Unpacking the Effects of Reduced Load Work Arrangements via Perceived Job Autonomy and Overall Justice Climate

ABSTRACT

In a context where employees increasingly seek to balance their work and personal life as well as a rising competition and concerns for reducing costs, employers increasingly use reduced load work arrangements (i.e., RLWAs) as part of their HR practices. In this study, we draw from job control theory and social information processing (SIP) theory to introduce two novel elements to explore how and when the influence of RLWAs unfold: employees’ perceived job autonomy as a mediating mechanism and the role of RLWA normativeness as a social context and boundary condition. Using a large and representative data set (the WERS, 2011), our findings supported our hypotheses. As a result, this research sheds lights on the mixed findings regarding the effects of RLWAs on employee outcomes and questions the assumptions of an invariant social context by introducing and supporting the role of normativeness of the use of RLWA in a workplace. From a practical perspective, caution is needed in implementing RLWAs as the presumed effects of RLWAs might disappear in a context where it is seen as a norm.

Key words: Reduced load work arrangement, normativeness, autonomy, affective commitment
INTRODUCTION

Employees are increasingly seeking ways to tailor their work in an effort to achieve a more effective time allocation between work and non-work roles (Friede et al., 2008). For this purpose, alternative or flexible work practices (FWPs) are becoming widely popular. One such practice, of particular interest to this study, is a reduced-load work arrangement (RLWA), which involves a voluntary and self-initiated decrease in work hours and workload with a corresponding decrease in salary and sometimes benefits (Lee, MacDermid, & Buck, 2000). While this practice is similar to traditional part-time work, a key difference exists: traditional part-time work is often low income, provides fewer opportunities for advancement, and is not necessarily voluntarily selected by the employee (Barnett, 2003; Barnett & Hall, 2001; Lee et al., 2002). On the contrary, RLWAs are typically proactively adopted by professionals and managers to achieve a better work-life balance (Hill et al., 2004; Meiksins & Whalley, 2002). From an organizational point of view, RLWAs allow companies to lower employee costs and stay competitive in a tough economy, while keeping their valued employees on board.

Despite the growing appeal of these practices across organizations, employees have mixed experiences with RLWAs. Prior research, mostly focusing on the effects of RLWAs on employee well-being, reveals mixed evidence. On the negative side, research has shown detrimental effects of RLWAs on mental health (e.g., Barnett & Gareis, 2002; Herold & Waldron, 1985). On the positive side, studies reveal that employees benefiting from RLWAs report higher satisfaction and well-being (Lee et al., 2002; Hill et al., 2004).

The main aim of this research is to shed lights on the inconclusive results of previous research by exploring an overall model through which the impact of RLWAs unfold on affective commitment. Our focus on affective commitment is important from a number of ways: First, RWLAs serve to enhance employees’ commitment the organization so that they
manage their lives better in relation to their work, and thereby enhancing their willingness to stay with the organization. Second, affective commitment is considered a key indicator of employee well-being, that concerns employees and organisations in the context of RLWAs (Kossek et al., 2016). To do so, we introduce an important, yet so far overlooked, mechanism (i.e., employees’ perceived job autonomy). In today’s changing and dynamic work landscapes, employees increasingly value RLWs because these deals provide them with the freedom in arranging how they work. Using job control theory (Karasek, 1977), we propose that RLWAs influence employees’ affective commitment toward their organization positively, because these practices provide employees with autonomy regarding the timing and pace of their work (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006).

Furthermore, we extent our model by introducing one social contextual boundary condition (i.e., normativeness of RLWAs) to delineate how our model unfolds. Based on social information processing theory (SIP; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), we argue that employees’ perceptions of their autonomy and their attitudinal reactions depend on the social context surrounding the RLWAs. To this end, we introduce the concept of normativeness of RLWA, referring to the extent to which such arrangements are prevalent in a workplace (Gajendran et al., 2015). Employees’ decisions to use RLWAs are likely to be influenced by the norms of their social context: In a context where everyone can have RWLAs and it is the norm, one’s freedom is limited, as people have to make sure everyone is still involved at work- so the higher the normativeness the more likely that one has to spend energy in coordinating (because everyone is on special schedules), limiting the freedom (and thus lower autonomy).

Integrating SIP theory with job control theory, this research makes two contributions to research on flexible work practices (FWPs), in particular to the literature on RLWAs. Using a large and representative dataset in the UK (WERS 2011), we take a step to remedy
inconclusive findings of previous research regarding the effects of RLWAs: We introduce job autonomy as a key mechanism that explains why the positive effects of this work arrangement translate into positive employee attitudes. We strengthen our arguments by controlling for previously tested and supported mechanisms: employees’ relationship quality with their managers and work-life interference (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007); hence emphasizing the importance of job autonomy as yet an untapped mechanism in this research stream. Moreover, we introduce normativeness of the RLWAs to explain under which conditions the positive effects of RLWAs do or do not unfold. Therefore, another contribution of this research is its examination of the workplace social contingency that provides information about the (lack of) exclusivity of employees’ use of RLWAs in a workplace and how they impact on employees’ affective commitment. Our model is depicted in Figure 1 and in what follows, we develop our hypotheses.

