



**The Impact of Uncertain and Ambiguous Work-  
Nonwork Experiences on Employee Health:  
Can Psychological Flexibility Help?**

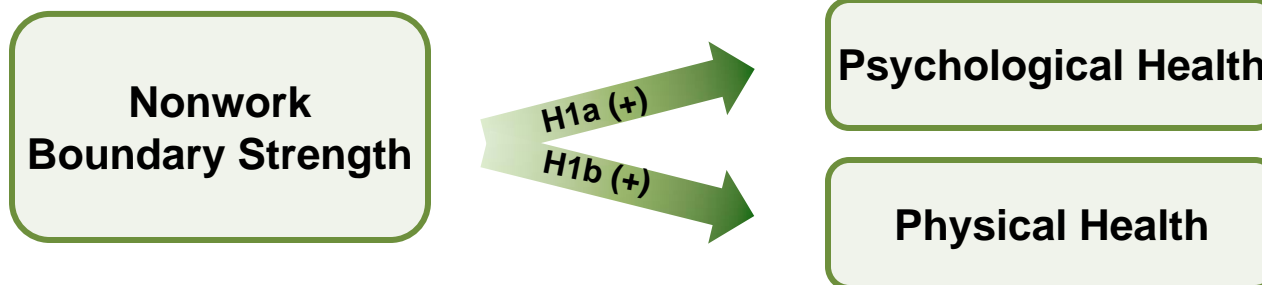
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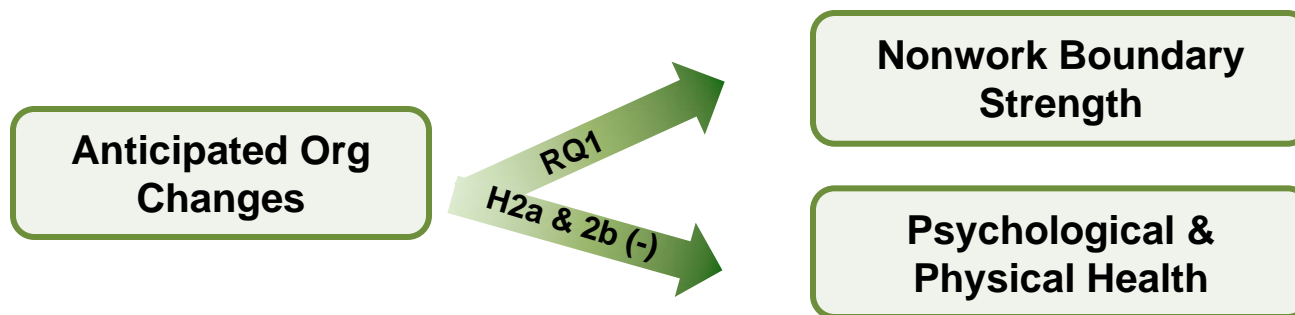
# Nonwork Boundary Strength

- **Boundary Management Theory and Work/Family Border Theory** (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996)
  - Changing nature of work and nonwork → role blurring and integration
  - Flexible and permeable work-nonwork boundaries allow work to intrude on personal life
- **Health Implications...**
  - Role strain theory: competing role demands (Kahn et al., 1964) require cognitively switching gears and can create interrole conflict (e.g., Cardenas et al., 2004; Rothbard, 2001),
  - Weak boundaries may create strain (Hecht, 2001; Louis & Sutton, 1991) or negatively impact health (e.g., Geurts et al., 2003; Hecht & Allen, 2001)
- ***H1a & 1b: Strong nonwork boundaries will be related to good psychological and physical health.***



