thing discussed in performance appraisals" (E39)

From a situation that is perceived as equitable, the arrangement slowly drifts towards a situation whereby employees are required to show more flexibility than they enjoy. The two interviewees have to make a conscious reflection to take stock of how their flexibility evolves and how they adapt to it. The idea of "drift" emerges as a key notion: the change in flexibility contributions is almost invisible, imperceptible without deliberately pondering it. The situation gradually, surreptitiously becomes "tougher". The word drift depicts a situation of uncontrolled and unnoticed movement, like an unanchored boat moving adrift. The employees are not necessarily in agreement with this drift, yet they

“let go” anyway and incorporate increased flexibility demands into their perceived flexible work arrangement. The adaptation of the arrangement also escapes formalisation, making it a tacit expectation that is re-enforced through everyday practice. The original objectives are modified, yet remain in the minds of employees, even if a certain effort is required by them to re-articulate the old deal.

Figure 4.1 illustrates this steady process by showing the experience of one individual (e.g. employee X). Building on the findings discussed in chapter two, the horizontal axis represents an employee’s perception of flexibility as an inducement and the vertical axis represents her perception of flexibility as a contribution. N indicates this employee’s overall perception of flexibility. It is her mental picture of her flexibility agreement, which is built through the internalisation of multiple experiences of flexibility as an inducement and as a contribution (c.f. Figure 2.3, p.80). The Figure 4.1 shows how this overall perception moves over time from N_t to N_{t+1} to N_{t+2} , indicating that perceived flexibility drifts towards a situation with increased perceptions of flexibility as a contribution but similar perceptions of flexibility as an inducement.

Figure 4.1: Flexibility process for employee X



It is relevant to note that Figure 4.1 shows the experience of one individual and not a representative agent. The pace of change, the perception of inducements and the limits

of the zone of acceptance differ among individuals. However, the interviews indicate that the process whereby perceived demands increase is common to most employees. This movement is informal: unwritten, tacit, and largely invisible.

The chequered area represents this employee's zone of acceptance, where this person is ready to submit to management authority. The increase in perceptions of flexibility as a contribution over time, make the perceived arrangement move outside of this zone. A question emerges: if the movement towards N_{t+2} is tacit and largely invisible, how do employees realise that their flexibility has gone beyond their zone of acceptance, that objectives get "tougher"—as interview 44 said—to a point where employees feel the need to speak up? Well-being, here, takes an active role and pushes the employee to analyse her situation and request a renegotiation. Indeed, continuously adapting to increasing perceptions of flexibility as a contribution appears to bring about a gradual deterioration in the employee's well-being. In some employees' accounts the connection between flexibility and well-being is laborious. Its existence is not readily conscious as evidenced in the following conversation:

“Employee: Lately I feel like the work peaks are more frequent or... I don't know, like each time I give more and more, more hours, more trips, more effort... I gradually notice it.

Researcher: How do you deal with this?

Employee: Barely. When there is a lot of work, badly. Emaciated, with bags under my eyes, without sleep, on the basis of coffee shots, whatever, and also the tension. The tension keeps you going but when you are done, you kind of feel the fall in your body and then well, you try rest. There is not much more to it. Be strong if your body allows you. It's also a physical conditions issue. Not everybody can resist some rhythm at the physical level, you can't, you are much more tired and it's just impossible to lead a certain life” (E7)

Although she clearly perceives an increase in her contributions, which takes the form of “longer hours, more trips, more effort”, she only associates it with well-being issues—“Emaciated, with bags under my eyes, without sleep...”—when asked how she deals with it. The link is not generalized, but specific to her experience. Most importantly she speaks of being unable to lead a satisfactory life. Her account is reminiscent of MacIn-

tosh's et al. (2007) proposal that well-being is a means to an end, a resource that allows individuals to lead prosperous and productive lives.

Other employees, however, explicitly associate changes in their experience of flexibility to well-being. Perceptions of increased contribution go hand in hand with decreased well-being:

“Demanded flexibility grows specifically in the aspect of continuous availability: you cannot disappear at 7pm because you get things to do and you are connected and ready to go. This affects well-being very negatively, although people don't entirely realise it in general until you are starting to feel burnt out.” (E28)

“You can't leave and forget about it. You can't disconnect. Instead there is a continuous feeling that you need to be on top of things. This is extremely bad for health. This is a very demanding company and I don't ever disconnect from it, not even during weekends or the summer. I do this because I want to” (E34)

These interviewees strongly connect struggles with well-being to an increase in the flexibility they provide to the firm. In their opinion, employees' well-being is negatively affected by one of the aspects of flexibility as a contribution, namely being constantly available. However, this well-being deterioration goes unnoticed until, as interviewee 28 noted, *“you are starting to feel burnt out”*. Not only is the perception of flexibility as a contribution growing, it is becoming ubiquitous, inescapable even: *“You can't disconnect. Instead there is a continuous feeling that you need to be on top of things”*. The feeling of unease accentuates to a point described by interviewee 34 as being *“extremely bad”* for her health. Despite all this, she adds a clear message: *“I do this because I want to”*. She accepts the situation, at least for now.

The process of deterioration is idiosyncratic. Each individual's experiences and features shape the process in different ways. An interviewee believed age plays a relevant role: *“As long as you are very young, the decline process is slower, it doesn't affect much, but in the long run, it takes its toll on you physically because of stress, of long hours, of little rest, of anxiety” (E10)*. Another one highlighted individual coping mechanisms,

such as reading for detachment: *“Look I need to read or to calm down. These are things that are necessary and that nowadays I don’t do. That affects health for sure”* (E26).

These quotes show that the pace of decline in well-being varies. However, it appears that, even if the steepness of the decline differs, employees ultimately feel a well-being deterioration until a point occurs when they push for a formal change in their work arrangement.

4.4.2. Transformation: when well-being triggers renegotiation

When employees feel pushed to their limit, they can no longer internalise the required adaptation. At some point, decay in well-being appears to prompt the obsolescence of the old deal, requiring a transformation of the flexible work arrangement. This transformation requires a formal, explicit negotiation between the employee and the firm. A senior manager explained:

“I had depression because of work weariness. I was exhausted. I looked for options outside of Minerva. I got offered a job in a different firm. Minerva counter-attacked and I ended up improving my position in the firm and my flexibility. It is true that at that time, Minerva’s response was very good” (E30).

In the case of this interviewee, reduced well-being acted as a trigger for drastic change. Although she initially looked for options outside of the firm, she was finally able to re-negotiate her work contract at Minerva, achieving a new satisfactory flexible work arrangement. This shows that flexibility shapes well-being, but well-being also plays a role in the construction of flexible work arrangements. It was because of her exhaustion that she pushed for an explicit and open discussion of what working flexibly meant to her. There seems to be a connection between well-being and the zone of acceptance: as employees reach their limit, they experience a process in which their well-being declines. Another interviewee provides additional context to understand how the adaptation process culminates in a re-negotiation:

“Employee: I don’t know. When I got promoted to my current role two years ago I knew that it would imply more work and more flexibility to work longer hours. At the same

time, I also got to decide more on how I work and when. But then I started having meetings from home between 11pm and 1am because part of my team is in the US, and I started feeling the pressure to be available during the weekend and that sort of stuff. But that didn't mean I could have more flexibility myself, like not have to work from 10 to 11am so that I could go to the gym, or leave work at 5pm to be with my kids and then work late. Little by little you give more but you don't necessarily get more. It kind of goes on until you are fed-up and you say this is a line I don't want to cross.

Researcher: Has that happened to you?

Employee: Yes, that is when I got promoted so I put up with it because I had like a fresh start and more flexibility for me, and I could work from home. Maybe it's not that there is a line I don't want to cross but more that I don't want to cross it like this, I want more". (E36)

The combination of the increased contributions of flexibility with stagnant inducements negatively affected his well-being. At the physical level, he could not exercise; at the social level, he had no time for family life. This situation prompted a formal renegotiation—namely a promotion—that reshaped his flexible work arrangement particularly through an increased experience of flexibility as an inducement (“*more flexibility for me*”).

The “*line I don't want to cross*” is the employee describing, in his own words, Simon's (1951) concept of the zone of acceptance. Another interviewee expressed the same idea in the following terms: “*All employees must know where their limit is. I don't know about the firm's limit because I'm not on the firm's side, I am on the employee's side. I know what my limit is, I know what I can do and what I can't do and I can't transgress it because that would turn against me (...) Not only would I end up feeling deranged. It comes to a matter of self-respect*” (E20). This specialist is explaining how, when the limit of the zone of acceptance is reached, adaptation no longer seems possible. The employee associates the transgression of his zone of acceptance to a severe psychological well-being problem of feeling mentally overwhelmed and losing self-esteem.

These quotes describe the zone of acceptance as an individual and subjective line. It is strongly connected to well-being and the threshold of what is acceptable and what is not, is idiosyncratic. For the purposes of illustration, let us imagine two extreme cases

of employees with different characteristics. Employee A is a healthy, ambitious and career oriented twenty six year old with no family responsibilities. Employee B is a forty three year old parent of three with a history of anxiety problems. Given their circumstances, their zones of acceptance—represented by the chequered areas in Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3—would differ substantially.

Figure 4.2: Idiosyncratic zones of acceptance. Employee A: The large example.

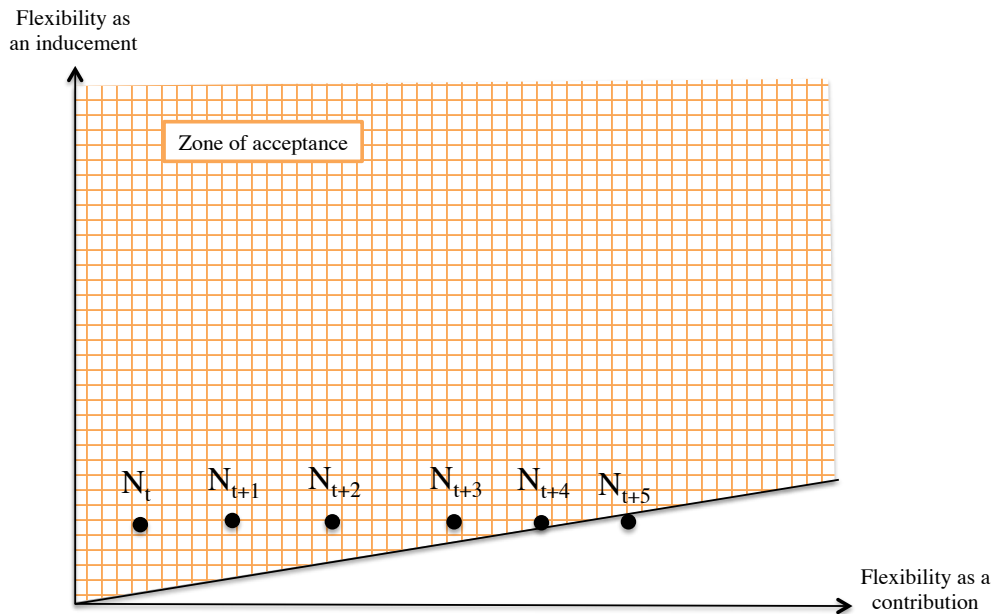
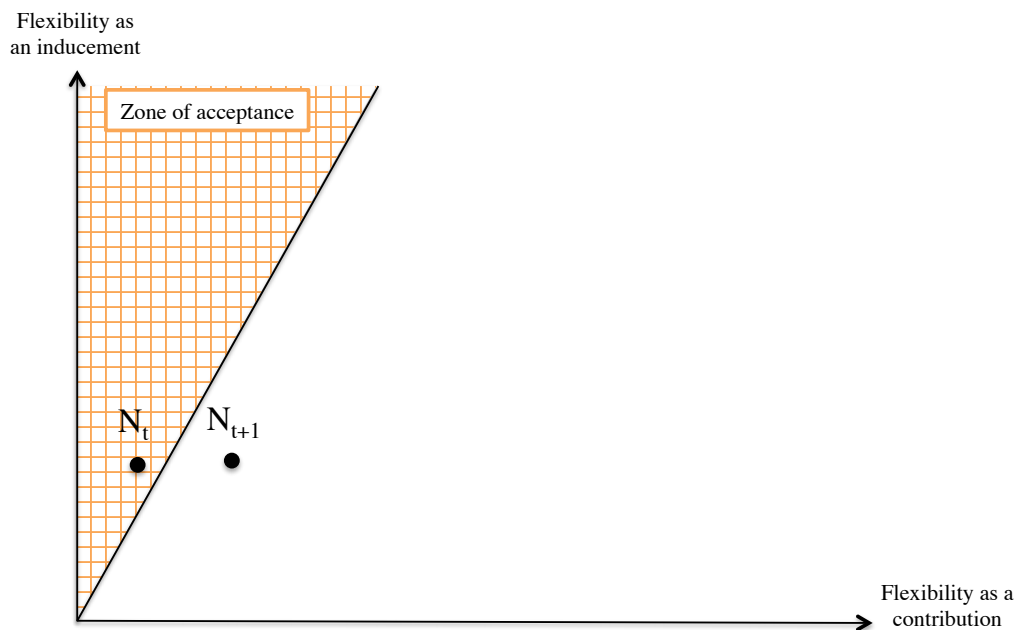


Figure 4.3: Idiosyncratic zones of acceptance. Employee B: The narrow example.



Employee A's zone of acceptance is much larger, which means that they would tolerate far more flexibility demands than employee B. In the case of the former, the process of drift and adaptation described in the previous section would endure longer (until $t+5$) because high perceptions of flexibility as a contribution are within the zone of acceptance. The zone of acceptance of employee B is much narrower. In this case adaptation would not be possible because the limit would be exceeded at moment $t+1$.

No matter where the threshold is, after stepping over it, rebalancing the arrangement for the employee to accept it appears to require a formal conversation that leads to the firm offering a better deal or to the employee quitting the organisation. One of the HR interviewees explained:

"Sometimes people come to us because they feel at a disadvantage. Instead of dealing with their supervisor, they request a formal change. If they've had good performance reviews recently, we offer a new role or a promotion with better conditions (...) in general, promotions come with increased flexibility for the employee. If performance hasn't matched our standards, we try to help them transition to a new job in a different firm" (E2).

Retaining the employee involves a formal renegotiation of the terms of the contract. This renegotiation tackles factors other than flexibility (such as wages, training, responsibility, etc.). However, offering flexibility as an inducement seems to play an important role in preserving the employment relationship. The renegotiation results in formal explicit transformation of work arrangements with three predominant options: (1) promotion; (2) change in work group; (3) reduced work hours. While the first two options (promotions and change in work group) imply major changes involving things like a new role, a different team, etc., option three only alters the work arrangement in an aspect strongly related to flexibility (work hours).