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HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

A Closer Look on the Association between RLWAs and Employee Attitudes: The Role of Employees’ Autonomy

Conceptualisation of RLWAs and Its Impact on Employee Outcomes. RLWAs refer to the practice of varying the number of work hours or amount of work that gives employees greater control over their work and non-work lives (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). In this research, we focused on RLWAs mainly for two reasons. First and most importantly, RLWAs represent a very important yet still underexplored HR practice. For other flexible work practices including flexitime, telework and i-deals; the amount of work to be completed remain same and constant (Kossek et al., 2013). For instance, flexitime involves rescheduling of the timing of work to complete the same amount of work within the same pay
scale. Same applies to telework. Unlike flextime and telework where work remains constant, RLWAs challenge managers’ assumptions regarding typical workloads. Managers have to reallocate and manage the demands arising from long work hours. Managers also have to reconfigure their expectations of professional work and talent management for employees who use RLWAs (Lee, MacDermid, & Buck, 2000; Lirio, Lee, Williams, Haugen, & Kossek, 2008; Valcour et al., 2007). Thus, this means RLWAs involve a radical redesign of a focal employee’s job, without having career reprimands and negative consequences.

A second reason why we focused on RLWAs relates to the fact that the allocation of RLWAs challenge and modify managers’ assumption on reduced-load employees’ performance and talent management (Lee et al., 2000). RLWAs are sometimes framed as “professional part-time work” (Kossek et al., 2016). However, while part-time work is usually carried out by low-skilled employees in an insecure and hourly-paid job context; RLWAs are voluntarily chosen by employees who still want to progress on their careers and balance work with non-work by reducing the amount of workload and number of hours they work, commensurate with the work they carry out (Friede et al., 2008). By focusing on RLWAs; we would like to explore the consequences of an understudied HR practice and investigate the mechanisms and boundary conditions of how the use of it relates to work and non-work related outcomes by employees who still pursue career goals and progression.

Considering the influence RLWAs have on employee well-being, earlier research offers mixed findings. In their study involving married female physicians who work on RLWAs, Barnett and Gareis (2002) found that these on RLWAs reported lower marital quality. Herold and Waldron (1985) found that employees working on RLWAs reveal problems with physical and mental health. On the positive side, Lee et al. (2002) revealed that 91% of reduced-load employees reported increased satisfaction with their balance between home and work as a result of adopting such an arrangement (see also Hill et al.,
With regards to the impact on employees’ work outcomes, in their study involving interviews with employees, Barnett and Hall (2001) found that seventy percent of employees reported that they would be more satisfied with their jobs if they were given the opportunity of work on RLWA program. In terms of impact on employees’ work performance, earlier evidence generally supports the implementation of RLWAs. It is found that employees with RLWAs are “at least as productive as their full-time counterparts” (Barnett, 2003, p. 1) and can benefit from similar career opportunities for promotion as full-time employees (Hill et al., 2004; MacDermid et al., 2001).

More recently, in their study involving interviews with HR managers, Friede et al. (2008) point out to relational and team level characteristics for the successful implementation and management of RLWAs. Their findings underscore that good relations with one’s managers and supportive climate facilitate the successful implementation of RLWAs. In another study involving interviews with managers, Kossek et al. (2016) demonstrated the importance of supportive relationships with a focal employee’s line manager and supportive climate for the implementation of RLWAs. These studies emphasize the relational dynamics involved in the core of RWLAs and invite future studies to delineate how and why RLWAs are likely to impact on recipients’ work and non-work outcomes in the way they do.

We build on job control theory (Karasek, 1979) to argue that RLWAs influence employees’ work and non-work lives positively because such arrangements are likely to provide employees with the discretion and freedom to control (1) how they work, (2) the pace of their work and (3) the location of their work (e.g., Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). The main tenet of this theory is that the exertion of influence and control at work leads to feelings of mastery and enablement of adjustment to changing or stressful job conditions (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Karasek, 1979). Tied to the job control theory,
an implicit assumption in RLWAs literature is that these arrangements increase self-reliance in scheduling, prioritizing and completing particular tasks (Kossek et al., 2016). Additionally, having the chance to work with a reduced work load schedule allows employees to have control over breaks, layout, decoration, music and all other ambient elements that add to increased feelings of autonomy (Elsbach, 2003). Hence, the literature implicitly assumes that RLWAs increase employees’ sense of autonomy.

