

# Flexible Working Arrangements and Subjective Career Success: Coping Mechanisms as Mediator during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract** - The research aimed to examine the effect of Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA) on subjective career success (SCS) with the mediation of coping mechanisms (social support, active coping, and identity awareness) among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research investigated whether coping mechanisms can act as a mediator when a work policy supports their employees during uncertain times through working from home to improve long-term health and well-being. The research was conducted in the e-commerce companies in Jakarta with a convenience sample of 205 respondents. The analysis was conducted empirically using Macro Hayes to examine the mediating role of coping mechanisms on the relationship between FWA and SCS. The results indicate that FWA has a significant positive effect on coping mechanisms. Coping mechanisms (social support and active coping) have a significant positive effect on SCS, except for identity awareness. FWA does not have a direct effect on SCS. Moreover, coping mechanisms (social support and active coping) mediate the relationship between FWA and SCS, except for coping mechanism (identity awareness), which does not have a significant effect. The research emphasizes the importance of coping mechanisms, namely social support and active coping, and calls for future researchers to pay more attention to coping mechanisms as countermeasures during a pandemic-induced public health crisis.

**Keywords:** flexible working arrangement, subjective career success, coping mechanism, crisis in context theory

## I. INTRODUCTION

The 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has caused a crisis in employment and business operations that has necessitated an emergency response in all countries, including Indonesia. The increasing number of non-full-time and underemployed workers in urban areas has led to an unemployment crisis in Indonesia. Until 2020, the unemployment rate increased by 2.13%, namely in February 4.94%, August 7.07%, while previously in 2019, it increased by 0.25% (Feb: 4.98% - August: 5.23%). In 2020, the population aged 15 years and over in urban areas increased by 4,042,399 people for the type of activity “non-full workers” from February 16,275,477 people to 20,317,876 people in August 2020. Meanwhile, those who entered the type of activity “Less than Normal Working Hours” for underemployment increased by 2,677,765 from February 3,129,866 people to 5,807,631 people in August 2020 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

The increase in the number of unemployed people who fall into the Less than Normal Working Hours type confirms that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on business activities in urban areas in Indonesia. Thus, when COVID-19 was designated by the government as a non-natural disaster that required movement restrictions, the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia issued a decree that ‘employees working from home’ was the solution for companies in Indonesia to conduct business. Many organizations began to implement new ways of working to effectively adapt to these changes in work models, namely by using teleworking or working from home policies (Irawanto et al., 2021). Even Nolan et al. (2021) also state that during the pandemic and

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post-COVID-19 era, new alternatives to remote work roles have emerged, with work arrangements that use hybrid software and flexible arrangements, which emphasize that work can be done from home and office or workplace. Such changes in work arrangements have provided opportunities for many studies, such as Shirmohammadi et al. (2022), and Briscoe et al. (2012), who state that work incapacity caused by the pandemic crisis provides an opportunity to explore flexible work arrangements and important work outcomes, as well as associated coping mechanisms. Briscoe et al. (2012) argue that when employees have little control over outcomes with job stability, subjective career success as one of the functional work outcomes present in periods of job instability needs to be explored.

Several researchers have examined organizational responses to crises and how to manage the impact, as well as how individuals respond to crisis situations (Reilly, 1993; Teng-calleja et al., 2020). However, there seems to be little research that attempts to link these two levels of behavioral response with subjective career success. To fill the theoretical gap, the research uses Crisis in Context Theory (CCT). The theory is an ecological framework lens in understanding the experiences that human individuals have in achieving subjective career success during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Myer & Moore, 2006). Therefore, the research uses the lens of CCT theory to explore how subjective career success outcomes are influenced by organizational responses in flexible work arrangements through coping mechanisms (i.e., social support, active coping, and identity awareness). The researcher argues that coping mechanisms as a form of career development skills driven by flexible work arrangements will promote positive career outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research aims to examine the role of coping mechanisms as a mediator variable in the relationship between flexible work arrangements and positive career outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 1.

A crisis is defined as, “A situation that causes

a dangerous disruption on a scale large enough that it requires a rapid response” (Teng-calleja et al., 2020). Crises can arise not only within an organization but also from unexpected external events that go beyond “normal business operations”, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Reilly, 1993).

