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The perks of being a small business
What happens when forced to work virtually?

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Abstract

During the covid-19 pandemic businesses have been forced to go completely virtual. This has ultimately changed the boundary landscape as we know it, and companies have had to swiftly respond to this unforeseen transformation. For small businesses this has meant a significant change as they are used to the perks of operating in an environment characterized by informality, fast communication, and togetherness. This study applies a boundary work perspective on the phenomenon, which allows us to understand how a firm with less visible boundaries has been affected by a shift to remote work. Earlier studies on boundary work have primarily been ascribed to human agency. This paper accounts for other important parameters such as that of time, space, and materiality. It also describes several boundaries at a time and the linkages between different boundaries, which much of previous research lacks. A case study on a small firm is conducted, where primary data is collected from retrospective interviews. The conclusions are threefold, firstly we conclude that boundaries become more distinct and visible during remote work. This is because the characteristics of the small firm depend on members existing in the same space and time, where communication is allowed to flow easily. Secondly, we see that the boundaries experienced in the firm are not due to specific actors, but rather to the virtual work itself. Thirdly, we determine that boundary work has both intended and unintended consequences and can change over time and transform into something else. Lastly, we provide managerial implications and future research for boundary work, but also interesting insights on the re-configuration of togetherness in a virtual setting.

Keywords: Small business, small business culture, virtual communication, remote work, remote flexible, boundary work, boundary management, temporal boundaries, spatial boundaries

INTRODUCTION

Since the first reported case in China in 2019, the covid-19 pandemic has speared, grown, and affected nearly every country and society around the world. It has sent ripple effects through various established societal workings, where things had to be changed drastically to be able to face the ongoing crisis. Especially so, regarding how work is organized and conducted in businesses. Offices had to be shut down, and the day-to-day work had to be moved to the home and done remotely (Kathryn Vasel, CNN Business, 2021). Studies indicate that this forced move to "working from home" has accelerated existing trends in remote work causing the business landscape to change as we know it (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021; Birkinshaw et al., 2021; Seetharaman, 2020). The benefits and challenges of remote or virtual work are reasonably well understood, where research has put emphasis on the positive outcomes regarding job satisfaction and work productivity, at the same time highlighting the challenges of conducting spontaneous or creative work through video conferencing, the loss of "water cooler" moments/small talk at the coffee machine and the absence of *joie de vivre* when working from home (Golden, 2006; Delany, 2021; Lindstrom et al., 2021; Birkinshaw et al., 2021). However, most studies of the benefits and challenges of remote work are made in larger organizations. The shift to remote work may have specific consequences for smaller organizations. In addition, studies on this topic often touch upon remote work in more general terms (e.g., pros and cons) or in regards to resilience, performance, and profit (Kairinos, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021; Hadjielias et al., 2022). In this paper, we are more interested in what happens in practice, that is how remote work affects the *organizing* of a small business.

Small businesses (broadly defined as employing 10-49 people) constitute a major part of the world's economy, as it is often described as its backbone (Muller et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged amongst scholars that there are fundamental differences between larger and smaller businesses, which indicates that previous studies do not take into account or are fine-tuned to the small business setting (Coetzer et al., 2017; Josefy et al., 2015; d'Amboise & Muldowney, 1988). Small businesses often rely on and are characterized by its informality. Informality can be defined as a "form of interaction among partners enjoying relative freedom in interpretation of their roles' requirements" (Misztal, 2000, p.46), and can be particularly prominent in employment relationships and working practices (ibid). Small businesses often display a close social and spatial presence, which can simulate an overlap in work and personal relationships as well as give rise to a greater level of familiarity in the place of work (Mallett & Wapshott, 2014). In other words, the internal communication used in such companies is based on an informal culture. Hierarchy (which is often very prominent in larger businesses) does not have as much importance or value, since the CEO, managers, and employees all can interact constantly to be able to face ambiguities, challenges and provide solutions and ideas (Mallett & Wapshott, 2014). This indicates that small businesses are quicker to respond and better able to adapt to unexpected changes due to their agile and nimble nature compared to larger businesses (ibid). Thus, small businesses are sites that produce a distinctive "fertile environment for the persistence and dominance of informal employment relations" (Marlow et al., 2010, p. 956), which often produces an appropriate response to the business context (ibid). Hence, what drives these companies

forward is their informal nature and the lack of prominent boundaries. Thus, employees in small businesses are dependent on each other in a completely different way. Being forced to work remotely due to external pressure may have important implications not only for the working conditions of employees but for how the business operates and is organized.

This paper draws upon the boundary work approach (Gieryn, 1983) to better understand what happens to small businesses when the benefit of informality is lost. Boundary work is a concept commonly used in social science to identify and understand the interactions between groups, individuals, and organizations. Boundaries are seen as lines that circumscribe entities like organizations, jurisdictions, professions, political identities, and issues, and thus can be social, material, symbolic, and/or temporal (Dawes et al., 2009; Quick & Feldman, 2014). This in turn makes boundaries especially interesting for this paper since it can aid in distinguishing entities and issues from one another by simplifying and ordering the environment, subsequently making boundaries useful for those individuals confronted by complex decisions (Watson-Manheim et al., 2011; Soundararajan et al., 2017). In addition, though boundary work is an ongoing process, it is especially visible during external triggers such as new technology (Barret et al., 2012; Lindberg et al., 2017; Langley et al., 2019). Seeing that boundaries are especially visible during such triggers, the pandemic and the following increased use of technology provides a great opportunity for studying boundary work.

As of today, there are few studies made about boundary work in settings with less visible boundaries. Langley et al. (2019) depict that most studies of boundary work are done in settings with pre-existing boundaries which people attempt to influence. More interesting are therefore settings where boundaries are initially not as evident, i.e., co-working spaces with less visible boundaries. Studies in these settings can help future managers refine their skills in boundary work. By doing a case study on a small business, which in its nature has less visible boundaries, it is possible to explore what new boundaries have been created (or made more visible), and how they have been met. In addition, most boundary studies attribute boundary work solely to human actors, and therefore only considers human agency. However, by abandoning the human-only perspective on the topic, we as researchers can study what is rare in current boundary work literature, such as what boundaries can look like when they are virtually mediated (Langley et al., 2019). In line with this, our paper explores how the digital transformation that has come with the past years' pandemic has influenced different types of boundaries.

The contribution made to organizational studies by this paper is shown by exploring how people in a small business setting create, adjust and maintain boundaries in remote work. More specifically, we look at how managers and employees (accustomed to informal interactions and dependent on social and spatial closeness) try to maintain the informal structure when such parameters have largely changed. This is achieved by using the framework developed by Langley et al. (2019) on boundary work. We show the different concepts of boundary work enacted at the case company, using a more open and comprehensive view of agency. We further account for how they change over time and the linkages between them. This sheds light on the complexity of boundary work in a social setting, as it displays the interactions among different types of actors, human as well as non-human.

The aim is to examine how an organization and its employees respond to a drastic change in their work environment and how, through the use of boundary work, they attempt to

make sense of the changing setting and work practices. This is achieved by studying the managers and employees within a small technological firm. The firm was forced to move all their work activities to a virtual setting due to the covid-19 pandemic, which meant that all personnel were working from home. This has given rise to various changes in the communication, culture, and relationship dynamics as well as various boundary work performed, which has indicated changes all over. The following report will contribute to the literature on boundary work as it aims to explain what happens to a firm with a more informal culture forced to operate solely virtually. Moreover, managerial contributions are made for small businesses, especially in a context where new technology and change are implemented or imposed. In general, it can also help in navigating the virtual context in which most companies work today, especially as many companies have chosen to take a "remote flexible" approach. This study is limited to a single case study, conducted through multiple interviews from all levels of the firm.

The research question is stated as follows: *How does working virtually affect a small business characterized by informality and less visible boundaries?*

Structure of the report

This paper is structured as follows. First, the theoretical framework is introduced, where boundaries and boundary work are presented, and serves as a foundation for analyzing the gathered data. Then, the methodology follows, describing the case study, the research process, as well as ethical considerations and limitations. Next, the empirical findings from the interviews are presented which illustrate how the case company's communication, culture, and relationship dynamics got affected by the virtual shift. After follows a discussion where the empirics are analyzed by the theoretical framework. The final chapter shows the conclusions as well as theoretical, managerial, and future recommendations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What follows is the theoretical framework, describing the notion of boundaries, boundary work, and its different categorizations, which provides a suitable foundation to understand and describe the phenomenon studied.

Boundaries and Boundary work

Boundaries, as a concept, can be explained as consisting of whatever demarcation that distinguishes one association from another (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) describe a boundary to be a "distinction that establishes categories of people, objects and activities" (p.191). Put differently, boundaries can be described as lines that circumscribe entities, for example organizations, professions, jurisdictions, political identities or issues (Dawes et al., 2009; Quick & Feldman, 2014). Boundaries are composite (Hernes, 2004) which means that they can include structural, social, symbolic, physical, mental or cognitive

boundaries, and they may be relatively permeable and flexible (Ashforth et al., 2000; Langley et al., 2019). Boundaries are created and maintained by people to simplify and order their environment (ibid). Traditionally in literature, boundaries are perceived as barriers, however, as shown by Quick and Feldman (2014), boundaries can be perceived as a way of aligning and allowing people to work across differences. Thus, boundaries can be seen and act as barriers (reinforcing separation), but also as junctures (enabling relations, connections and collaborations) (ibid). Emerging from the boundary literature, boundaries were understood as something that could be influenced through the notion of boundary work.