In turn, we argue that an increased sense of autonomy is positively associated with employees’ job satisfaction, affective commitment toward their organization while negatively relating to WTF conflict. According to the job control theory (Karasek, 1979; p. 289-290), job autonomy is “the working individual’s potential to control his tasks and his conduct during the work day”. The theory suggests that the more control one has over his or her job, the better his or her well-being and his or her attitudinal reactions. In support of this, research underscores the role of job control as a pre-requisite for enhanced well-being at (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). Moreover, through the autonomy provided by the opportunity to reduce workload, the organization signals to the focal employee that the organization is willing to invest in them and alter the work environment to address employees’ needs, hence fostering a social exchange relationship which is typically reciprocated by higher affective commitment (Wayne et al., 1997). Therefore, our first hypothesis is:

**H1. The use of RLWAs is positively and indirectly associated with employees’ job satisfaction, affective commitment towards the organization and negatively and indirectly associated with WTF conflict through employees’ job autonomy.**

**The Role of Social Context: Overall Justice Climate at Workplace Level**

We argue that employees’ perceptions of overall justice climate shape the association between the use of RLWAs and their perceptions of autonomy. In conceptualising overall justice climate, we draw on the works of Naumann and Bennett (2000) who first coined the
term justice climate. They defined it as “group-level cognition about how a work group as a whole is treated” (p. 882). This understanding of justice climate has been influential in justice literature (e.g., Ehrhart, 2004; Roberson & Colquitt, 2005; Rupp et al., 2007) and is considered a central tenet of SIP theory (Li & Cropanzano, 2009).

According to SIP (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), employees do not work in a vacuum. Instead, they engage with each other to evaluate, appreciate and make sense of the events that happen around them. Justice is one of the corner stone constructs that impact on employees’ perceptions. According to the theory, the consequential attitudes and behaviours are formed based on information collected from their social environment (for evidence, see Weiss & Nowicki, 1981). A key tenet of SIP theory is that the group shapes an individual’s perceptions, rendering some information more salient and priming the individual to form a perception of reality that is congruent with that of the group (Tyler, Degoey, & Smith, 1996).

Drawing on SIP, Bhave and colleagues (2010) point out that among people who provide cues, leaders are key parties as they represent the linking pins between the organization and the focal employee (Kossek, Pichler, et al., 2011). These studies underscore that consistent with SIP, individuals use the norms and behaviours of the work group to guide their own actions.

We build on SIP theory to support our argument that in workplaces where overall justice perceptions are high (v.s. low), employees using such arrangements are less (v.s. more) likely to feel autonomous of their tasks. The theory proposes that, individuals’ perceptions and attitudes are influenced by their social context and in particular, by their close social relations in a workplace (Pollock, Whitbred, & Contractor, 2000; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). As such, social environment “provides a direct construction of meaning through guides to socially acceptable beliefs, attitudes, and needs, and acceptable reasons for action.” (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; p. 227)
In line with the predictions of SIP theory (e.g., Bhave, Kramer, & Glomb, 2010),
employees using RLWAs are likely to compare their own situation to others, in order to make
sense of their environment and to adjust their perceptions and attitudes. In workplaces where
overall justice perceptions are high (i.e., employees working in the same workplace believe
that their managers are likely to provide RWLAs to other employees), employees are less
likely to feel more autonomous because of the RLWAs. This is because although high
perceptions of overall justice climate denote positive and desirable attributes for a wide range
of cognitive and emotional reactions of employees; it is likely to create psychological
barriers; information coming from such a work context suggests that employees’ use of
RLWAs is not special (although it is fair). As a result, by comparison with others, the
increased autonomy provided by the use of RLWAs is less valued, salient and influential as
many others in the workplace could easily have access to it (Gajendran et al., 2015). On the
contrary, in a workplace where overall fairness perceptions are low, employees are likely to
perceive that they have more control over their jobs. This is because such a work context
directs employees’ attention toward the uniqueness of their use of RWLAs, rendering the
benefits more productive and salient, i.e. an increased sense of control over their jobs.
Indirectly supporting our arguments, the study by Friede et al. (2008) revealed that employee
who utilise RWLAs are those characterised by high-performance (usually labelled as talents)
and those who value ownership of their jobs. This study underlines the importance of
perceptions of uniqueness regarding the use of RWLAs and how this perception explains the
positive impact on employees’ productivity. Integrating this argument in the context of SIP
theory and RLWAs, we set our second hypothesis:

**H2.** Overall perceptions of justice moderate the positive association between the use
of RLWAs and perceived job autonomy. The positive effects of use of RLWAs will be
weaker in workplaces characterised by high perceptions of overall justice.
As argued above, in workplaces where employees perceive overall justice to be higher, these employees’ attention is directed towards the ordinariness of RLWAs, which renders the benefits (in terms of autonomy) less salient for employees using them. As a result of this, employees are less likely to feel satisfied with their jobs. For example, they are less likely to feel happy with the amount of influence they have on their jobs, the scope of initiative they use to shape their jobs. These employees are also less likely to feel committed to their organizations because of the lack of perceptions of control and salience. Therefore, they likely to be less committed to their organisation. Finally, lacking control over various aspects of their jobs (such as timing, scheduling meetings), they are likely to experience conflict in their home domains. Taken together, we hypothesise:

\[ H3. \text{ RLWAs has a stronger and positive association with employees’ affective commitment and their job satisfaction through employees’ job autonomy in workplaces characterised by low perceptions of overall justice (H3A); RLWAs has a stronger association and negative association with employees’ WTF conflict through employees’ job autonomy in workplaces characterised by low perceptions of overall justice (H3B).} \]