A crisis is an unusual situation that requires immediate attention, so organizations and employees need to take appropriate steps to reduce the impact of the crisis (Boin et al., 2013). In such a situation, for the organization to operate normally, managing the impact of the crisis needs to be done quickly to avoid damage to stakeholders (such as employees and customers) and infrastructure. One form of organizational response is through crisis management strategies, namely through flexible work arrangements (Teng-calleja et al., 2020; Méndez et al., 2021; Memon et al., 2023). In addition, employees can use cognitive and behavioral strategies to overcome the impact of the crisis through coping mechanisms (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005). Coping is one process between adversity and adaptation (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2016), which helps researchers explain how, why, and for whom adversity turns into adaptive consequences in the short and long term.

Myer and Moore (2006), have developed CCT which assumes that the impact and appropriate response to a crisis should be considered from a situational or ecological perspective. CCT originated from Bronfenbrenner's theoretical assumptions relating to human development and Lewin's field theory (in Teng-calleja et al., 2020). Bronfenbrenner (1995) states that individual development is the result of complex interactions of context, time, process, and person. Later, Lewin and Cartwright (in Teng-calleja et al., 2020) states that human behavior is shaped by the role of context. The implication is that in crisis situations, both theories emphasize contextual factors as important factors for understanding people's reactions and actions. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, an important external factor for employees affected by the COVID-19 pandemic is the situation created by the society and organizations where they work.

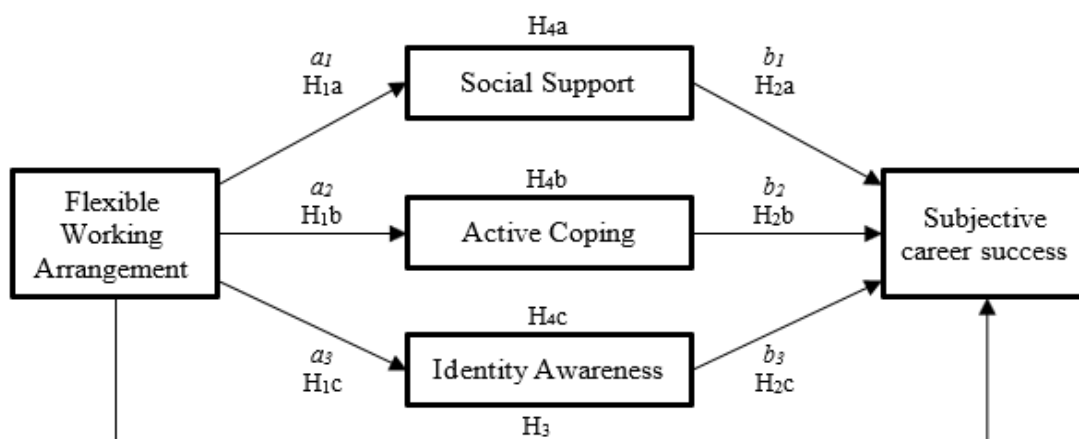


Figure 1 Research Model

For example, the Indonesian government's implementation of physical distancing aims to reduce the spread of disease. The government policy results in companies being unable to conduct their business and employees being unable to carry out normal work activities (Teng-calleja et al., 2020). These restrictions, at the societal level, shape the pandemic experience at the organizational and individual employee levels. However, the company's optimism in the work environment manifested in the organizational response may be a factor that intervenes in the impact of these social restrictions on employees. Company's actions that provide technological support and implement flexible work arrangements affect the continuity of work activities and improve employee performance. Research by Teng-calleja et al. (2020) proves that the ability of employees to work contributes to the ability of organizations to continue business operations which can then increase the capacity of society to get through the crisis.

How, during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, can flexible work arrangements affect career success when the work situation becomes uncertain? Under stressful economic conditions, it can be argued that work situations are "powerful" situations that can prevent individuals from acting in ways that are consistent with their true preferences (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Briscoe et al., 2012). The implication is that flexible work arrangements in crisis contexts are expected to adapt and provide opportunities for individuals to thrive during the uncertain COVID-19 pandemic.

