

How flexible are our social needs?

Does the type of communication influence job engagement in flexible work arrangements?

Introduction

The rise of new technologies, like smartphones or laptops, enables employees to decide **when and where to work** as they can communicate via different types of media (**media-mediated communication**). Communication is important in order to satisfy the **basic need of relatedness** at work which is central for **job engagement** (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Contradictory results have been found regarding the ability of media-mediated communication to substitute the amount of face-to-face communication:

Current research identifies two conflicting mechanisms about the role of media-mediated communication on social resources. Displacement hypothesis argues that media-mediated communication has negative effects, whilst augmentation theory identifies positive effects on social resources. In their research on communication in private context, Ahn and Shin (2013) concluded that both theories can be true as **relatedness consists of two aspects: seeking connectedness and avoiding isolation**.

Instruments

Dimension	Scale	Source	Items	α	Example
Flexible Work Arrangements	self constructed		9	/	"I have a fixed desk/work space at my company."
Connectedness Isolation	UCLA	Russell, Peplau and Cutrona (1980)	6	.76 .78	"At work there is no one I can turn to."
Job Engagement	UWES	Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006)	6	.89	"I am enthusiastic about my job."
Perceived Social Support	HSE	Health & Safety Executive (2004)	5	.84	"I am given supportive feedback on the work I do."
Communication Use: - Media-Mediated - Face-to-Face - Type of Communication	self constructed		7	.61 / / /	"How often do you use the following forms of communication during your work: face- to - face communication, telephone, email,..."

Research Questions

- ❖ This study tried to explain contradictory results regarding the impact of flexible work arrangements (FWAs) on relationships at the workplace by the possible explanatory mechanism of distinguishing relatedness into connectedness and isolation.
- ❖ Further, it investigated the role of perceived social support and communication synchronicity.

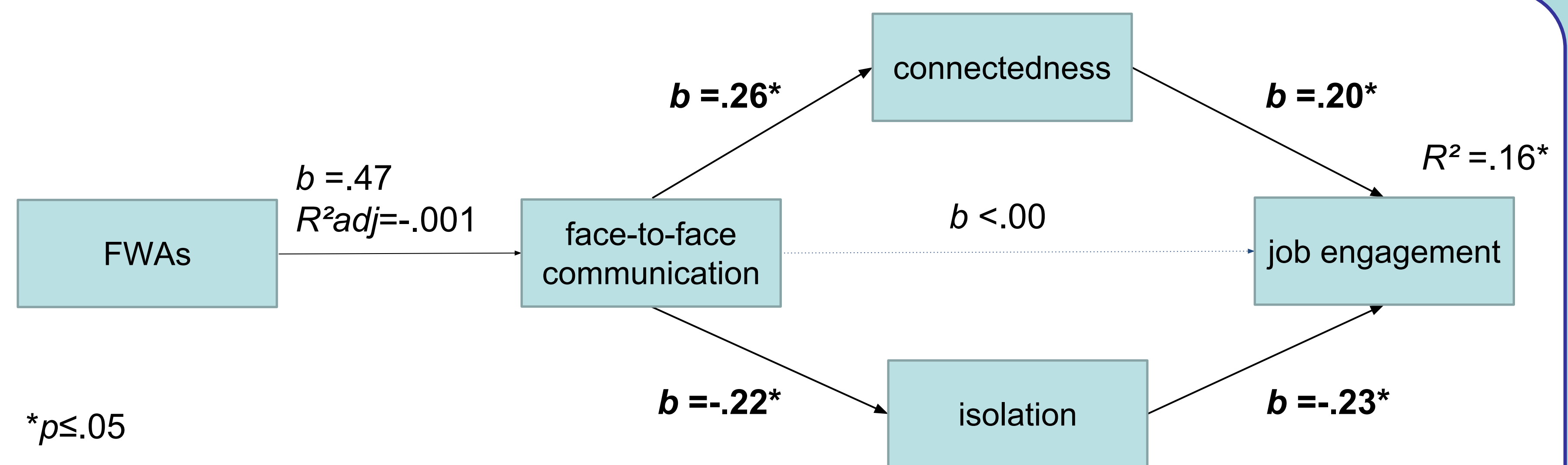
Sample

N= 324 (167 clickworkers: clickworkers.de; 25 cent/person) | ♂ = 54,3% | **Age**: 42% between 31 - 45 years (range: 18 - 64 years) **Inclusion criteria**: Person works at least 30 hours/week, is neither self-employed nor a teacher and has to communicate at work **Survey**: Fall 2017, online questionnaire in German and English **Method**: Mediation and Moderation analysis via PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013)