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\section*{METHOD}

\textbf{Research context and sample}

We used linked employer-employee data from the WERS 2011 management and employee surveys. WERS is considered a nationally representative dataset of British workplaces with five or more employees in all industry sectors (with the exception of agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing, and mining and quarrying). Being sponsored by the British government, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, and the Policy Studies Institute; it is widely regarded as a highly authoritative data source. In the survey, a workplace is defined as a premise consisting of the activities of a
single employer (Van Wanrooy et al., 2013), for example, a bank branch. In each of these workplaces, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the manager who was the primary responsible for employee relations. The management survey, which comprises 2,680 observations with a response rate of 46.5 percent, enables us to identify control variables at the workplace level. The employee survey, which is based on self-completion questionnaires administered to a random sample of up to 25 employees in each workplace, enables us to identify the variables of our hypotheses and control variables at the individual level. We used employee identification number (persid) to link employee and manager surveys. The final WERS employee survey comprises responses from 21,981 employee surveys (with a response rate of 54.3 per cent) in 1,922 workplaces.

**Measures**

*The use of RLWAs.* To measure RLWAs, employees were asked whether they used a RLWA in the last 12 months. We re-coded the answer categories 3 (not available to me) into a new code, 0, which represents non-use of RLWAs. We re-coded 1 (I have this arrangement) into a new code, 1, representing the use of RLWAs.

*Overall Justice Perceptions at Workplace Level.* In each workplace, employees were asked to evaluate the extent to which managers treat all employees fairly. We aggregated all the responses at workplace level (ICC: 45%) to reach a measure of overall justice perceptions at workplace level. This approach is adopted in related research (Naumann & Bennett, 2000; Roberson & Colquitt, 2005).

*Employees’ Job Autonomy.* We used a composite score of the following five items to measure employees’ autonomy at work (re-coded into 1= do not know; 5 = a lot; to ease the interpretation; α= .81): In general, how much influence do you have over the following? “The tasks you do in your job”, “the pace at which you work”, “how you do your work”, “the time you start or finish your working day” and “the order in which you carry out your tasks” α=
.86). The WERS research team selected these items based on prior research (e.g., Idaszak & Drasgow, 1987; Kim, Cable, Kim, & Wang, 2009).

*Employees’ Affective Commitment.* In line with studies that draw on WERS 2011 (Ogbonnaya et al., 2016), we used three items to measure employees’ affective commitment to their organization. Employees were asked to state the extent to which “they share the organization’s values”; “feel loyal to the organization”; and “are proud to tell people about the organization” (recoded into 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree to ease the interpretation; \( \alpha = .85 \)).

*Employees’ Job Satisfaction.* Following recent research on WERS (Wood & Ogbonnaya, 2016), we used a composite score to represent job satisfaction. These included the following items: Satisfaction from the sense of achievement from work; from using one’s own initiative, influence over one’s job, training one receives, opportunity to develop one’s skills, pay, job security and the work itself (recoded into 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree to ease the interpretation; \( \alpha = .87 \)).

*WTF Conflict.* The WERS has one item to measure WTF conflict which asks employees to evaluate the extent to which they often difficult to fulfil non-work commitments because of the time spent on job (recoded into 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree to ease the interpretation).

*Controls.* In testing our hypotheses, we included control variables at the individual and workplace level, which we selected in the light of studies on flexible work practices, affective commitment to organization and of previous studies based on the WERS series (e.g., Conway & Sturges, 2014). At the individual level, we controlled for gender, age, dependent children, workplace tenure, managerial status, contract type (permanent versus temporary), membership of trade union, ethnicity and fixed wage. At the workplace level, following prior research (Wood & Ogbonnaya, 2016; Ogbonnaya et al., 2017), we controlled
for workplace and organization size, whether it is a single independent workplace or otherwise, nationality of ownership, union recognition, the formal status of the organization, number of years the workplace has been operational, socio-economic group of the employees within the workplace, whether some employees are non-UK nationals, the number of male/female and non-UK national employees in managers and senior officials group and, finally, industry.

Additionally, we controlled for (1) employees’ quality of relationship with their managers (i.e., “In general, how would you describe relations between managers and employees here”; re-coded into 1 = very poor, 5 = very good); (2) employees’ work interfering with their non-work domains (i.e., “I often find it difficult to fulfil my commitments outside of work because of the amount I spend on my job”; re-coded into 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree); and (3) their non-work domains interfering with their work domains (“I often find it difficult to do my job properly because of commitment outside work”; recoded into 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). We controlled for these variables because recent research on FWPs (Kossek et al., 2016) as well as other related research, i.e., telecommuting (Gajendran et al., 2015) revealed that relationship quality with managers and interference between work and non-work domains might explain why reduced load arrangements shape employee attitudes. To provide a stronger argument for the role of employees’ perceived job autonomy as a mechanism, we included these variables as controls in our analyses. The direction and strength of our hypotheses did not change after having added these control variables. We therefore excluded them from our analyses to achieve simplicity and parsimony (Becker et al., 2015).