In uncertain situations, flexible work arrangements are likely to motivate individual engagement in career development behaviors that can lead to positive work outcomes. As stated by Teng-calleja, et al. (2020) that flexible work arrangements are one of the organizational responses to help employees adapt to the COVID-19 crisis situation. Currently, organizations and individual employees argue that individuals need flexible work arrangements. And a more self-directed approach to support adaptation (Savickas, 1997; Teng-calleja et al., 2020). Flexible work policies typically allow employees to choose when, where, and how much they work so that they can achieve a more satisfying work-life balance (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010) and sustainable well-being at work (Méndez et al., 2021). The concept of flexible work arrangements represents career pursuits with professional requirements and qualities that lead to career success, as 'whole life' becomes the individual's main goal (Hall, 1996).

According to the Georgetown University Law Center (2006), flexible work arrangements represent various forms flexibility, namely (1) flexibility in scheduling working hours, such as alternative work schedules and related arrangements for shift and rest schedules; (2) flexibility in working hours, such as part-time work and job sharing; and (3) workplace flexibility, e.g., working from home or satellite location. Flexible work arrangements

lead to related career management that serves as an organizational response that is relevant to effective career management. CCT explains that the dynamic interaction or relationship between organizational responses and individual employee-handling behavior was a strategy to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a job-threatening situation, people tend to explore alternative possibilities, while at the same time, trying to maintain their competence. CCT as an ecological lens of work provides a framework for understanding human experience (Myer & Moore, 2006), by examining and linking organizational responses (flexible work arrangements) and individual employee coping behaviors to mitigate against other consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., career development behaviors: social support, active coping, and identity awareness).

Social support is an interpersonal relationship with people closest to you, such as parents and peers, which can reduce psychological pressure and improve quality of life (Tindle et al., 2022; Tsilika et al., 2019). Social support pertains to individuals' needs, their needs from other people close to them, and offers support to other people who need it. Therefore, social support becomes a means of sharing and overcoming different problems (Hori & Kamo, 2018).

H<sub>1a</sub>: Flexible working arrangements are related to social support.

Individuals who have adaptive advantages, which include the ability to function effectively in changing contexts (Deci et al., 2001), tend to be more proactive (Briscoe & Hall, 2006) in exploring coping strategies that focus on problems and emotions, as well as being more able to demonstrate self-awareness by initiating individual responses to real or anticipated change.

H<sub>1b</sub> and H<sub>1c</sub>: Flexible working arrangements are related to (H<sub>1b</sub>) active coping and (H<sub>1c</sub>) identity awareness.

The authors expect that coping variables, namely social support, active coping, and identity awareness will have an impact on career outcomes, namely subjective career success. Subjective career success is a positive career outcome in various situations. If someone is able to achieve success in their way, they may feel less affected by external events that can threaten their identity and self-esteem (Waters et al., 2014; Waters et al., 2014).

In the context of relationships between individual employees as a form of organizational support, Sung et al. (2013) state that social relationships outside of work can affect outcome expectations and career development efforts. Social support is divided into five components (Ko et al, 2013), namely (1) informational support, which is support that results in the delivery of messages containing information or facts, such as advice or feedback on activities; (2) emotional support,



which is an expression that includes care, attention, compassion, and empathy; (3) esteem support, which is a message that helps promote inherent skills, abilities, and values; (4) social network support, which is the existence of a social network that helps strengthen a person's sense of belonging to a particular group with similar interests or the same situation; and (5) tangible support, the real assistance in the form of providing goods and services that are physically needed by the recipient. Kundi et al., (2022) state that social support influences the subjective career success of women. Siti et al. (2022), during the pandemic in Malaysia, show that organizational support influenced subjective career success.

H<sub>2</sub>a: Social support is related to subjective career success.

When career-specific individuals are able to cope with the changes experienced by the organization, they will almost certainly perform better than other employees. Coping ability has the potential to mediate the relationship between appraisal of a situation and the resulting emotional response (Fugate et al., 2004) and increase subjective career success (Kossek et al., 1998; Waters et al., 2014).

H<sub>2</sub>b: Active coping is related to subjective career success.

Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) explain that identity discovery and role adaptation play an important role in achieving career success and adaptation. Pratt et al. (2006) explain the important role of identity awareness in improving physician performance and skills. Some researchers argue that identity awareness has an important effect on job performance, i.e., subjective career success (Lo Presti et al., 2018; Briscoe et al., 2012).

H<sub>2</sub>c: Identity awareness is related to subjective career success.

