A Quantitative Investigation on the Role of Allowed Workplace Flexibility for Employees' Perceived Psychological Security - a focus on the Intersection between Generation Y and Z

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Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic has brought attention to workplace flexibility and its potential impact on employee psychological safety, particularly among Generations Y and Z in Germany. This study combines primary and secondary research, including a survey of 320 respondents experienced in flexible work. Surprisingly, no clear positive or negative correlation between New Work models and psychological safety was found, challenging common thinking. Four key recommendations emerge as a result: 1. Investigate specific respondent groups, 2. Focus on certain employee categories (e.g., roles or industries), 3. Solicit feedback from employees and 4. Provide training and education for affected employees.

However, gender and education imbalances in the respondent pool hinder generalizability. Therefore, future research should target more specific groups like management students or those in digital professions. In conclusion, this study adds to the discourse on workplace flexibility and its impact on psychological safety. It underscores the necessity for targeted research to comprehend its effects on diverse employee segments.

Keywords: Workplace Flexibility, Psychological Security, Impact.

Introduction
Relevance of the Subject: The world of work has undergone significant changes in recent years and is continuing to evolve rapidly.[97] Among other things, digitalization and demographic change have led companies to seek new work models to remain competitive and attract to retain qualified employees. As every generational change, the generations Y and Z have a different conception of work and work environment than their predecessors' and have also new demands on employers.[13] In this context, the discussion about allowed flexibility in the workplace has gained increasing importance in recent years.[64]

This refers to the possibility for employees to use components of the New Work philosophy in their work life.

Those include, among others, making their working hours and/or workplace more flexible.

Allowed flexibility in the workplace is viewed by many as key to better work-life balance and can therefore have a positive impact on job satisfaction and motivation.[5] On the other hand, there are concerns that allowed flexibility in the workplace can lead to less social interaction, higher work pressure and a lack of leadership and control. All these examples can contribute to lower psychological safety for employees.[67]

This study examines the influence of allowed flexibility in the workplace on the perceived psychological safety of employees, especially in the intersection between generations Y and Z.[13]

The relevance of this topic arises from several main aspects. First, there is an increasing demographic change. The population in the German-speaking region is aging and the number of workers is declining. From 1990 to 2021, the proportion of people under 20 years of age fell from approximately 22% to 19%, while the proportion of senior citizens (65 years and older) increased from 15% to 22%.[127] Companies must therefore compete for qualified employees and flexible working conditions can be an important factor in attracting and retaining talents.[74]

Furthermore, the shortage of skilled workers contributes to this development. According to official information, there was a deficit of more than 873.000 professionals in 2022.[22] Social professions were more affected such as social workers, social pedagogues and child care workers. This is resulting in the "war for talents" on the market. The shortage of qualified workers also means that companies must compete for employees. Flexible working condition can be an important factor in attracting and retaining talent.[69]

Moreover, the increasing digitization enables employees to work from anywhere and create even more flexible working conditions. Companies must therefore increasingly adapt their working conditions to remain competitive and offer their employees an attractive work environment. This was particularly driven during the COVID19 pandemic, as without flexible work models, work was often not possible or severely limited. Many companies have taken this as an opportunity to focus more specifically on the topic of

digitalization and the New Work approach in their organizations.[59]

Goal of this Research Work
This study aims to examine the impact of permitted workplace flexibility on the perceived psychological safety of employees at the intersection of Generation Y and Z. To achieve this objective, we first examine the theoretical basis for the New Work philosophy, employee emotional commitment to organisations and their performance. These factors should represent the basis for the research question of this study and make it possible to show the connections between job flexibility and psychological security.

Four hypotheses will then be formulated, based on the theoretical foundation, to provide more targeted analyses of individual factors. Based on these hypotheses, a research model is derived that serves as the framework for the empirical study. For the analysis, an empirical and quantitative survey is performed. Through the evaluation of the results, the hypotheses must be confirmed or refuted and thus an answer to the research question can be given. The main objective of this study is to discuss the results of the research and to derive recommendations for action. The precise research question to be answered is:

What is the impact of workplace flexibility on the psychological safety of the interface between Generation Y and Z?

Through answering this question, a deeper understanding of the impact of workplace flexibility on the psychological safety of the younger generations can be obtained.

Research Gap
The research gap of the dissertation "Influence of allowed workplace flexibility on employees' perceived psychological security - a focus on the intersection between generation Y and Z" can be found in the limited number of studies that specifically address the impact of workplace flexibility on employees' psychological safety without specific sector or job consideration.[37,104]

While flexibilities in the employment environment are becoming more popular and are seen as an important tool for employee retention and satisfaction, there is a limited amount of research that focuses on the specific impact of flexibility on the psychological safety of employed people with a focus on Germany.[113]

Specifically, the generations Y and Z, which are demanding in terms of working conditions and flexibility, have little evidence on how their perceived psychological security is affected by the flexibility permitted.

While these two generations have usually been analysed separately, the intersection of the two generations from the bordering years has never been considered.[60] This is particularly important as generations are based on clichés and therefore the period of time defining them is often fluent.[18]

A more comprehensive study would not only help to better understand the effects of flexibility on the psychological security of employees, but also would help to develop strategies to optimise these effects and improve working conditions for the intersections, as well as for the entire generations Y and Z in scaling.

Theoretical Foundations
As Peter Ferdinand Drucker[38] said *"We can't predict the future, but we can create it"*. In the current world of employment, shaping the future is being driven by the introduction of new working models like New Work. Especially with the intersection of generations Y and Z, it is important to consider these new work models and examine their impact. An important variable in this context is psychological safety at work, which is closely linked to employee satisfaction and working performance. This presents the theoretical basis for examining the impact of allowed flexibility in the workplace on workers perceived psychological safety. It focuses on the topics of New Work, the interface between generations Y and Z and psychological safety. Furthermore, hypotheses for the empirical part of the paper will be developed and the research model will be introduced.

New Work and the Associated Impact on the Work Habits of Employees
Ongoing changes impacting society like globalisation and digitalisation forced changes to the work habits of employees. But especially the global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated existing trends towards remote work, e-commerce and automation, resulting in 25% increase of workers that might have to switch their profession in the future.[98]

The term New Work first appeared at the end of the 1970s by the philosopher Frithjof Bergmann in his book *"On Being Free"*. The central message of this book was that real freedom only becomes possible for people when they realise what they really want to do in and with their lives and when they are enabled to implement their.[16] With this idea, he lays the foundation for the theories of New Work. Central values of the New Work are independence, freedom and participation in the community. Bergman defines these as three equal parts of "smart consumption", "high-tech self-providing" and "work that you really, really want" in his research.[17] Bergmann was the first person who addressed the issue of self-development.

Nowadays, New Work describes a modern and sustainable work concept that reacts to the changes in the world of work.[105] The focus lays on the requirements that arise from the aspects of globalisation and digitalisation. New Work enables efficient collaboration and agile working within the

company. The central focus is on personal responsibility and the development of employees' potential. Especially due to the change from an industrial to a knowledge society which is increasingly shaped by new values, freer and more flexible work structures are becoming more and more necessary. In this context, New Work offers a possible approach to the challenges in the world of work and to accompany the far-reaching changes in a human way.[12]

For the implementation in the companies, a strong willing for change compared to the previous way of working is necessary. Table provides an overview of the essential aspects for the implementation of New Work in a company.

In addition to the mentioned aspects, there are further factors, depending on the experts, as purpose driven organisations or Adaptation of the Hierarchies.[27,29] It has to be mentioned that New Work is a liberal-philosophical way of thinking in which all points may not be fulfilled, as these may vary significantly depending on needs and perspectives.

All these aspects have an impact on the previous processes and structures in the company. The role of employees is changing. For example, employee's wishes are the centre of attention. They might have a flexible arrangement of working hours and locations. For the implementation of this flexibility, a technical equipment is necessary which allows the daily work to be carried out completely and without restrictions like waiting times or technical barriers. Giving employees more power of expression, hierarchical or authoritarian leadership styles will be replaced by communicative or less affair leadership styles. By adapting the leadership style, employees are more involved in the processes and a certain degree of personal responsibility is created. This leads to the strengthening of agile work through stronger involvement and communication.

Implementing the New Work philosophy in a company comes with advantageous and disadvantageous which are listed in Table .[3]

Table 1
Requirements for the New Work approach (Own illustration)

Aspect	Description
Open Innovation[27]	"Companies are increasingly rethinking the fundamental ways in which they generate ideas and bring them to market — harnessing external ideas while leveraging their in-house R&D outside their current operations."
Shared Knowledge[90]	"Sharing knowledge is power. If ever there were a field to which this applies, it is the knowledge management industry. And in today´s highly-competitive, fast-paced business world, corporations, business and organizations […] searching for new cutting-edge methods and techniques for creating, storing, capturing, managing, organizing, disturbing, combining and retrieving knowledge."
Coopetition[29]	"Collaboration with rivals can lead to performance-enhancing business models"
Focus on the human[122]	"New Work sets people at the centre of work - in other words, it is "people focused""
Work-Life-Balance[28]	"Flexible working, that is worker's control over when and where they work, has increased substantially over the years across most industrialised countries. Furthermore, there is increasing demand for more flexibility in the workplace especially from the younger generation. …"

Table 2
Advantages and Disadvantaged of New Work (Own illustration)

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Increased productivity and innovation[89] • Motivation because of flat hierarchies[19,89] • Better network between employees through a higher level of communication[89] • Better Work-Life-Balance[89] • Competitive advantage in employee recruitment[89] • Advantages of remote work like time savings or working in silent places[19]	• Personal connections between colleagues can be lost due to flexible working locations.[15] • The company must be collectively committed to change[15] • Independent time and self-management of the employees[15] • Technical basis must be created/existing[15] • Implementing without technical know-how of the employees is difficult[15]

Without New Work, it becomes difficult for most companies to compete in the market today and in the future, due to already existing competition providing corporate services and benefits.[66] Nevertheless, the impact of New Work varies between sectors and occupational groups. For example, a carpenter does not have the flexibility for free choice of workplace like a graphic designer.[82]

But what does it mean in the context of New Work to have the possibility for a flexible workplace design? Flexible workplace design refers to the possibility of adapting working hours, work locations or working conditions to the needs of the employee or the company.