(1) Promotions

Many participants highlighted that formal contract renegotiation can include a promotion increasing their ability to manage their own work time and arrangements. For instance, interviewee 30 said: *"you get promoted, you get more responsibility, you do more things and you get more flexibility to organise yourself as you want"*. In this case,

the re-negotiation does not involve a reduction in perceived contributions: on the contrary, demands stay equal or even grow. The essential aspect of this new bargain for this employee is to increase her ability to self-manage. As a result of the re-negotiation, well-being experiences a positive boost:

“In the end I'm being promoted in the business, they are giving me more responsibility, with more tasks and autonomy... I've lived through various times with lots of pressure, since promotion I am better off... in my daily timetable to prioritise and adjust things, refine the objectives... this you notice in your health, in how you feel” (E27)

This manager noticed that increased flexibility to choose and prioritise objectives, attained through his new deal, led to better health and general well-being.

(2) Change in work group

As discussed in chapter one, this study includes employees in two different work group within the firm, the *management consulting group* and the *back office group*. Employees in the *management consulting group* work for external clients and, in many occasions, at the client's premises. For employees in the *back office group*, the client is internal. This means that Minerva has a much larger margin to negotiate employee-oriented arrangements with the *back office* team, not having to comply with client demands. As noted by an employee who underwent this change: *“Here [back office work group] the firm can give you more flexibility because it depends on itself”* (E38).

Because of this, moving from *management consulting* to *back office* is a common facet of the re-negotiation. When working in the *back office* team, employees have a greater perception that flexibility is an inducement: *“When I switched from the management consulting to the back office group my salary was reduced and frozen for 3 years. However, the change gave me the possibility to manage my work and personal life better. I can choose how to do things”* (E16). Even though the new deal involved a reduction in a major inducement (salary), the increased ability to make choices was seen as sufficient to redress the imbalance that drove this manager to request the change.

At the same time, in contrast with the promotion option, it appears that the work group switch is also associated with reduced flexibility contributions. An IT manager, said: *“I*

requested the transfer to IT [part of the back office group] for family reasons. I used to travel a lot. I have a five year old daughter. When I got the transfer she was a bit older than a year and she almost didn't know me. I decided I had to take a step to improve my quality of life. I love working long hours but geographical mobility was hard to deal with" (E5). His new deal maintained certain flexibility contributions such as working overtime, but significantly reduced others, particularly travelling. Another manager within the *back office* group (in finance) expressed similar feelings: *"I transferred to the back office group precisely looking for that balance between personal life and professional life. That slows your career down, but you achieve better quality of life"* (E16). They both highlight that the renegotiation brought about a better quality of life and that the new arrangement had a positive impact on their well-being.

(3) Reduced work hours

This option is different to the previous ones because, if requested by the employee, the firm is bound to accept it. Under Spanish law, employees with children under 8 years have the right to request a 30% reduction of their work hours with a proportional reduction in salary. Since the formal working hours at Minerva are 9-7, reduced work hour contracts imply an official 9-4 workday.

In practice, however these employees tend to work the same hours as those who do not benefit from this reduction. Instead, they have an increased perception that flexibility is an inducement because they feel able to adapt their work hours to their family needs.

"[After my third child was born] I took reduced work hours and that is something a lot of women do at Minerva because that way you don't feel bad if you have to take the kids to the paediatrician at 11am. It is a sort of justification. I have reduced work hours but I don't leave at 3 or 4pm or anything of the sort. I work in the evenings but now if I have to go to the paediatrician at 11 or I have to take my kid somewhere, I just take him. It is a personal justification that many of us [women] working here use. I am very happy. To me it is very positive" (E17).

The reduction in work hours gives a legitimate, formally recognised way for employees to manage their own time: *"because that way you don't feel bad if you have to take the kids to the paediatrician"*. Despite working beyond 4pm, this new bargain for this employee took away the guilt that she would otherwise have felt from working flexible

hours to attend to her family's needs. Most importantly, as noted in her last sentence, she experienced the new deal as something positive, improving her psychological well-being.

One employee may experience the three renegotiation options during their careers at different points in time. **Figure 4.4** and Figure 4.5 depict two examples of how transformation affects overall perceived flexibility for two employees. In both cases the negotiation changes the position of overall perceived flexibility (represented by N) by increasing perceptions of flexibility as an inducement so that the perceived arrangement moves back into the employee's zone of acceptance.

Figure 4.4, illustrates a situation in which the negotiation provides employee X with a stronger perception of flexibility as an inducement, without changing perceived contributions. The interviews indicate that for renegotiations focusing on promotion or reduced work hours, flexibility generally evolves in this manner. Figure 4.5 shows the situation of employee Y, for which the negotiation not only increases the perception of flexibility as an inducement but also reduces the perception of contributions. This sort of transformation is generally the case when the negotiation involves a change of work group. In all cases, these changes are formal and generally bring about modifications in the written work contract.

Figure 4.4: Employee X's flexibility transformation (steady perception of flexibility as a contribution).

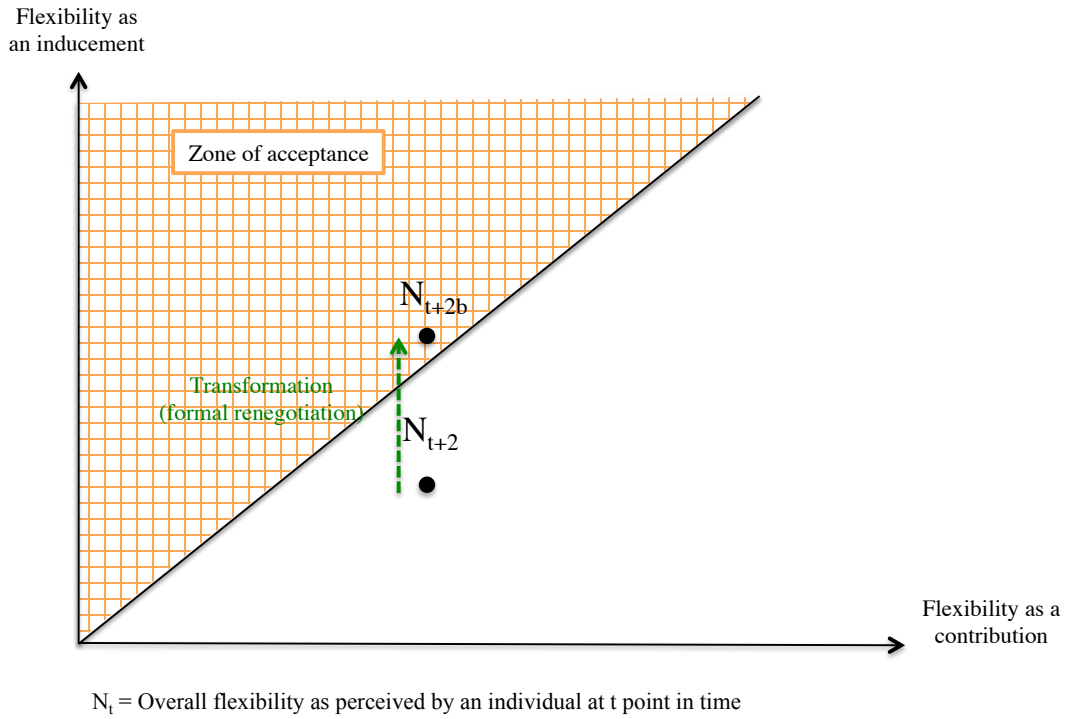
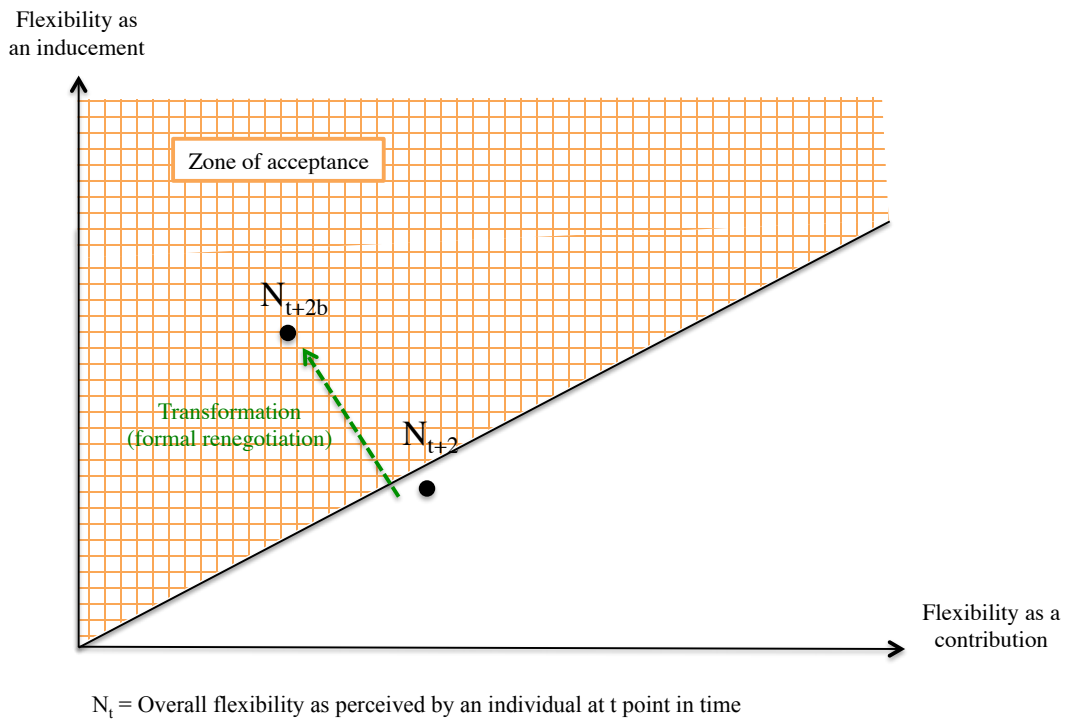


Figure 4.5: Employee Y's flexibility transformation (with reduced perception of flexibility as a contribution).



The renegotiation can also be unsuccessful, leading to the termination of the employment relationship. Sometimes the firm is not ready to offer a different deal to the individual. One of the HR interviewees said that *“When performance results are not at the expected level it is not possible for the firm to offer a new role or a promotion. Sometimes we have to let people go”* (E2). To be ready to grant better working conditions, the firm needs to identify the individual as a good performer who is strategically important to retain. This was confirmed by some of the former employees of the firm. Two of them explained that in their last appraisal their performance had been evaluated as similar to that of their peer group, which means that the firm would treat them as average employees instead of stars to keep.

Other times, employees did not accept the new deal that was offered to them. Two former employees described how Minerva was not able to provide a good enough deal because it didn't make up for what they had to forgo in terms of quality of life. Some didn't even consider renegotiating. Three said that they were exhausted to a level that required first some time off, and then another type of professional activity or a different firm in which to have a fresh start. Another one explained that, rather than a well-being issue, his quitting had to do with finding new professional challenges and starting his own business. It is relevant to note that this was the only person who said well-being had nothing to do with his decision to leave Minerva.

In most cases, Minerva's HR team offered to help exiting employees find new opportunities in other organisations, suggesting that, although the renegotiation was unsuccessful a certain level of trust remained.

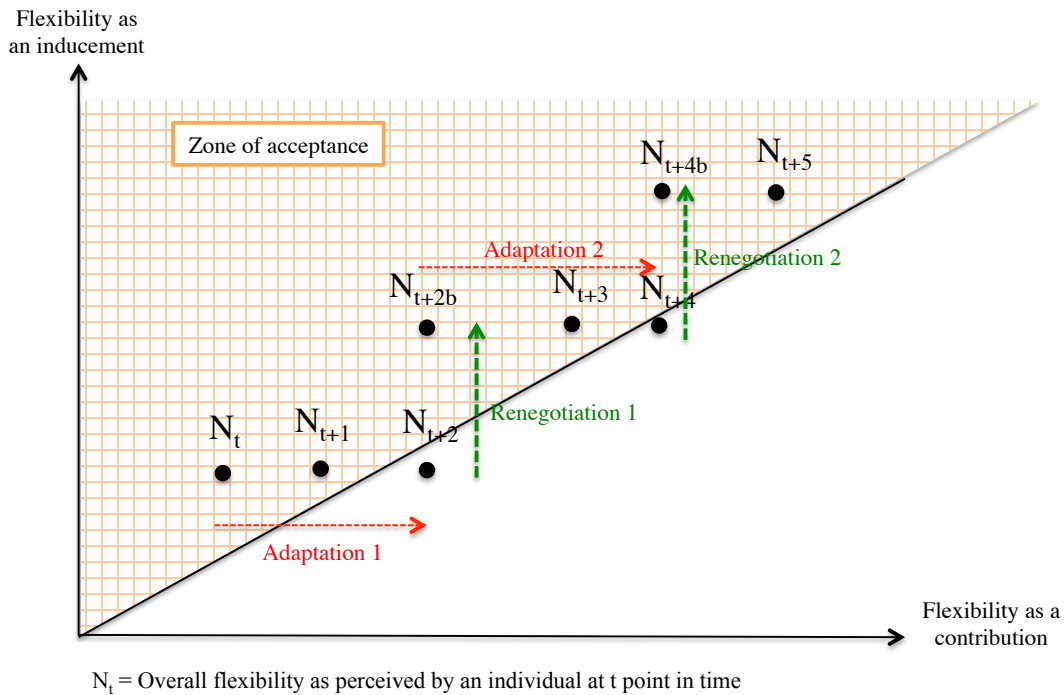
4.4.3. Well-being and flexibility as entangled processes

This analysis has shown that the way employees interpret their experiences of flexibility at work is strongly connected to their well-being. Moreover, well-being appears to be an important factor in shaping workplace flexibility. First of all, the findings show that the employees' perception of flexibility can be in constant development, between adaptation and transformation. In an adaptation scenario individuals internalise additional requests to be flexible towards the firm. However, at some point their well-being deteriorates.

rates to such an extent that they request a formal renegotiation of their deal, which is then transformed or terminated.

Figure 4.6 presents this ongoing processes of adaptation and transformation with the example of employee Z. Overall perceived flexibility (represented by N) experiences a drift over time towards a situation where contributions grow and inducements are stable (from N_t to N_{t+2}). Employee Z adapts to this situation until it trespasses on the area beyond their zone of acceptance (represented by the chequered area). At this point, this person pushes for a transformation of their arrangement, which requires an explicit renegotiation. Such transformation involves primarily an increased perception of flexibility as an inducement (from N_{t+2} to N_{t+2b}), although it can also involve reduced contributions (cf. Figure 4.5, page 156).