Coron and Garbe (2023) argue that flexible work arrangements affect subjective career success. Subjective career success is a form of individual response to their career (Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020), or a person's subjective evaluation process of achievement, work-life balance, health, and well-being of their personal career development (Greenhaus et al., 2008; Duan et al., 2011).

Flexible work arrangements have a positive impact on employees' perceptions of their achievements (Dikkers et al., 2010), and integration between work and organizational responses has a positive impact on work outcomes (Teng-Calleja et al., 2020). Crisis in context theory explains that organizational responses in the form of flexible work arrangements can increase one's personal resources for work, and improve work attitudes (Guan et al., 2019).

H<sub>3</sub>: Flexible working arrangements (FWA) related to subjective career success.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, individual employees are likely to behave in ways that align with organizational responses (Teng-Calleja et al., 2020). Flexible work arrangements are likely to encourage employees to develop certain career behaviors, such as social support, active coping, and identity awareness. Such behaviors are likely to result in important individual work outcomes. Therefore, researchers hypothesize that some career development skills play a role in mediating the relationship between flexible work arrangements and subjective career outcomes. Specifically, the research makes these predictions:

H<sub>4</sub>a: Social support mediates the relationship between flexible working arrangements and subjective career success.

H<sub>4</sub>b: Active coping mediates the relationship between flexible working arrangements and subjective career success.

H<sub>4</sub>c: Identity awareness mediates the relationship between flexible working arrangements and subjective career success.

## II. METHODS

The research conducts the sampling procedure between late 2022 and early 2023, when WHO had stated that the COVID-19 pandemic status was expected to be withdrawn before the end of 2023. The population in the research are employees who work at e-commerce companies in Jakarta. With the convenience sampling method, 205 completed questionnaires are obtained from employees who sample the research. The questionnaire is distributed online to the respondents by the researchers using Google Forms via social media platforms such as WhatsApp.

The research uses a survey method using a cross-sectional design. It consists of one independent variable, namely flexible working arrangements; one dependent variable, namely subjective career success; and three mediating variables, namely social support, active coping, and identity awareness.

All items are measured using a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Flexible work arrangements are measured using five items developed by Georgetown University Law Center (2006) and Hum in the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2015). Subjective career success was measured using nine items of Dyke and Duxbury (2011). Coping mechanisms in the research consist of three dimensions, namely social support, active coping, and identity awareness (see Appendix A). Social support is measured using items developed by Nabi (2001). The active coping dimension was measured using items developed by Folkman et al. (1986). Identity

awareness dimension was measured using question items developed by Briscoe et al. (2012).

The hypothesis testing method in the research is a mediation model, in which the coping mechanism is the mediator of the flexible working arrangement and subjective career success. Prado et al. (2014) reveal that mediation is a mechanism by which variable X affects variable Y, where the mechanism can be in the form of emotional, cognitive, biological, or other types of phenomena. The research uses the test suggested by Hayes (2018), called the Hayes process macro model 4. Hypothesis testing with the multiple mediator model has three criteria for determining whether the mediating variables have relationships (Hayes, 2018; Abu-Bader & Jones, 2021). The first criterion is the variation in the level of the flexible working arrangement variable (X) which significantly explains the variation in the mediation of coping mechanisms (M).

$$M_i = i_{M_i} + a_i X + e_{M_i} \quad (1)$$

The significance effect between the flexible working arrangement variable (X) on the coping mechanism variable (M) can be determined through the p-value. If the p-value is <0.05, the flexible working arrangement variable (X) has a significant effect on the coping mechanism variable (M).

Second, the mediation variation of the coping mechanism (M) significantly explains the variation of the subjective career success (Y).

$$Y = i_Y + c'X + e_Y \quad (2)$$

The significance effect of coping mechanism variable (M) on the subjective career success variable (Y) can be determined through the p-value. If the p-value is <0.05, the coping mechanism variable (M) has a significant effect on the subjective career success variable (Y).

The third criterion is the flexible working arrangement (X) variable which significantly influences the subjective career success variable (Y) with the mediating variable, namely coping mechanism (M).

$$Y = i_Y + c'X + b_1 M_1 + b_2 M_2 + b_3 M_3 + e_Y \quad (3)$$

The significance of the influence of flexible working arrangement (X) and coping mechanism (M) on subjective career success (Y) is seen from the p-value. If the p-value is <0.05, the flexible working arrangement (X) and coping mechanism (M) variables have a significant influence on subjective career success (Y).