As part of this flexibility, a wide variety of working approaches are included as shown in Table . The elements described in Table can bring benefits to both the company and the employee. Some of the respective advantages and disadvantages overlap with the New Work approach are shown in Table .

Intersection Between Generation Y and Z
"The next generation will be confronted with realities that we have not yet thought through to the end."[111] This citation by Horst-Joachim Rahn demonstrates how different age groups with different thinking profiles are clearly separated in their characterisations. The coming generations are being born into the historically young topic and not fully

developed work concept of new work and free choice of workplace arrangements.

Generations are used to better understand the differences and similarities between individuals of a particular time and their cultural, social and political influences. Each generation is shaped by different events and technological advances that affect their values, attitudes and behaviours.[48] Categorising people into generations allows to identify and analyse patterns and trends in consumer behaviour, political preferences and life choices within specific age groups. This categorisation can also help to understand the way different generations interact with each other and how we can better shape our society to meet the needs and expectations of all age groups.[33]

In literature, there are various definitions, designations or descriptions of the respective generations. The division of generations shown in Figure is used as a foundation for the rest of the study.[9,115,129]

The following description of the individual generations focuses on major historical events of the generations and their relation to working relationships. The traditionalists are influenced by the First and Second World Wars and the post-war period. The focus of life for this generation is predominantly on the profession.[87] Baby boomers are the first post-war generation of the Second World War.

Table 3
What does the flexible design of the workplace include? (Own illustration)

Working approach	Description
Home office[116]	Workers work entirely or partly from home instead in the office.
Remote working[137]	Workers work from home or from any location instead of the company office.
Flexible working hours[46]	Workers have the opportunity to determine their own working hours instead of sticking to fixed schedules.
Job-Sharing[136]	Workers share a full-time job but only work certain hours.
Teleworking[137]	Employees work partially or completely from another location while remaining connected to the company.
Coworking[116]	Workers use shared office space instead of having their own office.

Table 4
Advantages and Disadvantaged of flexible organisation of the workplace (Own illustration)

| Advantages	Disadvantages
• Increase employee satisfaction and motivation[46,116,137] • Improving the work-life balance[46,116,137] • Possibility to use talents and skills of employees independent of their location[137] • Reduction of the number of illness days[12] • Possibility to reduce costs for office space or commuting[116,136]	• Difficulties in communication and cooperation, especially in virtual teams[137] • Increased risk of isolation of employees[116,137] • Difficulties in building team spirit and corporate culture[116,137] • Increased effort for monitoring and evaluation of work performance[116,136,137] • Possible difficulties in complying with regulations and company policies[116,137] • Difficulties in protecting intellectual property and data security[116,137]
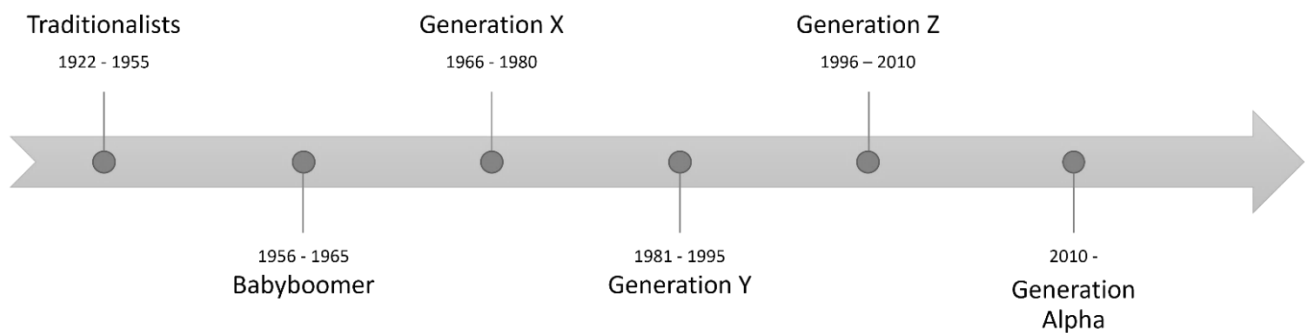
Figure 1: Generation overview timeline (Own figure)

Table 5
Comparison of Generation Y with Generation X (Own illustration)

	Generation Y	**Generation Z**
Other names	• Digital Natives • Millennials • Echo Boomers[39,87]	• Digital Natives • Digital Natives 2.0 • iGeneration[56,123]
Characteristics	• *"Digital natives"* - they grown up with digital transformation[87] • Question traditional structures • Considered curious and inquisitive. • The work should be meaningful. • Focus on work-life balance. • High number of academics. → *"High potentials"*[39]	• *"Digital natives"* - they are born into digital transformation. Everyday life takes place in virtual and real environments. • Focus on self-realisation. • Making decisions is more difficult due to questioning attitudes and many influencing factors. • Non-binding attitude[123] High pressure to perform due to social media, among other things[56]
Major contrasts (Gen. Y vs. Gen. Z)	• Flexibility • Willingness to perform • Are ambitious[39]	• Security • Structure • Focus on wellbeing[56]
Work and leisure (Gen. Y vs. Gen. Z)	• Work-life balance • Work must be compatible with family[39]	• Work-life separation • Work must fit with family[100]
Type of internet use (Gen. Y vs. Gen. Z)	• Intensive • Laptop • Websites and e-mails[39]	• High Intensive • Smartphone • Clouds and apps[100]

This generation was shaped by the economic boom, the historically high birth rate and comparatively few crises. The main attitude of this generation, like the traditionalists, is that people live for work.[92]

Generation X understands work as means for the purpose and does not prioritise it. This group has been influenced by the economic crisis, digitalisation, but also high rates of unemployment. Other characteristics are a high divorce rate and prosperity.[30] The focus of this work is placed on generations Y and Z. For this purpose, Table describes both generations in detail and provides an overview of similarities and differences. The characteristics of the current Generation Alpha will become visible in the upcoming years, since they are too young to be analysed in the working environment for the study.[96]

A major part of generation Z is too young to be studied in regard of work habits. Taking both generations with their full span into account would result in an overrepresentation of generation Y. Therefore, only a part of those generations is considered. People are studied that are born between 01.07.1988 and 30.06.2003. This results in a total span of 15 years that is in line with the common division of generations. The intersection of both generations splits to generation Y (01.07.1988 to 31.12.1995) and generation Z (01.01.1996 to 30.06.2003).

Psychological Safety in the Working Environment
"No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear".[23] In the 18th century, Edmund Burke a State philosopher from Ireland already linked the reduction of mental abilities to external influences.[63] There

are different opinions about the concept of psychological safety mentioned first in science. In terms of the work environment, the literature finds its roots in discussions about what is needed to create organisational change.

In 1965, MIT professors Edgar Schein and Warren Bennis argued that psychological safety is an essential pre-requisite for people to feel safe and be able to change their behaviour in response to changing organisational challenges.[120] In 1993, Schein[119] concretises the theory and describes that the defensive attitude or fear of learning new things will decrease with a positive psychological security if the new contents are contrary to the expectations or preconceptions. This allows employees to enhance on collective objectives instead on the protection of the individual.[119]

Since the 90s, there has been increased research on the term *"psychological safety"*.[43] For example, in 1990 William Kahn conducted a study with employees of an architectural company which showed how psychological safety enables personal engagement at work. He showed that increased safety makes the participants more physically, cognitively and emotionally engaged and less withdrawn. Furthermore, Kahn concluded that trust and respect in the organisation led the test persons to assume that they would be vindicated in case of doubtful decisions.[83]

In the further course of knowledge, Amy Edmondson coined the term with her research as the most common approach that is currently used as the State of the Art. Psychological safety is generally described as a work atmosphere in which people can express themselves and be themselves. More specifically, employees who experience psychological safety at work feel encouraged to express concerns and mistakes without fear of embarrassment or punishment. Amy Edmondson emphasises that high psychological safety helps people to express their opinions and ideas freely which can lead to better decisions and innovation. When individuals are afraid to express themselves, organizations lose power and are unable to leverage existing potential. For instance, they might miss out on innovative ideas or early warning signs of a market threat that someone has observed but was unable to articulate.

Fear is contradictory to high performance which is due to two reasons. First, cognitively. Neuroscientists suggest that when we are in a state of fear, the brain withdraws resources from those activities required to work with short-term memory: analytical thinking, creative insight and problem-solving. Secondly, people hold back and remain in their comfort zones instead of actively trying new things.
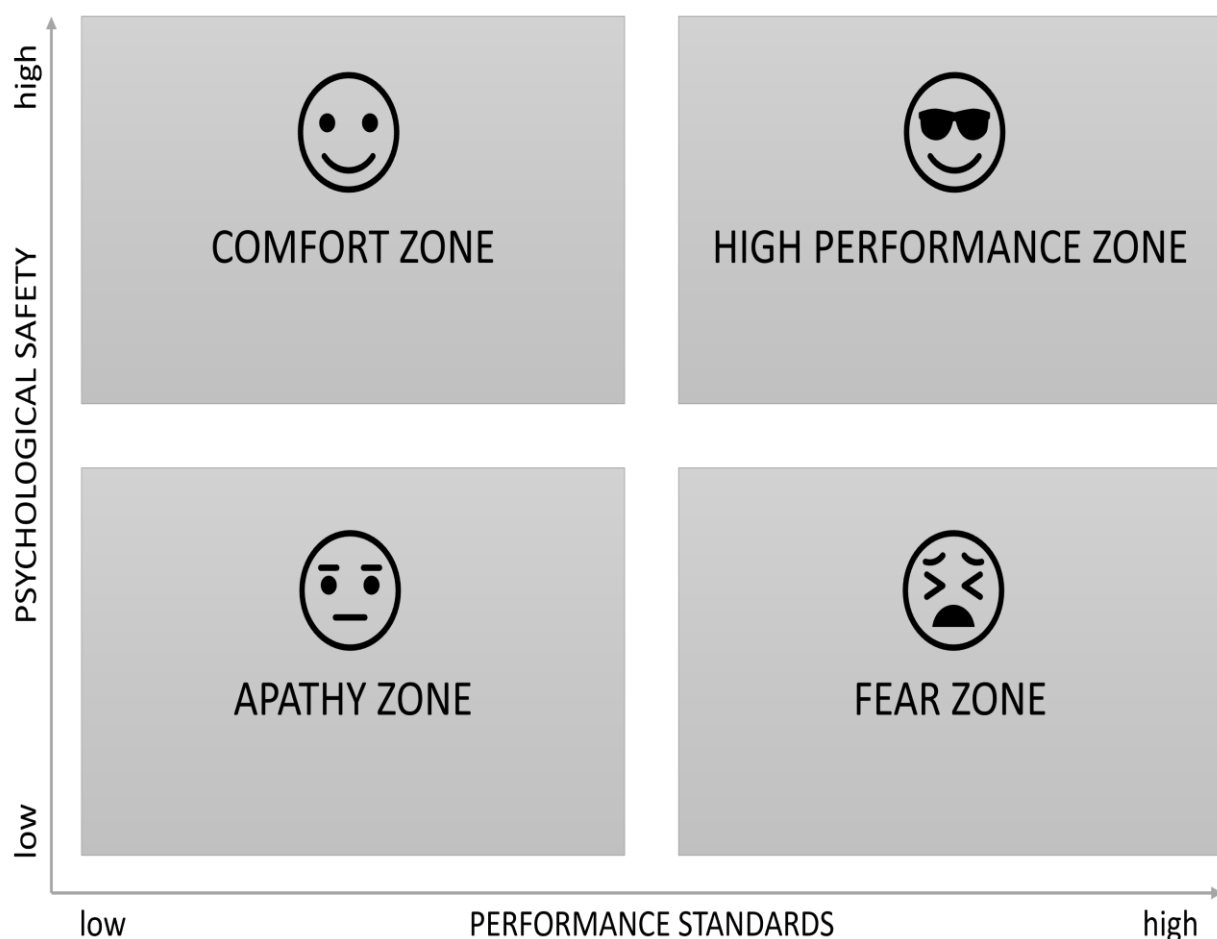