Figure 4.6: Employee Z's evolving flexibility



As shown in Figure 4.6, although the conditions and the position of this individual in the firm change, this process appears to repeat itself. Indeed, for those employees who are successful at renegotiating, it seems that the cycle of adaptation restarts. In the case of employee Z, after the transformation of their arrangement, as time goes by, overall perceived flexibility moves from N_{t+2b} to N_{t+3} to N_{t+4} , through a new process of adapta-

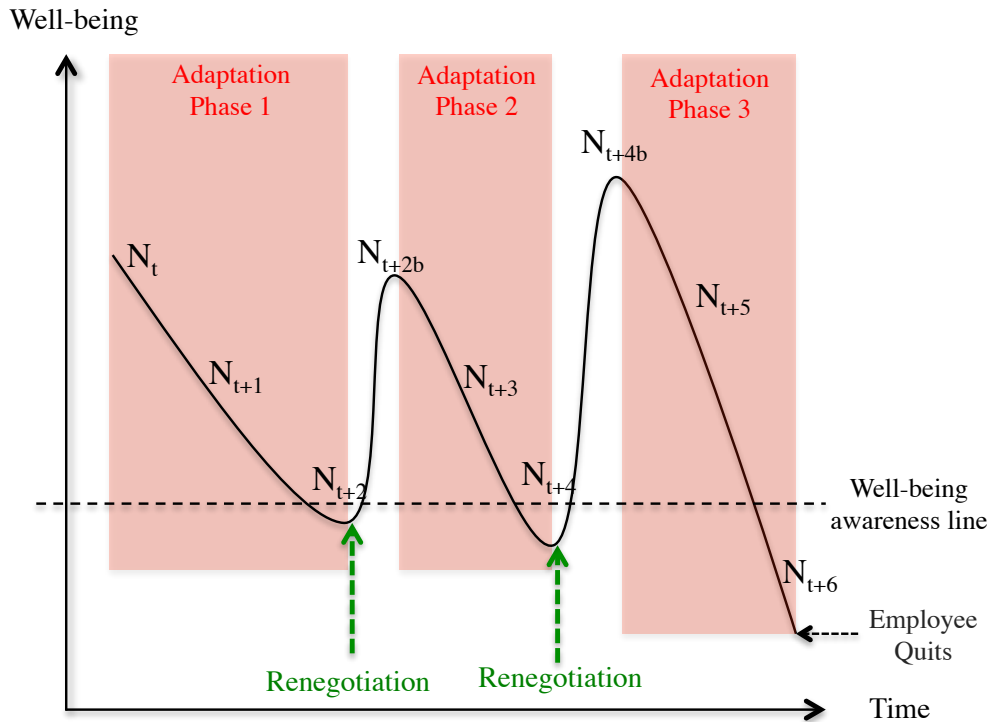
tion. When the perception goes beyond the zone of acceptance again, a new renegotiation takes place. This cycle would only stop if the employment relationship were extinguished.

Since successful renegotiations often involve promotions, this evolutionary additive process seems to be connected to the natural progression of careers at Minerva. I found no evidence of significant backward movements, which goes in line with the standard consulting up-or-out career system (Kubr, 2002; Smets et al., 2012). Once overall perceived flexibility attains N_{t+4} it will not go back to the initial situation N_t . It seems that the exchange of flexibility either progresses or the relationship becomes extinct.

It must be noted that the example depicted in Figure 4.6 assumes the zone of acceptance is static. This may not always be the case. As discussed above, individual circumstances make people have different zones of acceptance. Given that these personal circumstances change over time, the zone of acceptance is also likely to evolve. For instance, events such as having a child or the passing away of a dependent parent may reduce or increase the employee's willingness to submit to managerial demands. For example, an interviewee said: *"When my third child was born I knew something had to change. My capacity to absorb demands decreased. I could no longer accept things that I gladly dealt with when I only had one or two children"* (E28).

Second, the evidence points to this processual evolution of flexibility being intertwined with the employee's perception of well-being. In this sense, neither well-being nor flexibility are static entities but coevolving phenomena. Following on the example of employee Z, Figure 4.7 illustrates this idea and shows how there is not necessarily any static equilibrium. Instead the employee's understanding of well-being unfolds in a continuous flux that recurs as a wave, following the evolution of overall perceived flexibility.

Figure 4.7: Employee Z’s evolving well-being: entangled flexibility and well-being processes over time



During adaptation phases well-being slowly decays. This sliding down is not linked to a particular event but to the general understanding of what the employee should do for the firm and what they get in return. As overall perceived flexibility evolves towards increased contributions (e.g. from N_t to N_{t+2}), well-being deteriorates.

In general, the decrease of well-being reaches a limit that makes individuals realise the need to renegotiate. The quiet drift means that it takes time for them to sense and articulate their situation. They are taken to a position where their flexibility arrangement moves from a latent background to a foreground conscious concern. In Figure 4.7, the “well-being awareness line” depicts the point at which employee Z realises something needs to be done. Becoming aware of how the adaptation process damages this person’s well-being prompts a need for transforming their flexible work arrangement and pushes them to formally renegotiate the terms of their employment.

It is important to note that the turning point is particular to every employee. As noted above, a senior executive said: *“It kind of goes on until you are fed-up and you say this is a line I don’t want to cross.”* (E36). The issue is then to identify what constitutes the last straw. A specialist described how idiosyncratic the process is:

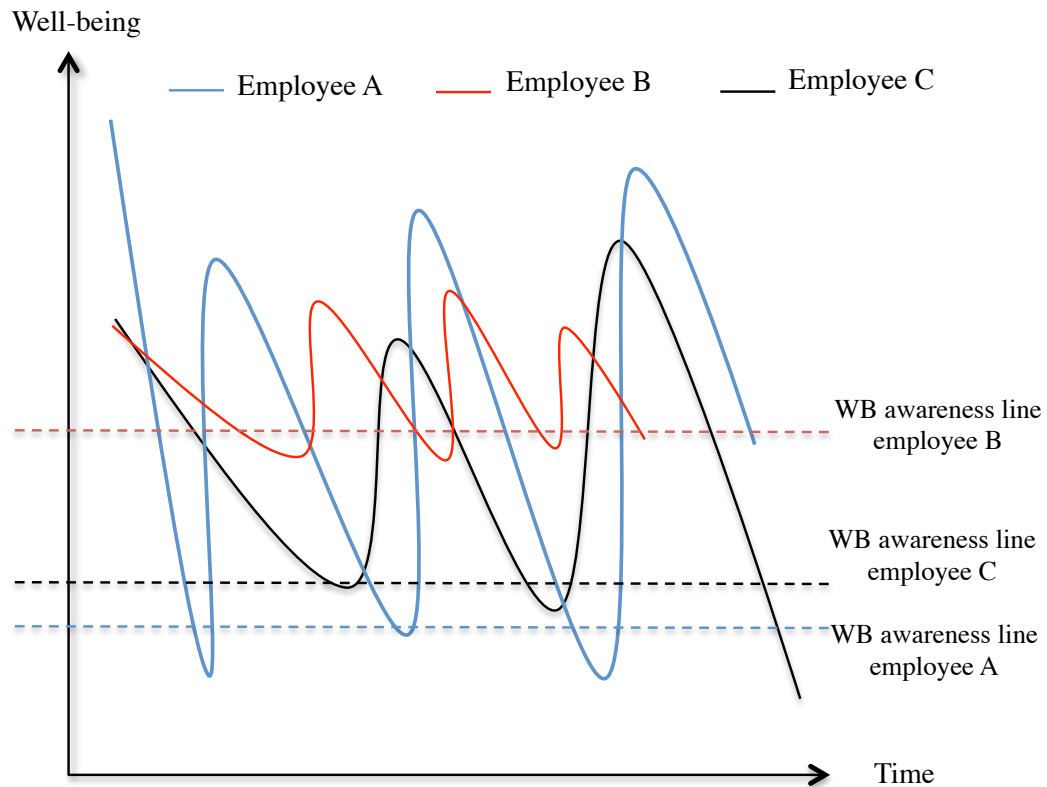
“One day, you realise that you’re losing sleep over this [work]. You feel awful, you’re exhausted. (...) Why do you realise that? Well, because you miss the school play for the nth, or because each day it gets harder to fall asleep, or because once again your project is understaffed and you can see that from the beginning. (...) As far as I’ve seen each person realises this in their own way” (E24).

Although the turning point is individual, the trend in the evolution of well-being and flexibility is shared. Becoming conscious of the decline in their well-being triggers the individuals’ need to explicitly explain, clarify, review and reinterpret their flexible work arrangement. Figure 4.7 shows that this renegotiation rapidly redresses employee Z’s well-being by changing their overall perception of flexibility (e.g. moving from N_{t+2} to N_{t+2b}). However, a new adaptation phase starts, making well-being decay once more, which it turn, elicits another renegotiation. This process appears to repeat itself until the employee quits.

Figure 4.8 shows that the shape of the well-being curve and the position of the awareness line vary because the process is different for every individual, despite the mechanisms behind the process being common.

This analysis shows that employees are not passive recipients of the flexibility practices that the firm decides to implement. Instead, with their interpretations and personal understandings, they actively participate in moulding their arrangements. In addition it highlights that well-being and flexibility are tangled and coevolving phenomena.

Figure 4.8: Well-being evolution over time for different employees



4.5. Discussion

This chapter has focused on advancing knowledge of the evolution of flexibility over time and of such evolution's connection to employee well-being. While chapter two showed that perceived workplace flexibility is the result of an ongoing construction process instead of single repetitive transactions, this chapter provides evidence first, that flexibility evolves through processes of adaptation and transformation and second, that such processes are intricately linked to employee well-being.

As far as the evolution of flexibility is concerned, the findings indicate that it entails a latent process of adaptation whereby employees internalise quotidian changes (Rousseau, 1995). The perception of flexibility tends to implicitly drift towards the interest of the employer. Individuals feel that as time goes by, flexibility as a contribution grows while flexibility as an inducement stagnates. This finding supports Williamson's (1975) argument that actors may have an opportunistic behaviour. The employees perceive that

Minerva slowly increases its flexibility demands, imposing tougher working conditions on them. This goes in line with Bartling and colleagues (2013) who find that employers' opportunistic behaviour is generally controlled by the existence of reputational mechanisms in repeated exchanges. However, some employers disregard reputational issues and still impose inefficient actions that are profitable for the organisation but costly for employees.

The timing of the interviews, which were conducted during a crisis period in Spain in which unemployment rates rose significantly, may have influenced this finding. Drawing on Simon (1951) the firm can use this situation in its favour because under these circumstances employees are more likely to accept less favourable conditions in order to preserve job security. In addition, given the reduced economic activity, consulting firms struggled to retain their clients. According to some of the senior managers and executives I interviewed, this situation pushed them to lower the selling price of their projects by reducing the size of the teams and intensifying work. In a sense, opportunistic behaviour can be seen as a necessity in order to remain competitive.

Notwithstanding this particular situation, almost all interviewees had been with the firm for over two years (i.e. prior to 2008) and described experiences that took place before the crisis started. The employees with the longest tenure discussed issues that had taken place over twenty year periods. Although the economic context may have exacerbated the process of adaptation by enlarging the zone of acceptance of many employees, it was already in place. In addition, there is evidence that, even during the crisis period, employees took the step of requiring a renegotiation of their arrangement. This shows that employees accept managerial prerogative until they perceive that costs outweigh the benefits (Mitchell and Scott, 1988) even if they hold less power to bargain because of market conditions.

Employees initiate the process of transformation when they become aware that their flexibility arrangement is severely affecting their well-being. In this sense, this study supports previous findings that employees play a proactive role in customising their working conditions (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The transformation process involves an explicit renegotiation of the arrangement in place (Rousseau, 1995), which is not equal for all employees but instead mainly idiosyncratic (Rousseau et al., 2006). The

analysis of the interviews indicates that employees with good performance appraisals that the firm would like to retain are more likely to be successful at this process. Following Simon (1951) it could be argued that employees, to a certain extent, also behave opportunistically. Knowing they are good and valued performers, they use their bargaining power to get a better flexible working deal.

Others, not being able to reach a new agreement, decide to leave. These quits can be partly explained by a lack of perceived organisational support (POS) (Eisenberger et al. 1986). While POS has been identified as a source of reduced psychological strain (George et al., 1993), increased affective commitment (Rhoades et al., 2001) and reduced turnover (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002), the lack of POS can lead to opposite effects. The adaptation process may be interpreted as a sign that the firm is not concerned about its employees' well-being. Going through successive adaptation phases would therefore reduce the employee's POS, which would result in them being more likely to monitor the organisation for contract breaches and more susceptible to them (Eisenberger et al. 2004).

Nevertheless, the findings do not allow one to assume that individuals have some sort of strategy to get up the chain. They actually indicate that the process is more about the employees being (feeling and experiencing well-being) than about strategizing (consciously thinking about the long term push of their careers). Their decisions are not entirely rational but strongly influenced by changing emotional contexts. In any case, it appears clear that employees at Minerva have agency in tailoring their work arrangements and that well-being is connected to how they enact such agency. The process seems to be close to Rousseau et al.'s (2006) *i-deals* in which "employees have a hand in creating or negotiating some aspect of their employment" (ibid; 979).

As far as the connection between flexibility and well-being is concerned, this chapter has uncovered a dynamic that has not been tackled by the literature. Departing from the predominant theories in the occupational health literature—JDC and ERI—the findings indicate that, for Minerva employees, flexibility and well-being are coevolving phenomena rather than associated variables.

A central tenet of the job demands and control (JDC) model is that employee discretion over work balances job demands and mitigates their negative effects on well-being (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). To a certain extent, the findings of this chapter could be argued to support this claim. When an employee perceives a drift in the arrangement whereby flexibility as a contribution increases—i.e. when perceived demands of flexibility grow—his well-being declines. Well-being is recovered through a renegotiation whereby perceived flexibility as an inducement—and therefore the employee’s sense of control⁷—increases. Effort reward imbalance (ERI) proposes that perceived lack of reciprocity between effort and rewards leads to low well-being (Siegrist, 1996). This hypothesis could also be supported by this chapter’s evidence because renegotiation, which is intended to restore balance to the relationship, is linked to increased well-being.

However, both these theories neglect to explain how well-being evolves over time. They posit that well-being depends on the perception of balance between different variables (Karasek, 1979; Siegrist, 1996) but fail to explain how such perceptions are constructed and how the construction of reciprocity and balance is connected to well-being. In this sense, they are constrained to static explanations and overlook processual perspectives. The findings presented in chapter two indicate that although individual experiences may be unbalanced, an overall balanced perception of flexibility may be constructed through different mechanisms. Therefore, reciprocity may not exist at one particular point in time, but be continuously enacted. This chapter has shown how this ongoing evolution is tied to well-being. As suggested by cognitive appraisal theory, the employees’ evaluation of their flexibility is context dependent and shapes the emotions they experience towards flexible work. A similar event is not equally apprehended by an individual who is not a parent and has worked for the firm for six months, than by a parent of three who has been through several phases of adaptation and transformation.

In this regard, the findings contribute to developing theory beyond the JDC and ERI arguments, because these are variance theories and this chapter builds process theory (Langley, 1999). “Variance theories provide explanations for phenomena in terms of

⁷ Issues like autonomy over work hours or choosing where to work from are part of flexibility as an inducement (c.f. chapter 2, figure 2.1).

relationships among dependent and independent variables (e.g., more of X and more of Y produce more of Z), process theories provide explanations in terms of the sequence of events leading to an outcome (e.g., do A and then B to get C)” (ibid; 692). This chapter has provided evidence of patterns in events over time that connect the employees’ perception of flexibility to their well-being and has been able to show “a sequence of "phases" that occur over time to produce a given result” (ibid; 692).