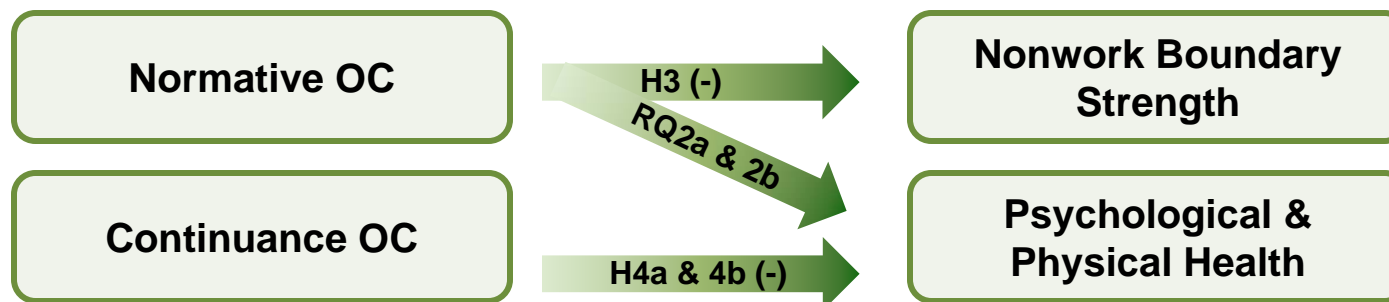
# Anticipated Organizational Changes

- **During the recession, employees have anticipated organizational changes** ("The continued economic downturn: Employee perspective", 2009)
  - Associated with job insecurity during past economic downturns (Kalimo et al., 2003; Lee et al., 2008) and during current recession ("The continued economic downturn: Employee perspective", 2009)
- **Work implications...**
  - Some may withdraw or reduce work efforts (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke et al., 2002)
  - But when there is an economic need for work, some may increase work efforts (Brandes et al., 2008; Brockner et al., 1992; Burton et al., 2010)
- **Health implications...**
  - Organizational changes were associated with strain-related complaints (Ackerman, 1982)
  - Anticipated downsizing was associated with psychological strain (Kalimo et al., 2003)
- ***RQ1: Are anticipated organizational changes linked with nonwork boundary strength?***
- ***H2a & 2b: Anticipated organizational changes will be related to poor psychological and physical health.***



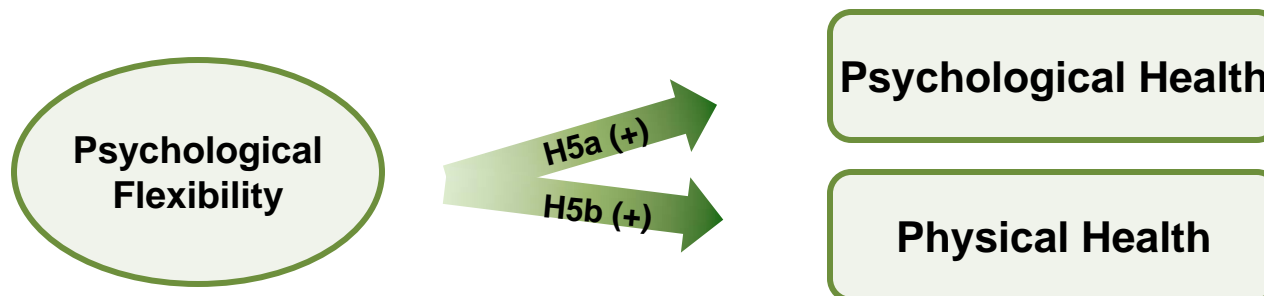
# Continuance and Normative Organizational Commitment

- **During the Great Recession, employees perceive few job alternatives** ("The continued economic downturn: Employee perspective", 2009)
  - Seek more secure career opportunities (Ashford et al., 1989; Kalimo et al., 2003; Lee et al., 2008)
  - But if few alternative opportunities, organizational commitment may increase (Brandes et al., 2008; Burton et al., 2010)
    - Continuance (CC): associated with the costs perceived to be related to leaving ("need")
    - Normative (NC): pressure to remain resulting from organizational socialization ("obliged")
- **Work implications: NC was related to OCBs but CC was not** (Gellatly et al., 2006)
- **Health implications...**
  - CC was associated with low psychological well-being (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009)
  - CC and NC were related to low self-esteem and low self-efficacy (Harris & Cameron, 2005; Meyer et al., 2002)
- **H3: NC will be related to weak nonwork boundary strength.**
- **H4a & 4b: CC will be related to poor psychological and physical health.**
- **RQ2a – 2b: Is NC related to poor psychological and physical health?**