Figure 2: Under Security and Mutual Dependence (Own figure based on Edmondson)[42]

Therefore, fear reduces individual learning behaviour.[42] To realise the potential that exists in their employees, leaders at all levels need to find ways to actively reduce interpersonal anxiety. As shown in Figure, Amy Edmundson illustrates that employees who have both high-performance standards in their environment combined with high levels of psychological safety are prepared to perform at the highest level.[42] She also argues that psychological safety is not only about the individual, but that leadership plays an important role in creating a positive team culture and making team members feel safe to express their opinions and support each other.[41]

Key features of good functioning psychological safety are:
- Trust between team members
- Open practised feedback culture
- Opportunities for team members to share their opinions
- Open communication of information
- Positive failure culture without judging failure
- Mutual willingness to support without questioning capabilities

The fulfilment of the points does not necessarily mean that the relationship between colleagues is always harmonious or that discussions are constantly carried out in a friendly or trouble-free manner. Nevertheless, if these points are not fulfilled, there is a psychological insecurity.[41] As a result, mutual trust within the company can suffer and, for example, mistakes are concealed or opportunities for further development are seen as a weakness. These circumstances can lead to a feeling of constant fear of punishment nor exposure.[43]

Working in the virtual world has become an increasingly important issue, not only because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which also comes with its difficulties to keep the psychological safety of employees at a high level. Home office means a break that can turn work, family, home life and household into permanent stress. The goal must be to create a close relationship between the employees through the resulting distance.[124]

Emotional Employee Commitment
"Your number one customers are your people. Look after employees first and then customers last."[75] Hutchinson's statement describes a *status quo* that has changed over time in terms of the emotional commitment of employees in organisations. In the 19th century, working conditions were often very difficult and employees were forced to work for long hours, often in dangerous conditions with low salaries. During this time, it was easy for employers to retain employees by offering job security and exercising paternalistic care for them.[43] By the 1950s, the ideas of human relations and social psychology were applied to the world of employment. This development led to the creation of organisational psychology and the human relations movement, which continued to change the understanding of

employee engagement.[65] Based on factors of autonomy, challenge, responsibility and recognition, research in this field showed that employee retention was based on the ability to work in an organisation. Today, employee engagement is seen as a long-term relationship between employer and employee based on trust, commitment and shared goals.[101] Companies have realised that they can increase employee retention by creating a positive work environment that considers the individual needs and interests of employees. This includes supporting career opportunities, providing training and development opportunities, recognising achievements and creating a positive work climate. It can also be described as the level of emotional commitment that employees have to their company or organisation.[131]

A positive level of psychological safety can help create a supportive, trusting and cooperative work environment, which promotes emotional commitment of employees to their company. As a result, the employees will identify with their company and work to ensure that the company is successful.[86] A high emotional connection leads to higher employee motivation and commitment and can turn in contribute that employees are achieving their goals and performing their tasks more effectively.[91] Thus, positive psychological security of employees contributes to high emotional commitment to the company or organisation.

It can also help to build trust between employees and managers. Leaders creating a supportive environment where employees can express their opinions and ideas, results in an increase of trust of employees' trust in their leaders. Employees who trust their leaders are more likely to follow them and support their goals, which in return lead to higher emotional commitment to the company. In addition, when their opinions and ideas are valued and they can speak freely without having a negative impact on their career or well-being, employees feel more secure and comfortable in their work environment. They have more confidence in their abilities and their relationship with their colleagues and supervisors leading to a higher emotional attachment to the company.[41]

The shortage of qualified workers creates major challenges for companies. Given the tight job market, it has become more difficult for companies to find and retain qualified workers. In this context, emotional employee loyalty to a company is becoming increasingly important. A high turnover of employees can cause significant costs and affect the efficiency of the company. Organisations that manage to achieve a strong emotional commitment from their employees have a clear advantage in recruiting and retaining qualified workers.[133]

Employee Performance
In the workplace, the term "performance" refers to an employee's ability to accomplish tasks within a specific timeframe.[125] Performance can be measured by both

quantitative and qualitative goals such as meeting sales targets or the quality of work produced by an employee.[6] Over time, the definition of performance in the workplace has evolved. In the past, performance was mainly limited to quantitative goals such as the number of goods produced or amount of work completed. An employee's performance was often evaluated based on numbers and statistics established by company management.[52] In the 1980s, the definition of performance changed as companies began to place more value on the quality of work. Qualitative goals such as customer satisfaction and productivity became more important and companies began developing methods to measure the quality of their employees' work.[25]

In the 1990s, new management concepts such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and Six Sigma emerged, which focused on improving the quality and efficiency of work processes. These concepts led to further changes in the definition of performance, as companies began measuring employee performance based on specific performance indicators closely linked to the company's goals.[4] Today, the definition of performance has continued to evolve and includes an employee's ability to adapt to changes in the work environment, drive innovation and collaborate effectively with others. Companies are increasingly aware that employee performance is not only dependent on quantitative and qualitative goals but also relies on factors such as motivation, engagement and job satisfaction.

As a result, many companies have focused on creating a positive work environment that promotes the performance and well-being of their employees.[130] Pradhan and Jena have defined three core influences on employee performance which can be seen in Figure.[107] Task performance refers to the quality of the work to be done. This refers to the direct task areas of the employee. Adaptive performance describes the will and the realisation to constantly develop and

improve in the respective work areas. For example, it can also ensure that the flexibility of the workforce can be useful in times of change. Contextual performance for example is about guiding new colleagues beyond the scope of the task and to engage in the company accordingly.[107]

The factor of extra work and overtime is often associated with performance.[47] Overtime is defined as working hours that exceed the regular working hours. This additional working time can be arranged in different ways such as through overtime, work on weekends or holidays.[110] Extra work is often associated with an employee's performance because it is seen as an indicator of the employee's commitment and work ethic.[8] Employees who are willing to work additional hours are often seen as engaged and motivated, which can have a positive impact on their performance.

Companies can also use overtime as an indicator of employees' resilience and flexibility, as it shows that they can handle an increased workload and effectively completing their tasks.[20] Too much overtime can also have negative effects on an employee's performance. Fatigue and burnout can occur when an employee works too many additional hours over a long period of time.

This can lead to a deterioration in the quality of work and a decrease in productivity, ultimately affecting the employee's performance.[110] It is therefore important for companies and employees to find a balance between overtime, personal health and well-being. Companies should ensure that employees receive appropriate rest days and recovery time to avoid burnout and exhaustion. Employees should also learn to carefully plan their work time and prioritize tasks to ensure that they can effectively manage their workload without jeopardizing their health and well-being.[138]
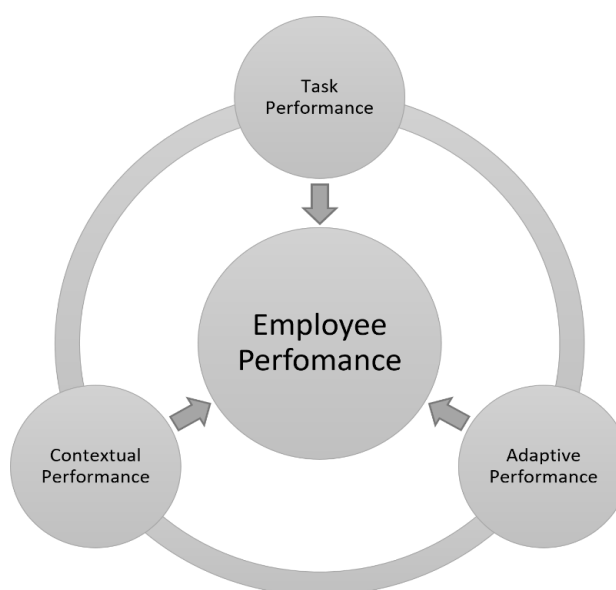

Figure 3: The Triarchy Model of Employee Performance (Own figure based on Pradhan and Jena).[107]