Moreover, instead of seeing the relationship between flexibility and well-being as a set practice’s effect over a certain state (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011) I find that well-being is not an object but an ever-changing flow. In concordance with MacIntosh et al. (2007; 208) “well-being is the result of a series of processes in which the individual interacts with other people and the environment”. Changes in the perception of flexible work arrangements are one of these interactive processes. As a result, synchronic approaches to the well-being phenomenon, concerned with the existence of well-being at one point in time, are bound to be limited. Instead, a diachronic perspective focusing on how the concept develops and evolves over time provides richer information. As Langley et al. (2013; 4) say, “By recognising the centrality of time, process conceptualisations offer an essential contribution to organisation and management knowledge that is not available from most variance-based generalizations.”

In addition, JDC and ERI treat well-being as a passive construct, subjected to a number of variables but unable to affect the construction and modelling of such variables. They do not consider the possibility of reversed causality. These findings highlight that well-being is not merely shaped by the perceived combination of flexibility inducements and contributions. It is itself a substantial actor in the unfolding of the evolution of flexibility.

Flexible work arrangements are constantly shaped and reshaped, like psychological contracts (Conway and Briner, 2005). This ongoing evolution is tied to the employees’ perception and awareness of their well-being in a way that makes well-being as much a consequence and an antecedent of the process. The evidence indicates that while flexibility drifts in favour of the firm and employees internalise change through the adaptation process (Rousseau, 1995), they simultaneously experience well-being decay. This occurs gradually, going sometimes unapprehended. At some point, employees become

aware of the prominent decline and reject the continuation of the drift. In line with other studies (Dick, 2000), this realisation appears to be sudden and connected to mundane and regular events rather than extraordinary experiences. The rejection of the drift leads to a formal explicit transformation of the work arrangement and the understanding of flexibility. Decreased well-being seems to be the stimulus that invites employees to demand changes. It is the trigger of the renegotiation. A successful renegotiation takes well-being back to acceptable levels from the employees' perspective. When the renegotiation is unsuccessful the employment relationship is extinguished (March and Simon, 1958). These ongoing interactions occur all through the lifetime of the employment relationship, making flexibility and well-being naturally tangled phenomena.

A consequence of identifying well-being as a crucial factor triggering formal change in flexible working is that it becomes blurred with the notion of the zone of acceptance. In a sense, the findings indicate that they are intimately related, to such an extent that it is very difficult to tell them apart. The line of well-being awareness represents the employee's acknowledgement that their well-being has been significantly affected by their job. As a result of this recognition, individuals appraise their flexible work arrangement more carefully, which makes them realise they have gone beyond their zone of acceptance. The slow drift of the arrangement makes it difficult for people to clearly see the limits of the zone of acceptance have been reached, because they get used to high levels of contributions in a gradual way. Stumbling upon their low well-being triggers a cognizance of how much they have been asked to contribute, particularly as compared to what has been offered to them in exchange.

To a certain extent, these findings contradict cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1991), in the sense that they suggest individuals are not constantly evaluating their ongoing experiences but flow with them until they reach the line of awareness. It is only at this point that they carefully appraise their situation and react to it. Moreover, these findings present an opportunity to connect the economic and psychological perspectives of the employment relationship (Simon, 1951; Rousseau, 1995), showing that individuals are not merely rational economic actors balancing inducements and contributions but emotional beings who consider their work arrangement deals in particular states of mind.

It must also be noted that, just as with well-being, the zone of acceptance is not a static reference but an evolving one (Marsden, 2007). Although not visible in the analysis figures, the flexibility and well-being processes are also likely to move the zone of acceptance. The question of how remains to be further explored. Although transformation creates a “new deal”, the successive “old deals” remain present. On the one hand, as time goes by and successful renegotiations take place, it can be argued that trust increases (Blau, 1964) enlarging the zone of acceptance. On the other hand, one could state that repeatedly going through the same process of well-being deterioration may have the opposite effect, making the exit of the employee more likely. Some interesting paradoxes emerge from this reasoning. While organisations use flexibility to adapt to competitive needs, doing so without careful consideration of the zone of acceptance may create tensions leading to opposite effects.

Other implications for management practice can be drawn out. Identifying that well-being plays a role in the construction of flexibility is relevant from an instrumental perspective. So far, the management literature’s interest in well-being has revolved around the fact that healthy employees perform better (Pfeffer, 2010). These findings shed some light on why this happens. If well-being shapes the individuals’ experience of flexibility—and presumably other human resource management practices—its contextual understanding should play a role in the design of such practices.

Although it is difficult to grasp, because there is a certain recurrence in the flexibility and well-being processes, organisations should try to monitor them. There is no single solution formula, but incorporating well-being concerns into performance management systems may provide valuable information for the organisation to better understand and influence these processes.

Moreover, as idiosyncratic deals grow, particularly among highly trained knowledge workers, the management of flexibility becomes at the same time increasingly relevant and complicated (Dick, 2009; Guest, 2004). Given its focus on individual employee perceptions, the personalisation of employment negotiations make the model discussed in this chapter particularly relevant.

In addition, incorporating a process understanding of well-being to the design of organisational health interventions seems essential to their success. Many firms are currently developing measures such as exercising in the workplace or coaching to preserve psychological well-being. However, as noted by MacIntosh et al (2007; 208), “no amount of corrective action on the state of health will affect the processes which generate these states”. Our findings show that wellness programmes may show better success if they focus on making flexible relationships sustainable.

Finally, these findings may provide new insight into the processes of organisational change. In many occasions, the transformation of the work arrangement results in the employees changing their position within the organisation, either through a promotion or a change in the work group they belong to. These changes occur because the employees push for them. Consulting firms are known for their well-established promotion processes—up or out systems— where they systematically promote their best performing employees (Smets et al., 2012). However, the interviews show that Minerva does not necessarily approach its employees to promote them and that instead employees are the ones to take a proactive role.

4.6. Summary and conclusion

This chapter contributes to the human resource management and occupational health literatures by describing a process theory of the connection between workplace flexibility and well-being at the individual level. The chapter enlarges the conceptual framework on workplace flexibility developed in chapter two. Building on notions of contract change derived from psychological contract literature, it explains how the employees’ perception of flexible work evolves. The construction mechanisms described in chapter two, are therefore nuanced and portrayed in time.

In addition, this chapter complements and clarifies the theory presented in chapter three, offering explanations to the interactive effects of perceived flexibility as a contribution and perceived flexibility as an inducement on well-being. By stepping into the employees’ shoes, the chapter shows that their interpretation of flexibility is both a source and a consequence of their well-being and that perceptions of flexibility and well-being co-

evolve in time. Well-being is not a clearly defined state, but an ongoing process that must be carefully understood in order to be managed. In this sense, by taking a diachronic approach, the chapter develops existing theories on well-being at work—JDC and ERI.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

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5.0. Objective and overview

This thesis has examined the concept of flexible working and its relationship with employee well-being. Its aim was to conduct an individual-level study, considering employees in context, to look at how they experience flexibility at work and to develop theory on how such experience is connected to well-being. In so doing, this work has theorised flexibility as a constructed concept that is not understood as a constant, but which evolves in time depending on the experiences of the employee. Well-being is affected by flexibility but also plays a significant role in its construction.

This topic is relevant because flexible working is an increasingly popular and highly advocated HR practice (Kersley, 2006; Zeytinoglu et al., 2009) whose definition and outcomes are still unclear and convoluted (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). Four main research questions emerged from the literature review that I organised in three separate chapters:

- (1) How do employees experience and define what working flexibly means?
- (2) Does perceived flexibility affect employee well-being?
- (3a) How do flexible work arrangements evolve over time?
- (3b) Are flexibility and well-being interconnected processes? (i.e. do they play a role in each other's evolution over time?)

To tackle these research questions a longitudinal, critical case study investigation in the unfolding context of a large consulting firm was conducted. Data were collected using a mixed methods design, combining inductive and deductive logics to match the needs of each research question and to provide a holistic take on the problem. Both logics feed into each other, providing the possibility to triangulate data and build rich explanations on the complex issues related to flexible working.

The findings confirm that flexibility is not a stable, straightforward, HR designed practice, but a complex and dynamic perception that employees construct through their interpretation of unfolding experiences. Moving beyond the contrast of either employer or employee-centred flexibility present in the literature (Reilly, 1998), this research ad-

vances a perspective of flexibility based on the ideas of exchange and reciprocity as perceived by employees.

The evidence collected suggests that adopting this novel understanding of flexibility can contribute to clarifying the controversial literature on the relationship between flexibility and well-being (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). Most importantly, the findings indicate that well-being is both a consequence and a cause of workplace flexibility. Therefore, a central argument of this thesis is that flexibility and well-being are entangled processes. Rather than associated variables, they are co-evolving phenomena: Employee well-being plays a crucial role in the construction of perceived flexibility and the individuals' evaluation of their exchange.

The aim of this concluding chapter is to provide an overarching examination of the contributions of the research presented in this dissertation, to suggest some implications for management practice, to discuss the limitations of the research, and to present avenues for future work.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

5.1.1. A new understanding of flexibility

The first theoretical motivation of this thesis was to try to ascertain greater construct clarity regarding workplace flexibility. In this respect, this thesis has highlighted two existing approaches to the concept of flexibility that, when examined together, appear paradoxical. On the one hand, flexibility has been studied as an employer centric practice that allows organisations to adapt to competitive needs (Hoge and Hornung, 2015). On the other hand, flexibility is increasingly analysed as an employee-focused practice that enables employees to make choices about their work arrangements (Hill et al., 2008a). This dissertation has contributed to the literature by developing a rich description of the meaning, experiences and feelings evoked by flexible working, which shows that both perspectives co-exist in employees' perceptions.

Relying on established theories of the employment relationship (Rousseau, 1995; Simon, 1951), I have found that employees do not interpret flexibility as a set and straightforward practice but as a complex experience combining inducements and contributions that unfolds and evolves over time. The definition of two dimensions of flexibility—flexibility as a contribution and flexibility as an inducement—stemmed from these findings. Flexibility as a contribution has been defined as an employee’s perception about specific contributions that the organisation requires from them in terms of working time and location arrangements, to serve the organisation’s need for adaptability and competitiveness. Flexibility as an inducement has been defined as an employee’s perception of the incentives provided by the organisation allowing them to make choices to arrange where, when, and for how long he works, in order to meet their personal needs. These dimensions of flexibility are separate, but interact and build an overall perception of workplace flexibility.

This thesis has also found that the way flexible working is put in place is, in part, influenced by the employees’ perceptions of it. Employees are not mere subjects of the practices designed and implemented by the firm. Rather, they actively participate in the evolution of their flexibility. In sum, this work advances a new way to understand flexible working in which flexibility is not a stable clearly delimited practice, but a fluctuating and constructed process whose meaning is repeatedly interpreted through experience.

By drawing on this novel conceptualisation of flexibility, this thesis is proposing a pluralist approach (Fox, 1974) to the understanding of flexible work. In this sense, it argues that although flexible work arrangements may emerge either as managerial or employee-focused initiatives, they persist because a negotiation regarding their content and boundaries takes place, striking a balance between the conflicting interests of the parties involved (Budd et al., 2004). The exclusive *win-win* or *win-lose* scenarios suggested by the unitarist and radical approaches seem constricting. This is particularly relevant to the HRM literature which takes a markedly unitarist stance. Indeed, a majority of studies on flexibility in the HR literature assume mutual benefits (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011) because the same practices can simultaneously cater to the needs of both employers and employees (Fox, 1974), smoothing over differences between the two. In particular, this perspective disregards differences in power and objectives (Dick, 2009) and there-

fore overlooks how such differences can shape the meaning, the experience and the construction of flexibility.

The position adopted here is that incompatibilities between managerial and employee interests exist with regards to flexible working. However, employees understand these can be reconciled by experiencing flexibility as an evolving combination of inducements and contributions. The findings and the theoretical constructs developed throughout this thesis (in particular those of flexibility as an inducement and flexibility as a contribution presented in chapter two) indicate that employers and employees have different interests with regards to flexible work. Some of their goals are incompatible (e.g. work overtime to serve client's needs vs. work flexible hours to address family issues) and a latent tension exists. As a result, conflict happens when employees realize their well-being is suffering, hence require a change in their arrangement. By expressing their voice and negotiating with the firm, the two parties reach a new mutually satisfactory agreement. The findings in chapter four support that a pluralistic view is interesting to study flexibility because they show that repeated formal and informal negotiations of flexibility directly affect how flexible working is implemented. This view emphasises the importance of considering the interests of different actors in the construction of HRM practices within organisations.

The adoption of a pluralist approach is particularly relevant in the context of knowledge intensive firms, such as the one studied in this thesis. The crucial role that employees play in building competitive advantage in these organisations enhances the value of HR management (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2008). For this reason, knowledge workers can be argued to be particularly well-positioned to exercise influence in the development and implementation of HR practices. Assuming diversity of interests and inherent negotiation processes can help understand the unfolding and the consequences of HR practices more accurately.

This thesis has also opened a space to challenge the study of flexible working as a homogenous practice within an organisation. The findings suggest that employees interpret flexibility differently, shaping their experience, and taking their work arrangements in varying directions. To a certain extent, flexibility can be considered as idiosyncratic, resulting from an *i-deal* (Rousseau et al., 2006). Individuals go through formal and in-

formal negotiation processes at different stages in which they play a proactive role to instantiate and customise their flexible work arrangement. Given the decreasing relevance of collective bargaining—in general (Farber & Western, 2001), and in knowledge intensive occupations in particular (Casper and Vitols, 2006)—employees depend on their individual capacity to negotiate, leading to people having diverse arrangements.

Nevertheless, as discussed in chapter two, this thesis has found evidence that individuals having very different experiences can share similar overall perceptions of flexibility. In this sense, the construction of flexibility appears to be heterogeneous, rather than purely idiosyncratic. The logic behind this finding is that the experiences and behaviours of employees depend on their context (Hill and Trist, 1955). Employees holding similar jobs, sometimes working in the same teams, appear to incorporate group norms that shape their interpretation of flexible working, pushing arrangements to evolve in similar directions. A consultant surrounded by other consultants in the *management consulting group* will be unlikely to perceive flexibility in the same way as a finance manager within the *back office group* because their occupations and contexts are substantially different. Conversely, two consultants are likely to have analogous appreciations of their flexibility exchange. Overall, it can be argued that individuals perceive and negotiate flexibility in their own way, but that their occupation or particular context contribute to observable patterning of flexibility arrangements.

5.1.2 A theory of flexibility and well-being

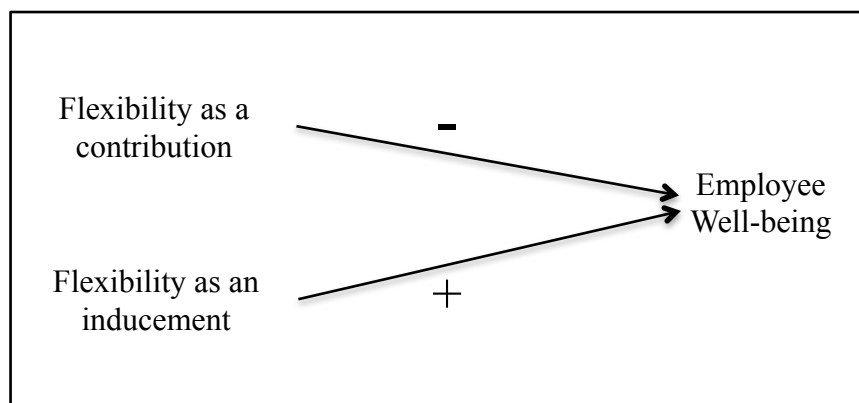
The chief theoretical contribution of this thesis is its exploration of the relationship between flexibility and employee well-being, in the context of a professional services firm with highly skilled employees. To unpack this contribution, I draw on Mohr's (1982) distinction between variance theories and process theories. He summarises the difference between the two forms of theoretical explanation in the following way: "Variance theory, roughly, is the common sort of hypothesis or model, such as a regression model, whose orientation is toward explaining the variance in some dependent variable. Process theory represents a series of occurrences in a sequence over time so as to explain how some phenomenon comes about" (ibid; p. 9).