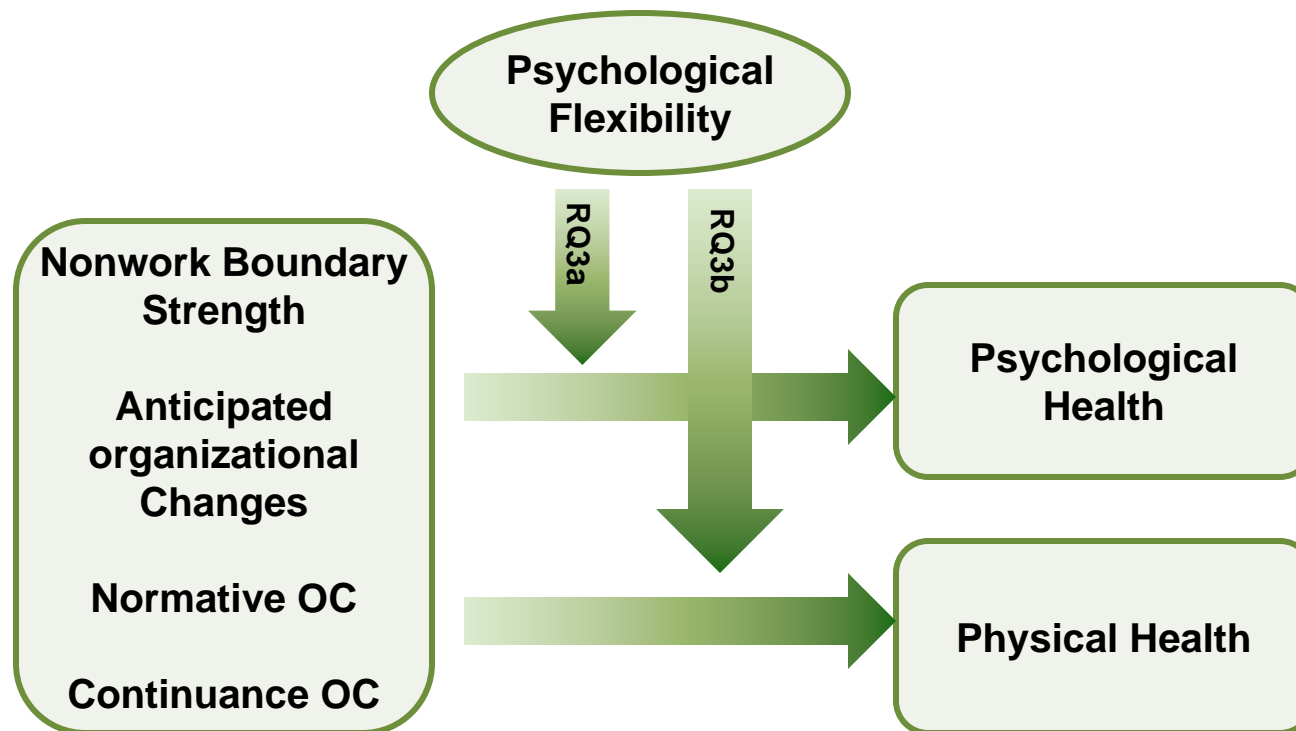
## Benefits of Psychological Flexibility

- **ACT Theory:** people can be trained to be aware of their thoughts and feelings and base their actions on their values and goals rather than unwanted internal events (Bond & Bunce, 2003; Hayes, 1987; Hayes et al., 1999)
- **Psychological Flexibility:** the ability to focus on the present moment and to persist with or redirect their behavior to the pursuit of goals and values (Bond et al., 2008)
  - No need to control or be overly guided by unwanted internal events
  - Able to redirect limited attentional resources to the present moment
- **Health Implications...**
  - Less emotionally disturbed (Baer, 2003; Hayes et al., 2006)
  - Linked with better mental health and stress reduction (Bond & Hayes, 2002; Grossman et al., 2004; Hayes et al., 1999)
- **H5a & 5b: Psychological flexibility is related to good psychological and physical health?**