**Analytical Strategy**

Due to the nested structure of the data, i.e., employees (Level 1) nested in their workplaces (Level 2), multi-level regression modelling is used. We utilized MLwiN software
to test our proposed hypotheses (Rasbash, Browne, Healy, Cameron, & Charlton, 2000). To determine whether multi-level analysis was appropriate, we followed two steps. First, for our dependent variable, we evaluated the deviance statistics. We built two separate models for our dependent variable using random intercept modelling (Klein et al., 2000). The model at level 1 did not involve nesting of employees in their workplaces. We then compared this model to model at level 2 which involved nesting of employees in their workplaces. The deviance statistics demonstrated that a model at Level 2 fit data significantly better than models at Level 1 ($\Delta -2 \log = 1.241, p < .001$ for affective commitment).

Second, we calculated the ICC (1) for our dependent variable, affective commitment to account for the extent of variance in total variance that is attributed to differences between workplaces (Level 2): The ICC (1) for affective commitment is .14. This means that 14 percent of the overall variance in affective commitment can be attributed to differences between workplaces. Our results therefore support the use of multi-level regression analyses.

The WERS is based on sample designs that involve departures from simple random sampling. Weighting is needed to account for the probability of selection of the respondent’s workplace into the main management sample, the respondent’s own probability of selection from the employee population at the workplace, and bias introduced as a result of employee non-response. Accordingly, we used weighting procedures as suggested by the WERS team\textsuperscript{1}. Specifically, in weighting the analyses, we used the variable: svyset serno [pweight=seqwtnrc - (seqwtnrc_apr13)] from the raw dataset, where: seqwtnrc is the employee weight variable and serno is the unique workplace identifier. As the mode of weighting, standardized weights are used. Our analyses include weighted results. We also scaled the weights, using the scaling option in MlwiN for standard errors and quantile estimates. This process, which only changes
the standard errors, ensures that bias corrected estimates with weighting provide accurate results.

RESULTS

Table 1 reports the mean, standard deviation, and correlations among study variables.

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It is worth noting that various measures (e.g., conducting pilot tests and dress rehearsals of items to ensure items are the best representatives of their corresponding constructs) have been taken by the WERS research team to reduce the common method bias (CMB). Additionally, we conducted statistical analyses (Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012) to see if CMB is a problem. Building on our findings and the various measures taken by the WERS team, it can be concluded that CMB was not an issue.

Hypothesis Testing

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2 As a first step, surveys were developed and cognitively tested in 2010 by the National Centre for Social Research. These included face to face interviews and findings from the cognitive testing included suggestions as to how to improve each of the surveys. Following this step, a pilot survey was carried out to test all the process; including the processes for contacting respondents, making appointments and administering the questionnaires in 2010. The pilot test included surveying a total of 28 workplaces in Britain (i.e., London, Norfolk, Wiltshire, Shropshire and North Yorkshire). An agency provided the sample that included representative workplaces varying in size and sectors. The findings from the pilot study provided detailed recommendations to improve the field survey process. Finally, a dress rehearsal was carried out in 2010 that includes testing the fieldwork procedures and all the instruments to be used in actual WERS (45 interviews and surveys in a sample of 228 workplaces drawn by the list provided by the agency).

3 First, we conducted split-half reliability test, which is suggested when single item measures are used and sample size is relatively large (Wanous, Reicher, & Hudy, 1997). Accordingly, we split the data into two groups: according to use and non-use of reduced work load arrangement. In each separate groups, the correlations between job autonomy and affective commitment (r = .52, p<.01 for group who had reduced work load; r = .56, p<.01 for group who do not have reduced work load) were similar. Second, we conducted a marker variable analysis (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). We did this by subtracting the lowest positive correlation between self-report variables which can be considered a proxy for common method bias, from each correlation value. Each of these values was then divided by 1 – the lowest positive correlation between self-report variables. The resulting correlation values reflect common method bias adjusted correlations. Large differences between the unadjusted and common method bias adjusted correlations suggest that common method bias is a problem. The absolute differences were relatively minimal in our findings, ranging between 0.01 and 0.005.
Hypothesis 1 proposed that employees’ job autonomy would mediate the association between the use of RLWAs and affective commitment. The results outlined in table 2 suggest this as the use of RLWAs relates positively to job autonomy ($\gamma = .11; p < .001$) which in turn increases affective commitment ($\gamma = .45; p < .001$). We utilized Monte Carlo Method for Assessing Mediation (MCMAM)\(^4\). We used an on-line tool developed by Selig and Preacher (2008) to calculate the confidence interval. Hypothesis 1 was supported as the confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include the value of zero (95% CI = [0.017/ 0.074]). The mediation was however partial, as the effects of the use of RLWAs on employee affective commitment was still significant when job autonomy was tested simultaneously ($\gamma = .03, p < .001$). See the footnotes in Table 2 for details.

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Hypothesis 2 proposed that normativeness of RLWAs moderates the positive association between the use of RLWAs and employees’ affective commitment. With regard to this, the interaction term was significant, offering initial evidence for our hypothesis ($\gamma = -0.23, p < 0.001$; see Table 3, Model 2). To interpret the meaning of this interaction, we used the procedures outlined by Dawson (2016) to conduct simple-slope analyses at high and low levels of the moderator (see figure 2 for a graphic view of the moderation). At high levels, the association between the use of RLWAs and job autonomy was significant and negative (gradient of simple slope: -0.11; $p < .05$). At low levels of normativeness of RLWAs, the association between the use of RLWAs and job autonomy was positive and significant.