The history of boundary work stems from the work of Gieryn (1983) who studied the demarcation of science from non-science. Boundary work was used to describe how demarcations between the two were achieved as well as maintained through rhetoric and discursive strategies (Gieryn, 1983; Langley et al., 2019). Since then, several definitions of the concept have emerged. Boundary work can be defined as "purposeful individual and collective effort to influence the social, symbolic, material or temporal boundaries, demarcations and distinctions affecting groups, occupations, and organizations" (Langley et al., 2019, p.2). In more general terms one can describe it as a never-ending process, where boundaries are negotiated, placed, maintained, and transformed by people. Something that happens over time (Lindberg et al., 2017). Further, Quick and Feldman (2014) describe them as emergent, relational and active, rather than static. From these definitions, it is clear that boundary work is not something that exists on its own, but something that *is* done. Langley et al. (2019) mention that boundaries can be enacted through both intentional and reflexive activities, meaning that people either deliberately shift or defend boundaries, or they are carried out without specific effort and rather as a response to an external trigger. The role of agency varies in existing research, but studies tend to focus on either intentional or reflective boundary work enacted by humans (ibid). Boundary work is especially interesting for collaboration dynamics as well as inclusion and exclusion dynamics, that in turn can affect work practices, learning, and effectiveness in organizations (Lindberg et al., 2017). Studying boundary work as a theory can provide conceptual tools as well as ideas that develop collaboration and integration in organizations. It can help those who work in multi-boundary conditions, and it can help managers who construct and monitor boundary activities. Further, it is relevant for project managers, who work in settings where boundaries are constantly reworked (Langley et al., 2019).

Categorizing boundary work

As Langley et al. (2019) provide a literature review of multiple papers in the field of boundary work, it is perceived suitable to serve as a foundation for this paper. Three different types of boundary work are presented, and by using these categories one can better understand conflict, collaboration, and integration. First, *competitive* boundary work relates to an actor gaining some kind of advantage over others. Second, *collaborative* boundary work relates to boundaries that enable collaboration, and third, *configurational* boundary work involves ensuring activities in certain groups are either brought together or separated, to balance competition and collaboration. One usually says that boundary work rarely is completely

competitive or collaborative. One type of boundary work can also influence another, which indicates that there often is some sort of interaction between them (Langley et al., 2019).

Competitive boundary work

Competitive boundary work can be seen as working *for* boundaries. It centers around how individuals construct, extend or defend boundaries to make themselves unique compared to others. This is done by defining an exclusive territory, for example a profession, where they appear to have some sort of advantage over their peers. This type of boundary work is in its nature self-oriented and is used to gain power, social position, status or obtain resources (Bourdieu, 1977; Langley et al., 2019). An example of this is the legitimization of either including or excluding an individual's membership in a group. Essentially, this type of boundary work involves how groups of people construct boundaries that provide legitimacy, power, and privilege on themselves. The first sub-category, *defending* boundaries, includes efforts made by people to make themselves superior to others, while at the same time creating practices that enhance their claims (Langley et al., 2019) such as in the examples of ethical or not (Wainwright et al., 2006) or scientific or not (Gieryn, 1983; Garud et al., 2014). In the study by Allen (2000), nurse managers engage in demarcating their work from others when establishing the nurses' superiority, expertise, and experiences from that of assistants and support staff. *Contesting* boundaries demonstrates the friction generated by boundary work between groups such as high-status groups perceiving their superiority as natural, while other groups attempt to blur out these boundaries to justify their positions, where they go to great lengths to justify these positions (Sanders & Harrison, 2008; Bach et al., 2012; Langley et al., 2019). *Creating* boundaries consists of two aspects. First, groups make use of boundaries to show themselves as valuable and influential, such as to connect with other powerful groups (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005; Edlinger, 2015;). Second, there are groups or organizations with a social mission that involve opposition to dominant strands of society. This includes trying to minimize such connections with those parties (Farias, 2017).

Collaborative boundary work

Collaborative boundary work, as opposed to the first category, serves to promote coordination and communication while working towards a common goal, despite possible differences. Here you work *at* boundaries (Strauss, 1978; Langley et al., 2019). When people work together frequently, this usually indicates a growing mutual understanding about who will do what. So, though boundaries can raise tensions, they may also be important for accomplishing collaborative work (Langley et al., 2019). As Quick and Feldman (2014) point out, boundaries are many times seen as barriers, but can just as well be junctures, drawn on to enable instead of inhibit collaboration. Furthermore, collaborative boundary work often means negotiating or downplaying boundaries. In essence, this category is about how groups negotiate or build connections at boundaries, to be able to achieve something (Langley et al., 2019). In literature, the largest group of collaborative boundary work falls into the subcategory *negotiating* which studies socially constructed boundaries. Often, this means pragmatically agreeing on

something that should be accomplished, such as what work needs to be done (Langley et al. 2019). This paper adopts the same view on negotiation as that of Langley et al. (2019), meaning that alignment (Quick & Feldman, 2014) and translation (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Quick & Feldman, 2014) are considered negotiation boundary work. Alignment is the process of recognizing the differences in perception, whereby these are attempted to be worked around, in order to find new shared interests to pursue. It is used to bring people together through mutual interests and synergetic goals (Langley et al., 2019). Translation stems from different kinds of understandings, and it can be defined as working across them (Carlile, 2002; Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Quick & Feldman, 2014). Further, *embodying* is another way to perform collaborative boundary work. This includes how people practice collaborative work through their being and doing, between (Ellis & Ybema, 2010) and within (Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011) organizations. In this category, there are boundary subjects (or objects), where boundary work, through agency, can be developed through the activities of individuals who play these roles. In their actions, they can reduce tension that threatens to harm collaboration (Ellis & Ybema, 2010), and mobilize differences to form their own distinctive roles in new contexts (Levina & Vaast, 2005). *Downplaying* is another concept of collaborative boundary work. In the study of healthcare practitioners, asking the question of how collaboration is produced across boundaries, Meier (2015) concluded that when creating a sense of "we", boundaries can be dissolved, when having a relational approach to collaboration that focuses on the importance of trust and familiarity.

Configurational boundary work

Configurational boundary work, or working *through* boundaries, is what affects the interaction patterns of future boundary work. This is done by actors or institutions to reshape the boundary landscape through new pattern interactions. In other words, people such as managers, leaders, or institutional entrepreneurs work from the outside of current boundaries to reshape or organize the boundaries that influence others' behaviors (Langley et al., 2019). Boundaries can serve two purposes. Either it can join, or it can divide. If used carefully, it can lead to positive organizational change and effectiveness. One example is *arranging* boundaries from the outside i.e., by an external party, where the practices within the boundary are transformed (Langley et al., 2019). According to Akkerman and Bakker (2011) transformation leads to changes in practices and might even create a new "in-between" practice. Transformation can be viewed as a result of being confronted with an issue or a breakdown that is not easily overcome, but where the practices and actions that caused the issue need to be reconsidered. *Buffering* involves buffering boundaries through the creation of boundary organizations, where this type of configurational boundary work maintains competitive and collaborative forces in paradoxical equilibrium. This means boundary shaping is done to accommodate collaboration among organizations from actors or social worlds that are incompatible and have competing interests. Hence, spaces are created to mediate or resolve such relations, which are then labeled "buffering" boundaries (Mørk et al., 2012; Perkmann & Schildt, 2015; Langley et al., 2019). Furthermore, *coalescing* boundaries studies how elements of existing settings can be integrated into new or expanded ones. Here, established boundaries are reshaped, by coalescing already

established activities into a new domain or space. This is a way of using configurational boundary work to bring groups together, who potentially have competing goals and perspectives (Frickel, 2004; Howard-greenville et al., 2017). Finally, *boundary blurring* is another concept that affects patterns of interactions. It can be used for both competitive and collaborative boundary work since both similarities and differences can be blurred with the aim to achieve a certain future outcome (Langley et al., 2019). Boundary blurring, in practice, can be used intentionally or unintentionally to blur lines of a boundary to reduce so-called boundary distance between different actors (Lindberg et al., 2017; Langley et al., 2019).

In essence, boundary work gives insights for managing and organizing in a world in which our organizational life is more and more characterized by digital and fast-shifting settings, as opposed to research that views organizations as codified and stable (Langley et al., 2019). With the use of boundary work, this paper hopes to increase the understanding of organizations, not with a traditional lens which, as mentioned by Langley et al. (2019) only focuses on structures with well-defined boxes such as professions and occupations, but with a more nuanced view that considers boundaries and the reasons behind them. More specifically, about peoples' and collectives' sayings and doings, as they invest in boundary work (ibid). Consequently, with these categorizations, boundary work is considered to be a suitable theoretical framework as it helps in describing the change process the case company experienced during remote work. This means that by making sense of the boundary work and boundaries enacted, we can also make sense of the organizational change. Using boundary work also provides the opportunity to contribute to unexplored areas in research as well as it paves way for interesting managerial implications.