## Can Psychological Flexibility Help Keep Employees Resilient?

- Psychological flexibility as a stress reduction technique can be an effective means for employees dealing with uncertain employment conditions (Jacobs & Blustein, 2008)
- Perhaps employees can cope with the stress associated with employment in an increasingly ambiguous work environment (e.g., role blurring, anticipating organizational changes; poor job mobility)?
- *RQ3a & 3b: Does psychological flexibility act as a buffer on employee psychological and physical health?*



# Methodology: Participants, Procedure, and Analysis

- Self-report survey data were collected via a convenience sample (n = 68)

Demographic	Percent
Gender	59% male
Ethnicity	85% White
Education Level	60% Graduate/Professional Degree
Industry	73% Service
Job Level	42% Professional Staff

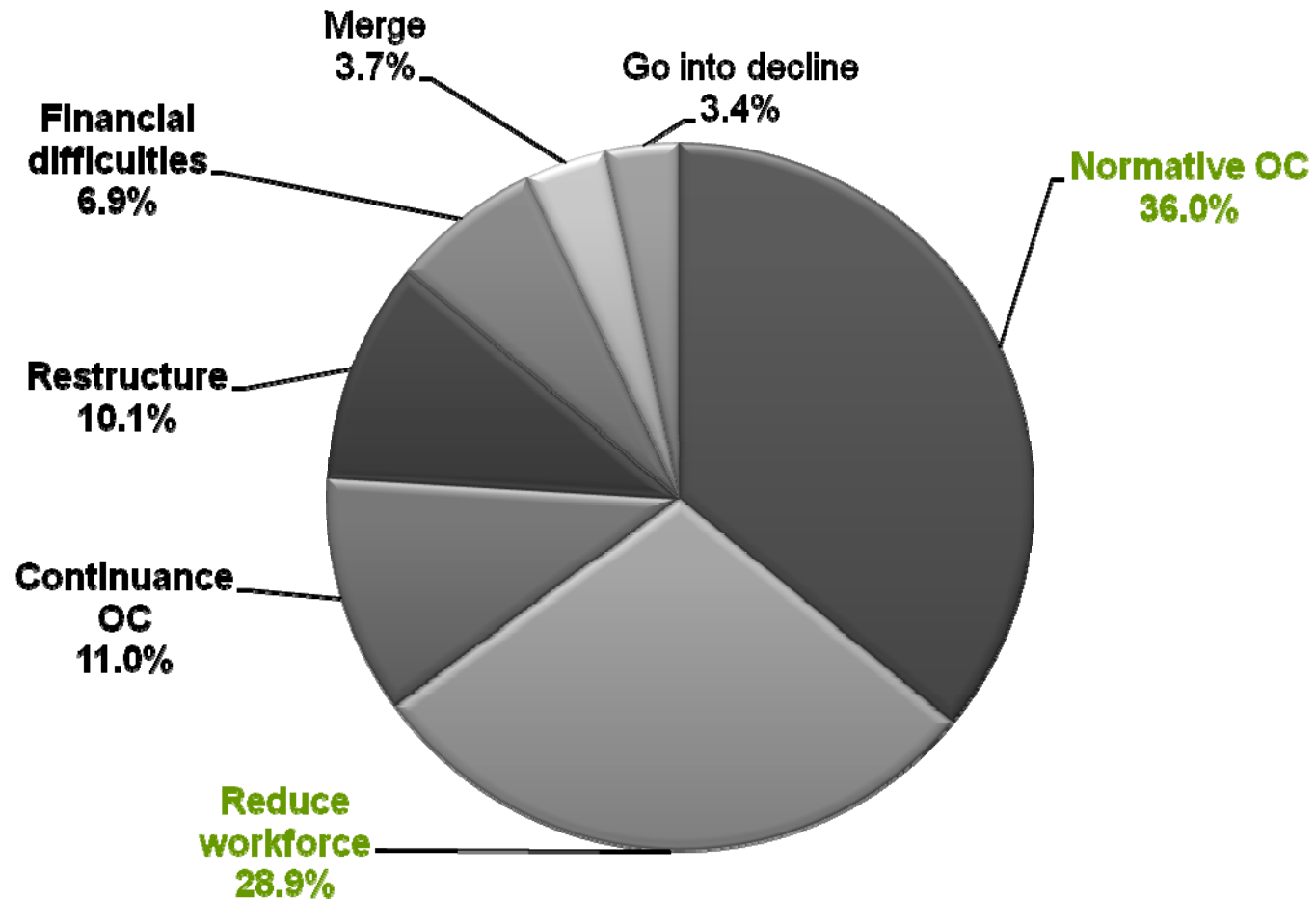
Demographic	Min	Max	Mean	sd
Age	23	62	33.70	9.38
Tenure (years)	1	6	3.80	1.57
Tenure with mgr	1	6	2.90	1.41
# Children	0	3	.75	1.05