Derivation and Hypotheses: Based on the current state of research, a hypothesis-based model will be developed to determine the influence of permitted job flexibility on the perceived psychological security of generation Y and Z employees. Part of the New Work philosophy is a high degree of workplace flexibility. Home office, remote work and similar concepts are part of it. This flexibility can influence different areas of the employees. In the research, the young generations (Y and Z) have been rarely examined in this regard. This begs the question whether the statements of young employees in practice can be compared with the current state of research. The following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: A high level of workplace flexibility has positive effects on the psychological well-being of the employees.
Based on literature, there is a direct impact of workplace flexibility on the psychological safety of employees.[40,43] As a result of a higher sense of safety, various positive behaviours can be expected. For example, employees are more likely to share sensitive and success-critical information with each other.[26] They can be also more willing to experiment with new or unconventional solutions and to take risks on an interpersonal level.[55,71,72,135]

H2: A high level of workplace flexibility results in an increase in emotional employees' loyalty.
The literature indicates that supportive organisational practices have a significant impact on employee fluctuation.[1] New Work in the context of Supportive Work Environment (SWE) also increases employee interest in their work and thus increases their performance.[77] According to different studies, various factors can influence an employee's intention to stay in the organisation. As reported by Hytter[76] workplace practices such as compensation, supervisory style, career development activities, employee training and growth, physical work environment and work-life balance are positively related to employee's loyalty. With these practices signalling to employees that they are valued, it has been claimed that this kind of perceived SWE promotes employees' intention to stay with the organisation.[112,118]

H3: A high level of workplace flexibility results in performance increases of the employees.
According to previous research, a high degree of flexibility in the workplace can have a positive impact on organisational performance and on the performance of individual employee.[7,10,11,57,68,84,103] It can reduce stress, boredom, fatigue and work-life balance conflicts. As a result, positive performance outcomes can be achieved. Also, absenteeism can be reduced or productivity and commitment to the organisation can be increased.

H4: A high level of workplace flexibility increases the amount of extra work.
As mentioned in the previous hypothesis, a high level of flexibility can reduce the number of days, employees are absent.[10] The additional work hours can also be generated by working more hours per day. According to various studies, people who work with flexible models usually work more than conventional ones without extra compensation.[21,85,134]

Research Framework
This study addresses beside the research question, how workplace flexibility affects the psychological safety of the interface between generation Y and Z as well the four hypotheses described above. The research framework and the respective links between the hypothesis elements are shown in the Figure.

The hypotheses are represented as part of the theoretical framework in the figure. In this way, the interaction of the respective components of the hypotheses is examined. The research questions presented in the introduction can be found consistently across the entire research framework and form the core of the study.

Methodology
Research Direction Justification and General Information: The aim of this work is to determine how the permitted workplace flexibility affects the psychological safety. The focus lies on a defined intersection between Generations Y and Z, starting with the date of birth on 01.07.1988 to 30.06.2003.
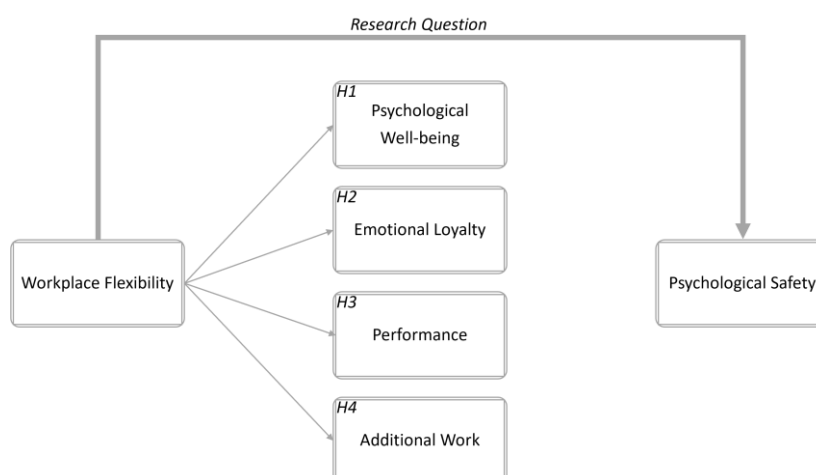

Figure 4: Research framework (Own figure)

A recommendation for improvement approaches will be made based on the results. To obtain the overall information for the formulation of recommendations, the secondary research is used as a foundation and primary research in form of a quantitative empirical study. For the selection of the method of data collection, qualitative as well as quantitative methods will be considered. A quantitative, standardised survey was chosen for several reasons.

The technological possibilities enable many participants to be reached to obtain a larger representative sample of participants. To ensure high external validity, the sample size was determined with the help of the tool G*Power.[50,51] A confidence level of 95% was assumed. The exact calculation can be found in the appendix. The calculation results in a minimum sample size of 210 test persons to be able to present a sufficiently representative result. Furthermore, a survey can be standardised and systematised which increases the comparability and accuracy of the results in relation to the framework of the research.[109] Another factor in favour of a survey is that the data can be clearly quantified and analysed. This allows for a more comprehensive statistical analysis of the results, increasing the validity and reliability of the results.

Using interviews, on the other hand, carries the risk of creating distortions, because the results can be more subjective due to individual interpretations of the interviewer.[108] In addition, the restriction of the age groups by the intersection of generations Y and Z and the necessary requirement to have already worked in a flexible working model make it more difficult to find representative interview partners.

With the main objective of proving the hypotheses and theories, quantifying and generalising the results[36] a standardised online survey was conducted using DATAtab. This is a web-based provider for the individual creation of online surveys with various statistical evaluation functions.[32]

Choice of Survey Tools: Based on the theoretical element of this dissertation, an empirical study in the form of a standardised questionnaire has been conducted. The quality criteria of empirical social science were observed and among other factors, objectivity, profitability, validity etc. were considered.[99] All participants must answer the same questions in the same numerical and chronological order.[114] The survey consists mainly of closed questions, in which the respondents must choose one of the given answer possibilities. In addition, there are two questions that cannot be assigned to the open questions.

In the initial question, the respondents can add an alternative to the given answers. In the last question, the respondents can also write their own comments in the form of a user-defined text. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part was developed based on the questionnaires already applied and previous literature. From the previous literature

and published studies, the scale of the survey was adopted. The following variables are examined:

- V1 ≜ Level of job flexibility. *(H1, H2, H3, H4)*
- V2 ≜ Psychological safety *(H1)*
- V3 ≜ Emotional employee commitment *(H2)*
- V4 ≜ Performance *(H3)*
- V5 ≜ Extra work *(H4)*

The first variable is based on the survey by Giannikis and Mihail[58] from the analysis of the factors affecting the perception of flexible work possibilities. In this survey, 362 Greek workers participated. Attitudes towards flexible were found to depend on gender, employment sector and previous participation in a flexible work programme. Because the survey was carried out in English, the questions were translated into German using the Translation / Back Translation method, avoiding translation errors.[126] Based on the analysis, all 20 items were integrated into the survey of this study. The respondent can give their answer on a seven-point Likert scale from *"do not agree at all"* to *"totally agree"*.[24] The participants have the option of choosing the middle category due to the odd number of possible answers.

For the second variable, the items of the "PsySafety-Check (PS-C)" survey by Fischer and Hüttermann[52,53] were used. This instrument measures the construct of psychological safety and shows the different perceptions of the members in a team or group. This survey was tested on 325 respondents from different industries and has a reliability of .81 in terms of Cronbach's alpha. The long version with seven items was used to create the survey. The respondent can answer on a seven-point Likert scale from *"*do not agree at all" to "totally agree". As this survey, like the following ones, was already conducted in German, no translation methodology was necessary.

For the third variable, the questions from the German version of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ-G) by Maier and Woschée[94] were used. The OCQ is based on the conceptualisation of organisational commitment as an (affective) attitude. It captures the affective commitment of employees to their organisation. The survey was carried out with 1414 employees from different industries and measured as Cronbach's alpha value of .90. For the survey of this elaboration, all 15 items were integrated. The respondent can give their answers on this variable on a five-point Likert scale from "do not agree at all" to "totally agree".

For the third variable, the measurement tool is based on the performance orientation of employees from Hippler and Krüger.[70] This questionnaire is subdivided into areas of career orientation, attitudes towards performance and success and fear of failure. The survey is designed to reflect the performance-related attitudinal and behavioural symptoms in the respondents' self-perception or self-reflection. The questionnaire was tested on 187 people from the scientific sector at the University of Mannheim and has

a Cronbach's alpha of .87. The questionnaire can also be used separately in the categories, therefore the second chapter with seven items relating to performance and success-promoting working attitudes was considered for the creation of the survey. The respondent can answer on a seven-point Likert scale from "do not agree at all" to "totally agree ".

For the last variable, the questionnaire of Schneider and Bühler[121] was chosen which represents a scale for the assessment of work addiction. This describes the excessive need or compulsion to work incessantly. For the purposes of this study, extra work will be derived as follows: The survey has 20 items which were completely adopted and has a Cronbach's alpha of .87. For this variable, the participant must give their answers in the form of dichotomous characteristics. The response options are limited in this case on two.[95] In this case, "do not agree" to "do agree". This measurement instrument was tested on 263 randomly selected test persons from the general population in Germany.

After the questionnaire was created, a pre-test was carried out to verify the quality and logic of the questionnaire before the publication. The aim was to ensure that the objectives will be achieved and that there was no misinterpretation of the questionnaire.[73] Seven people from industry, education, healthcare, finance, IT and two students from the International Management College (IMC) tested the survey.

The final questionnaire contains one introduction question, 49 questions to measure the variables and seven demographic questions. At the end, the respondents can make suggestions in a blank text box. The survey is available in the appendix.

In order to collect the sample, the survey can be distributed actively or passively.[2] In the active distribution method, the respondents are addressed directly.[49] For this survey, the passive variant is chosen. In this case, the survey is published on the digital platforms with an introduction text, giving the respondents access to the survey.

It is possible that the survey will be shared and spread in the form of a snowball system. The disadvantage of not addressing the participants personally is that the sample can be distorted. To avoid this distortion, criteria for participation were defined and clearly stated in the posts and the introductory text.[2] The survey on the influence of permitted workplace flexibility on workers' perceived psychological safety was carried out between 08.-22 February with a targeted duration of 14 days.

The survey was open to all those who were born between 01.07.1988 and 30.06.2003 and who already had a professional activity with flexible working models. In addition, the survey was conducted in German, because only the Germany was considered for the research. The survey was distributed through common social networks like Instagram, WhatsApp and LinkedIn. The results of the survey are evaluated with the DATAtab statistical software.[31] These functions make it possible to evaluate the respective items from the survey according to scientific standards, taking into account the evaluation criteria.