METHODOLOGY

The following section describes the methodology of the case study, such as the research approach, data collection, and setting. It also displays limitations of the study and ethical reflections and considerations.

Research design

To be able to answer the research question, and understand how working virtually affects a small company characterized by informality and less visible boundaries, a qualitative research approach is utilized. According to both Hinings (1997) and Silverman (2019), a qualitative research approach is deemed appropriate for this study since it enables the investigation of *how* a phenomenon is understood and perceived in a social setting. It also aids us in getting in-depth data and information about the case study. This further justifies the use of this method. As this is a single case study, the aim is to understand what boundary work is performed in a small business when a drastic change to work virtually is experienced, and how (through boundary work) they make sense of it. Hence, the choice of having a case study as research method is suitable, since it allows for comprehensive and in-depth insight in one context regarding a specific phenomenon, which can later be used to make generalized insights and conclusions

applicable in other contexts (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Silverman 2019). Even though case studies have received criticism from many scholars, it has likewise been recognized as a legitimate method in research since general conclusions can be obtained (ibid). In addition, we have utilized a grounded theory approach to process the empirical findings, which according to Silverman (2019) as well as Martin and Turner (1986), is appropriate to use when conducting qualitative research. Hence, with the aid of the grounded theory approach, excessive data has been processed and different patterns have been located in the empirical findings, which has allowed us to develop codes and themes that have steered our choice of theory.

The setting of the case study

As mentioned, the qualitative research design is applied through a single case company named Cloud AB (*pseudonym*), which has gone through an organizational change in its work practices, going from solely operating in the office, to working completely digitally, to then ending up with a hybrid variant named remote flexible. The case company studied is a sales company that employs 25 people and has 5 external software developers. The company sells a cloud-based solution for finding customers to other businesses (i.e., a B2B). Thus, they engage in a lot of communication with potential and existing customers. Moreover, the company has several sales teams, which include the roles Sales Development Representative ("pre-sales"), Sales Representative ("sales"), and Customer Success Manager ("customer success"). Each team has a "team lead", making sure that they reach their goals. The team leads in turn have a lot of communication with the top management. Within the sales teams, they rely a lot on the communication between the different roles, as pre-sales find customers, sales have meetings to understand the customers' needs, and customer success takes care of and helps customers that use their solutions. Because of this, working closely with each other has been favorable for the teams and the organization as a whole, and it is particularly interesting to understand how this communication has unraveled in a virtual setting.

As a small business, they are characterized by their informal communication and culture, working closely together, and communicating a lot not only about work-related issues but also personal matters. They themselves have described how, normally, they engage in many activities together such as having lunch together or going on walks, and that there is much small talk among everyone in the company. Due to the covid-19 outbreak, they went from sitting side by side at the office to working completely digitally from home, going from one "extreme" to another which of course has meant several changes in communication and culture. Today, they work remote flexible, meaning that they sometimes are at the office and sometimes they work from home. Having the possibility to choose which days to go to the office, there is a mixture of virtual and physical communication.

To conclude, Cloud AB is considered an appropriate choice and context for studying the research topic since it provides an environment where informal culture and communication are very prominent. Thus, studying this case company offers an opportunity to receive in-depth, multilayered information to increase our understanding of what happens to a small business characterized by an informal nature, needing to shift to a virtual environment, and how through the use of boundary work they make sense of themselves and their work environment.

Data collection methods and procedures

Primary data has been collected through interviews with various managers and employees at different levels at Cloud AB. The interviews have been conducted through the digital platform Zoom, and make up the majority of the data collected. Silverman (2019) and Kvale (2006) recognize interviews as an efficient way of collecting qualitative data, as it enables the researchers to gain deep knowledge about what people think about a certain topic. However, it should be noted that interviews do not give direct facts, but rather a representation of experiences, or an account of a certain individual's views and opinions (Silverman, 2019). As interviews are often used in qualitative, exploratory research and allow for in-depth knowledge, and enable the researchers to get firsthand information from managers and employees dealing (in our case) with virtual workspaces, it is deemed relevant for this study to make use of. Further, many researchers have made use of interviews as a reliable method for studying boundary work (see e.g., Wainwright et al., 2006; Bach et al., 2012; Hobson-West, 2012; Edlinger, 2015). This makes us confident that interviews are not only enough but highly suitable for this study. In addition, the interviews cover concrete examples, described by the respondents, which represent how the company has been affected by the change in practice.

Eighteen people were interviewed and the interviews lasted for around 30-45 minutes. Every respondent was asked to elaborate on their experiences with the communication and culture within the company. Interviewing several people in a small business is perceived as suitable as they are a tight-knit group where daily communication is a big part of the activities carried out. Hence, the selection of both managers and employees. As the purpose of the study is to understand the interactions, and thereby boundaries, between people within an organization, it is relevant to study the experience of several parties. Gathering information from several people in an organization provides the opportunity to unravel interesting details of the interplay between them, such as who takes part in the communication practices, what actions are (or are not) taken, and what the effects are on the organization. Selecting only managers or only employees, could lead to biased information and would not give a complete picture of the communication and work practices that defines a small business. Interviewing people at different levels of the organizational hierarchy, as well as receiving information about the same practices from several viewpoints, is a way of assuring reliable information, as in line with what Silverman (2019) argues. Furthermore, the number of interviews, according to Silverman (2019), depends upon the research problem's depth, and so, we argue that the various roles the respondents have as well as 18 out of 25 people have been interviewed, gives us data that is relevant for our analysis.

According to Malhotra et al. (2012), interviews should be conducted in a location of convenience and an environment of comfort for the people involved (ibid). All interviews were held through Zoom, which was preferred by the organization, as it is fast and efficient, and no travel was required for either party. Several interviews were also conducted during a time when there were still restrictions due to the ongoing pandemic, which further made it suitable to hold interviews virtually. To further increase the comfort of the participants, the interviews were held in Swedish and later translated to English. Furthermore, steps were taken to maintain the

confidentiality of the participants. The information collected is used for the purpose of the research only, which all participants were made aware of. The case company, as well as the people taking part in the interviews, has wished to be anonymous. Thus, they have not been named. Instead, information such as profession has been presented. This has not been to any disadvantage to the study, rather, the conclusions have brought value all the same. Further, all interviews were recorded to make sure no information was forgotten or excluded. This was done with the consent of everyone participating in the interviews.

A semi-structured approach was used when conducting the interviews. This means that the questions asked were predetermined, but had an open-ended twist to them. In other words, set questions were asked, but probing was used to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon investigated. Silverman (2019) argues that flexible semi-structured (as well as open-ended) questions have a higher chance of gaining more considered answers compared to e.g., survey-based approaches, and thus will provide a better look/access into interviewees' interpretations, understandings, views, opinions, and experiences. Saunders et al. (2016) argue that semi-structured interviews allow the researchers to follow the interview guide, but also change the order of the questions during the interview to fit that specific situation. Hence, the reason why a semi-structured approach is deemed appropriate for this study.

Prior to the interviews, a pilot interview, also called a pretest, was conducted to determine the relevance and quality of the interview guide. It also made sure that all questions are understandable and that everything is in order for a smooth interview process (Malhotra et al., 2012; Silverman, 2019). This pilot interview was held with one person in the organization and lasted for 40 minutes. Based on this, it was decided that some questions were to be improved and others removed. In addition, secondary data in the form of literature, academic articles, and journals were used as a means for providing understanding and information about the background of the chosen topic, as well as working as a base for the interview questions. To collect the secondary data, the primary source was the digital library of the School of Business, Economics and Law at the University of Gothenburg. Also, Google Scholar was a frequently used database for finding relevant information.

Data analysis methods

According to Silverman (2019), the use of theoretical frameworks and concepts to filter through and analyze gathered data is of importance. Therefore, a grounded theory approach has been utilized to process the empirical findings of this study. Additionally, Silverman (2019) as well as Martin and Turner (1986), argue for the use of grounded theory when conducting a qualitative study, which is another justification of the suitability and use of the theory for this particular study. A grounded theory approach allows for extensive processing of gathered material as well as helps to detect and find various patterns in the empirical findings. This will in turn aid in developing codes and themes which will guide the process of selecting a suitable theory for the study (Silverman, 2019; Martin & Turner, 1986). Thus, through the coding process several levels of codes were developed, which were then worked into overarching themes that served to produce some kind of idea or notion of an appropriate theoretical concept/framework. Through the coding process, patterns were found in the collected data,

which in turn were compiled into themes. More specifically, the coding process was done in a three-stage process: first-level coding where 60 codes were identified, second-level coding including 20 codes, and finally third-level coding where five codes were defined; *losing togetherness, trying new ways to small talk, challenges in connecting, more distinct groups* and *remote flexible*. When coding in the final step, it was possible to see occurring patterns. In turn, the defined codes showed similarities with the theory of boundary work, which then was suitable for the analysis of boundaries within the organization. Boundary work was then used to increase the understanding of how the organization had changed as a result of working virtually. From that, the theory and the third-level coding generated themes used in the discussion, which helped answer the research question. Finally, the data of the report is presented in a way where excerpts of interview answers are showcased. This is done to illustrate and highlight the following argument made since it is important to demonstrate to the reader explicitly why some conclusions and assumptions have been made.