5.1.2.1. A variance theory of flexibility and well-being

The third chapter of this thesis has advanced the perceived flexibility framework, which is a variance theory of the relationship between flexibility and well-being. Like other variance theories, the perceived flexibility framework treats employee well-being as an outcome. This means that some individuals perceive more or less flexibility as an inducement and flexibility as a contribution than others, thus there is variance in their level of well-being. Since the dimensions of flexibility account for significant proportions of the variance of flexibility, they are seen as necessary and sufficient conditions for the outcome (well-being) (Mohr, 1982). The order of the variables in time makes no practical difference.

Figure 5.1 summarises the relationships posited by the theory developed in chapter three. It shows that flexibility has mixed effects on employee well-being because flexibility as a contribution has a negative relationship with well-being while flexibility as an inducement has a positive one. This theory provides a possible explanation to the mixed research findings regarding the relationship between flexibility and well-being in the literature. Its underlying argument is twofold: a) the literature makes no difference between perceptions of flexibility as a contribution and as an inducement and b) the signs of these constructs' relationships with well-being are opposed and, unless studied separately, may be cancelling each other out.

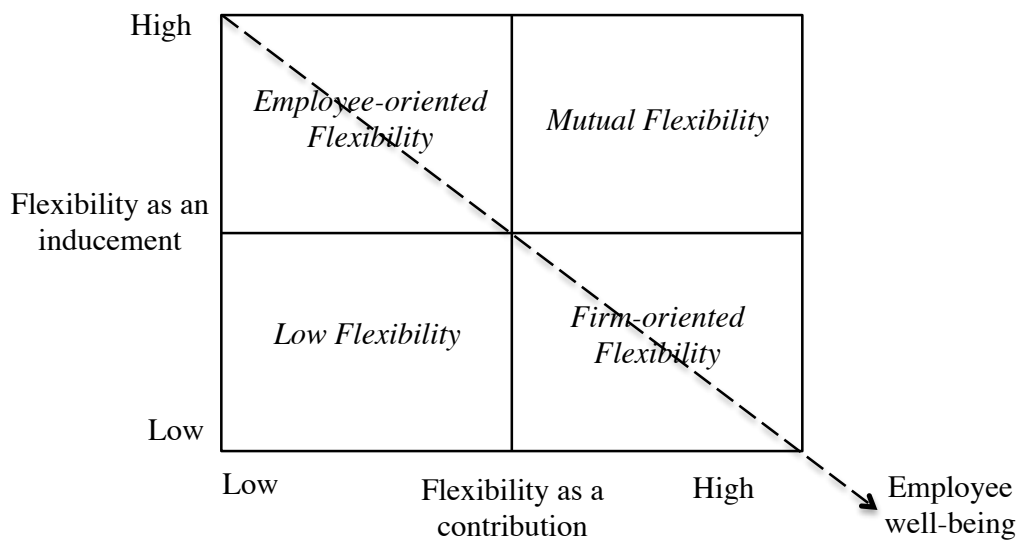
Figure 5.1. The relationship between flexibility and well-being.



Resting on the job-demands-control model (JDC) (Karasek and Theorell, 1990), the theory further posits that these two domains of flexibility are different, but can interact. The argument is built that a combination of high perceived flexibility as a contribution and low perceived flexibility as an inducement will be associated with the worst effects on well-being.

Figure 5.2 summarises the perceived flexibility framework developed in chapter three by showing the types of flexible work arrangement that might result from different combinations of perceived flexibility as a contribution and flexibility as an inducement. The diagonal arrow represents the interaction in which perceived contributions and inducements differ. The theory posits that well-being decays as perceived contributions become relatively higher than perceived inducements.

Figure 5.2. The perceived flexibility framework.



The depicted framework resembles Karasek’s (1979) JDC model in order to provide a parsimonious middle-range theory to explain the connection between flexibility and well-being in a simple and clear manner. It provides support to the new understanding of flexibility advanced in this thesis and pays particular attention to the argument that flexibility as an inducement and flexibility as a contribution are independent but interrelated variables. Although, several interpretations of the interaction can be advanced and could be further explored, this framework can provide insights to investigate flexible

working in a range of organisations and knowledge-intensive jobs. Indeed, the interaction between different perceptions of flexibility may occur for professions in which employees have a relatively high degree of bargaining power, which is the case in most knowledge intensive occupations (Donnelly, 2008; Holland et al., 2002).

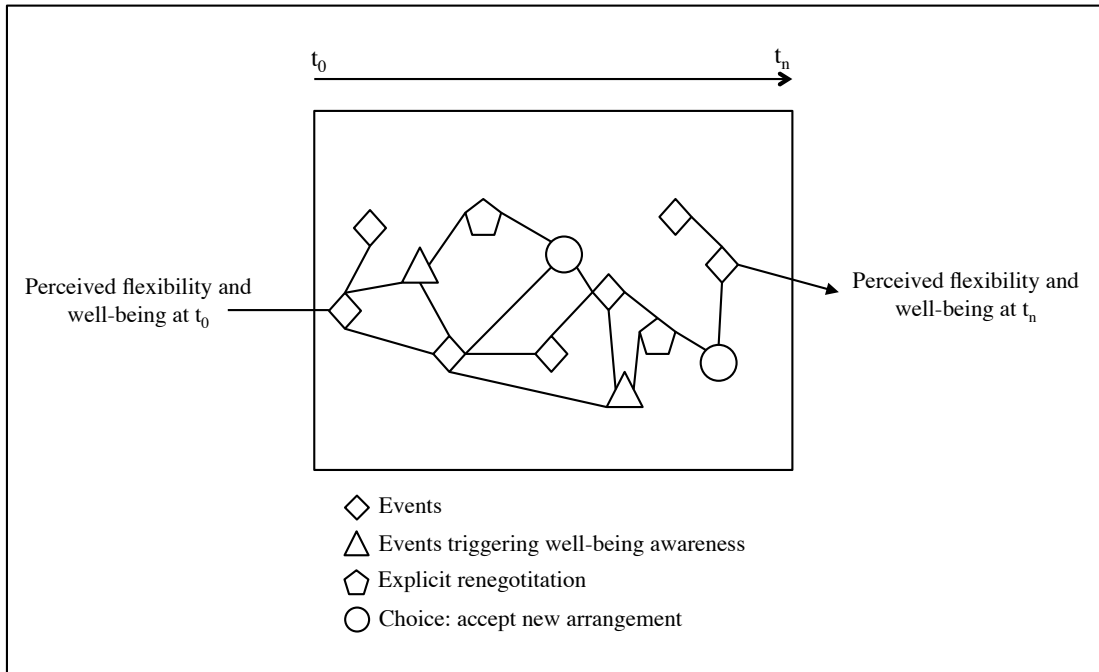
5.1.2.2. A process theory of flexibility and well-being

Process theory thinking emphasises flows of events, probabilistic encounters, and combinations within this flow. Process theories adopt very different premises. First, they understand the outcome as a discrete state or event, not as a continuous variable. Second, the precursor is only a necessary condition for the outcome and, third, time-ordering among the events is critical to the theory (Mohr, 1982; 38). In this thesis, adopting a diachronic perspective, focusing on how the concept of flexibility develops and evolves over time, has provided rich information on the succession of events that connect flexibility and well-being.

The theory developed in chapter four provides two notable contributions to explain the flexibility and well-being relationship. First, it highlights that this relationship is not linear: X increase in flexibility as a contribution does not always equal a Y drop of well-being. Their relationship will fluctuate depending on the prior flow of events. Second, the theory shows that time ordering among events is critical to understand this entangled relationship.

Figure 5.3 provides a visual representation of this complex chain of events. At t_0 an employee holds certain perceptions over their flexibility and their well-being. This changes over time through two main processes: adaptation and transformation. Adaptation takes place as employees internalise quotidian events (represented by diamonds in the figure) that implicitly change their experience of flexibility. It is characterised by a general trend towards employees perceiving increased flexibility as a contribution, but constant flexibility as an inducement. This adaptation process appears to go hand in hand with a decay in well-being.

Figure 5.3. Explaining flexibility and well-being with a process model.



At some point, a particular event (depicted by a triangle) takes place that makes employees aware of their low well-being and brings forth in their minds the chain of events that was internalised during the adaptation process. This realisation triggers a need for change that leads to a desire to formally renegotiate the employee's flexible work arrangement. The renegotiation (represented by a pentagon) generally involves the employee being offered flexibility as an inducement in order to preserve the employment relationship. At this point the employee makes the choice (depicted by a circle) of accepting a new transformed arrangement or quitting the organisation. This transformation process redresses well-being, taking it back to acceptable levels for the employee. These interactions and processes are repeated throughout the lifetime of the employment relationship. In the figure, after the choice to stay is made, new events occur that eventually lead to other renegotiations and choices. At t_n , the employee will hold certain perceptions over both his flexibility and his well-being, that have co-evolved since t_0 , and will continue evolving until the employment relationship is extinguished.

This theory tries to shed light over a complex phenomenon by arguing that it is more accurately articulated as a sequence of events than as a linear relationship between a set of variables. To do so, the mechanisms that affect flexibility and well-being have been

explained over time. As Langley and colleagues (2013; 4) say, “By recognising the centrality of time, process conceptualisations offer an essential contribution to organisation and management knowledge that is not available from most variance-based generalizations”. This theory contributes to the literature by explaining flexibility and well-being as entangled and co-evolving phenomena.

This thesis has also drawn attention to the fact that the employees’ interpretations of flexibility are both a source and a consequence of their well-being. The theory highlights that well-being pushes employees to reconsider their flexible work arrangement, reshaping their understanding of contributions and inducements. Well-being is not merely an end-state. It is a significant actor in the unfolding of the evolution of flexibility. This contribution challenges the causal relations present in the literature, which generally studies well-being as an outcome of flexibility.

The idea that well-being plays a role in the understanding and deployment of HR practices in general, can also contribute to the development of the process-oriented approach to HRM. This approach emphasises the relevance of employee interpretations of and responses to the messages communicated by HR practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). If employee well-being filters and influences the experience and interpretation of flexible working, it could also be argued to affect the interpretations of other HR practices. This thesis advances a view in which well-being is not just a mediator or a consequence of HR practices, but also an antecedent whose comprehension becomes crucial to the design of HRM systems. Individuals are no longer passive receivers of HR practices but active actors who can shape their content and implementation.

The process-oriented approach to HRM posits that there may be gaps between intended practices (as designed by HR professionals), implemented practices (as put in place by line managers and team leaders), and experienced practices (as lived and interpreted by employees) (Khilji and Wang, 2006, Ehrnrooth & Björkman, 2012). This approach assumes that HR practices will only deliver the desired outcomes if employees have a consistent experience that is aligned with HR’s intended design (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). The findings presented in this thesis show that HR designed flexibility practices (e.g. flexible working time or remote working) can be interpreted very differently and that well-being plays a crucial role in shaping their experience. In this sense, the theory

advanced in this dissertation can help explain the processes through which employees understand and react to HR conveyed messages (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). It therefore answers the call made by authors in the HR discipline to put aside the analysis of HR content, which has been extensively investigated, and devote more attention to the process aspects of HRM systems (Piening et al., 2014).

The thesis has additionally answered the call of some management scholars to explore the impact of HR practices on outcomes other than organisational performance and particularly on aspects related to human sustainability (Pfeffer, 2010). HRM studies have tended to look at well-being as a mediating variable towards increasing performance, restricting its inherent value (Delaney and Godard, 2001). However, my research suggests that taking well-being as an end in itself can also provide valuable insights onto the employment relationship and the design of HR practices.

Mohr (1982) argues convincingly that process and variance theories can coexist peacefully and be mutually informative. In this thesis, the two types of theories complement each other, to provide a better overall understanding of flexibility and well-being. In Mohr's words, the variance theory provides snapshots that are easy to observe and replicate, while the process theory shows a more accurate and complete movie. For example, the perceived flexibility framework is a straightforward variance theory that could easily be transposed into other contexts. However, it leaves some questions unanswered, such as, why do unbalanced flexible working arrangements exist? The process theory answers this question by suggesting that flexible work arrangements are continuously changing and that unbalanced situations are temporary. Similarly, the variance theory corroborates the process interpretation that the two dimensions of flexibility are separate and that they are significantly connected to employee well-being. Taken together, these two theories counterbalance their inherent shortcomings and add unique features that enrich the story.

5.2. Applicability to other contexts

The theories outlined in this thesis have been developed in a very specific environment but can provide valuable insights to a range of professions and occupational contexts.

This thesis started with an interest in studying flexibility under a pluralist umbrella, that is, assuming that a bargaining process between employers and employees may exist. To do so, it was paramount to find an organisation in which employees held bargaining power because, if no negotiation were found in such a context, it would be highly unlikely to be found in others. A consulting firm was chosen as the critical case (Goldthorpe et al., 1967) because management consultants are considered the archetype of knowledge workers (Fincham, 1999): they are highly skilled and work for organisations that rely on their abilities to create competitive advantage. For these reasons, they are believed to hold bargaining power and to have notable influence over their jobs.

The understanding of flexibility, well-being and their relationship acquired in this setting is expected to be useful for the study of HR practices and work arrangements in other contexts in which employees are likely to have significant bargaining power. This is the case of knowledge intensive firms (KIFs). KIFs are organisations composed by highly educated employees, in which most work is intellectual and involves applying and developing knowledge (Alvesson, 2000; Nachum, 1999). In these firms, employees have a strong bargaining position because they hold valuable and hard to replace know-what, know-how, and know-who (Swart, 2008; 454). According to Donnelly (2008; 197), “Knowledge workers are widely considered to represent the vanguard of a new employment era, characterised by a greater degree of balance in the relationship between the employer and the knowledge worker. Instead of being a purely dependent employee, the knowledge worker is expected to be able to benefit from a new level of employment interdependency”. The particularly generous employment conditions they have been able to achieve have led to some calling them gold-collar workers (Holland et al., 2002).

A clear example of KIFs are professional services firms (PSFs) which can include organisations in different fields such as management consulting, information technology, engineering consulting, investment banking, legal services, audit, accounting, tax advice, market research, executive search (Kubr, 2002), and even architecture firms, universities, and hospitals (Kaiser et al., 2015). Employees are PSFs’ most relevant asset (Hitt et al., 2001; Hitt et al. 2006), making HRM a major concern. According to Kaiser and colleagues (2015; 78) “The human resources of PSFs (...) can walk out of the front door every evening”. This ability to quit the organisation and quickly find another job

enhances their bargaining power. These characteristics of KIFs in general and PSFs in particular suggest that the theory developed in this thesis has the potential to provide interesting insights on the understanding, deployment, and evolution of flexible working and well-being in such firms.