Evaluation Method: Different variables like workplace flexibility, psychological safety, emotional employee commitment, performance and extra work are considered. Those are formed from different items of the questionnaire. For data analysis. Four main aspects are considered:

1. Mean and median: The average values of the respective variables are calculated to get an overview of the central tendencies of the data. The median is used as a measure of central tendency because it is robust against outliers.[34]

Formula for calculation of the mean value:[14]

$$\bar{x} = \frac{x_1 + x_2 + x_{3 + \ldots + } x_n}{n}$$

Formula for calculation of the median value:[78]
For even number of observations:

$$\tilde{x} = \frac{1}{2}\left(x_{\frac{n}{2}} + x_{\frac{n}{2}+1}\right)$$

For uneven number of observations:

$$\tilde{x} = x_{\frac{n}{2}+1}$$

2. Measure of Variance (standard deviations): The standard deviation is calculated to measure the variability of the data. It indicates how far the individual data points are from the average trend.[34]

Formula for calculation:[78] $\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n}(x_i - \bar{x})^2}$

3. Spearman correlation: The correlation is a quantitative measure for assessing the strength of the relationship between two continuous or quantitatively discrete characteristics. It describes the monotonic component of the relationship between the two characteristics.[34]

Formula for calculation: [78] $rho = \frac{6 * \sum d_i^2}{(n^2 - 1) * n}$

4. Linear regressions: To model the linear relationship between a dependent variable (e.g. the perceived workplace flexibility) and one or more independent variables (e.g. psychological safety, emotional commitment, performance and/ or overtime), linear regressions are conducted.[34]

Formula for calculation:[78]
$$\hat{y} = b_1 * x_1 + b_2 * x_2 + \ldots + b_k * x_k + a$$

In addition, appropriate analysis methods will be chosen for each variable and item to generate further insights into the data. For example, for the demographic questions, descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions or cross tabulations can be used to describe the characteristics of the

sample. In summary, the methods of analysis will be designed to test the hypotheses and research question posed in the introduction of the study.

Quality Criteria of Robust Research: The quality of a study can be assessed using the criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity. The criteria are described in relation to the quantitative survey and the associated article. Validity indicates the level of a study in measuring what it is supposed to measure.[117] To ensure validity, the study is based on the hypothesis variables to avoid bias and to measure the right elements using well-established scales. The survey was further pre-tested to ensure that the questions are clear and the intended variables were accurately measured. Translation errors were also eliminated using the translation/back translation method.[117]

Reliability is the degree to which a study produces consistent and stable results over time.[93] Reliability means that the survey questions used to measure for example workplace flexibility and psychological safety should produce consistent results when repeated under similar conditions. Reliability is ensured by using established scales with good psychometric properties and by addressing the survey to a minimum sample size of 210 participants. For the statistical reliability, the Cronbach's alphas for each variable were evaluated V1=0.89; V2=0.65; V3=0.93; V4=0.68; V5=0.8. The results indicate a high degree of reliability, suggesting that the study produces consistent and stable results over time.[93]

Objectivity means that a survey is free from bias or subjective influence.[93] In the context of this dissertation, the objectivity refers to the fact that the study was designed and conducted without personal bias or influence. Therefore, the study is carried out anonymously by the participants and does not allow any conclusions about the persons questioned. It is also ensured that objectivity is guaranteed with proven scales and the avoidance of leading questions.

In conclusion, a scientific research's quality depends on the level of compliance with certain quality criteria including validity, reliability and objectivity. In the context of this quantitative online survey, it shows a high level of validity, reliability and objectivity. This ensures that the study provides accurate, consistent and unbiased results that can serve as a foundation for results and discussion, as well as future research in the field.

Results and Implications
Results of the Empirical Study
Demographic Information: For the upcoming evaluation of the quantitative data, methods of descriptive statistics are used which are described and visualised by graphical elements and tables.

The survey was accessed 2374 times in the defined period. 905 people started the survey, 331 of them completed the survey. A total of 574 people stopped the questionnaire. Of the completed respondents, 11 were excluded from the evaluation, because the age barrier was exceeded (10 times) or not reached (1 time). In total, 320 questionnaires were completed with the necessary quality criteria (n=320). The minimum sample size of n=210 calculated by G-Power was therefore fulfilled and exceeded by 52.38%.

Figure provides an overview of the gender and generation distribution of the respondents. With 84.1% the female gender is overrepresented in this survey. Generation Z is more strongly represented with 62.2% than generation Y. Female respondents from generation Z form the largest group of participants with a total share of 55.94%. Male participants from the same generation represent only 6.25%. In generation Y, female and male respondents have a share of 28.13% and 9.69% of the total number of participants respectively. The gender imbalanced distribution is taken into account in the following descriptive evaluations.

The marital status on the other hand is equally distributed among both female and male participants. Most participants are single (f=81.04%; m=80.39%). The other marital statuses are evenly distributed and are therefore negligible.
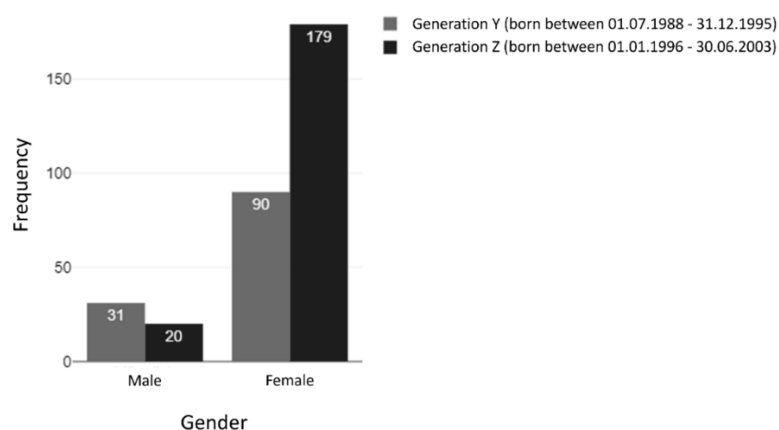

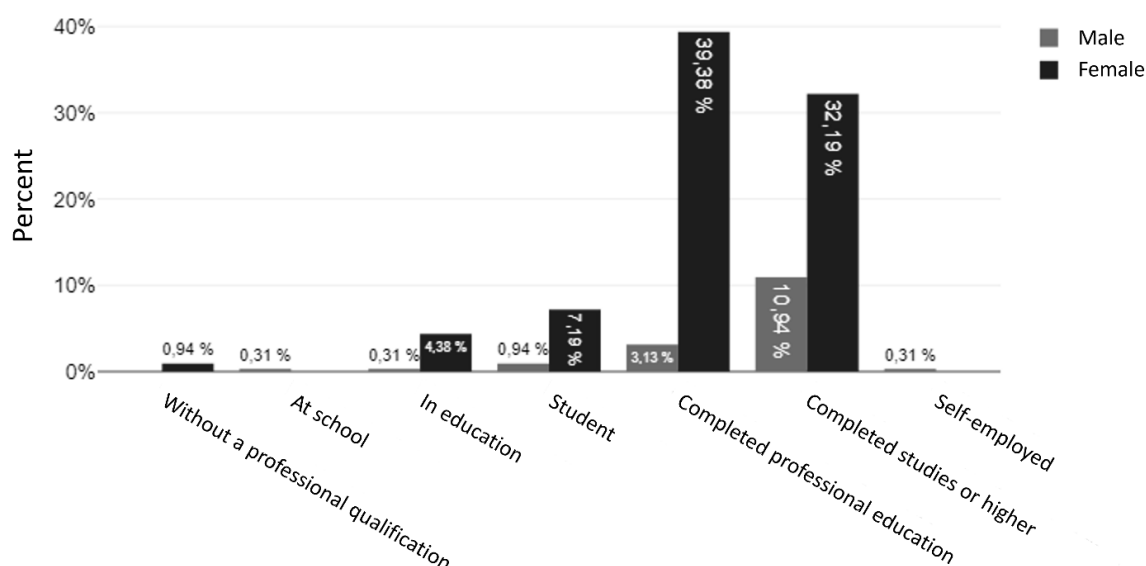**Figure 5: Distribution of genders and generations (Own figure)**

Figure 6: Distribution of professional educational level (Own figure)

Table 6
Spearman correlation coefficients V1 vs. V2-V5 (median) (Own illustration)

V1 on	V2 Psychological Security	V3 Emotional Employee Commitment	V4 Performance	V5 Work Overload
Male	-0.08	-0.08	0.12	0.25
Female	-0.12	-0.17	-0.09	0.10
All	-0.12	-0.15	-0.06	0.12

Figure shows the distribution of professional status among the participants. The largest group is formed by participants with a University degree or higher, with 43.13% (f=32.19%; m=10.94%). Furthermore, 42.5% (f=39.38%; m=3.13%) have completed vocational training. Thus this group forms a similarly large proportion. Except for two job seekers (0.625%), all respondents are currently employed. The majority, with 47.2%, work 40 hours or more per week, 36.9% work between 30 and 39 hours per week and 15.3% are employed between 1-29 hours per week.

Outstanding is the alignment of the income distribution of the respondents (Figure) with national average.

Standard Deviations
To evaluate the survey, it is split in five categories that are in line with the definitions. Among those five categories, the mean and median values as well as the standard deviation of all the questions that fall into it, are calculated. This allows for a stable evaluation of the defined categories by reducing questionnaire biases due to calculating the indices from multiple questions.

Figure visualizes those indices. The figure 8 shows one plot for each category with the candidate index (n=310) on the x-axis and the mean value as dots surrounded by the standard deviations as vertical lines. The standard deviation represents the spread of answers given within one category. The figure shows that a majority of candidates answered

within each category neither consistently positive nor negative, indicating a high degree of dispersion (Appendix). A very high standard deviation is represented in category V1 (Workplace Flexibility) and V5 (Additional Work). Notably, V5 only consists of binary answer choices (1 or 0), natively resulting in higher standard deviations.