Limitations of the study

One issue for this report is the currently limited research on the topic. The effects of such a drastic change in the work environment (moving all communication and work practices to a completely virtual setting) is a relatively new phenomenon and something that has been seen during the past years' pandemic. Thus, the difficulty in gathering information about similar situations. This especially applies to small businesses. On the other hand, what makes this study interesting is the opportunity to explore a new phenomenon that is highly relevant for managers and organizations today, as it has fundamentally changed the way most organizations work. When this thesis is written, we have been living in a pandemic for almost two years, which allows managers and employees to evaluate and think back on how communication has played out during this time. Thus, the possibility to ask relevant questions is connected to the aim of the study. Furthermore, this paper is a case study and therefore limited to only one company. This is, however, as stated by Silverman (2019) adequate when making a qualitative study, as opposed to quantitative studies where one needs to consider several populations. Hence, it is possible to draw valid conclusions that can help managers and other stakeholders in similar situations. Finally, it can be seen as a limitation to have conducted only interviews and no observations, thus not being able to follow the company in close interaction. However, this was considered at the beginning of this research, and in line with Silverman (2019) interviews were perceived as more suitable and adequate for this paper. As mentioned, the interviews display concrete examples (i.e., what happens in practice). Also, it is a method used by several scholars conducting similar research on boundary work.

EMPIRICAL SECTION

The following chapter shows the empirical findings from the interviews, divided into five themes. More specifically, it displays how the push to virtual-only affects the communication format and culture of a small business characterized by informality and less visible boundaries.

The last rubric explains findings from their current remote flexible approach, showing how remote flexible has allowed the company to grow and improve in unexpected ways, such as re-creating togetherness in small teams, called "pods".

Losing togetherness

A drastic shift to online-only meant that Cloud AB's culture changed, and they lost much of their togetherness. One of the major benefits of working in a small business is the possibility to get hold of colleagues spontaneously, to discuss urgent matters, or voice ideas that can lead to development such as the start of new projects or initiatives. It is a natural, and crucial, part of their informal nature. One respondent emphasized the quick communication exchange at the office which, normally, leads to solving many issues and thereby makes the company grow;

> I think what drives us forward today is quick insights. For example, if I'm coming directly out of a meeting and realize that there is an issue, I can get a hold of some colleagues quickly, who can influence someone at management-level, to discuss "I noticed this today, do you see it as an issue? Okay, what can we do about it? Who needs to be involved?" We are very fast. We can notice today that there is an issue and then on Thursday we have a meeting with the top management to try and solve it. (Sales Representative)

This was argued by several other respondents, whereby they emphasized the loss of creative work as a result of having to communicate through digital means only, and therefore no longer experiencing any spontaneous get-togethers.

> During the height of the pandemic, we lost the sense and notion of driving the company forward because these spontaneous get-togethers did not occur, which is often when we come up with great ideas and solutions, where you just can grab someone spontaneously and discuss various matters. It is often the case that you have something that you are thinking about, that you have just come out of a meeting and got an idea, and you just grab a person to sort some things out or come up with some smart solution quickly. But if you don't have that opportunity, you often forget about it. (Sales Specialist/Team Lead)

In turn, the flow of communication started to become more formal, since talking to each other came as a result of deliberate actions, not from natural and spontaneous exchanges. When referring to how things usually played out at the office, as opposed to communicating virtually, respondents said;

> Two minutes before a meeting you can talk to someone quickly to raise a concern instead of [when working from home] asking "can I book a meeting with you later?" and it becomes super serious and you kind of need to have an agenda for that web meeting. Compared to just grabbing someone and going to a room, randomly, it's like

> "something just hit me, and it might be something we can discuss" and you can decide there and then if it is necessary to book a meeting with an agenda. (Sales Representative)

> In the office it is more natural to do various tasks in between meetings that move the company forward - that is not the case at home. There is no natural flow of communication that is exchanged. (Customer Success Manager)

The informality that used to be deeply rooted in their daily communication practices, was diminishing. Communicating in a digital landscape meant setting meetings for specific purposes during limited time slots, and if wanting to consult with others on a matter people needed to raise that concern explicitly and visibly in these meetings. This came to be a challenge for the organization. Further, another challenge included fewer people speaking up in the organization. As previously mentioned, an important aspect of the small business culture is idea sharing, which often leads to the improvement of the organization. People sit closely together in a small office space, sharing thoughts and opinions on how to bring the company forward. One interviewee put it like this;

> To raise different issues and then solve them - that happens much more easily in a physical setting. To just be able to vent about things, and push the company forward because you dare to speak up. (Head of Sales)

When asked about what struggles they had faced when working in a virtual setting, several people mentioned the difficulty in speaking up and sharing opinions. This was brought up by one respondent who said;

> There are these questions that I might not ask, but that I probably would ask if we were at the office. (Sales Representative)

On the other hand, many people said this issue did not affect them personally. They had, however, noticed a difference in other people's behaviors.

> I would say that the biggest difference from the physical meetings is it felt like some people did not dare to voice their opinion or say what they felt about something. Because as soon as you said something it got dead quiet, you alone were showing on the screen, so you became very exposed. And so, people didn't say what they were thinking, or didn't express themselves as well. So that was a challenge. It is difficult for those who have a lot of good ideas that they want to present, to make yourself heard, because you really have to talk at the same time as someone else. So that was a problematic pattern that I noticed, not really when it comes to myself, but surely for a lot of other people. To dare to take up that space. (Head of Customer Success)

The difference in setting had affected the natural flow of ideas and viewpoints circulating in the business. Having the spotlight on you in a digital meeting could make individuals hesitant

and uneasy which prevented them from speaking up even though they held valuable thoughts that could lead to advancements for them, their team, or the company as a whole. This further affected their culture. Because people had difficulties in speaking up, communication was carried out differently than before and they lost a big part of the small business culture - the one which used to unite them and make them stand out compared to larger businesses.

> It's difficult to get this "togetherness" feeling digitally and that's because it's hard, in a meeting with several people, to make people speak up digitally. So, I would say that it's a big advantage to be at the office, just because it's a lot about interacting with each other. It affects the internal structure, driving it forward because you dare to speak up. (Sales Development Representative)

As described by several respondents, they see themselves as a company that relies much on their informal communication, inclusion, and spontaneous interactions. However, as a result of communicating virtually, much of what once was the organization had now vanished.

> I mean, for us as a quite small company that social part, to get to know each other, is important to get this feeling of unity and to build on the team spirit, and it can be difficult to include someone in the group if everything happens digitally. You notice that it becomes a lot better when there are opportunities to see each other physically. Especially with new colleagues. (Marketing Manager)

> It's difficult when you don't meet each other because you usually talk a lot with your colleagues, and when working from home you almost forget, like "who are they?" *laughing*. I mean you know who they are, but yeah, you get it, you "forget" who your colleagues are for a while. (Sales Representative)

It was further highlighted how important energy sharing is in a small company, and how fast it disappeared when not seeing each other physically. As opposed to bigger companies, everyone is visible and therefore able to help each other out, whether that be with certain tasks or simply by being there and contributing with valuable discussions and energy.

> At the beginning of the pandemic, we were a lot fewer than we are now. So then, it was extremely important to have each other, and it still is. It is important because we are driven by each other's energy all the time, and especially so in a sales-oriented profession. You need each other to get the energy by for example hearing each other in the office space. So, when we started working remotely, that disappeared, super-fast actually. Then it was even more important to try to stick together as a small company, because I mean, if someone went in another direction it really became apparent. If you work in a bigger company, I think you kind of can hide away a bit, but in a smaller organization everything is so much more apparent, what people do and don't do. So, for us it is very important to have each other. (Head of Customer Success)

Everyone gets more energy and performs better at the office. It is quite noticeable that if you work from home, it can be quite hard to deliver and do what you have to do. Also, it is much about the learning culture, you do not overhear what your colleagues are doing. If I hear that someone is talking about something, then maybe I can learn just through eavesdropping a bit. All that disappears when all of us are working from home, and if we are many new people, then there will be a great deal of knowledge that is not conveyed. (Sales Development Representative)

By being forced to work in a virtual setting, their daily work life and internal communication processes changed, and much of their inclusive culture got lost. They could no longer benefit as much from informal communication such as stopping by their colleague's desk to discuss an idea or problem but needed stricter guidelines to achieve information sharing. Thus, they had to rely much more on scheduled meetings, often described as "serious" by the respondents, which once again highlights the newfound formality. Likewise, an element that was no longer as visible in their communication was what you often call "water-cooler moments" or "coffee-machine talk".

Trying new ways to small talk

With the loss of casual interactions at the office, the natural "coffee-machine talk" disappeared, which is another important factor that makes the business and its employees thrive. Small talk can lead to innovative ideas and problem solving, but it is also key in networking and building relationships. The natural small talk that occurs in small businesses across hierarchies is what often distinguishes them from larger businesses (Mallett & Wapshott, 2014). In an attempt to keep up the small talk between everyone in the organization, the management implemented several initiatives, incorporated into the employees' schedules.