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The demographic data of the respondents are as follows: 56% are male, 94% are undergraduates, 70% have worked for 1-3 years, 61% have not experienced a promotion in the previous three years, and 62% work as e-commerce staff.

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, and Pearson correlation coefficients of the research variables. The highest mean score (56.58) is the active coping variable, and the lowest mean is identity awareness (20.16). The correlations among the research variables are quite strong. For example, the highest correlation (0.621) occur between career identity and active coping. Table 1 shows that social support, active coping, and identity awareness—correlate with flexible working arrangement (0.375, 0.465, & 0.267) and subjective career success (0.543, 0.567, & 0.425). The results of these correlations indicate that the three coping mechanisms have a stronger relationship with subjective career success than the flexible working arrangement.

Table 2 shows that the bootstrapping method using SPSS Process Macro aims to examine the mediating role of coping mechanisms on the relationship between flexible work arrangements and subjective career success. First, the regression analysis results show that flexible work arrangements are a significant predictor of coping mechanisms for the dimensions of social support ( $b = 0.4667$ ,  $t = 5.7622$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Hypothesis 1a is supported; active coping ( $b = 0.9145$ ,  $t = 7.4927$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Hypothesis 1b is supported; and identity awareness ( $b = 0.2471$ ,  $t = 3.9467$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Hypothesis 1c

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, Alpha Coefficients, and Correlation Coefficients of Flexible Work Arrangement, Social Support, Active Coping, Identity Awareness, and Subjective Career Success

Variable	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Flexible Working Arrangements	20.24 (2.255)	1				
2. Social Support	32.49 (2.807)	0.375**	1			
3. Active Coping	56.58 (4.430)	0.465**	0.525**	1		
4. Identity Awareness	20.16 (2.088)	0.267**	0.492**	0.621**	1	
5. Subjective Career Success	35.73 (3.058)	0.321**	0.543**	0.567**	0.425**	1

Notes: Numbers on the diagonal represent alpha coefficients. N=205; \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

is supported. Second, social support ( $b = 0.3576$ ,  $t = 4.8743$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and active coping ( $b = 0.2537$ ,  $t = 4.7123$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) significantly influence subjective career success, meaning that Hypotheses 2a and 2b are supported. Meanwhile, identity awareness ( $b = 0.0440$ ,  $t = 0.4163$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) has no significant effect on subjective career success, meaning that Hypothesis 2c is not supported.

Furthermore, by controlling coping mechanisms (the mediator), the results of the second regression analysis show that flexible working arrangements are a significant predictor of subjective career success (dependent variable  $b = 0.4359$ ,  $t = 4.8354$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), meaning that Hypothesis 3 is supported. The result for the direct influence, based on 5,000 bootstrap samples, shows a significant positive influence between flexible working arrangements and subjective career success which is mediated by social support ( $a*b1 = 0.1669$ , Bootstrap CI95 = 0.0502 and 0.3459) and active coping ( $a*b2 = -0.43$ , Bootstrap CI95 = -0.62 and -0.25), meaning that Hypotheses 4a and 4b are supported. However, identity awareness ( $a*b3 = 0.0109$ , Bootstrap CI95 = -0.0443 and 0.0793) does not mediate the relationship between flexible working arrangements and subjective career success, meaning that Hypothesis 4c is not supported.

Table 2 shows that the indirect effect is “0.0109”

with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval from -0.0443 (lower bound) to 0.0793 (upper bound). Since “zero” does not fall within the 95% confidence interval, the research rejects the null hypothesis. In conclusion, coping mechanisms in the form of identity awareness do not mediate the relationship between flexible work arrangements and subjective career success that, “ $a*b$ ” is not statistically significant at alpha 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ).

The mediator, coping mechanisms for social support, accounts for around 38% [ $PM = (0.1669) / (0.4359)$ ], and active coping accounted for around 53% of the total effect on subjective career success [ $PM = (0.2320) / (0.4359)$ ]. This means that the coping mechanism variable in the research partially mediates the relationship between flexible working arrangements and subjective career success.