Spearman Correlation: Correlations between the individual variables are provided according to the Spearman method. Figure and 10 show the impact of V1 on V2-V5 by correlating the mean values of V1 with the values of V2-V5. Notably, the Spearman correlation indices are all around 0, indicating a low correlation.

Based on the values obtained, the following results of the hypotheses can be described:

The correlation between Workplace Flexibility (V1) and Psychological Security (V2) is slightly negative (-0.12) for all groups. This means that higher workplace flexibility tends to be associated with lower psychological security. The correlation between Workplace Flexibility (V1) and Emotional Employee Commitment (V3) is also slightly negative (-0.15) for all respondents. Therefore, a higher workplace flexibility tends to be associated with lower employee commitment. The correlation between Workplace Flexibility (V1) and Performance (V4) is very low and close to zero (-0.06). This means that there is no significant correlation between workplace flexibility and performance.
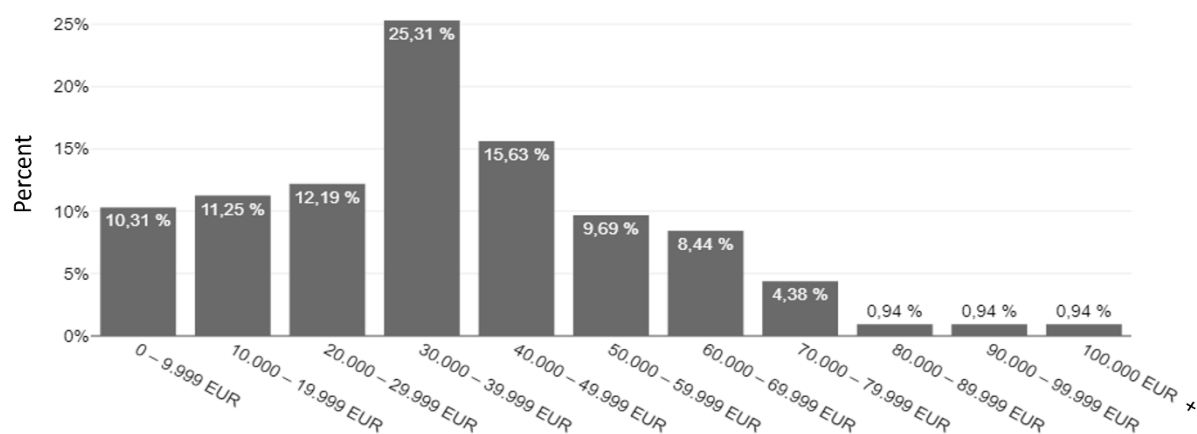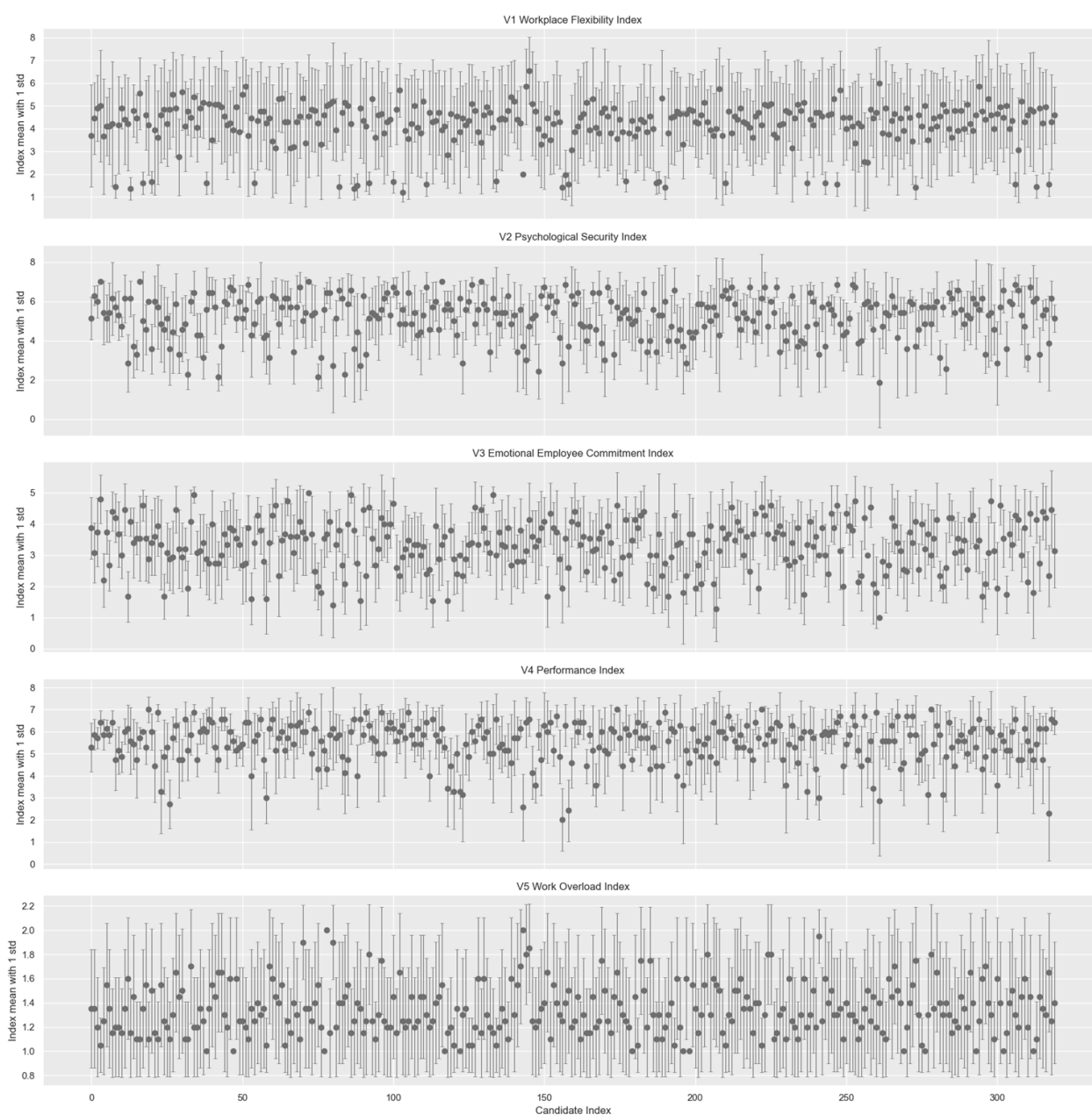
Figure 7: Income distribution (Own figure)

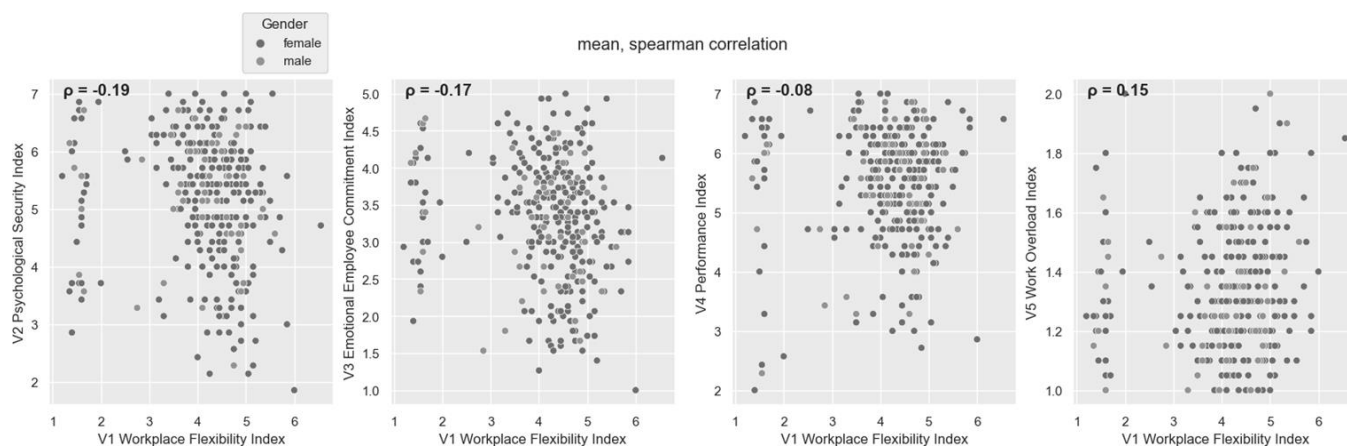**Figure 8: Survey results and standard deviations (Own figure)**

Figure 9: Spearman correlation coefficients V1 vs. V2-V5 (mean) (Own figure)
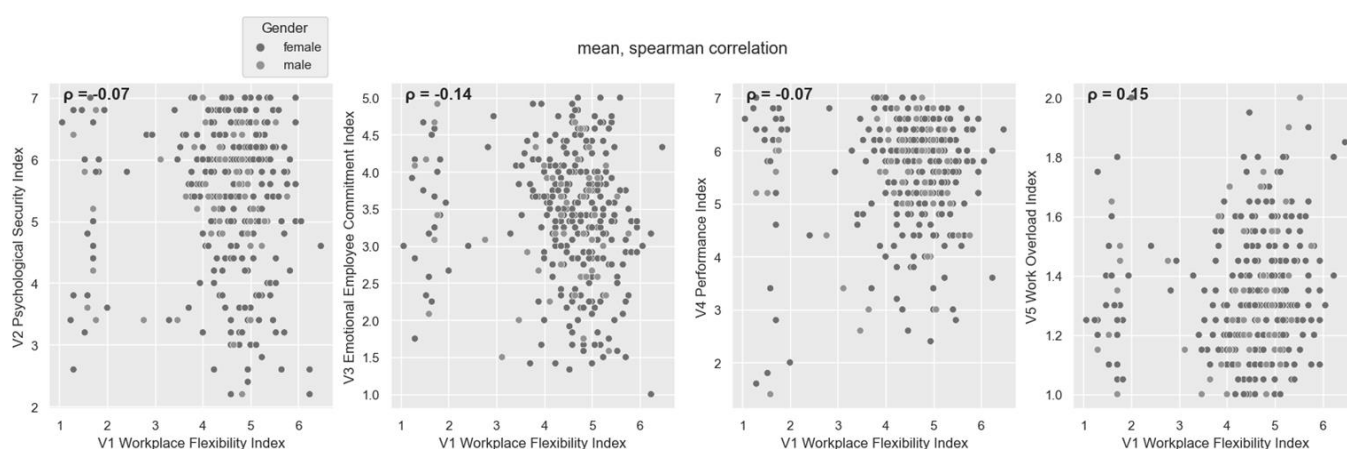

Figure 10: Spearman correlation coefficients V1 vs. V2-V5 excluding outliers (mean) (Own figure)

The correlation between Workplace Flexibility (V1) and Work Overload (V2) is slightly positive (0.12). Therefore, a higher workplace flexibility tends to be associated with a higher sense of work overload. All those correlations only indicate a very low relationship between the variables of interest.