Hypotheses and Results

Face-to-face Communication

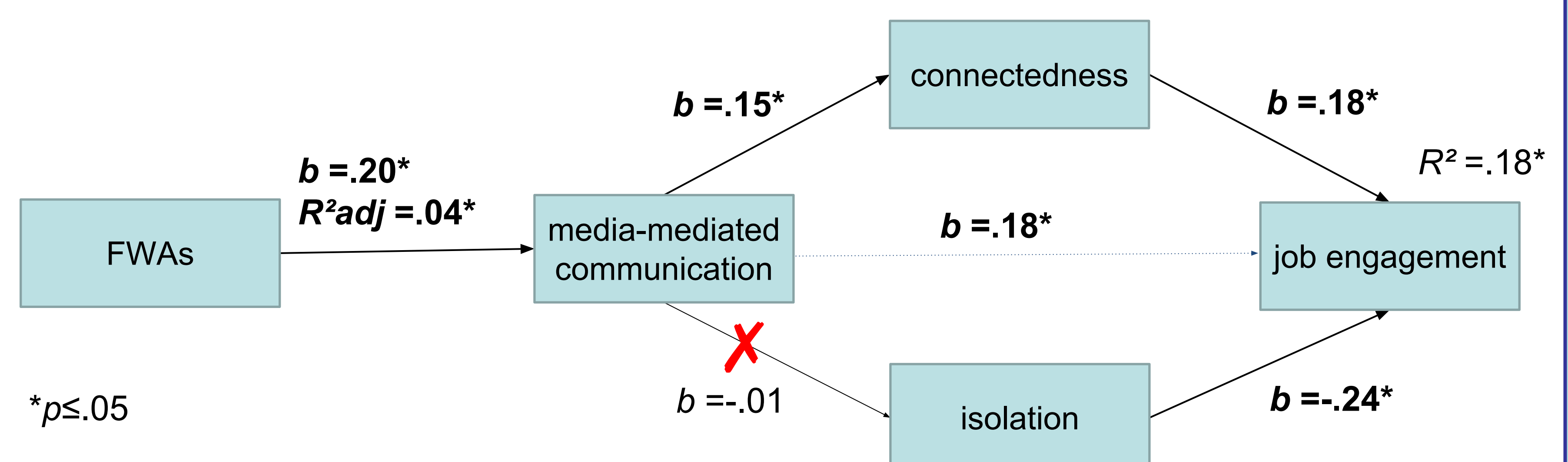
- ✗ H1a: Use of FWAs lowers face-to-face communication.
- ✓ H2a: Perceived connectedness mediates the effect of face-to-face communication on job engagement.
- ✓ H3a: Perceived connectedness mediates the effect of face-to-face communication on job engagement.



Indirect Effect: Isolation $b=.05$ [.02; .10] Connectedness $b=.05$ [.02; .10] | Total: $b=.10$ [.06; .16]

Media-mediated Communication

- ✓ H1b: Use of FWAs increases media-mediated communication
- ✓ H2b: Perceived connectedness mediates the effect of media-mediated communication on job engagement.
- ✓ H3b: Perceived isolation does not mediate the effect of media-mediated communication on job engagement.



Indirect Effect: Isolation $b=.004$ [-.03; .04] Connectedness $b=.03$ [.005; .07] | Total: $b=.03$ [-.02; .08]

Discussion

- ❖ This study revealed that **media-mediated communication** can foster feelings of connectedness but is **unable to avoid feelings of isolation**. Furthermore, our results showed that face-to-face communication is able to avoid feelings of isolation. Therefore, the results of Ahn and Shin (2013) have been **successfully applied to the work context**. Contrary to our assumptions, we found no moderating effect of neither perceived social support nor communication synchronicity. However, social support correlated with job engagement demonstrating its relevance for employees.

Practical Implications

- ❖ Practitioners as well as scientists should think about implementing **connectedness and isolation separately** in order to capture social needs at the workplace accurately.
- ❖ Thus, employers can mitigate employees' feelings of isolation by increasing face-to-face communication.
- ❖ Consequently, supervisors and HR departments should pay attention to both connectedness and isolation in employee appraisals.

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