- Partial Correlations:** controls for demographics that are highly correlated with dependent variables (e.g., age, tenure, marital status)
- Stepwise Relative Weights Analysis (RWA)**
  - Controlled for demographics (entered partial correlation matrix as the RWA input)
  - Accounts for multi-collinearity among survey measures
  - Tested for the relative importance of antecedents when predicting
    - Nonwork boundary strength
    - Psychological health and physical health
- Interactions:** due to small sample, computed Median Splits and ran ANOVAs
  - Tested for psychological flexibility as a buffer on employees' health

## Methodology: Measures

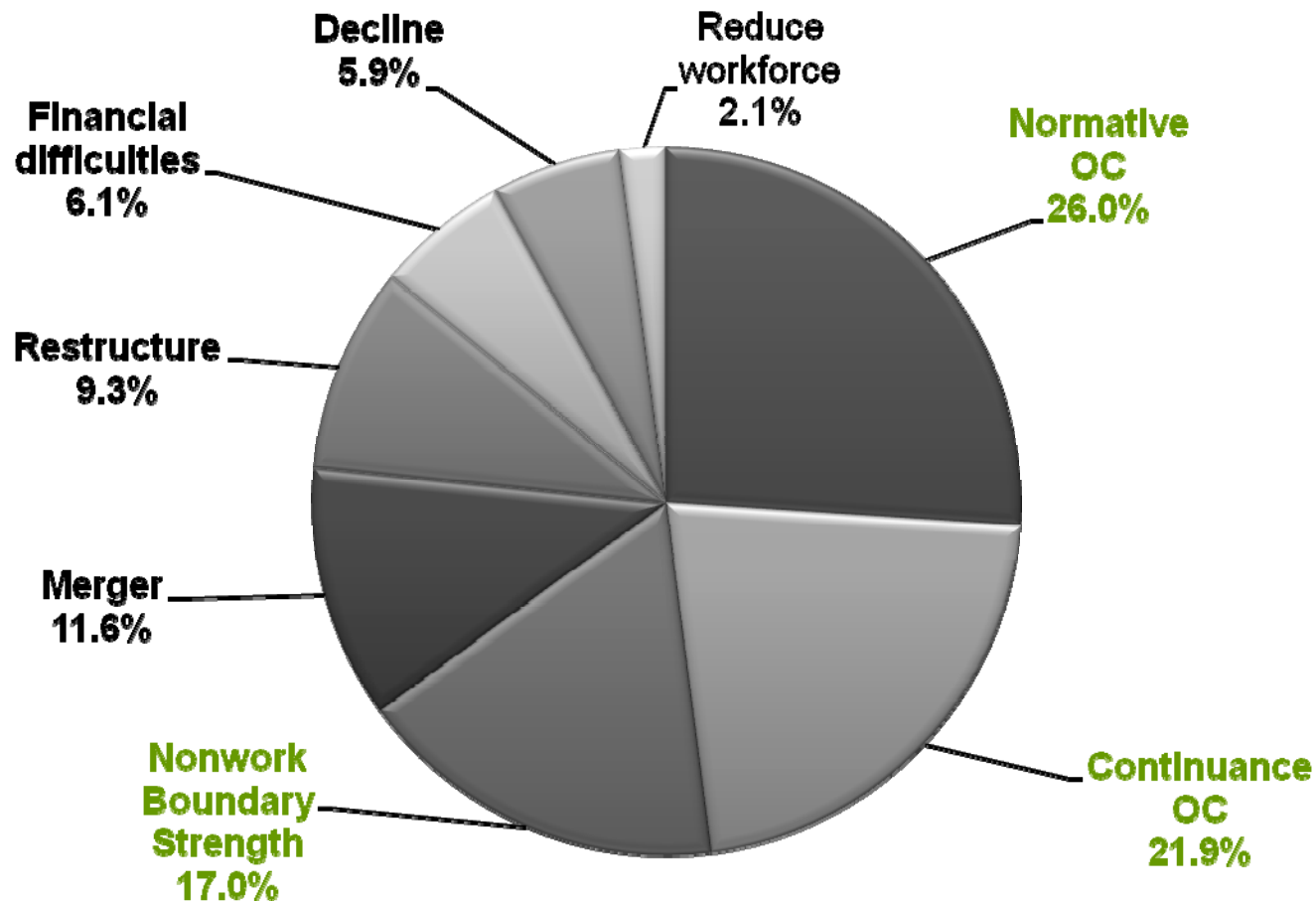
Measure	Sample Item	Response Scale	Alpha
<b>Anticipated Organizational Changes</b> (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989)	Likelihood the organization will... Have financial difficulties Go into decline Cut back the size of its workforce Undertake a major restructuring Merge with another company	1 = very unlikely; 4 = very likely	NA
<b>Organizational Commitment</b> (Meyer & Allen, 1997)	<u>Normative</u> : I owe a great deal to my organization. <u>Continuance</u> : One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.	1 = <i>strongly disagree</i> ; 5 = <i>strongly agree</i>	0.89
<b>Nonwork Boundary Strength</b> (Hecht & Allen, 2009)	It is not unusual for me to work over breakfast or dinner.	1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree	0.92
<b>Psychological Flexibility</b> (Bond & Bunce, 2003)	Despite doubts, I feel as though I can set a course in my life and then stick to it.	1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree	0.57
<b>Psychological Health</b> (Cohen, 1994)	Recently have you...E.g., Been able to concentrate on whatever you are doing?	1 = Not at all; 4 = Frequently	0.87
<b>Physical Health</b> (global)	E.g., Overall, how would you rate your health?	1 = Poor; 4 = Excellent	0.83

## RWA Results: Nonwork Boundary Strength



*RQ1: Anticipated workforce reductions were associated with strong nonwork boundaries.  
H3 (support): Higher normative OC was associated with weak nonwork boundaries.*