Testing of the path of the final model (depicted in Figure 2) indicates that flexible working arrangements are correlated with social support, active coping, and identity awareness (Hypothesis 1a-c). These three coping mechanisms are then related in different ways to the outcome variables. Seeking external support (Hypothesis 2a) and active coping (Hypothesis 2b) are related to subjective career success, but identity awareness is not correlated with subjective career success (Hypothesis 2c). In addition to the indirect effect, the flexible working arrangement is directly

Table 2 Mediation of the Effect of Flexible Working Arrangement on Subjective Career Success through Coping Mechanism of Social Support, Active Coping, and Identity Awareness

Variable/effect	b	se	t	p	95% Confident Interval	
1. Flexible → Career Success	0.4359	0.0901	4.8354	0.0000	0.2581	0.6136
2. Flexible → Social	0.4667	0.0810	5.7622	0.0000	0.3070	0.6264
3. Flexible → Coping	0.9145	0.1220	7.4927	0.0000	0.6738	1.1551
4. Flexible → Awareness	0.2471	0.0626	3.9467	0.0001	0.1237	0.3706
5. Social → Career Success	0.3576	0.0734	4.8743	0.0000	0.2129	0.5022
6. Coping → Career Success	0.2537	0.0538	4.7123	0.0000	0.1475	0.3598
7. Awareness → Career Success	0.0440	0.1056	0.4164	0.6776	-0.1643	0.2522
8. Flexible → Social → Career Success	0.3576	0.0734	4.8743	0.0000	0.2129	0.5022
9. Flexible → Coping → Career Success	0.2537	0.0538	4.7123	0.0000	0.1475	0.3598
10. Flexible → Awareness → Career Success	0.0440	0.1056	0.4164	0.6776	-0.1643	0.2522
<b>Effect</b>						
Direct	0.0262	0.0851	0.3078	0.7585	-0.1416	0.1940
Indirect*						
Social	0.1669	0.0774			0.0502	0.3459
Coping	0.2320	0.0620			0.1193	0.3628
Awareness	0.0109	0.0299			-0.0443	0.0793
Total	0.4359	0.0901	4.354	0.0000	0.2581	0.6136

Notes:

Flexible = flexible working arrangement; career success = subjective career success; social = social support; coping = active coping; awareness = identity awareness.

\*) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. Source: data was processed using PROCESS Macro Hayes model 4.

\*)  $b$  = Standardized coefficients;  $se$  = standard error;  $t$  = measure the size of difference relative to variation in sample data;  $p$  = p-value

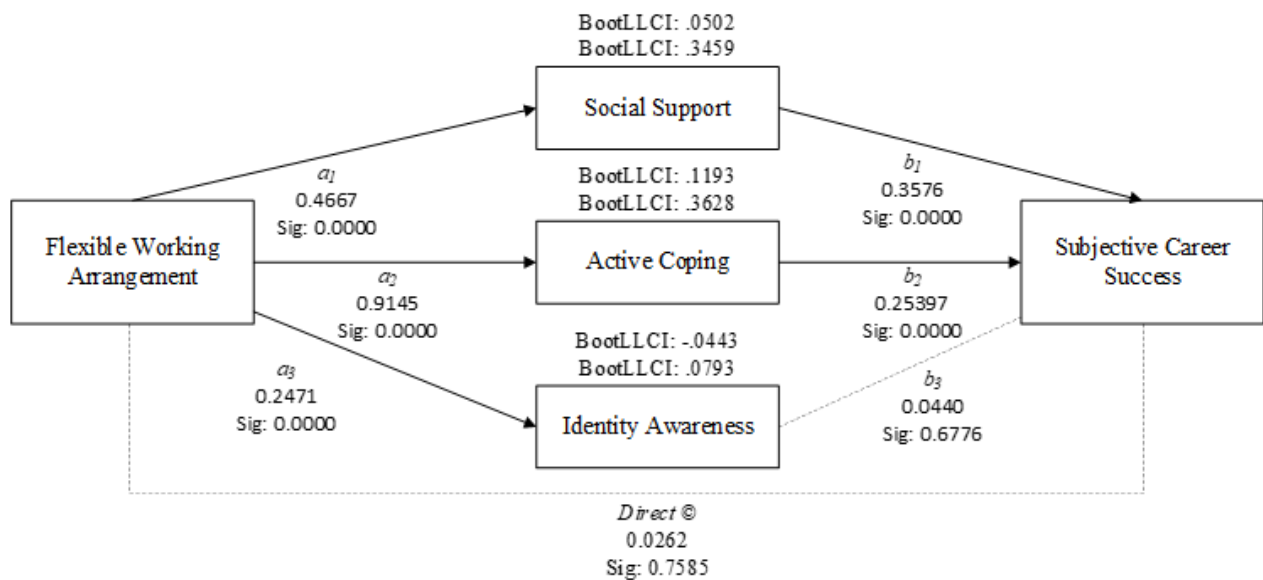


Figure 2 Simple Mediation Hypothesis Test (Hayes Process Macro)