During the pandemic we had selected hours, for example between 3-3.15 pm we decided to see each other in a specific [virtual] room to have a chat. So we had booked "coffee breaks". We also introduced obligatory morning and afternoon meetings that were held every day. So, every morning we started the day together and then ended it together just to see each other. (Sales Development Representative)

People just jumped into these meetings like "what's everyone doing? how is everyone?" and you could talk about everything and anything. Some talked about some crazy process that they had during the day. And some people talked about their walk during lunch like "it's really sunny outside, have you guys been out yet?". So really "fika-talk", "what are you doing after work? are you going swimming?" if it was in the summer. But it was set as an open invitation in our schedules, if you wanted to you could jump in the meeting, if not then that was fine, but it was an opportunity for us to see each other during the day. And like, allow us to take a little break. (Customer Success Manager/Team Lead)

These attempts to hold on to the way they used to talk to each other were however only partly successful. Despite trying to maintain a feeling of "togetherness", which so much characterizes them as a small business, it was difficult to sustain these efforts over time. In the beginning, many people took part in the digital coffee breaks, but the willingness to do so slowly faded. What was once a well-needed break to talk to colleagues, came to be perceived as unnecessary by the majority of the organization.

> People stopped doing this after a while. You got more used to working at home, and allowed yourself that break. So you didn't need it as much. Maybe you called a friend or something. So those meetings [digital coffee breaks] were there in our schedules, but people kind of stopped joining them after a while. In the beginning it was so weird, we were like "oh hey here I am at my apartment" *showing apartment with camera*. In the end it was like, two people joining the meeting and it was like "ooh awkward". (Sales Development Specialist)

People started creating new routines at home, and they became used to the new type of communication, or rather lack of communication - but the culture had changed. Some people were eager to engage in small talk with others, something that was often described as related to a certain personality type. Those who really liked chatting and sharing personal stories were present in the meetings, but others missed being at the office where small talk was a natural part of their work life.

> It's a lot more social at the office. Because everyone just sat by themselves when working from home. Some tried to take a digital coffee and things like that but it's not really the same. (Customer Success Manager/Team Lead)

> If you have 10 minutes between meetings when you are sitting at home, you go and do something, like make the bed, hang laundry, cook breakfast, etc. While in the office, you talk with your colleagues. This was kind of the hardest part of working from home, and the regular small talk was something I definitely missed. (Sales Representative)

> If you don't have that social side as part of your personality it kind of disappears pretty quickly if you're not at the office. (Customer Success Manager)

The respondents explain that the management's desire to keep the regular small talk was met with positivity, but that in reality, it was difficult to maintain a routine.

> I guess it was a nice thought, but it didn't land that well. In the beginning, it did, and people had lunch together occasionally. But it was basically always the same people who were there, and the same people who weren't. So, I definitely think it is a nice thought and a good idea, but it gets a bit… I don't know, I think it's difficult to do it consistently, to really keep it as a routine. But yes, it was definitely there and I believe that many people tried to make something good out of it, to find a context, and to connect with their colleagues besides the meetings. And we did a lot of other things,

for example we had the Christmas party digitally. Tried in the best possible way to do things like that, but it's hard. (Head of Customer Success)

Evidently, people were disappointed in the loss of connection with others, yet many still decided to prioritize personal matters instead of contributing to the mutual small talk. One respondent expressed how she made an effort to connect with the newly employed, but that the effort was not extended to the rest of her colleagues. It did not come as naturally and routinely as it did in the office, she argued.

> I've tried to ask, now especially when there's been a lot of new people and you haven't met, to try to at least write to them, like "how are you? how's it going?" but otherwise I'm pretty bad at it. (Sales Development Representative)

Because the business landscape changed the communication practices within the organization, initiatives were taken from the management to include the people who had recently been employed. This pushed them to chat with the others in the organization.

> When we brought in a new person, then they were always supposed to book a digital coffee with everyone. (Customer Success Manager / Team Lead)

Yet, despite these efforts, it was made clear by the respondents that getting to know people in a virtual environment was not easy, and when being new it was even more of a challenge to feel included.

> I think it is a lot about everyone being different people, and if you start as a new employee in a company, it's not like you are sitting there and chasing people. So even though other people will make sure that there will be a digital coffee gathering, and make sure there will be meetings, I think it's easy to not really get so close to people. When you are at the office, you can sit with a group without really contributing or saying that much, and still feel that you are a part of something. If you are at home, it is hard because you don't really get that same feeling in a digital meeting. You don't feel the community or connection in the same way as being in a room together. (Customer Success Manager/Team Lead)

The virtual environment took away the natural small talk between people and influenced the organization to take actions that came to be perceived as quite forced.

Challenges in connecting

Remote working did not only affect interaction between employees. It also affected the interaction between managers and employees. Managers found new ways of supervising and controlling as a result of longer communication paths, but it was found that the initiatives taken to small talk and create a feeling of inclusion, were also a way of making sure that people were

doing the work that they were supposed to. Indeed, remote work had created bigger barriers between people, as it was no longer as easy to contact others. Managers could no longer get hold of employees fast and efficiently as at the office. Nor could they be present to give feedback in projects or customer meetings in the same way as they were used to. This led to new ways of supervising, which were often claimed to be an initiative to connect with each other. When talking about the check-ins and check-outs at the beginning and end of each day, one respondent said;

> I think the aim was to have some sort of context, but then it was also there to kind of make sure that people were there and did their work. So, there was kind of "two sides of the coin", to first check-in and say hi, and then also for the management to see that people were working. (Sales Development Representative)

Furthermore, they made use of an app called Tandem, which includes a function enabling people to live stream each other while working. This is also the same app used for their digital coffee breaks. The app was, similar to the check-in and check-outs, a way of creating a "we" feeling but also confirming that the employees were working.

> We tried the app Tandem. You could either jump into a virtual meeting consisting of maybe three people and lock that room, so no one else could join it. Or you could hang out in "breakout sessions", where you could name a room the "fika room" and decide that at 3 pm we will meet there. People could then join it freely, and come and go as they pleased, while people sat and talked. You could also turn on "work mode" where you saw your colleagues in small video boxes along your screen, so you could see that everyone was working. It was a way for us to show each other that we also worked. Just because you are at home, it doesn't mean that you are alone. (Customer Success Manager/Team Lead)

Several middle-managers such as team leads, sales managers, and customer success managers experienced difficulties in supervising through digital platforms. Issues circled around not being able to sit beside someone in a meeting to observe and give feedback afterward, not knowing what people were actually doing after the digital meetings, and difficulties in coaching virtually. One team lead expressed her dislike of using text as the primary form of communication with the members of the sales team, as people tended to take her words too literally and copy the advice she had given them.

> To put it like this - if I write to them and answer a question they have asked me, it is usually copied word by word, such as if they ask me "how should I respond to this customer?". If I then elaborate on that in the chat, they think I am doing the job for them. So then I call instead, and they get more room to think for themselves. So I don't like texting, but would much rather be in the office and help people there. (Sales Specialist/Team Lead)

On the contrary, one respondent mentioned that some managers preferred supervising through digital meetings and did not stumble upon similar challenges, though they argued it might be a matter of personality types and personal preference.

> It has to do a lot from person to person, some think it is much easier to give feedback, coach, or train someone when sitting virtually because it doesn't become as personal as sitting next to them in a room. (Head of Customer Success)

From this information, it is clear that supervising has become more demanding for many managers as a result of the change in how communication played out virtually. Further, new ways to supervise were found, but the lines between them and actions that were taken to promote small talk were somewhat blurred. Moreover, working remotely and completely virtually affected the communication practices and habits the company and its employees had and were used to. Working remotely meant that there was not the same understanding and awareness of what colleagues and management were doing, as well as the distance affecting the quick communication (i.e., fast answers, smaller questions, etc.), which now needed extra effort and more steps. A respondent described it like this:

> I would say that we struggled a lot with fast communication. If I stumble upon any problem, or if someone else stumbles upon a problem, and needs to discuss something with someone - if we sit in an office then it's not far to the next desk and I can go to someone and solve that problem. During the pandemic when working from home, it always becomes a bigger step. Like, you're supposed to call someone, and that person should free their time, so the communication paths become so much longer. So that was the first difficulty, or problematic thing, in the fast communication. (Head of Sales)

The longer communication paths and the extra steps needed to be taken resulted in employees reaching out less to their colleagues and managers than they used to do. Since the employees did not have any perception of what was happening on the other end of a text or call, people made sure that it had to be "important enough" for one to reach out.

> It is not so natural to ask questions, so I write to my manager if I really need to and feel like I can ask for her time. If you are sitting beside each other, it is a lot easier to ask quickly "Can you take a look at this?". Now, it's more like "Okay I'm writing to my manager because I really need help" and then it has to be a solid question. (Sales Representative)

A manager at the company described a similar situation, where interaction with her team members was much less, especially regarding questions where help or advice was needed.