## RWA Results: DV = Psychological Health



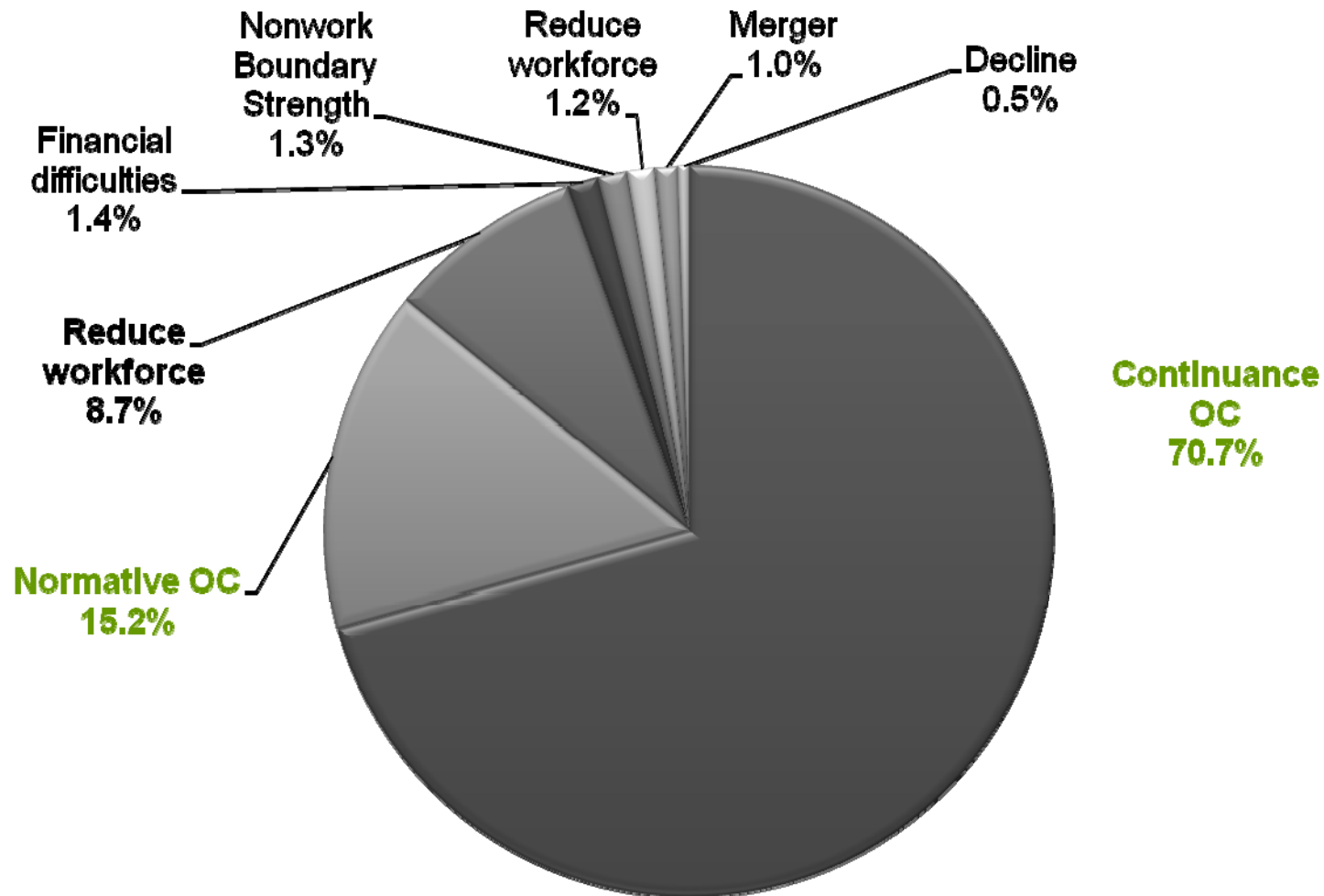
***H1a (support): Nonwork boundary strength was related to good psychological health.***

***H2a (partial support): Anticipated mergers & restructuring were weakly related to poor psych health.***

***RQ2a: Normative OC was related to good psychological health.***

***H4a: Continuance OC was weakly related to poor psychological health.***

## RWA Results: DV = Physical Health Status



***H1b (no support): Nonwork boundary strength was not related to physical health.***

***H2b (partial support): Anticipated workforce reduction was weakly related to good physical health.***

***RQ2b: Normative OC was associated with poor physical health.***

***H4b: Continuance OC was associated with poor physical health.***

# Psychological Flexibility as a Buffer

- ***H5a & 5b (supported): Psychological flexibility was associated with better psychological and physical health.***
- **Among employees with weak nonwork borders, those high in psych flexibility reported better psychological health compared to those low in psych flexibility (RQ3a).**

Psychological Health		Psychological Flexibility		Mean Difference
		Low	High	
Nonwork Boundary Strength	Weak Boundaries	2.68	3.31	.63**
	Strong Boundaries	3.15	3.26	.11

- **Among employees with high normative commitment, those high in psych flex reported better psychological and physical health compared to those low in psych flex (RQ3a & 3b)**
- **Among employees with high continuance commitment, those high in psych flex reported better psychological health compared to those low in psych flex (RQ3a).**