\(^4\) This method uses simulations with 20,000 iterations which relies on product-of-coefficients (ab) approach; where ab is equal to the product of a, the regression path between non-entitlement to flexitime and fairness perceptions, and b, the regression path between fairness perceptions and affective commitment (MacKinnon & Fairchild, 2007). We then used the distribution of the product method (Preacher, 2015) to calculate confidence intervals and validate our ab coefficients. When the confidence intervals do not contain zero, it means an indirect effect is established.
(gradient of simple slope: 0.13; p < .05). These results mean that in workplaces where normativeness of RLWAs is high (low), the use of RLWAs is negatively (positively) associated with employees’ job autonomy. Hypothesis 2 is supported.

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Insert Figure 2
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Hypothesis 3 proposed that the indirect effect between the use of RLWAs and affective commitment would be stronger and positive in workplaces where the normativeness is low (vs. high). To test this hypothesis, we used Edwards and Lambert’s (2007) procedure. Results supported our hypothesis: At low levels of normativeness, the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect was positive and significant, excluding the value of zero (0.105 / 0.114). At high levels of normativeness of RLWAs, the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect was not significant as it included the value of zero (-0.087 / 0.012). Hypothesis 3 is supported.

DISCUSSION

Due to the dynamic nature of business environments and the growing evidence showing that employees prefer individualized treatment and flexibility (Bal & Dorenbosch, 2015), RLWAs are becoming more common in workplaces (World at Work, 2013). Yet the research to date has revealed an incomplete picture and mixed findings regarding the effects of such practices. This study, drawing on the SIP theory and research on job control revealed that employees’ sense of job autonomy is a key mechanism explaining why RLWAs are positively associated with employee affective commitment. Moreover, given that previous research has treated the social context as invariant, this study introduced a novel element:

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5 This method integrates the moderation and mediation into one model, and explores whether the indirect effect is different at low and high conditions of the value of the moderator variable. The moderation could be at the first path between the independent variable and the mediator (i.e., first stage moderated mediation) or in the second path between the mediator and the dependent variable (i.e., second stage moderation). Confidence intervals and corresponding effects size are reported in high and low conditions.
normativeness of RLWAs. We discuss our theoretical contributions to research on RLWAs and the broader FWPs literature below.

**The role of job autonomy as a missing linchpin.** Our findings revealed that job autonomy translates the positive effects of RLWAs on employees’ commitment, emphasizing its role as a linchpin (H1). This finding is important because prior research has assumed that the effects of RLWAs unfold either via a relational route (e.g., LMX, co-worker support, supervisor support) or via an enrichment – conflict route between work and family domains (e.g., spill over from work to non-work, spill over from non-work to work domain). Our findings, going beyond the predictions of these theoretical perspectives and based on the premises of research on job control theory, affirm the role of perceived job autonomy. Although other related research (e.g., telecommuting) built on job autonomy, no research exists about the downstream consequences for this relationship, especially for RLWAs, which are different from other forms of FWPs in terms of their content and implications for employees (Allen et al., 2013). In the context of one of the key assumptions of job control theory (Karasek, 1971), RLWAs are instrumental for employees in generating a key resource for them: perceived job autonomy over their tasks and their work environments (e.g., Hobfoll, 2002).

**The role of social context: Normativeness of RLW.** Our findings underline the important role of social context in influencing the effects of RLWAs (H2). In line with the predictions of SIP theory, we found that when normativeness is high, the distinctiveness of RLWAs decreases, making the benefits less salient for the focal employees. As a result, the arrangement loses its power to affect employees. On top of that, our findings suggest that perceived job autonomy even goes down when RLWAs are common in the workplace. This could be attributed to an increased need for planning, coordination and control within a team of employees in which many benefit from an RLWA. Hence, the practical side-effects of
such arrangements outweigh any potential positive impact on employees’ autonomy. This eventually annuls an RWLA’s power to act as a lever for affective commitment, since no significant relationship was found between an RWLA and affective commitment via job autonomy under the condition of high normativeness. When normativeness is low, on the other hand, employees’ perceived job autonomy increases by making the arrangement and its benefits more salient and unique, which consequently leads to enhanced affective commitment. In other words, employees as well as their organization only benefit from the use of RWLAs when few employees get access to such arrangements. It might be that when others (colleagues / and or supervisors) also use RLWAs, employees could not benefit from such practices readily (e.g., Gajendran et al., 2015).