Notes: Dashed lines represent nonsignificant paths. N = 205; \*\*\*p < 0.001

correlated with subjective career success (Hypothesis 3).

Considering the insignificance of the path from identity awareness to subjective career success, the research results indicate partial mediation of the effect of flexible working arrangements on the subjective career success variable through the mediators of seeking external support (Hypothesis 4a) and active coping (Hypothesis 4b).

Some important contributions that the research makes to the career literature. First, the findings empirically confirm that organizational responses in the form of flexible work arrangements help employees to develop coping behaviors and ultimately be able to gain career success in uncertain environments. Second, the relationship between organizational responses, and employees' individual coping behaviors shows synergy in nomological relationships with attitudes, skills, and career outcomes. Third, results indicate that organizational attitudes or responses encourage self-exploration and enable individuals to get through crises through social support, active handling of crises, and self-awareness, to achieve career success despite crisis situations.

The results support existing literature (Briscoe et al., 2012; Teng-calleja et al., 2020) on how organizations respond effectively to crises. The findings suggest that organizations' timely responses have an impact in developing and enforcing policies related to flexible work arrangements. Flexible work arrangement strategies can protect and facilitate employees in dealing with the transition to new working conditions. The organization's response provides an opportunity for employees to continue to carry out their work productively despite the crisis. When organizational and employee actions work together, the impact of the crisis can be minimized

(Boin et al., 2013). Leslie et al. (2012) find that flexible work practices generate a career premium when managers (organizational proxies) make productivity attributions. Ter Hoeven and Van Zoonen (2015) state that flexible working conditions can increase demands on employees. Workers in flexible jobs with certain restrictions must organize themselves and take responsibility for achieving work goals (such as career success). Flexible working conditions are related to coping strategies. For example flexible working conditions reinforce certain work behaviors such as continuing to work (outside the office) despite being sick.

These results highlight the idea that flexible work arrangements focus on external factors, allowing each employee to facilitate self-exploration which, in turn, enables them to seek external support and actively seek opportunities. Ter Hoeven and Van Zoonen (2015) state that flexible work practices provide choices for employees that have a positive impact on employee perceptions of job quality.

It is possible that subjective career success is not determined much by one's awareness of one's identity. Flexible work arrangements encourage active coping with seeking external support and active coping behavior, which the authors have previously predicted, although only two coping variables (social support and active coping) can predict subjective career success, but not identity awareness. When facing change in a stressful environment, people who actively engage in change are thought to be more vulnerable. The unexpected relationship in sense of identity may be due to the cross-sectional nature of data collection, where respondents report engaging in coping behavior as well as career success. A limitation of cross-sectional research is the collection of data at one point in time, where each research subject is observed



once, and measurements are made of subject variables at the time of examination. Future research can use longitudinal designs which will potentially determine whether these relationships produce different results. Qualitative data can be used to develop survey tools that will be employed in quantitative studies that are able to link organizational responses and individual behavior to other variables, such as quality of life, stress levels, employee engagement (Teng-Calleja et al., 2020), and organizational citizenship behavior (Aggarwal & Singh, 2018).

Figure 2 shows that identity awareness only correlates with flexible working arrangements and not with subjective career success. The research hypothesizes that identity awareness will be associated with greater feelings of self-fulfillment since people who are aware of their identity are able to understand their strengths and weaknesses and set realistic expectations for themselves. However, it is possible that in the crisis situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the orientation of career success is different and no longer based on subjective considerations such as the value of human resources (Stumpf et al., 2010), their assessment of self-worth and their abilities (Chang et al., 2012), the satisfaction they feel in their career (Oubibi et al., 2022), and internal achievements and inner feelings (Dai & Song, 2016). Instead it shifts to success that is objective, directly observable, measurable, and verifiable by an impartial third party (Stumpf & Tymon, 2012; Gubler et al., 2014).