In general, the answers by gender tend to be in the same direction. Notably, V1 on V4 stands out. The male participants showed a slight positive correlation while the female participants showed a very slight negative. The correlation between V1 and V5 is also stronger on male probands and represents a comparatively high value of 0.25 and therefore it is a positive, medium-strong correlation.

Overall, the correlations between workplace flexibility (V1) and the other variables are very low. A minor correlation occurs between workplace flexibility (V1) and work overload (V5). Organisations that offer their employees more flexibility should therefore ensure that the feeling of work overload does not increase in relation to these respondents.

As the results of the survey were contrary to the theoretical basis, the questionnaire was put into review. The theory was put forward that there were strong outliers among the responds, which falsified the result. The hypothesis is that among the questions within one category, there are questions that often have different answers than most of the answers within this category. This specifically indicates inconsistency and flaws within the questionnaire. To test this hypothesis, the standard deviation was calculated from the mean of all questions. From the resulting average, an interval (1.5 times the standard deviation) was taken in which about 86% of all response values belong.

In this way, questions that have particularly high outlier rates were defined. Looking at category 4, question 3 "I also assert myself in the face of resistance" stands out with 52 outliers and question 7 "If I have failed in a task, I prefer to stay away from similar tasks in the future" with 54 outliers. For each category, those outlier questions were removed. The results are visualised in Figure.

By removing these questions with high outliers, it was tested if the correlation of the variables increases due to a higher consistency within the categories. This hypothesis is only slightly confirmed. H1 changes the most through the adjustment and becomes a very slight negative correlation from a slight negative correlation. Therefore, the deletion of the outliers has no major influence on the result as can be seen in Table .

Linear Regression: A linear regression with V2-V5 as independent variables and V1 as the dependent variable was calculated. This method allows to test the linear relationship between the combined information of V2-V5 on V1. The results show a slightly positive relationship between the independent variables (V4 Performance, V5 Extra Work) and the dependent variable (V1 Level of job flexibility). The correlation coefficient (R) is 0.23 and the coefficient of determination (R2) is 0.05 which means that only 5% of the variance of the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables. The adjusted coefficient of determination (adjusted R2) is 0.04 which means that the model has low quality to predict the dependent variable (Table to **Table**).

The results of the multiple regression analysis can be found in Table and show that only the variables V3 (Level of Emotional Commitment) and V4 (Level of Performance) are significant predictors of the dependent variable. V3 has a negative standardised regression coefficient (beta) of -0.15 which means that a higher level of emotional commitment leads to a decrease in the criterion V1 (Level of Job Flexibility). The degree of performance (V4) has a positive standardised regression coefficient of 0.15 which means that higher performance is related to higher criterion V1.

The other independent variables, V5 (Index of Extra Work) and V2 (Level of Psychological Safety) are not significantly related to the criterion, as their p-values are higher than 0.05.

The results of the linear regression indicate that employee emotional attachments and employee performance are significant predictors of the criterion V1 while psychological security and overtime do not play a significant role. It is important to point out that the model as in total has a low predictive power and is therefore not very expressive.

Table 7
Adjusted Spearman correlation coefficients V1 vs. V2-V5 (Own illustration)

Hypothesis	Spearman r	Correlation	Adj. Spearman r (Outliers removed)	Adj. Correlation (Outliers removed)
H1	-0.19	slightly negative	-0.07	very slight negative
H2	-0.17	slightly negative	-0.14	slightly negative
H3	-0.08	very slight negative	-0.07	very slight negative
H4	0.15	slightly positive	0.15	slightly positive

Table 8
Linear Regression R-Values (Own illustration)

R	R2	Adjusted R2	Standard estimation error
0.23	**0.05**	**0.04**	**1**

Table 9
Linear Regression df, F, p (Own illustration)

Model	df	F	p
Regression	4	4.48	0.002

Table 10
Linear Regression Coefficients (Own illustration)

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients	Standardised Coefficients				95% confidence interval for B	
	B	Beta	Standard error	t	p	Lower limit	Upper limit
(Constant)	3.49		0.56	6.25	<0.001	2.39	4.6
V2 Index Level of Psychological Safety	-0.07	-0.07	0.06	-1.09	0.275	-0.19	0.05
V3 Index Level of Emotional Commitment	-0.19	-0.15	0.08	-2.28	0.023	-0.35	-0.03
V4 Index Level of Performance	0.16	0.15	0.06	2.59	0.01	0.04	0.28
V5 Index Level of Extra Work	0.47	0.1	0.28	1.71	0.088	-0.07	1.02

Recommendations for Action

In addition to the already mentioned and implemented removal of outliers, further concrete recommendations for action can be determined from the results. Since the survey results show a high standard deviation, it is necessary to take another closer look at the questions and to separate the respective groups of people to specify them in subsequent studies. If, for example, a clear distinction is made between people with a University degree or higher and people without a University degree, different results emerge. For example, the Spearman correlation coefficient shows that the influence of workplace flexibility on psychological security is lower among respondents with a University degree or higher (r = -0.04) than among respondents without a University degree (r = -0.18). Similar results are observed for the other variables.

The influence of V1 on V3 and V4 is more negatively correlated for respondents without a university degree than for those with a university degree or higher (r = -0.24 vs. r = -0.02 and r = -0.09 vs. r = -0.02). In contrast, work overload shows a positive correlation with workplace flexibility for both groups.

This is slightly higher for respondents without a university degree (r = 0.14) than for those with a University degree or higher (r = 0.11). Overall, the results suggest that the impact of V1 on different variables varies depending on the educational level of the respondents. Thus, it can be assumed that different levels of education may enjoy different conditions in working life due to their circumstances. This is additionally illustrated by the differentiation of salaries.

Considering the correlation between the level of flexibility at work (V1) and the level of psychological security (V2), clear tendencies stand out. In the group with an income of 40.000 to 49.999 EUR, there is a negative correlation (-0.27), which means that a higher V1 is associated with a lower V2. In the group with an income of 50.000 to 59.999 EUR, there is also a negative correlation (-0.20), but it is less strong than in the next lower income class. In the group with an income of 60.000 to 69.999 EUR, there is a positive correlation (+0.27), indicating that a higher V1 is associated with a higher V2. In the group with an income of 70.000 to 79.999 EUR, there is an even stronger positive correlation (+0.49), which indicates that a higher workplace flexibility is even more strongly associated with a higher psychological security what is shown in Figure. Across all respondents, the value of -0.12 is far below that of the higher earners.

Due to the number of respondents (3 each), the following salary groups from 80.000 EUR and more are not considered for the purpose of validity. The correlation of the 3 respondents with an income of 100.000 EUR and more would be very strongly positive with +0.87, which indicates that higher V1 in this group is associated with higher V2. The increase is shown in grey to give an indication of how the graph may continue. This is not considered further in this study due to validity.

In summary, the data show that there is a positive trend between workplace flexibility (V1) and psychological security (V2) with increasing income. Nevertheless, in lower income groups, there seems to be a negative relationship, indicating that other factors may matter in these groups which are proposed as future research directions.

One recommended course of action is to explore additional factors that may impact employee psychological safety. Given that the survey results do not reveal a significant correlation between workplace flexibility and psychological safety for all respondent groups, it is prudent to investigate other potential factors that could be influential. It may be worth considering industry sectors, professions, or positions within organizations, as these factors may be relevant for different correlations of the variables. For instance, a landscape gardener may have less opportunities for flexible work arrangements under the New Work philosophy compared to a digital graphic designer.

Another part to explore is the company culture, management style and working conditions which may shed light on the factors that contribute to psychological safety. By researching into these additional factors, it can gain a deeper understanding of the complex nature of psychological safety in the workplace environment.

An additional recommendation for action is to obtain feedback. The questionnaire does not reveal which reasons are responsible for the indications from this research. Further work should therefore also address this issue for example in the form of qualitative studies or open text fields. This point also applies to organisations, as it is important to consider the opinions and needs of employees, especially when it comes to working conditions. Through regular feedback, organisations will be able to better understand the needs of their employees to feel safe and supported. Therefore, employees should be asked for feedback on a regular basis to identify possible weaknesses and make changes accordingly.