Psychological Health		Psychological Flexibility		Mean Difference
		Low	High	
Normative OC	Low Commitment	2.94	3.18	.24
	High Commitment	2.88	3.38	.50*
Continuance OC	Low Commitment	3.08	3.37	.29
	High Commitment	2.77	3.20	.43*

Physical Health		Psychological Flexibility		Mean Difference
		Low	High	
Normative OC	Low Commitment	3.03	3.40	.37
	High Commitment	2.65	3.22	.57*

# Conclusions and Implications

- **Weak boundaries surrounding employees' personal lives may negatively impact psychological health**
  - Weakened nonwork boundaries are very common today
  - Negative impact on health may have long-term negative consequences for organizations
  - Preferences and role identification matter
- **Should think about how the current economic context may affect boundary strength**
  - Changes that directly affect employees and organizational commitment based only on need may strengthen nonwork boundaries
  - Commitment to the organization based on obligation may weaken nonwork boundaries
- **Avoid the extreme ends of the continuum, as there are costs associated with very weak and very strong boundaries**
  - It is not desirable to have employees maintain very strong boundaries when they anticipate organizational changes that increase the uncertainty of their employment
    - Communicate how these changes will affect employees
  - Employees should not feel the need to weaken their boundaries out a sense of obligation, but more so because of engagement and affective commitment
    - Ensure employees are fulfilled and not just in a transactional relationship
  - Perhaps when employees' preferences match their situation, there would be less of a negative impact on psychological health
    - Idiosyncratic arrangements with employees may be beneficial to both parties

# Conclusions and Implications

- **Organizational changes may differentially affect employee psychological health**
  - Some changes were related to poor psychological health (e.g., restructuring, merging)
  - Some changes were related to good psychological health (e.g., financial difficulties)
  - Consider employee perceptions of how changes will affect them, whether they perceive control over changes, and their expected outcomes of the changes
- **Reasons for organizational commitment were differentially related to health**
  - Staying with an organization out of need was negatively related to health
    - Regardless of anticipated changes, when employees perceive no other job options, we may see a negative impact on health
  - Staying with an organization out of obligation may positively impact psychological health (engaged?) but may negatively impact physical health (burnout?)
- **Psychological flexibility may help employees remain resilient during times of uncertainty**
  - Among employees in uncertain or ambiguous situations, those high in psych flex were able to buffer the negative impact on their health, while those low in psych flex reported the poorest health
  - Efforts to create a healthy work environment and psychologically healthy employees may increase employee wellness during uncertain times or ambiguous employment situations
  - Training employees to be psychologically flexible can serve as a coping mechanism or stress reduction technique during uncertain economic times and in ambiguous employment situations



# Appendix

## Partial Correlations:

Controlling for Age, Tenure, Job Level, Industry, Marital Status

Variables	Perceived Job Mobility	Co. will go into decline	Co. will restructure	Co. will have financial difficulties	Co. will reduce workforce	Co. will merge w/ another co.	Cont. Org Commit.	Normative Commit.	Nonwork Boundary Strength	Psych Flexibility	Psych Health	Physical Health
Perceived Job Mobility												
Co. will go into decline	.176											
Co. will restructure	-.004	.270										
Co. will have financial difficulties	.014	.529***	.224									
Co. will reduce workforce	-.168	.247†	.535***	.238								
Co. will merge w/ another co.	.000	.155	.296*	-.067	.038							
Continuance Org Commit.	-.348 **	-.164	.046	-.205	.324*	.090						
Normative Commit.	-.326 **	-.280 †	-.113	-.137	-.057	.047	0.275†					
Nonwork Boundary Strength	-.024	.043	-.146	.178	.299*	-.187	.107	-.308 *				
Psych Flexibility	.142	.053	-.158	.162	.010	-.004	-.120	-.123	.051			
Psych Health	-.115	.017	-.154	.173	.066	-.163	-.081	.194	.213	.449**		
Physical Health	.095	.169	.069	.137	.101	-.067	-.280 †	-.172	.044	.609***	.580***	

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$



## Integration and Q&A



- **Key Themes**

- **Practical Implications**

- **Research Implications**