> When they [team members] have just had a meeting with the customer and they need a "thumbs up" that they are on the right track or if they need some feedback afterward. For example, if the customer said that the price was too high. "How do I motivate that in a good way?" If I am at the office then I can discuss that with them, and they can ask

"Is it ok if I give them 10% off?" or "I guess it is ok if I give them this". They just throw it out and I can give them feedback. Like, "But wait, why should we give them this discount, we already gave them this, etc". So here we can decide something together. And they're like "she's already here so I can just ask". But if I'm home, I don't think they to the same degree want to disturb me and they "know the answer" so maybe they give a discount anyway, or they don't take action, or they do something else". (Sales Specialist / Team Lead)

Thus, the extra effort and time needed to reach out implied that many refrained, as well as not knowing what the other person was up to. Additionally, many perceived it as being a very formal way to discuss matters. Needing to reach out, asking for someone's time, and then scheduling a meeting, made it feel, according to respondents, like a much more serious matter than it was.

> You really have to make a meeting of all things, which makes things feel bigger than they might be. And so, many times you think about if you should even have that meeting, so there is a tendency to skip it sometimes. And you do not have as good control/knowledge of what people are doing and if you are disturbing them. (Sales Development Representative)

The employees expressed their skepticism, or insecurity, about initiating meetings for trivialities, but this also led to them missing valuable opportunities to develop their organization. The same issue was seen on several levels in the organization. For example, among the managers, where one person in middle management argued:

> I feel like the problem has to be bigger during the pandemic, to actually make that call. In the office it was like, okay our CEO or the COO is outside my door, all of the managers are here. So if you need to discuss something, you can quickly vent, and maybe realize that there are two more people who also think this is an issue. Then we are quick to set a meeting. But like, for me in that situation to call someone… I guess it is almost like when my team members do not call me. It is not that easy for me to just gather the whole top-management team for a small thing where I'm probably overreacting. But many times, if you actually do that, it leads to us solving a problem and this drives the company forward. (Sales Specialist/Team Lead)

Working in a virtual environment meant that all communication between employees and managers felt much more formal since it required a scheduled meeting to be able to discuss various matters. This created insecurities regarding the subject matters they wanted to discuss because it meant that you would take time from someone else. Additionally, as mentioned previously, in a smaller business, the employees have quite a good perception of challenges and various situations since a natural flow of communication happens in the office regularly, and since this informal communication was no longer possible, it contributed to the insecurity regarding whether various matters are important enough to discuss. Thus, the extra time and

effort needed to contact others as well as the formality this action indicated, meant that many would hesitate to reach out, or did not do so at all.

More distinct groups

Going from fully working in the office, where both managers and employees worked in close social and spatial proximity to each other, to working from home meant big changes not only for the employees but also for how business practices used to be carried out. The groupings within the company had become more noticeable, where people rather called their old work friends or talked to their teammates only. According to respondents, the informal nature they relied upon slowly faded away. The way they used to complete work tasks and face various organizational challenges was much through ad hoc informal practices which stretched over job roles and titles, which now changed and evolved into something different in the virtual space.

> What was very apparent was that gaps between different roles became bigger, not just top to bottom, but also sideways between different departments. Those sitting far away from each other, like marketing vs sales did not speak much to each other during this period. You interacted with the people doing the same job tasks as you. (Sr. Sales Specialist/Team Lead)

The change in the physical space changed the dynamic of how the company used to operate. Since employees did not have the opportunity to quickly get a hold of someone to solve or ask about a potential challenge or task, a more conscious effort had to be made when colleagues needed to be contacted. The natural progression was contacting the people working in the same department as themselves, or those having the same title since communication there already happened naturally due to similar job tasks. However, respondents described situations where they did turn to others (outside of their departments), but these were people who they already had established a relationship with prior to the switch to working from home.

> At home it becomes more divided, as it is so clear who you call and are friends with. If you are physically in the office you talk to everything and everyone and can have a good time and discuss various matters. Now I can call a colleague to talk or go for a walk, but it's the people I'm friends with. (Sales Representative)

This new environment that slowly emerged due to less communication between departments created a functional separation between pre-sales, sales, and customer success. The different departments became more solid and distinct, which was a contrast to how things used to operate, where much communication and discussion happened across titles and roles.

> The ones you naturally talk to because you have similar job activities, and need the professional exchange, we of course talked to- you call them because you need help, etc. And then you had the colleagues who are also your friends, that you called and

chatted with. But there were definitely people you never talked to, except maybe if you haven't talked for weeks and just write a "hello, how are you". So it was definitely the case that you lost touch, and especially so with people that you didn't have to contact professionally. (Sales Development Specialist)

Another respondent commented on the situation as a new member and described it as being difficult to be included in groups/departments whom you do not have a natural communication flow with.

It is very difficult for new people to get into a company and just do everything digitally because you do not get workmates in the same way. It's very difficult to get into a group where people call each other privately when you're new. So, people probably lost touch with each other, I would say. (Sales Development Representative)

However, even though this created an environment where more distinct groups emerged and fewer relationships developed, respondents described that working virtually led to deeper one-one relationships.

It evolved in you talking to your colleagues one-on-one. When everyone is in the office, then it is usually that you hang out in big groups. However, when you sit at home you may actually call a person more. You get deeper relationships when you work from home. (Customer Success Manager)

This functional separation between the different departments was not only found horizontally in the organization but also vertically. Findings showed that there had become bigger barriers in communication between management and employees.

I really can't see that I would just call the CEO, or even text him unless I ask my boss about something and then she says "ask the CEO" and then through that I contact him and I am like "my manager told me to ask you, etc". But I don't see myself calling someone in top management just like that. (Sales Representative)

As opposed to working in the office where people consistently spoke to each other no matter what position they had, it was now questioned whether or not it was considered strange to, for example, call your boss to chat or ask questions. Most employees turned to each other in times of problem-solving issues, whereas they only contacted their boss when absolutely necessary, and the top-management close to never.

Remote flexible

As the recommendation to work from home slowly got lifted and phased out, the company started to go back to working from the office. However, as with many other businesses, the organizational structure got permanently affected/changed by virtual working, and the

company decided to implement a remote flexible working situation for its employees. This meant that the employees had much more flexibility in their schedule since they themselves decided when to work from home and when to work from the office. This initiative was very much appreciated since it allowed for much flexibility regarding how to plan your work schedule and tasks.

> When you are at the office, there are many people, and there is a lot of time that disappears precisely because it is social and many people ask for help - you throw out questions to the right and left. So for me, it is really beneficial to have one day at home where I have maybe fewer meetings, where I can focus on tasks that can take a little bit more time. If you are at the office, you have a meeting and then an hour in between, and then you get a lot of questions, then suddenly you do not have time to do the administrative stuff or things that require a bit more focus. So that, I would say, would be a huge benefit for me to sit at home and put in time in things that are a bit more demanding. And I think this is beneficial for many others as well. Also, the point in being able to get your life together in general. You can combine workouts and some have kids, so there are advantages with that too - you can save a lot of time by working some days from home. (Customer Success Manager/Team Lead)

The change to working remote flexible did not only allow freedom and flexibility in planning one's work, but it also changed how internal communication in the office was conducted and performed. Even though people were back in the office, much of the communication happened through Slack (their internal communication tool). As respondents described it:

> What I think is different from before is that if I sit here with for example three people and one person connects online, then everyone connects through one computer each and looks at the meetings screen, rather than everyone looking at the same screen - that has changed a bit. So, I guess that we have become a bit more comfortable, like I could absolutely write to someone in Slack and ask something, even if they were sitting like 2 meters away from me. (Sales Representative)

> We try to cheer on each other a lot in our slack channels, if we win a deal or whatever, then we write about this quite clearly in our slack channels, and try to highlight this. Even if the person sits next to me, I still write it in slack, just to get it noticed. So it is a lot of communication that happens through slack, even though things happen physically, so are there many things that land there. (Sales Development Representative)

Since working remote flexible means a type of hybrid work between physical work (i.e., working in the office) and working digitally, the culture that had emerged in the virtual space got transferred or mixed with the culture they used to have in the office. Thus, even though the company went back to the office, many of the struggles they had in the virtual space were still present in this new remote flexible way of working. For instance, struggles in spontaneous interactions or creative work were still present, since all employees were not in the office at the

same time, and knowledge about when people would be there was not clear. Hence, the sense of formality of booking a meeting with a colleague made it so that employees waited to discuss things until they were in the office.