Moreover, the issue of flexible working has been a particular concern in this type of organisation. On the one hand, a major characteristic of knowledge intensive jobs is that they are ambiguous, variable, and evolving, hence necessitate versatility, flexibility, and adaptability (Ram, 1999; Starbuck, 1992). In the case of PSFs, succeeding appears to require individuals to be flexible and to demonstrate high performance, both in terms of quality of work and quantity of hours devoted to work (billable hours) (de Janasz et al., 2011). In accounting firms, for example, professional image and promotions are connected with rapidly responding to the pressures of clients and a culture of long hours (Smithson et al., 2004). On the other hand, knowledge workers have been found to strive for autonomy and self-organised work (Hinings et al., 2015; Swart, 2008). In this context, flexible working can be considered as a relevant practice to foster employee loyalty towards the firm. The fact that the first general adopters of remote working, back in the 90s, were the IT and consulting industries, exemplifies that incorporating flexible working practices has been a relevant concern for KIFs (Di Martino and Wirth, 1990; Daniels et al. 2001). Considering these issues, exploring flexibility in other KIFs through the lens of the theory developed in this thesis can help develop HR practices to increase employee retention.

Recently, the management of knowledge workers has become relevant even in organisations that are not exclusively knowledge intensive and have more bureaucratic structures (Krausert, 2014). Large organisations in many different sectors, such as banking, telecommunications, retail, hospitality, etc., also consider human resources as a source of competitive advantage and strive to hire and retain highly skilled employees. Therefore, the theory developed in this thesis can also contribute to the analysis of organisations that rely on knowledge workers to develop their strategy. Moreover, practices applied by consulting firms are easily spread on to their clients (O'Mahoney, 2010). This is particularly relevant to the case of Minerva in Spain because it provides services to over 1000 clients, including 80% of the firms in the IBEX-35. This means that Minerva is in a position where its practices can potentially reach and be mimicked by most large

Spanish companies, making the latter an interesting arena to explore the insights developed in this thesis.

Overall, insights acquired on the understanding, evolution, and connections of flexible working and well-being in a consulting organisation are applicable to a large amount of contexts because consultants are the archetype of knowledge workers, they play a key role in the knowledge economy and they contribute to the diffusion of work arrangements (Donnelly, 2015).

5.3. Practical implications

The findings of this thesis and the contributions outlined in the previous section can be developed into a number of practical recommendations. Chiefly, the thesis has found that flexibility is perceived as a combination of contributions and inducements that are separate but interrelated dimensions of flexible work arrangements. Secondly, it was found that such perception is shaped by the employees' experiences and therefore evolves over time. Thirdly, findings suggest that the two dimensions of flexibility are significantly related to employee well-being, that they co-evolve, and that they influence each other in time. In this sense, the findings put forward that well-being might be best viewed as an essential HR concern. Rather than being just an outcome of work arrangements it has the potential to shape the construction and interpretation of such arrangements.

Taken together, these findings suggest that organisations should monitor the well-being of their employees closely and adapt flexible working and other HR processes accordingly. The yearly evaluations as currently carried out in Minerva are not sufficient to provide a detailed and evolving picture of flexible working and well-being. For example, the organisation does not track whether employees are close to a renegotiation or have just been through one, which would make a relevant difference to well-being. Indeed, this is a difficult task. As suggested by the process-oriented approach to HRM, there seems to be a certain distance between intended, implemented and perceived flexibility (Bowen and Ostrof, 2004; Khilji and Wang, 2006). Individuals interpret and react to the practices developed by the firm depending on their experiences (Boon et al.,

2011). The findings of this thesis suggest that the experience of flexible working and well-being do not simply come from established practices at the corporate level but, most importantly, from quotidian events that depend on departments, supervisors, personal circumstances, etc.

Therefore, in practical terms, organisations are likely to benefit by incorporating evaluations of flexible working and well-being in two standard HR processes: performance evaluations and employee surveys. The performance evaluations generally involve a face-to-face meeting between each employee and their direct supervisor. These meetings can provide a good opportunity for supervisors to be attuned to their team's well-being and to explore their perceptions of flexible working. Understanding to what extent employees perceive flexibility as an inducement or as a contribution and investigating their expectations can provide valuable insights. In particular, the findings suggest that rather than being driven by purely rational and economic criteria, the request to renegotiate work arrangements is highly connected to the employees' perception of their well-being. Supervisors could explore the possibilities of employees requesting a formal renegotiation of their deal and may have a chance to redress perceived imbalances and increase the employees' perception of reciprocity. However, this would require high levels of trust between employees and their supervisors.

Additionally, organisations could gather information from employee surveys. This option has the advantage of securing anonymity, which may encourage employees to be more open to sharing their perceptions with regards to both flexibility and well-being. However, anonymity entails that no individual solutions can be developed. Nevertheless, group level information can prove very valuable for HR to make recommendations and design specific policies. For example, if flexibility as a contribution and flexibility as an inducement are evaluated, organisations may use the perceived flexibility framework proposed in this thesis (c.f. Figure 5.2, page 178) to locate the position of their teams and make general inferences about their well-being. If most members of a team are in the firm-oriented flexibility quadrant of the matrix, it means that their well-being is likely to suffer at some point in time, and that many of those employees could request a renegotiation in the short term. Under these circumstances, HR could anticipate exhaustion and offer flexibility practices that employees are likely to perceive as an inducement (for example employee-led telework), looking to redress the balance prior to a

formal renegotiation. At the same time, if most members of a team are in the employee-oriented flexibility quadrant of the matrix, HR can know that such team can potentially absorb greater demands of flexibility, and maybe alleviate some of their colleagues' workload.

The perceived flexibility framework can also be useful to analyse the impact of the policies implemented by HR. For instance, if the opportunity to telework were to be given to a group of employees, an analysis could be carried out before and after the implementation of the practice to observe if such implementation impacts perceptions of flexibility as a contribution and flexibility as an inducement. This information could be valuable to investigate the real impact of new policies and to produce a cost-benefit analysis.

If the employee survey were carried out by an external provider and employees were willing to provide information that is linked to their well-being and their flexible work arrangements, a more in-depth analysis of individual situations could be carried out. During the data gathering process for this thesis, Minerva made one such employee survey focusing on health issues. A number of mechanisms were put in place to ensure employees felt safe to respond (the survey was carried out by an external firm who only delivered results to the medical service under a doctor-patient confidentiality agreement). This type of survey could be expanded to include flexibility and well-being issues. Compared to the internal survey, it would not provide information directly to HR, but would be useful for medical services to provide individual support to employees in particular need.

All survey options have the disadvantage of providing just a snapshot. However, if necessary, HR could follow up on the information they provide to develop a more processual understanding. Moreover, gathering yearly survey data could provide valuable longitudinal information and help visualise evolution patterns in a simple manner. In sum, by processing this information HR could become more proactive with regards to preserving employee well-being rather than reacting once problems have clearly emerged. Organisations might look to monitor employee well-being and flexibility, seeking to proactively manage experiences and expectations.

5.4. Limitations

Scholars generally accept that all research methods have inherent flaws limiting the conclusions that can be drawn from empirical studies (Scandura & Williams, 2000). The research presented in this thesis is no exception.

As advanced in chapter three, the quantitative study linking perceptions of flexibility and well-being has a number of limitations. Firstly, the study used self-reported data for both dependent and independent variables, which may introduce common-method bias. The use of self-report methods intended to answer the critique in the literature whereby most studies had disregarded employee experiences and favoured organisations as their unit of analysis (Green et al., 2006). Secondly, since data is cross-sectional, the results of the regression cannot be argued to determine causality. Thirdly, the scale used to measure flexibility as a contribution was developed for this work. Although its construction was based on the in-depth analysis of the interviews, further studies in different samples would be necessary to confirm construct validity.

Additional limitations can be highlighted for the qualitative study. Firstly, given the restrictions of access to the case study, initial interviews were suggested and organised by HR. The HR director put me in touch with some employees who were potentially interested in participating in the study. These individuals may have been prone to provide biased answers to favour the organisation and its HR policies. In addition, they may have been reluctant to trust my promise of confidentiality, given my connection to the HR director. However, had the direction not backed the research and provided the first set of interviews, it would have been difficult to ensure participation in the study. The backing of HR legitimised my study, ensured participants they could take time off work to answer my questions and removed potential reluctance to discuss the firms' working practices with me. Secondly, a possible limitation is participant self-selection bias. It could be argued that solely participants that were highly interested in the research would accept being interviewed. To mitigate this issue, interviewees were asked to name two or more colleagues that could have a different view on the phenomena under investigation, and to introduce me to them so that they would accept being interviewed. This also contributed to limiting the HR director's involvement in the selection

of interviewees. I interpreted the participants' candour in relating their difficulties and the vivacity with which they expressed their experience of flexibility and well-being—good or ill—as evidence that the research approach was appropriate (Boussebaa et al., 2012).

The overall research design of this thesis, contributes to alleviating these limitations. Indeed, one of advantages of mixed-methods research (MMR) is that drawing conclusions based on both quantitative and qualitative methods can mitigate the inherent limitations of each (Scandura and Williams, 2000). For example, although the cross-sectional study did not allow inferring causation, the qualitative study provided evidence on the order of events. MMR enables triangulation (Jick, 1979) and may provide better and more robust answers to research questions than each individual approach (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). By counteracting each other's limitations and providing a wider range of divergent and complementary insights on the phenomena under investigation, MMR enables developing substantive theory (Shah and Corley, 2006; Venkatesh et al., 2013).

Finally, the study of a single organisation may be considered an additional limitation. Indeed, statistical sampling-based generalizability is not possible beyond this case and some of the findings may be related to the particular characteristics of this organisation. Nevertheless, as discussed in the contributions section, the theory developed in this thesis can provide interesting insights to other organisations employing knowledge workers who have bargaining power. Such workers are a growing part of the economy (Miozzo and Grimshaw, 2006). Additionally, this case was presented as being critical. If no bargaining over flexibility had been found in this case, it would have been unlikely to be found in other settings.

5.5. Further work

On the basis of the research advanced in this thesis, it is possible to suggest a number of avenues for future investigations. First, it would be interesting to expand the theory to contexts other than that of knowledge workers in large organisations. Given that bargaining processes of flexibility were identified in the studied case, it would be valuable

to explore if such processes also take place for employees in less qualified jobs. The analysis of flexibility in this thesis has relied substantially on the psychological contract. However, the premises of psychological contract may only provide a useful analytical lens when studying individuals that can engage with its inherent reciprocity discourse (Nadin and Cassell, 2007). Therefore it may only be applicable to investigating certain categories of employees (Dick and Nadin, 2011). If so, how is flexibility constructed in domains that are not knowledge intensive, in which employees are less likely to master the reciprocity discourse? Are they equally entangled with well-being or do other variables and events play a more prominent role? Do unions and collective bargaining intervene in non knowledge-focused occupations?

Similarly, looking at the case of entrepreneurs would help expand the theory of flexibility and well-being. What happens when individuals are their own bosses? What is the process of flexibility and well-being when people negotiate with themselves? Extant research suggests that although perceptions of flexibility may be different for entrepreneurs who are in total control of their work arrangements, effects on well-being are not necessarily different (Bourne and Forman, 2014). If renegotiation with upper-levels is not possible, how do flexibility and well-being evolve over time?

Secondly, future research could elaborate on the perceived flexibility framework. As shown in Figure 5.2 (see page 178), in its current form, the framework includes a single downward diagonal arrow. This diagonal runs through the quadrants in which perceived contributions and inducements differ, positing that well-being decays as perceived contributions become relatively higher than perceived inducements. The question arises whether a second diagonal runs upwards through the quadrants in which perceptions of flexibility as a contribution and flexibility as an inducement are balanced. If well-being does not differentiate low flexibility and mutual flexibility arrangements, what does?

In addition, further exploring the mechanisms behind the impact of flexibility as an inducement and flexibility as a contribution on well-being could enlarge the framework. Drawing on the job-demands-job-resources theory (Bakker et al., 2004; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), it could be argued that different underlying behavioural processes mediate the impact these variables have on well-being. For instance, perceived flexibility as a contribution may lead to increased work intensity, which in turn reduces well-

being, whereas perceived flexibility as an inducement may boost job satisfaction leading to increased well-being.

Thirdly, further research could develop a more finely-grained understanding of well-being. This thesis did not specifically explore differences between hedonic and eudemonic well-being. Ryan and Deci (2001; 143) explain these two perspectives of well-being in the following terms: “hedonism (...) reflects the view that wellbeing consists of pleasure of happiness. [For eudemonism] (...) well-being consists of more than just happiness. It lies instead in the actualisation of human potentials (...) [Both perspectives] are founded on distinct views of human nature and what constitutes a good society.” Analysing whether flexibility is more closely connected to hedonic or eudemonic well-being could generate further insights on how to preserve employee well-being. For example, it may be argued that certain events and perceptions are related to short-term emotions, whereas others have a more long-term effect on self-actualisation and human flourishing (Ryff and Singer, 1998).

This thesis has focused primarily on a psychological and perceptive understanding of well-being. Further work could look more specifically into other dimensions of well-being, namely, health and relationships (Grant et al., 2007). As far as health is concerned, do employees with different perceived flexible work arrangements suffer more or less than others from health problems? For example, the combination of high flexibility as a contribution and low flexibility as an inducement could, hypothetically, be linked to higher anxiety, sleep deprivation, or high blood pressure. Further analyses would be necessary to confirm such hypotheses. As far as relationships are concerned, are teamwork dynamics affected by individual perceptions of flexibility? Will employees’ realisations of their declined well-being trigger a similar realisation for their colleagues? To what extent do workplace relationships affect the connection between individual perceptions of flexibility and well-being?

Fourthly, an interesting question emerges that is connected to the theory of the employment relationship: why is the adaptation process recurrent? As discussed in chapter four, flexibility seems to naturally drift in favour of the firm because perceptions of flexibility as a contribution grow over time, while perceived flexibility as an inducement stagnates. In this sense, employers appears to act opportunistically, using their prerogative for ex-

exploitation. However, such behaviour should be controlled by the existence of reputation incentives and a need to retain valuable employees. Bartling et al. (2013) found that reputational mechanisms are not always sufficient to solve employer moral hazard. Their experiments show that, although it is possible to discipline the employer in repeated exchanges, some may still use their power to force inefficient actions that are profitable for the organisation but costly for employees. This suggests that additional mechanisms may be necessary to prevent opportunistic behaviour, highlighting the role of unions and labour laws. In the case of Minerva, is this behaviour related to the lack of union representation? Are there other factors that explain such recurrent opportunistic behaviour? Would different mechanisms be identified for knowledge workers in unionised workplaces?