Recent research, mostly adopting a qualitative perspective, has identified the importance of workplace characteristics as critical factors for the successful implementation of RLWAs (Friede et al., 2008). While, as emphasized in these studies, a focus on characteristics related to work-unit relationships, processes and structure was revealed to be important (e.g., conducive team characteristics, effective communication processes in workplaces, flexible work unit culture), the extent to which such practices are differentially implemented is also an important yet overlooked aspect. This is a crucial omission because RLWAs are valuable resources for those who benefit from them and in a workplace where these practices are differentially implemented, the implications on employees’ perceptions and attitudes are likely to differ due to social comparison and the informational cues retrieved from a work context characterized by high versus low in normativeness. Our research, by emphasizing the role of normativeness, therefore questions the assumptions of an invariant unit culture and responds to a call for research to explore under which conditions the implementation of RLWAs is likely to influence employee affective commitment positively (Friede et al., 2008).
From a measurement perspective, previous research on RLWAs has built on the implicit assumption that the implementation of this practice is standardized within a company, applying to many if not all employees (e.g., Kossek & Michel, 2016; Thompson et al., 2015). While in these studies employees were asked to indicate whether this practice applies to them, the possibility that some employees within a workplace might be entitled to it while others are not, was not taken into account. This might be viewed as a considerable omission because the implementation of RLWSs does not occur in a dyadic vacuum: the differential implementation of RLWAs exists and it has important implications of how employees perceive and react to it. Our study goes beyond previous research which has either relied on managers’ report of the proportion of employees who telecommuted (Gajendran et al., 2015) or employees’ reports of co-workers’ telecommuting proportion (Golden, 2007) in calculating normativeness. Here, for each workplace, we calculated a percentage of prevalence of RLWAs (i.e., normativeness), that is more objective compared to other-rated measures of normativeness, hence adding rigor to this research stream and reporting findings of a representative sample.

Finally, our model as a whole answers to research calls to focus on particular types of FWPs (Chadwick, 2010; Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell et al., 2005; Paauwe, 2009). Defining aspects and implications of each FWP for employee outcomes are different and unique. It is likely that RLWAs, flexitime, flexi location, or taking leave to take care of elderly or children operate differently, with unique antecedents as well as consequences (Allen et al., 2013; Kossek et al., 2016). Despite this acknowledgment, only recently researchers have started focusing on particular types of FWPs, namely telecommuting (Golden, 2011), and to a certain extent, flexitime (Thompson & Aspinwall, 2009). Focusing solely on RLWAs, we contribute to this research stream by delineating the overlooked role of perceived job autonomy and the
role of normativeness of RLWAs, as a social context, in influencing employee affective commitment towards their organization.

**Practical Implications**

From a practical perspective, the results from this study may also be helpful to managers who may need to justify the adoption of RLWAs. For example, managers might show that the adoption of RLWAs has tangible benefits with regard to individual employee outcomes, such as increased affective commitment. This outcome can subsequently lead to a lower turnover rate for the organization and can help to reduce turnover costs (cf., Cascio, 2003).

Moreover, the normativeness in a workplace was found to be important, influencing (a) the association between the use of reduced load work arrangement and (b) employee affective commitment positively via employees’ perceptions of job autonomy. We suggest supervisors along with HR managers to provide procedures and guidelines on the overall design and implementation of reduced load work arrangements (Ostroff & Tamkins, 2003). These work practices need to be encouraged given their positive effects on employees’ sense of job autonomy and affective commitment, which ultimately contribute to organizations’ effective functioning. As such, official HR policies might be structured to involve these types of flexibilities as well as provide guidelines on who can benefit from them.

However, caution is needed as the differential implementation of these practices influences employees’ perceptions of autonomy and their commitment. To offset the ramifications that arise when the normativeness of RLWAs is high (Gajendran et al., 2015), employees might still be given control and leeway on how they work, such as by means of letting them craft their jobs and have idiosyncratic arrangements. Through these bottom-up approaches, these employees, even in workplaces where normativeness of RLWAs is high, are likely to feel in control of their jobs and hence experience greater commitment.
Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

This study has notable methodological strengths including (1) its use of a nationally representative large data set, (2) its rigorous measurement of normativeness of RLWAs for each workplace and (3) its use of a matched employee-employer, multi-level design when testing the hypotheses. However, some limitations need to be noted. One is its cross-sectional nature. Our creation of a dichotomous variable (use / non-use of reduced load work) and the calculation of normativeness index can be considered as more objective measurement approaches compared to subjective Likert scales (e.g., Bal et al., 2012). Moreover, are results are in line with causal predictions based on SIP theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). However, a longitudinal design is suggested to disentangle the causal inferences in future research.

Our focus in this research was on employees in receipt of a reduced load work arrangement, showing that employees and organizations especially benefit when they are one of the happy few being subject to such an arrangement. Yet, it is possible that these positive effects are offset by the reactions of employees not in receipt of them. Recent research has shown that witnessing others receiving more favourable arrangements can raise substantial questions of fairness, as well generate negative reactions in the form of envy and employee turnover (e.g. Marescaux et al, 2017; Ng, 2017). The negative reactions of these employees might even be stronger in workplaces where normativeness is high versus low, as being one of the only ones not benefiting from a particular arrangement can potentially generate strong negative reactions. Future research might explore the effects of such practices from non-recipients’ perspective and question the assumption that these FWPs are always beneficial by underlining a darker side.