The research results have practical implications for organizational leaders in developing appropriate responses to crises that affect organizations and employees. Testing the data using an ecological perspective shows that individual employee-handling behavior is largely influenced by or depends on organizational initiatives. Therefore, organizations and employees must have good communication to know the needs, concerns, and responses of each party. Thus, problem-solving initiatives and organizational responses become relevant and targeted to address employee needs. The findings may provide an opportunity for organizations to revisit their business continuity or risk management plans through flexible work arrangements, and individual employee coping mechanisms. Ultimately, the research can provide valuable insight into whether the human side of the organization needs to be given much more attention in an effort to ensure organizational sustainability.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Flexible work practices provide benefits to both employees and organizations as they are thought to facilitate occupational crisis coping skills and high job performance, yet relatively little research has explored how they affect subjective career success in crisis situations. The research seeks new insights into the relationship between flexible work arrangement use and subjective career success by introducing the

construct of employee crisis coping skills.

The research suggests that coping mechanisms in the form of social support and active coping mediate the relationship between flexible work arrangement and subjective career success. The mediation results are reinforced by the finding that flexible work arrangement does not directly affect subjective career success. However, it turns out that coping mechanisms in the form of identity awareness are not able to play a mediating role. Future research may need to add proactive personality variables in the relationship between flexible work arrangements and subjective career success.

Crisis theory in context as an ecological approach helps researchers to understand organizational responses and individual coping behaviors (coping mechanisms) in dealing with the COVID-19. The managerial implication of the research is that when there is a crisis situation, organizational intervention is an important thing to do so that employees can determine or direct their work behavior to achieve the success of both the organization and individual employees. Insights from these findings can direct efforts to minimize the negative impact of a pandemic like COVID-19 on organizations, improve programs to support employees in facing crises and increase organizational readiness to face similar crises in the future (such as economic crises, natural disasters, and air pollution).

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## Appendix A

A.1. Flexible working arrangement (adopted from Georgetown University Law Center, 2006 and Hum in the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2015).

1. I feel my working hours are flexible.
2. I can organize my working hours so that I can fulfill family responsibilities.
3. I am able to gradually return to work after the major event that happens to me.
4. The company provides a policy where two or more people can carry out one job simultaneously /job sharing.
5. I can work in locations other than the office (official workplace).

A.2. Coping mechanisms in research consist of three dimensions, namely social support, active coping, and identity awareness.

A.2.1 Social support (adopted from Nabi, 2001)

1. I take the initiative to exchange information within the company related to the problems experienced.
2. I have someone who I consider my best friend and I can share any problems, both professional and personal.
3. I get career guidance from others who are experienced in the workplace.
4. I get career guidance from my boss.
5. I get career guidance from experienced people outside the workplace.
6. I build relationships with several people who have important positions in the workplace.
7. I network with people from different departments.
8. I network with many people outside the workplace.

A.2.2 Active coping (adopted from Folkman et al., 1986).

1. During the pandemic, I have stuck to my beliefs and what I think is right.
2. When having a difference of opinion in solving a problem, I try to get the person in charge to change his/her mind.
3. I hold back my anger when dealing with people who cause problems.
4. I try to dig up information on the problems that are being experienced, not least during the pandemic.
5. When facing problems at work, I talk to someone who can do something about the problem I am experiencing.

6. I criticize myself for what I have done to become a better person during the pandemic.
7. I admit if I bring problems to my work.
8. When faced with a problem, I do not expect it to disappear or end on its own.
9. When faced with a problem, I already know what to do and put in more effort so that the problem is resolved quickly.
10. I make and complete a to-do-list for work.
11. I have changed or grown as a person during the pandemic.
12. I have a better experience at my current workplace.
13. After reflecting on myself, I have found new beliefs that can make me a better person.
14. During the pandemic, I have rediscovered the important meaning in life.

A.2.3 Identity awareness (adopted from Briscoe et al., 2012)

1. During the pandemic, I have reflected on how my past career and activities fit into my future.
2. During the pandemic, I have looked back on my career.
3. During the pandemic, I have focused my thoughts on me as a person.
4. I have reflected on my past during the pandemic.
5. I have understood the new relevance of past behaviors for my future career.