> I would say I talk a lot less with my colleagues when I work from home. That part disappears, but maybe it's like "oh I need to discuss this thing but we'll see each other tomorrow, maybe if it's something about a customer etc. So maybe you say that you will bring it up when you go to the office. (Sales Development Specialist)

> I would probably rather want more pronounced days when people need to be at the office. That it is decided "on Fridays there are people at the office", and if you can't be there that day, you have to say so. Because then you know that on Fridays, there is an opportunity to share ideas and thoughts which may not be super important, but which I would still like to discuss in person. Currently, when no such system exists, you kind of hesitate or skip discussing it because you have to make a meeting of everything. Therefore, rather, I would like to have remote flexibility but that we prefer to work at the office, so you can get some of the physical exchange. So, I would like to have some days where you should be at the office, because then you also know e.g., on Tuesdays everyone will be in and then I can discuss this thing. (Sales Development Representative)

Furthermore, the distinct groupings that emerged between the different departments during the pandemic and virtual work were still in existence. This was an unintentional effect not meant by management and something they wished to change. Thus, they created two pods with a mix of employees from all different departments in an effort to bring back the more informal culture where communication flowed more easily. As a manager explained:

> The idea was that we should have better communication between the entire sales cycle, from pre-sales, sales, and customer success. So we are two teams consisting of 3 salespeople, 2 SDR:s and 2 from customer success approximately. So, we are two teams that have their own… we have both individual budgets, as well as team budgets to reach. In one way we are a sales team, but the sales team is divided in two- into the two pods, so that you can get closer to the different departments, to know more "okay, what is a good customer for us, and what is not" etc. (Head of Customer Success)

Hence, what was found before the shift to working from home, that is the informal culture where all employees communicate both vertically and horizontally (up and down the hierarchy), had evolved and changed into something else expressed as remote flexible work.

DISCUSSION

The empirical section shows valuable insights into the organizational change that happened at Cloud AB as a result of working virtually during the pandemic. Most interestingly, they lost

their sense of togetherness and their informal nature. To answer the research question, *how working virtually affects a small company characterized by informality and less visible boundaries*, we analyze the findings using boundary work. Noticeably, this is an example of a company whose boundaries have become more visible, though not in the way one might expect. Cloud AB, as we know, is a company with apparent closeness and unity, or as the participants themselves call it, "togetherness". Fast communication, spontaneity, and innovation flow freely, undisturbed by time and space. In this discussion, we demonstrate how the pandemic and remote work created boundaries in time and space, which in return triggered boundary work that created unintended boundaries resulting in more distinct roles and structures. That is, boundaries between employees and employees (horizontally), as well as boundaries between employees and management (vertically). To address the loss of togetherness, the management created pods consisting of a few members. In this way, togetherness could be reconstructed again by the smaller units.

Reshaping the boundary landscape

When Cloud AB moved from its office space to working remotely, the relationship dynamics changed, and so did the prerequisites for managers to control the employees and their work. This called for new actions, which can be seen as a way of regaining control, or as a way of bringing people together again. It seems that the intentions behind were somewhat twofold. The managers started to engage in several types of boundary work. One of the most prominent was configurational boundary work (Frickel, 2004; Howard-greenville et al., 2017; Langley et al., 2019). In other words, they acted from the outside to influence interaction patterns of boundary work, trying to bring people together and thereby reshaping the boundary landscape. By implementing more meetings (both informal and formal), management worked through structural boundaries, trying to facilitate an environment where communication could flow naturally. This is done to try to recreate the togetherness that gives them a competitive edge. In turn, these activities are enacted by the employees as a form of collaborative boundary work (Strauss, 1978; Quick & Feldman, 2014; Langley et al., 2019), for example participating in the daily morning meetings, or trying to cope with the difficulties and complex challenges of the pandemic together. Another example of configurational boundary work (that then is enacted as collaborative boundary work by employees) is the initiative from the management that each new employee is to have a digital coffee with everyone at the company. Further, one can assume that this type of change would have been met with more resistance if it had not been for the special circumstances. It was not only a matter of management presenting their ideas for change, but everyone was trying to restore what they had before, which made them more likely to partake in the activities. Thus, much of the collaborative boundary work enacted at Cloud AB is a result of a trigger, rather than simply stemming from the aim to enhance collaboration (as is usually the case). In other words, the loss of togetherness in the virtual setting made the employees, and at times the management, engage in collaborative boundary work that they otherwise would not. At least, it would not have been as clear, because collaboration would have flowed naturally.

As mentioned by Langley et al., (2019) boundaries are enacted by both deliberate and reflexive actions. It can be argued that these actions taken by both management and employees are reflexive actions, as a result of the organizational change that was caused by the pandemic. From another viewpoint, these actions can be seen as deliberate, as there is a clear intent from the managers to recreate the togetherness that they lost with a shift to remote work, where the employees also make deliberate choices to participate. One could also view the actions taken in the first period of the pandemic as reflexive, acting from the result of a trigger, but as time went on and remote work became normalized, the boundary work performed by the organization moved more and more towards purposefulness. Furthermore, as opposed to their normal business climate, the feedback given from team leaders and managers was now more explicit, given during set out meetings in peoples' schedules. Previously, feedback had been given more spontaneously. This shows, once again, how boundaries have become more visible. In this case, the discussions and feedback giving have become more structured, and thus more noticeable. However, the need for more formality clearly shows the big organizational change for Cloud AB, where spontaneous interactions and closeness between employees and leaders are no longer there.

As the more structured environment created more unintended boundaries, managers drew on the use of boundary work to overcome them. More specifically, to facilitate collaboration in this new setting, they call on the notion of teamwork and togetherness and engage in boundary blurring (Bach et al., 2012; Langley et al., 2019) because it emphasizes the similarities between roles and departments rather than their differences. Liberati (2017) mentions that some settings show a clearer separation of roles, while others show signs of highly fluid blurring (ibid). When new boundaries start emerging as a result of remote work, they blur those boundaries, such as between roles and departments, by organizing daily morning and afternoon meetings as well as scheduled "fika" breaks. Thus, they create a shared sense of identity among the employees, reminding them of how they used to communicate in the office. This enabled them to deconstruct differences across actors, such as continuing to unite people from different departments in a similar way to how they are used to. Therefore reaching unity beyond an organizational hierarchy, which is in line with their characteristics and advantages as a small company. In an office space where people sit close together, it is natural to work across boundaries, something that is also needed to keep the uniqueness of a small business. Now, on the other hand, existing boundaries (and thus the roles) are blurred to enhance collaboration and enable small talk among everyone. In line with Allen (1997), an organization can have an ongoing boundary blurring process, when people take part in each others' work tasks and help each other out, despite it not being their responsibility (ibid). For example, when employees brainstorm new ideas with the management, or when someone in marketing helps those in sales (which with the digital meetings is supposed to be made possible in an online environment).

This initially strengthened the relationships within the company, such as when using the app Tandem where people could feel as if they were all working together and when given the opportunity to small talk with their colleagues through digital coffee breaks. However, the participants' elaborations showed that this sense of "we" did not sustain over time i.e., they failed in blurring the boundaries. The remote work came to cause big organizational changes, changes that were never intended. Their uniqueness was challenged by the unintended

consequence of the pandemic, which forced them to structure their activities, subsequently creating boundaries. In line with Langley et al., (2019) this is further evidence that boundary work is more visible after triggers (Barret et al., 2012; Lindberg et al., 2017; Langley et al., 2019), in this case being forced to work remotely.

Boundaries in time and space

As time moved on, the collaborative boundary work that the employees enacted slowly tailed away since both the spatial and temporal boundaries surrounding them had drastically changed. The use of technology that enabled remote work (i.e., Tandem, Google Meets, Slack etc.), had a huge influence on the temporal and spatial boundaries. Moreover, the fact that boundaries are constantly in flux and continually becoming (Langley & Tsoukas, 2017), means that it is subject to human agency (i.e., the boundary work performed in practice). The employees at Cloud AB need to continually enact boundary blurring to preserve the collaborative nature that defines the company, that is their togetherness. Hence, the materiality of technology together with human use (i.e., remote work in itself), had agency to change both the spatial and temporal boundaries in which communication took place (Latour, 2005; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). Before, communication flowed freely since everyone worked in a close spatial and social presence, which meant that there was an immediacy and simultaneity when wanting to discuss various matters. Employees could (with almost no effort) reach out to whomever, and since all employees worked in close proximity to each other, others could join in or listen to the conversations. Working remotely, communication was bound in time, since it took extra effort and time to be able to communicate and reach out to colleagues which in turn created new and different temporal boundaries. This demonstrates how situated conditions (in this case spatial and temporal parameters) make a difference in how and in which way collaborative boundary work is performed and enacted (DiBenigno & Kellogg, 2014). Thus, due to the different temporality embedded in the remote workspace, different boundaries are generated in practice. In line with Langley et al. (2019), changing a big part of an organization may make other things salient which makes people sensitive to new and different types of boundaries as well as boundary work. This demonstrates the role temporal boundaries can play in enabling different activities to occur, at the same time as it demonstrates how the notion of temporal boundary work (needing to schedule meetings, windows of opportunity etc.) can play a significant part in the day-to-day life of organizations and groups.