Finally, the connection between well-being and the limit of the zone of acceptance warrants further investigation. The identification of well-being as a defining factor for the triggering of a new deal strikes an interesting parallel to the notion of the zone of acceptance (Simon, 1951). As it stands now, chapter four has posited that they could be intimately related, but in what ways they might differ remains to be explored.

Moreover, the zone of acceptance is an evolving notion (Marsden, 2007) that the findings presented in this thesis suggest that it will likely be affected by ongoing flexibility and well-being processes. However, further research is required to understand how. Although new flexible work arrangements can result from successive renegotiations, the previous experiences of flexibility remain present. It could be argued that, as time goes by and successful renegotiations occur, trust increases (Blau, 1964) enlarging the zone of acceptance. However, one could assume that suffering periodic processes of well-being deterioration may have the opposite effect, increasing the likelihood of the employee quitting the organisation. This reasoning results in a paradox: without careful consideration of the zone of acceptance, using flexible work as a source of adaptability for the firm could lead to tensions that, in fact, reduce the firm's competitiveness.

5.6. Summary and conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to provide a better understanding of flexibility in organisa-

tional settings and to develop theory on the relationship between workplace flexibility and employee well-being. In conclusion to the thesis, this chapter has briefly summarised the extent to which this general aim was achieved, by highlighting the connection between the three empirical chapters and their overall contribution to the literature. In addition the chapter has put forward a number of practical implications for managers and organisations to consider in managing workplace flexibility and monitoring employee well-being. The chapter has concluded by discussing the limitations of this work and presenting some avenues for further research.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide

1. General questions

- Can you briefly describe your job, the responsibilities of your team and the role you play in it?
- Can you tell me about your history in this firm? (probe with: how long have you worked for this organisation? What has your trajectory been? Etc.)

2. Flexible working

- What does flexible work mean to you?
- What is your experience of flexible work in this firm?
- How would you characterise it?
- Has your experience changed since you have been with this firm? How? Why?

Potential additional questions

- Do you think your experience is similar to that of your colleagues? In what ways?
- Are you generally aware of the new working practices the HR team has implemented in the last two years? Do you know of any flexible working practices offered by HR? Do they affect you?
- Would you say the HR discourse on flexible working is close to your experience?
- Do you think flexibility is an important characteristic of work in this firm? If so, how?

3. Well-being

- Is your experience of flexibility satisfactory? Could something be done to improve it?
- In your opinion what are its advantages of flexible work? What are its disadvantages? Can you provide specific examples from your experience?
- Does flexible work have an impact on the way you feel? or How do you feel about this way of working?
- In general terms, do you think this organisation cares for the well-being of its employees?
- What does the firm understand by employee well-being? And you?
- Do you think your work influences your well-being?
- Have you experienced any well-being problems that are connected to your work? What about your colleagues?
- Have you ever used the medical service? What was your concern?

4. Other potentially related topics

- In general terms, are you satisfied with working for this firm? Do you feel committed to it? Would you recommend it to a friend or a family member?
- Who do you think benefits the most from your work effort, the firm or yourself?
- What drives people in this organisation to work with such dedication? Why is work here so intense?

5. Final questions

- Is there anything we have not discussed that you would like to bring up?
- If necessary, could I contact you again? (for example to clarify my understanding of your words once transcribe and analyse the interview)
- Can you please recommend three colleagues for me to interview next that can provide interesting and potentially different insights to this research?

Appendix B. Interviewee Form

Name:

Group work:

Department:

Professional category:

Number of years with the firm:

Number of years in the current job:

Interview details

Interview n°:

Date:

Duration of the interview:

Demographic information

Gender:

Age:

Number of children:

Age of children:

Marital status:

Education level:

Appendix C. Survey

Dear employee,

Thank you for accepting to participate to this study. This questionnaire is part of a Ph.D. thesis researching HR practices and is being currently conducted at the London School of Economics and Political Science in London. The goal of the thesis is to contribute to a better comprehension of the links between flexible working and well-being.

Your answers will be anonymous and treated strictly confidentially. I will be the only one responsible for managing the information that you provide. Your name and your answers will never be linked and the overall results will be presented without any possibility to connect you to your answers.

The questionnaire is divided in thematic blocks in which different types of questions are asked. The themes are: demographic information; your job; your working conditions; your well-being and finally your performance.

Filling in this questionnaire will take you about 15 minutes. For your comfort, once you start the questionnaire, your answers will be saved and you can come back later clicking, on the same computer, the link in the email you have received. You will be able to complete your answers within a week.

If you so desire, you can consult my CV and research interests at the following page: <http://personal.lse.ac.uk/canibana>. If you have any doubt, you can contact me at the following email: a.canibano1@lse.ac.uk.

Thank you again for taking part in this research and the time you have dedicated to it.

Almudena Cañibano
PhD Candidate
Department of Management
London School of Economics and Political Science

Section 1: In this first section, you have to answer some general demographic questions.

Q1 What is your gender?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)

Q2 How old are you?

Q3 What is your marital status?

- Single (1)
- Married (2)
- Divorced (3)
- Widowed (4)

Q4 How many children do you have?

- 0 (1)
- 1 (2)
- 2 (3)
- 3 (4)
- 4 (5)
- 5 or more (6)

Answer If How many children do you have? 0 Is NOT Selected

Q5 How old are your children? Please indicate the age of the youngest first and the eldest last. (If you have more than five children, indicate the age of the youngest five)

- Child 1 (youngest)
- Child 2
- Child 3
- Child 4
- Child 5

Section 2: In this section, you have to answer some general questions about your job

Q6 What workforce do you belong to?

- Management Consulting (1)
- Operational Solutions (2)
- Client Services (3)
- Back office (4)

Answer If What workforce do you belong to? Back office Is Selected

Q7 In which department do you work?

- CIO (1)
- Facilities and Services (2)
- Finance (3)
- Human Resources (4)
- Legal (5)
- Marketing (6)
- Operations (7)
- Research (8)
- Sales (9)

Answer If What workforce do you belong to? Management Consulting Is Selected

Q8 In which area do you work?

- Operating Groups (1)
- Technology Growth Platforms (2)
- GM&MC Growth Platform (3)

Answer If What workforce do you belong to? Back office Is Selected

Q9 What is your professional rank?

- Assistant (1)
- Sr Assistant (2)
- Analyst (3)
- Sr Analyst (4)
- Specialist (5)
- Sr Specialist (6)
- Manager (7)
- Senior Manager (8)
- Senior Executive (9)

Answer If What workforce do you belong to? Management Consulting Is Selected

Q10 What is your professional rank?

- Analyst (1)
- Consultant (2)
- Manager (3)
- Senior Manager (4)
- Senior Executive (5)

Q11 How many years have you been working for this firm? (if year than one year write 0)

Q12 How many years have you been working in your current job? (if year than one year write 0)

Q13 In which city is your primary work establishment?

- Madrid (1)
- Barcelona (2)
- Bilbao (3)
- Valencia (4)
- Sevilla (5)

Q14 What was your gross salary last year, including fixed and variable pay (Please right a figure in euros without points or comas).

Q15 Do you currently have reduced work hours?

- Si (1)
- No (2)

Section 3: In this section you will be asked information about your working conditions.

Q16 How many hours of work appear in your work contract?

Q17 How many hours, including overtime or extra hours, do you usually work in your job each week? (Including trips, meetings and all work-related activities)

Q18 Do you work on the weekends?

- None (1)
- Some (2)
- Many (3)
- All (4)

Q19 My job requires me to...

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Be available outside of official working hours (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work outside of the office (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Travel(3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work outside of official working hours (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Change my schedule and work time regularly (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Deal with work issues when I am not at the office (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have my cell phone on outside of official working hours (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Constantly watch for e-mails (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dedicate time during the week-ends (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q20 Does your department officially offer the following flexible working practices?
(Select as many as appropriate)

- Flexible working time (1)
- Part-time work (2)
- Telework (3)
- Reduced work hours (4)
- Job-sharing. (5)
- Compressed work weeks (6)
- Annualised work hours (7)
- Paid leave of absence (8)
- Unpaid leave of absence (9)

Q21 Even if there is no official policy in your department, do you informally benefit from any of the following flexible working practices? For instance, because you have informally agreed so with your supervisor (Select as many as appropriate)

- Flexible working time (1)
- Part-time work (2)
- Telework (3)
- Reduced work hours (4)
- Job-sharing. (5)
- Compressed work weeks (6)
- Annualised work hours (7)
- Paid leave of absence (8)
- Unpaid leave of absence (9)

Q22 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The firm gives me the flexibility I need (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My supervisor gives me the flexibility I need (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel free to use the flexibility programmes available in the firm (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using flexibility won't affect my career progress (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I use the flexibility programmes I can't complete my work in time. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have the work flexibility I need (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q23 In general, how would you describe your relationship with your supervisor?

- Very bad (1)
- Bad (2)
- Not good nor bad (3)
- Good (4)
- Very good (5)

Q24 How often does your job require you to work very fast?

- Never (1)
- Sometimes (2)
- Often (3)
- Very often (4)
- All the time (5)

Q25 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
My job requires that I work very hard (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I work under a lot of pressure (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q26 During your work day, how often do you take a short break?

- Never (1)
- Once a day (2)
- Twice a day (3)
- Every two hours (4)
- Every hour (5)

Q27 In comparison with other firms, you think working for this firm is:

- Very bad (1)
- Bad (2)
- Not good nor bad (3)
- Good (4)
- Very good (5)

Q28 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Flexible work is an incentive for me to work beyond job requirements (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexible work makes me feel pressured to work more intensely (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexible work makes me work longer hours (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 4: In this section you will be asked information about your well-being.

Q29 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
After I leave work I still worry about work related issues (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is difficult for me to disconnect from work at the end of my workday (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q30 Thinking about the last month, to what extent has your job made you feel the following emotions? (1 = never; 6 = all the time)

	Never (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	All the time (6)
Calm (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comfortable (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relaxed (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Motivated (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enthusiastic (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Optimistic (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tense (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anxious (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worried (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Depressed (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Melancholic (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unhappy (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q31 Please indicate for each of the following five statements, which is closest to how you have been feeling over the last two weeks.

	At no time (1)	Some of the time (2)	Less than half of the time (3)	More than half of the time (4)	Most of the time (5)	All of the time (6)
I have felt cheerful and in good spirits (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have felt calm and relaxed (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have felt active and vigorous (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I woke up feeling fresh and rested (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My daily life has been filled with things that interest me (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 5: In this section you will be asked information about your performance.

Q32 On a scale from 0 to 100 (0 being very low performance and 100 being excellent performance), how would you evaluate your general work performance over the last year?

Q33 What rating did you receive in your last performance evaluation?

- At the very top (1)
- Significantly above (2)
- Above (3)
- Consistent with peer group (4)
- Below peer group (5)

Q34 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I understand the reasons why I received my last performance evaluation (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My last performance evaluation is an accurate reflection of my performance (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q35 What rating do you think you should have received in your last performance evaluation?

- At the very top (1)
- Significantly above (2)
- Above (3)
- Consistent with peer group (4)
- Below peer group (5)

Appendix D. Preliminary data analyses (Chapter 3)

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the distribution of all variables is significantly different ($p < .01$) from a normal distribution. This is common for variables measured on a Likert scale of five or less points. It is not a worrying result because the sample is very large and parameters are ideal descriptors of the population (Field, 2009). Nevertheless, the standard errors have been interpreted cautiously.

A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted on the 20 items with orthogonal rotation (varimax). An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Three components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and in combination explained 65,843% of the variance.

Table D.1. Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation (Preliminary analysis with 20 items).

	Component		
	Flexibility as a contribution	Flexibility as an inducement	Well- being
Deal with work issues when I am not at the office	.894	-.138	-.115
Be available outside of official working hours	.876	-.041	-.087
Have my cell phone on outside of official working hours	.846	-.027	-.077
Constantly watch for e-mails	.835	-.034	-.098
Work outside of the office	.823	-.159	-.066
Dedicate time during the weekends	.812	-.062	-.130
Work outside of official working hours	.804	-.246	-.139
Change my schedule and work time regularly	.776	-.228	-.150
Travel	.640	-.154	-.048
If I use flexibility I can complete my work on time	.384	-.087	-.111
The firm gives me the flexibility I need	-.076	.856	.173
I have the work flexibility I need	-.143	.852	.197
I feel free to use the flexibility programmes available in the firm	-.150	.843	.169
My supervisor gives me the flexibility I need	-.104	.788	.193
Using flexibility won't affect my career progress	-.246	.644	.140
I have felt cheerful and in good spirits	-.087	.143	.838
I have felt active and vigorous	-.001	.179	.799
I woke up feeling fresh and rested	-.171	.184	.767
I have felt calm and relaxed	-.247	.123	.752
My daily life has been filled with things that interest me	-.138	.208	.709
Eigenvalues	7.838	3.406	1.925
% of variance	31.799	17.720	16.324

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Note: Factor loadings over .40 appear in bold

The items that cluster on the same components suggest that component 1 represents perceived flexibility as a contribution, component 2 perceived flexibility as an inducement and component 3 well-being. Table D.1 shows the factor loadings after rotation.

One of the items (FI5: If I use flexibility I can complete my work on time) did not have a high enough correlation with any of the factors and was therefore eliminated. In addition, for the first component “Flexibility as an inducement”, an analysis of reliability showed that Cronbach’s $\alpha = .836$ could be improved to Cronbach’s $\alpha = .946$ by eliminating item 3 (FC3: Travel).

A final principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted on the 18 remaining items with orthogonal rotation (varimax). The factor structure remained intact; three components had eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of 1 and in combination explained 70,154% of the variance. Table D.2 shows the factor loadings after rotation.

Table D.2. Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation and reliability of scales (Final analysis with 18 items).

	Component		
	Flexibility as a contribution	Flexibility as an inducement	Well-being
Deal with work issues when I am not at the office	.902	-.151	-.118
Be available outside of official working hours	.888	-.055	-.087
Have my cell phone on outside of official working hours	.861	-.040	-.077
Constantly watch for e-mails	.846	-.047	-.098
Work outside of the office	.819	-.074	-.131
Dedicate time during the weekends	.806	-.168	-.076
Work outside of official working hours	.798	-.258	-.143
Change my schedule and work time regularly	.763	-.237	-.159
The firm gives me the flexibility I need	-.063	.857	.173
I have the work flexibility I need	-.138	.854	.196
I feel free to use the flexibility programmes available in the firm	-.137	.845	.170
My supervisor gives me the flexibility I need	-.103	.789	.193
Using flexibility won’t affect my career progress	-.229	.648	.142
I have felt cheerful and in good spirits	-.081	.144	.839
I have felt active and vigorous	.009	.178	.801
I woke up feeling fresh and rested	-.164	.186	.768
I have felt calm and relaxed	-.245	.127	.751
My daily life has been filled with things that interest me	-.129	.209	.711
Eigenvalues	5.812	3.551	3.265
% of variance	32.288	19.730	18.136
α	.946	.884	.86

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Note: Factor loadings over .40 appear in bold

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .922 and all KMO values for individual items were >.843, which is well above the acceptable limit of .5 (Field, 2009). Barlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2 (153) = 7965,444 p < .001$ indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA.