Despite its use of a representative sample in the UK, the findings of this study could be influenced by the cultural context, i.e. a high degree of individualism and low power distance characterizing the UK business context (House et al., 2004). In a cultural context
where collective goals are more important than individual goals (low individualism) and where hierarchy is important (high power distance), employees might be less willing to take a reduced load work arrangement, with the fear that their job and future might be insecure. Moreover, employees in collectivistic work context might be more productive in a team environment, hence for them, the use of reduced load work arrangement might be detrimental. This necessitates future research in a wider range of cultural contexts.

We suggest future research to take into account the perspective of different stakeholders in evaluating the success or un-success of reduced load work arrangements. It is possible that HR managers and supervisors value different aspects when implementing the reduced load work arrangements (e.g., Fried et al., 2008). For HR managers, it might be that employees who are high performers could be granted reduced load because they deserve such arrangements (e.g., Lee et al., 2002) while managers might value employees’ preferences for work-life balance and grant these practices accordingly (Kossek et al., 2016). In relation to this point, future research should investigate why different stakeholders might value and perceive different factors as critical to the implementation of reduced work load.

Future research might extend normativeness by focusing on the normativeness of other types of FWPs, such as normativeness of telecommuting within the same entity which might either strengthen or weaken the positive effects arising out of the use of RLWAs. In addition to normativeness, future research might adopt a climate perspective and focus on different types of organizational climate to investigate if and how different types of climate (e.g., for empowerment (e.g., Liao & Chuang, 2004; Schneider et al., 1998) affect variables that reside at different levels for employees in a similar manner.
REFERENCES


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model

Overall Justice Perceptions at Workplace Level

The Use of RLWAs

Job Autonomy

Job satisfaction

Affective Commitment

WTF Conflict

Note. RLWA = Reduced Load Work Arrangement

Figure 2. Interaction of Normativeness of RLWA with the Use of RLWA on Employee Job Autonomy

Note. RLWA = Reduced Load Work Arrangement
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Relationship Quality with Managers</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Work to Non-Work Interference</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>-0.09**</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Non-Work to Work Interference</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>-0.02**</td>
<td>0.49***</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Use of RLWA (0 = No; 1 = Yes)</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.05**</td>
<td>-0.03**</td>
<td>0.01**</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Normativeness of RLWA</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.02**</td>
<td>-0.02**</td>
<td>0.01**</td>
<td>0.45***</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Employee Job Autonomy</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.47***</td>
<td>-0.18**</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
<td>0.08**</td>
<td>0.02**</td>
<td>(0.85)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Employee Affective Commitment</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.47***</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>0.06**</td>
<td>0.03**</td>
<td>0.58***</td>
<td>(0.86)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes.** RLWA = Reduced Load Work Arrangement  
  n = 19,454 employees in 1,545 workplaces.  
  ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.  
  Reliabilities, where applicable, are shown along the diagonal in parentheses.
Table 2. Indirect effects of the use of RLWA on Affective Commitment via Job Autonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>0.02</td>
<td>181.51</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>388</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship Quality with Managers</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>23***</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>17.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work to Non-Work Interference</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>-15***</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-4.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Work to Work Interference</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-4.00***</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-10.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of RLWA (0 = No; 1 = Yes)</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>10.00***</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>3.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Autonomy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>450***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2LL</td>
<td>38404.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33,349.669</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ in -2LL</td>
<td>1102***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6657***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.F.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between-level Variance and Standard Error</td>
<td>0.04 (0.01)</td>
<td>0.03 (0.004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within-level Variance and Standard Error</td>
<td>0.45 (0.02)</td>
<td>0.36 (0.006)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. a Statistical comparison with an intercept-only model 1 (not shown in the table). For all values, gamma coefficients, their corresponding standard error and t values are reported. The indirect effect is calculated using an on-line interactive tool that generates an R score: http://quantpsy.org/medmc/medmc.htm. The first path of the indirect relationship relates to the association between the use of RLWA and job autonomy (0.11; 0.01) and the second path of the indirect relationship relates to the association between job autonomy and affective commitment (0.45; 0.001) when the use of RLWA is in. RLWA = Reduced Load Work Arrangement. n = 19,454 employees in 1,545 workplaces. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.
Table 3. Interaction effects of the use of RLWA and the normativeness of RLWA on Job Autonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>S.E.</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>S.E.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>181.51</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>183.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship Quality with Managers</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>60.00***</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>60.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work to Non-Work Interference</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-14.00***</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-14.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Work to Work Interference</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-8.00***</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-8.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of RLWA (0 = No; 1 = Yes)</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>11.00***</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>12.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normativeness of RLWA</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-1.75</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of RLWA * Normativeness of RLWA</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-3.83***</td>
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<tr>
<td>-2LL</td>
<td>38,401,429</td>
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<td>38,386,418</td>
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<tr>
<td>Δ in -2LL</td>
<td>5324,18***</td>
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<td>15.11**</td>
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<tr>
<td>D.F.</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Between-level Variance and Standard Error</td>
<td>0.04 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.04 (0.01)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within-level Variance and Standard Error</td>
<td>0.48 (0.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.48 (0.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. a, b Statistical comparison with an intercept-only model 1 (not shown in the table). For all values, gamma coefficients, their corresponding standard error and t values are reported. RLWA = Reduced Load Work Arrangement

n = 19,454 employees in 1,545 workplaces.

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.