Furthermore, training and education for organisations are recommended. Due to the high variance among the respondents, it is obvious that the handling of the New Work concepts has not yet found the right form with the employees. Companies can offer training and further education to improve the handling of their flexible work concepts and consequently the psychological safety of the employees. These topics pertain to areas such as conflict resolution, stress management, communication and feedback with the aim of enhancing employees' skills. This is particularly necessary in the context of the modern world of work, as theory clearly shows that managers are faced with new challenges[61]. This recommendation applies to all persons involved in the company.
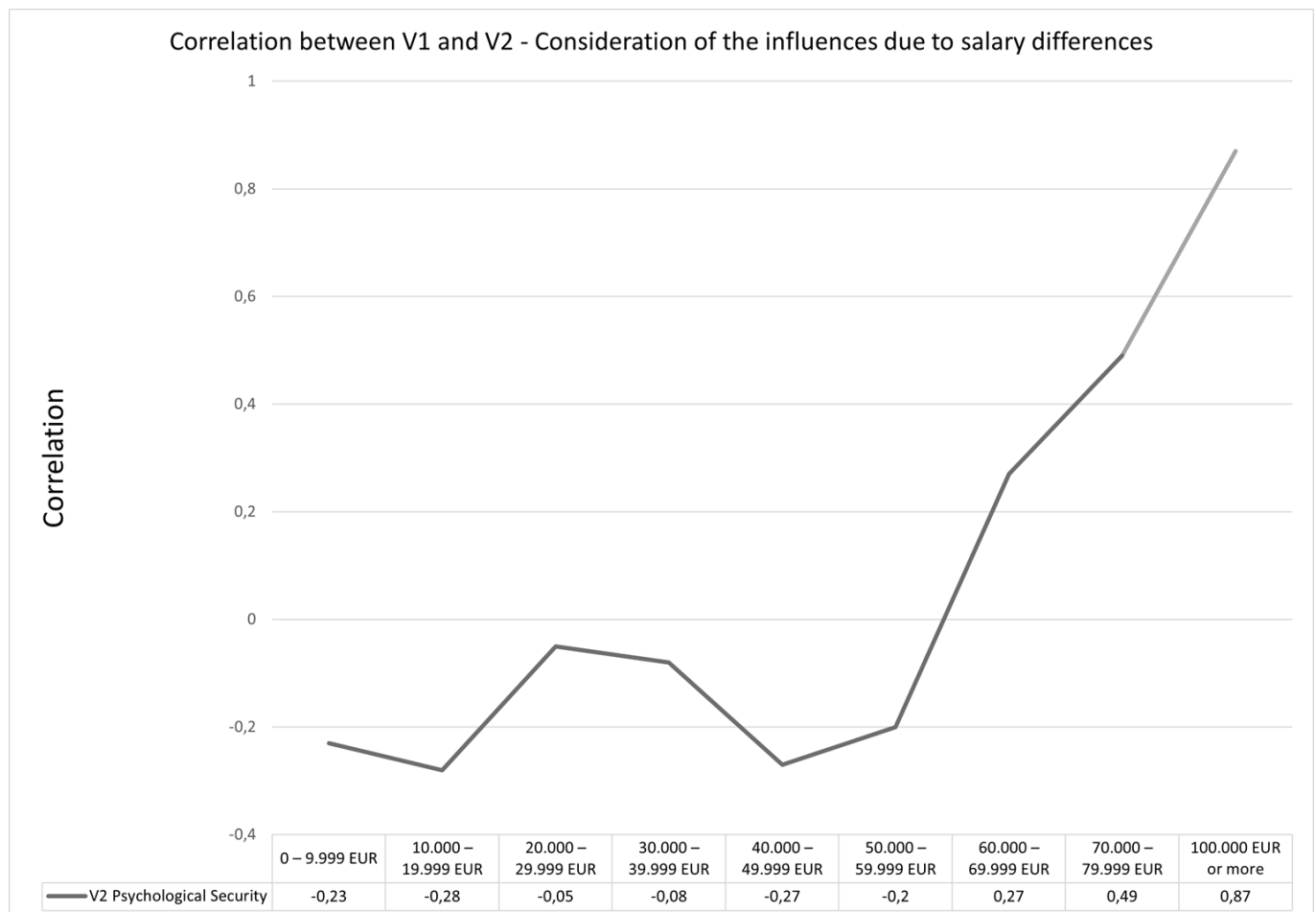
Figure 11: Correlation between V1 and V2 - Consideration of d. salaries (Own figure)

	0 – 9.999 EUR	10.000 – 19.999 EUR	20.000 – 29.999 EUR	30.000 – 39.999 EUR	40.000 – 49.999 EUR	50.000 – 59.999 EUR	60.000 – 69.999 EUR	70.000 – 79.999 EUR	100.000 EUR or more
V2 Psychological Security	-0,23	-0,28	-0,05	-0,08	-0,27	-0,2	0,27	0,49	0,87

Discussion

The aim of the empirical study is to answer the question of what influences permitted workplace flexibility on the psychological safety on the intersection of generations Y and Z in the German region. In addition, the hypotheses formulated will be evaluated. For this purpose, an empirical survey was conducted and the results are summarised and interpreted. Contributions of this study and its limitations are presented. Possibilities for further research are proposed.

Own Contributions: The results of the empirical study show, contrary to the theoretical foundations, that a higher degree of job flexibility tends to be associated with a reduced psychological security and a lower emotional commitment of the employees. No significant correlation was found between job flexibility and performance and only a slight positive correlation was found between job flexibility and additional work. These results are specifically relevant for the generations Y and Z surveyed, because these groups have a high affinity to flexible working conditions. Nonetheless, the results are limited in significance. This is attributable, for example, to the fact that the gender distribution of the sample is unbalanced, with 84.1% of respondents being female and generation Z being overrepresented at 62.2%. The respondents' answers also vary strongly within categories and are not uniformly positive or negative, which indicates a high degree of dispersion. Furthermore, no conclusions can

be drawn about the branches or positions of the respective employees. The results were obtained through a quantitative survey in which a total of 320 people successfully participated. The data was analysed by means of descriptive statistics and presented visually by diagrams and tables.

The focus on the intersection of generations Y and Z expands the previous understanding of the impact of workplace flexibility on the psychological safety of employees. In addition, the research differs from other studies in its use of a cross correlation approach, examining not only the direct correlation between job flexibility and psychological safety, but also the indirect effects on emotional attachment to the employer, performance and work overload. These elements were analysed in the German region.

The results have implications for employers in practice. An excess degree of job flexibility can potentially lead to lower psychological security and employee retention. It is therefore important to consider the needs of employees when creating working conditions and to ensure that employees can achieve a good work-life balance.

The study contributes to theory development by showing that the effects of workplace flexibility on employees' psychological safety are very complex and are not limited to direct correlations. The results therefore contribute to

expanding the understanding of the impact of flexible working conditions on employee health and satisfaction.

Limitations

First, besides defining the research gap, there is a limitation inherent in the title of the work, as the consideration of generations is largely based on stereotypes and not transferable to the entirety of age groups.[132] In addition, the focus on the intersection of generation Y and Z limited the potential survey participants for the later convenience sampling, as only individuals born between July 1, 1988 and June 30, 2003, who are currently or were previously employed in flexible work arrangements, were eligible to participate.

Moreover, variables were chosen for the survey that predominantly relied on the self-assessment or personal feelings of individual participants. For example, psychological safety or performance can be valued differently among various respondents. The convenience sampling methodology was used to conduct the quantitative survey which involved using a small part of the population to make assumptions about the general population.[102] The target audience was reached through accessible platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, or LinkedIn and their respective networks.

In principle, potential participants of all age, gender, industry and social groups who met the survey participation criteria were expected to be reached through these platforms. It was discovered that the gender distribution of respondents was significantly distorted due to Julian Gutjahr reposting the survey on Instagram (approx. 136.000 followers, March 24, 2023). According to an analysis of the Instagram account, the gender distribution of 2023 (March 24, 2023) was 96.7% female and 3.2% male respondents. Resulting the post was viewed 33.611 times and clicked 1.762 times. There is a significant indication that the repost forced the gender imbalance.

Furthermore, during the evaluation, it became apparent that additional demographic questions could have provided further insights on the analysis. Specifically, the possible question about industries in which participants were or are employed, was missed. This could have identified potential differences between each other. In addition, querying positions and roles within the companies would have offered better opportunities to examine conclusions about the effects of workplace flexibility on the respective variables.

Possibilities for further research

The present elaboration provides the basis for further research. An important aspect that can be examined in the future is the specification of the results to other branches and companies. The present study was carried without a focus on specific sectors, companies and position types. That restricts the transferability of the results to individual sectors, companies and positions. It would be interesting to investigate if similar results can be observed in specific companies and sectors.

One potential area of research could be to investigate the impact of different working time models on perceived psychological safety. This study has focused on overall permitted flexibility at the workplace, but working time arrangements can also have a significant impact on employees' psychological safety.[35]

Considering other generations and examining the impact of workplace flexibility on them is a further aspect that could be considered in future studies. In the present study, the intersection of generations Y and Z was examined. It would be interesting to investigate if similar conclusions apply to other generations such as Baby Boomers or Generation X. In conclusion, supplementing the quantitative study with a qualitative investigation could provide a more comprehensive understanding of employee psychological safety. While the current study employed a quantitative approach, a qualitative inquiry has the potential to elucidate and expand upon the findings. Additionally, a qualitative investigation could shed light on the underlying reasons for the observed outcomes and pinpoint actionable steps to enhance perceived psychological safety.

Conclusion

The work environment is constantly evolving and companies are looking for new working models to ensure they stay competitive to attract and retain qualified employees. Digitalisation and demographic change are among the most impactful factors driving this change. The discussion about permitted flexibility in the workplace has thus become increasingly important in recent years, especially due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

This study examines the question of what impact permitted workplace flexibility has on the psychological security across the intersection of generations Y and Z in the German region. It gives an overview of the current state of research and highlights in particular the new work models, the generations Y and Z, psychological security, emotional employee loyalty and performance to link these theoretical bases with the results of an empirical study. Recommendations for action are made for organisations and possible approaches for follow-up research. As the literature shows, employees' well-being in relation to evolution has only recently become an important issue for organisations.

The New Work philosophy is becoming the market's answer in bringing flexibility such as choice of working locations or hours into the professional world. Implementing components of New Work can promote benefits such as higher productivity, innovation-drivenness and better interaction with colleagues. Virtuality is an increasingly important challenge, as it is more difficult to sustain psychological safety in virtual work environments. This theoretical chapter provides the basis for primary research.

In summary of the presented research, no clear statement regarding the influence of permitted workplace flexibility on the psychological security of employees can be made across all branches and positions. Because of the high standard deviation, it is necessary to examine the questions more closely and separate the respective groups to investigate them more thoroughly in future studies. An important aspect is that the impact of workplace flexibility on psychological safety varies depending on the education level of the respondents. It can therefore be assumed that different education levels and thus different social classes, may enjoy different working conditions based on their circumstances.

It is recommended to explore additional factors that may influence employees' psychological safety as well as to seek feedback and provide training and development opportunities for organizations. Companies should also regularly collect feedback from their employees to better understand their needs and identify potential weaknesses, making appropriate changes accordingly.

This study therefore provides a foundation for follow-up work in which the specification approaches of sectors, positions or generations can be explored. Especially due to the redistribution of interests shown by the current generation, flexible working models will become more and more important in the upcoming years. Companies must deal with the challenges of the new working model and this study provides an orientation for this purpose.

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