For component 1 (tables D.3., D.4. and D.5.), *Flexibility as a Contribution*, Cronbach's $\alpha = .946$ was very high, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .939 to .952. All inter-item correlations were positive with a mean correlation between items of .688, and ranging from a minimum of .568 to a maximum of .825. Adjusted item-total correlation, when excluding the assessed individual item from the scale overall score, ranged from $R_a = .752$ to $R_a = .892$. Squared multiple correlations when regressing each individual item on the remaining scale items ranged from $R^2 = .611$ to $R^2 = .807$. The results show that deleting items from the scale would not improve Cronbach's alpha.

Table D.3. Summary item statistics for observed correlations.

	Mean	Min	Max	Range	Max / Min	Variance	N of Items
Inter-Item Correlations	.688	.568	.825	.257	1.452	.004	8

Table D.4. Intraclass correlation coefficient.

	Intraclass Correlation ^b	95% Confidence Interval		F Test with True Value 0			
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	Sig
Single Measures	.685 ^a	.658	.712	18.408	625	4375	.000
Average Measures	.946 ^c	.939	.952	18.408	625	4375	.000

Two-way mixed effects model where people effects are random and measures effects are fixed.

a. The estimator is the same, whether the interaction effect is present or not.

b. Type C intraclass correlation coefficients using a consistency definition-the between-measure variance is excluded from the denominator variance.

c. This estimate is computed assuming the interaction effect is absent, because it is not estimable otherwise.

Table D.5. Item-total scale statistics.

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Be available outside of official working hours	23.05	56.048	.849	.753	.935
Work outside of the office	23.02	55.719	.772	.611	.941
Work outside of official working hours	22.75	57.056	.792	.683	.939
Change my schedule and work time regularly	23.23	56.614	.752	.641	.942
Deal with work issues when I am not at the office	23.19	55.082	.892	.807	.932
Have my cell phone on outside of official working hours	23.02	54.668	.806	.732	.938
Constantly watch for e-mails	23.07	56.404	.796	.693	.939
Dedicate time during the weekends	23.44	58.278	.776	.643	.940

For component 2 (tables D.6., D.7. and D.8.), *Flexibility as an Inducement*, Cronbach's $\alpha = .884$ was high, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .869 to .898. All inter-item correlations were positive with a mean correlation between items of .612, and ranging from a minimum of .433 to a maximum of .734. Adjusted item-total correlation, when excluding the assessed individual item from the scale overall score, ranged from $R_a = .572$ to $R_a = .801$. Squared multiple correlations when regressing each individual item on the remaining scale items ranged from $R^2 = .346$ to $R^2 = .679$. The results show that deleting item 4 from the scale (FI4: Using flexibility won't affect my career progress) would increase Cronbach's alpha. However, the increase being small, the decision was made to keep the item.

Table D.6. Summary item statistics for observed correlations.

	Mean	Min	Max	Range	Max / Min	Variance	N of Items
Inter-Item Correlations	.612	.433	.734	.301	1.695	.011	5

Table D.7. Intraclass correlation coefficient.

	Intraclass Correlation ^b	95% Confidence Interval		F Test with True Value 0			
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	Sig
Single Measures	.605 ^a	.571	.638	8.652	625	2500	.000
Average Measures	.884 ^c	.869	.898	8.652	625	2500	.000

Two-way mixed effects model where people effects are random and measures effects are fixed.

a. The estimator is the same, whether the interaction effect is present or not.

b. Type C intraclass correlation coefficients using a consistency definition-the between-measure variance is excluded from the denominator variance.

c. This estimate is computed assuming the interaction effect is absent, because it is not estimable otherwise.

Table D.8. Item-total scale statistics.

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
The firm gives me the flexibility I need	11.79	14.319	.774	.620	.848
My supervisor gives me the flexibility I need	11.39	14.705	.705	.539	.864
I feel free to use the flexibility programmes available in the firm	11.98	13.416	.782	.625	.845
Using flexibility won't affect my career progress	12.58	14.708	.572	.346	.897
I have the work flexibility I need	11.95	13.892	.801	.679	.841

For component 3, (tables D.9., D.10. and D.11.), *Well-being*, Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$ was high, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .842 to .877. All inter-item correlations were positive with a mean correlation between items of .554, and ranging from a minimum of .456 to a maximum of .647. Adjusted item-total correlation, when excluding the assessed individual item from the scale overall score, ranged from $R_a = .620$ to $R_a = .739$. Squared multiple correlations when regressing each individual item on the remaining scale items ranged from $R^2 = .395$ to $R^2 = .579$. The results show that deleting items from the scale would not improve Cronbach's alpha.

Table D.9. Summary item statistics for observed correlations.

	Mean	Min	Max	Range	Max / Min	Variance	N of Items
Inter-Item Correlations	.554	.456	.647	.191	1.418	.004	5

Table D.10. Intraclass correlation coefficient.

	Intraclass Correlation ^b	95% Confidence Interval		F Test with True Value 0			
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	Sig
Single Measures	.551 ^a	.516	.587	7.139	625	2500	.000
Average Measures	.860 ^c	.842	.877	7.139	625	2500	.000

Two-way mixed effects model where people effects are random and measures effects are fixed.

a. The estimator is the same, whether the interaction effect is present or not.

b. Type C intraclass correlation coefficients using a consistency definition-the between-measure variance is excluded from the denominator variance.

c. This estimate is computed assuming the interaction effect is absent, because it is not estimable otherwise.

Table D.11. Item-total scale statistics.

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I have felt cheerful and in good spirits	13.89	13.248	.739	.579	.815
I have felt calm and relaxed	14.53	13.408	.662	.497	.835
I have felt active and vigorous	13.79	13.843	.680	.501	.831
I woke up feeling fresh and rested	14.48	13.405	.690	.488	.827
My daily life has been filled with things that interest me	14.11	13.530	.620	.395	.846

Table D.12. Means and standard deviations of items in the flexibility as a contribution scale

	FC1	FC2	FC4	FC5	FC6	FC7	FC8	FC9
M	3,34	3,37	3,65	3,16	3,21	3,38	3,32	2,96
SD	1,210	1,335	1,202	1,291	1,230	1,371	1,248	1,126

Table D.13. Means and standard deviations of items in the flexibility as an inducement scale

	FI1	FI2	FI3	FI4	FI6
M	3,13	3,54	2,94	2,34	2,97
SD	1,050	1,063	1,181	1,224	1,089

Table D.14. Means and standard deviations of items in the well-being scale

	WB1	WB2	WB3	WB4	WB5
M	3,81	3,17	3,91	3,22	3,59
SD	1,098	1,157	1,064	1,125	1,188

Appendix E. Non significant interaction analyses (Chapter 3)

Interaction between FC and LFI

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted in three steps. Results can be found in table E.1. Control variables were entered in the first step of the regression (model E.1a). FC and LFI were entered at the second step (model E.1b). The relationship of FC and well-being was negative and significant ($\beta = -.31, p < .0005$). LFI had a significant negative relationship with well-being ($\beta = -.58, p < .0005$). Both β coefficients were larger than those of FC and FI in model 2 (c.f. table 3.8, p.116) and significance of the relationships remained equal. However, the sign of the β coefficient for low flexibility as an inducement was inverted, indicating that low levels of perceived flexibility as an inducement had a negative relationship with well-being. In the third step (model E1c), the product term variable of FC and LFI was entered to test for the interaction hypothesis. The interaction variable was not significant ($\beta = .1, p = .26$). The direct effects of FC ($\beta = -.29, p < .0005$) and LFI ($\beta = -.55, p < .0005$) had the same sign than in model E1b and remained significant. The change in variance explained from model E1b to model E1c was not significant ($\Delta R^2 = .00, p = .26$).

Interaction between FC and MLFI

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted in three steps. Results can be found in table E.2. Control variables were entered in the first step of the regression (model E.2a). FC and MLFI were entered at the second step (model E.2b). FC had a significant negative relationship with well-being ($\beta = -.4, p < .0005$). The relationship between MLFI and well-being was negative but not significant ($\beta = -.1, p = .25$). In the third step (model E2c), the product term variable of FC and MLFI was entered to test for the interaction hypothesis. The interaction variable was not significant ($\beta = .15, p = .1$). The direct effects of FC ($\beta = -.43, p < .0005$) had the same sign than in model E2b and remained significant. The direct effects of MLFI remained negative and non significant ($\beta = -.11, p = .21$). The change in variance explained from model E1b to model E1c was not significant ($\Delta R^2 = .00, p = .1$).

Interaction between FC and MHFI

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted in three steps. Results can be found in table E.3. Control variables were entered in the first step of the regression (model E.3a). FC and MHFI were entered at the second step (model E.3b). FC had a significant negative relationship with well-being ($\beta = -.39, p < .0005$). The relationship between MLFI and well-being was positive but not significant ($\beta = .16, p = .07$). In the third step (model E3c), the product term variable of FC and MHFI was entered to test for the interaction hypothesis. The interaction variable was not significant ($\beta = .08, p = .37$). The direct effects of FC ($\beta = -.41, p < .0005$) had the same sign than in model E3b and remained significant. The direct effects of MHFI remained positive and non significant ($\beta = .16, p = .06$). The change in variance explained from model E1b to model E1c was not significant ($\Delta R^2 = .00, p = .37$).

Table E.1. Results of hierarchical regression analysis (Dependent variable = well-being; interaction variable = FC x LFI).

Variables	Model E.1a		Model E.1b		Model E.1c	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Flexibility as a contribution (FC)			-0.31***	(0.05)	-0.29***	(0.05)
Low flexibility as an inducement (LFI)			-0.58***	(0.09)	-0.55***	(0.09)
FC x LFI					-0.10	(0.09)
Children	0.32***	(0.10)	0.13	(0.09)	0.13	(0.09)
Age	0.01	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)
Gender	-0.05	(0.08)	-0.11	(0.08)	-0.11	(0.08)
Junior	0.10	(0.11)	-0.16	(0.11)	-0.16	(0.11)
Manager	-0.12	(0.10)	0.12	(0.10)	0.12	(0.10)
Senior	-0.24	(0.12)	0.12	(0.13)	0.12	(0.13)
Constant	-0.52	(0.27)	0.16	(0.25)	0.01	(0.25)
Degrees of freedom		619		617		616
R-squared (overall)		0.04		0.19		0.19
R-squared (change)		0.04***		0.15***		0.00

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05. Standard errors are in parentheses. Consultant dummy variable was used as a base variable.

Table E.2. Results of hierarchical regression analysis (Dependent variable = well-being; interaction variable = FC x MLFI).

Variables	Model E.2a		Model E.2b		Model E.2c	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Flexibility as a contribution			-0.401***	(0.05)	-0.43***	(0.05)
Medium-low flexibility as an inducement			-0.10	(0.09)	-0.11	(0.09)
FC x MLFI					0.15	(0.09)
Children	0.32***	(0.10)	0.17	(0.1)	0.16	(0.1)
Age	0.04	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)
Gender	-0.05	(0.08)	-0.14	(0.08)	-0.14	(0.08)
Junior	0.10	(0.11)	-0.22	(0.11)	-0.20	(0.11)
Manager	-0.12	(0.10)	0.17	(0.11)	0.18	(0.11)
Senior	-0.24	(0.12)	0.22	(0.13)	0.23	(0.13)
Constant	-0.52	(0.27)	-0.85	(0.26)	-0.11	(0.26)
Degrees of freedom		619		617		616
R-squared (overall)		0.04		0.13		0.14
R-squared (change)		0.04***		0.1***		0.00

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05. Standard errors are in parentheses. Consultant dummy variable was used as a base variable.

Table E.3. Results of hierarchical regression analysis (Dependent variable = well-being; interaction variable = FC x MHFI).

Variables	Model E.3a		Model E.3b		Model E.3c	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Flexibility as a contribution			-0.39***	(0.05)	-0.41***	(0.05)
Medium-high flexibility as an inducement			0.16	(0.09)	0.16	(0.09)
FC x MHFI					0.08	(0.09)
Children	0.32***	(0.10)	0.17	(0.1)	0.17	(0.1)
Age	0.01	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)
Gender	-0.05	(0.08)	-0.12	(0.08)	-0.12	(0.08)
Junior	0.10	(0.11)	-0.22	(0.11)	-0.23	(0.11)
Manager	-0.12	(0.10)	0.16	(0.11)	0.16	(0.11)
Senior	-0.24	(0.12)	0.2	(0.13)	0.19	(0.13)
Constant	-0.52	(0.27)	-0.19	(0.26)	-0.11	(0.26)
Degrees of freedom		619		617		616
R-squared (overall)		0.04		0.14		0.14
R-squared (change)		0.04***		0.10***		0.00

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05. Standard errors are in parentheses. Consultant dummy variable was used as a base variable.

Appendix F. One-way ANOVA Results for the effect of perceived flexibility category on well-being (Chapter 3)

Table F.1. Descriptives.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Firm-oriented flexibility	196	-.5289	.95286	.06806	-.6631	-.3949	-2.83	1.61
Low flexibility	116	-.0849	.95806	.08895	-.2611	.0913	-2.83	2.06
Mutual flexibility	117	.1778	.89778	.08300	.0134	.3422	-1.52	2.72
Employee-oriented flexibility	197	.4706	.86285	.06148	.3493	.5918	-1.74	2.29
Total	626	.0000	1.00000	.03997	-.0785	.0785	-2.83	2.72

Table F.2. Test of homogeneity of variance

Well-being			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1,061	3	622	.365

Table F.3. ANOVA

Well-being					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	102.975	3	34.325	40.899	.000
Within Groups	523.025	622	.839		
Total	625.000	625			

Table F.4. Homogeneous well-being subsets.

Well-being

Tukey HSDa,b

Perceived flexibility category	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05			
		1	2	3	4
Firm-oriented flexibility	196	-.5260			
Low flexibility	116		-.0849		
Mutual flexibility	117			.1778	
Employee-oriented flexibility	197				.4726
Sig.		1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 148.274.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

Table F.5. Post-hoc test results. Multiple comparisons. Tukey HSD.

(I) Perceived flexibility category	(J) Perceived flexibility category	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Firm-oriented flexibility	Low flexibility	-.44398*	.10732	.000	-.7204	-.1675
	Mutual flexibility	-.70666*	.10703	.000	-.9824	-.4310
	Employee-oriented flexibility	-.99942*	.09242	.000	-1.2375	-.7613
Low flexibility	Firm-oriented flexibility	.43398*	.10732	.000	.1675	.7204
	Mutual flexibility	-.26269	.12003	.128	-.5719	.0465
	Employee-oriented flexibility	-.55544*	.10722	.000	-.8316	-.2793
Mutual flexibility	Firm-oriented flexibility	.70666*	.10703	.000	.4310	.9824
	Low flexibility	.26269	.12003	.128	-.0465	.5719
	Employee-oriented flexibility	-.29275*	.10693	.032	-.5682	-.0173
Employee-oriented flexibility	Firm-oriented flexibility	.99942*	.09242	.000	.7613	1.2375
	Low flexibility	.55544*	.10722	.000	.2793	.8316
	Mutual flexibility	.29275*	.10693	.032	.0173	.5682

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Figure F.0.1. Mean plots.