Consequently, changes in spatial and temporal boundaries created an unknown and ambiguous environment where much of the usual work practices conducted at Cloud AB by the employees and management could not be undertaken. Hence, this sustained uncertainty around one's own role and work practices, and so, over time, the boundary work performed changed and turned into something else. Blurring boundaries evolved into defending boundaries, that is, collaborative boundary work became competitive boundary work. This expressed itself in employees not enacting the boundary work arranged by management, for instance not participating in scheduled "fika" breaks. Rather, many times, people scheduled more sales meetings to excel in their own roles or did the laundry instead of taking the time to chat with colleagues. Hence, people started to protect their own interests instead of working to

collaborate. Thus, as the surroundings changed, collaborative boundary work turned into competitive boundary work overtime. Moreover, the change in spatial and temporal boundaries reinforced the already existing (but less visible) boundaries the company had from the beginning (i.e., those between the different departments and roles). The ambiguities in working remotely resulted in competitive boundary work where people tried to defend and in turn make the implicit boundaries much more explicit to distinguish and promote themselves from others (Langley et al., 2019). Hence, by employees engaging in competitive boundary work and trying to define an exclusive territory (i.e., making boundaries more explicit regarding pre-sales, sales, and customer success), one confers legitimacy to one's own membership in the organization (ibid). In addition, boundaries did not only emerge horizontally (between employees and employees) but also vertically (between employees and management). This is illustrated by how management no longer had "control" over overseeing work processes since everyone worked from home, which affected the interaction between them. This ambiguity and uncertainty lead to competitive boundary work where management engaged in defending boundaries to restore and protect their status and role. This expressed itself by the use of Tandem (where everyone could be seen) and scheduled check-ins. In this way, the management mobilized practices that enhanced and strengthened their legitimacy and claims by taking control (Allen, 2000; Burri, 2008; Langley et al. 2019). However, even though the competitive boundary work (enacted by both employees and management) created boundaries between roles and departments, it also reinforced and strengthened collaboration within the specific departments, contributing to even more separation across departments. The consequence of these types of boundary work resulted in the loss and sense of togetherness.

Consequently, Cloud AB's attempts to recreate and restore their ideal state, i.e., the informal and the sense of togetherness, did not work despite the efforts. Spatial and temporal boundaries were found working from home. Thus, it could be argued that the configurational boundary work that management tried to arrange lacked the consideration of spatial and temporal boundaries, as well as the negotiation upfront on how to proceed in the new environment. As illustrated in Patriotta and Spedale's (2011) study on decision making in a consulting project, particular importance was found in negotiating or enacting boundary relations at the outset. The study showcases what happens when consensus on this matter cannot be reached, and how this inevitably leads to ambiguities and conflicts. Similar to what happened at Cloud AB, boundary relations were not negotiated in the new environment (it was determined by management) which led to ambiguities regarding one's role, which eventually led to competitive boundary work. Hence, to enable collaboration one has to first establish what the actual boundaries are (Patriotta & Spedale, 2011).

Reconfiguring togetherness

As mentioned in the empirical section, the company eventually moved back to the office due to restrictions and recommendations easing up. However, the switch to remote work completely changed the structure and work processes of the organization. It is often very hard and difficult to change a company's blueprint, which makes them great and unique (Christensen et al., 2016). Which is in this case, as the employees coined themselves, togetherness and the

informal nature. But here it has been done anyway as an unintended consequence of the pandemic and the virtual work. The organization got much more structured in its processes than ever before, still, this did allow Cloud AB to grow its operations. However, high value was found in the "barrierless" situations which enabled communication without any restrictions, rules, or boundaries. It was a place in time and space in which it was possible to talk to people with immediacy. In certain situations, this was extremely important for them as a small business. Cloud AB therefore made sure to take actions to keep the togetherness feeling which had characterized them so much before they had to adapt to a virtual setting. Towards the end of their remote working, they implemented different "pods", which again created this sense of belonging and togetherness, but in a new way. The togetherness feeling was instead found inside these pods.

In line with Langley et al. (2019), the management at Cloud AB worked through boundaries, arranging boundaries from the outside in an attempt to reconstruct the feeling of togetherness. Arranging boundaries is here used to do the same things as they used to do, but in a new way, refocusing interactions between the employees. This was achieved by for instance having members from each department constituting one pod as well as now having team goals as opposed to only having individual goals. In this way, the structure (the pods, having team goals) aligned and "spoke the same language" as the culture they desired to reconfigure (i.e., togetherness). This is an example of acting "outside the box" when isolated from regular activities. Through arranging boundaries and spaces within the organization, new patterns are created and the actors manage to achieve things collectively that otherwise would not have been possible. Similar to the work of Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) who describe how forestry companies became engaged in boundary work when faced with the growing social and environmental concerns raised by environmentalists and the local community. The paper illustrates how a company resolved a longstanding conflict between opposing interests by inviting outside parties into a space where collaboration and testing of ideas could be achieved. Thus, there is value to be found in having a sense of togetherness since this creates flexibility as well as innovation and collaboration which is highly valued in the much turbulent and ambiguous environment businesses operate in today. As Schumacher (1973, p.45) puts it;

> When it comes to action, we obviously need small units, because action is a highly personal affair, and one cannot be in touch with more than a very limited number of persons at any one time. But when it comes to the world of ideas, to principles or to ethics, to the indivisibility of peace and also of ecology, we need to recognize the unity of mankind and base our actions upon this recognition. Or to put it differently, it is true that all men are brothers, but it is also true that in our active personal relationships we can, in fact, be brothers to only a few of them, and we are called upon to show more brotherliness to them than we could possibly show to the whole of mankind.

Adhering to Schumacher's idea and concept, organizations (and businesses in general) may be better served by focusing their attention on achieving "economies IN scale", as opposed to the traditional "economies of scale", by leveraging and using the fundamental advantages existing in smallness. As illustrated by Cloud AB, the creation of the pods allowed them to recreate togetherness (which characterizes small businesses), at the same time as the company grew. In

this way, they benefited again from the inherent advantages of smallness. By looking at the boundaries and boundary work performed, only then can we understand how and why things develop and change over time. Or in the words of Langley et al. (2019) "boundary work is thus a central element of organizing and crucially important to understanding how organization emerges and unfolds over time" (p.65). We see that the organization is driven by energy sharing, connection, and the togetherness that comes with belonging to a small business. To keep their uniqueness over time, managers (and thereby employees) thus have to actively perform and enact boundary work. More specifically, boundary work that not only enhances collaboration but which also allows for togetherness in smaller units (as comes naturally though less visibly in an office space, but gets lost in a completely virtual setting). Cloud AB exemplifies this in its remote flexible approach by recreating togetherness in a completely new way. Thus, we understand that small businesses need to, time and time again, do what they do best. That is, to embrace their "smallness" because when separated in time and space individuals are likely to defend their own interests rather than engage in activities that enhance collaboration, and this may cause the small business to lose its competitive edge. Cloud AB also demonstrates how it is possible to let the company grow while keeping the advantages of smallness (i.e., togetherness), which can serve as a valuable insight for bigger companies as well as smaller companies in the stages of expanding. Because, at the end of the day, man is small, and so, small is beautiful and something worth preserving (Schumacher, 1973).

CONCLUSION

Drawing upon retrospective interviews obtained from a small Swedish tech company, this report sets out to illustrate how a small business (characterized by informality and less visible boundaries) gets affected by working solely in a virtual environment. By following the virtual processes at Cloud AB, as well as studying the employees and managers there, the aim of the report was fulfilled. The findings illustrate how an organization (with less visible boundaries), restructures its practices and explicates its boundaries due to remote work, and finally settles into a hybrid version with smallness in mind. We answer the research question, *how does working virtually affect a small company characterized by informality and less visible boundaries*, with three conclusions. Firstly, we conclude that a small company operating completely virtually, slowly develops and creates more boundaries between individuals in the organization. Existing boundaries that were not visible or important, emerge and become more distinct. This is due to the fact that much of a small company's characteristic depends on members existing in the same space and time where communication can flow easily. Changing the condition for such key parameters creates different and new temporal and spatial boundaries which have a huge effect on the organization in question. Secondly, the initial boundaries experienced at Cloud AB were due to the remote work in itself, and not (as literature often mentions) due to a specific actor or actors. The initial boundaries were not created through boundary work by management or employees, but from moving to remote workings. Thirdly, we conclude that boundary work both has intended and unintended consequences. As shown, boundary work can change over time, and become something else, which is not necessarily

intentional. It is important to take into account the ever-changing work environment when taking action to change or preserve certain work practices.

Theoretical contributions and managerial implications

Previous research regarding boundary work assumes that boundary work is mostly (if not only) ascribed to human agency. There are few studies that abandon the human-only perspective and consider materiality in regard to boundary work (Barrett et al., 2012; Kaplan et al., 2017; Lindberg et al., 2017). However, as shown in this report, both materiality and temporality have (in encounter with humans) great agency in orienting and influencing boundaries and in turn the boundary work performed and its outcomes. Hence, by considering and taking into account that boundaries and boundary work can be generated by different materialities and temporalities rooted in practice, a much richer and deeper understanding can be developed regarding the subject matter. Thus, this study contributes to both organizational studies and boundary research, by shedding light on the importance of considering other types of agencies which can in turn deepen our understanding of organizing in businesses. Furthermore, most research has primarily focused on a single boundary at a time such as between accountants and buyers (Ezzamel & Burns, 2005), doctors and nurses (Allen, 1997), or scientists and anti-scientists (Garud et al., 2014). This study accounts for several boundaries between individuals, groups, and roles. For example, between managers and employees, employees and employees (having different roles), and between teams. With this extensive view, it takes into account how tensions between one community or role may affect others in the organization. For example, we see how defending one's own role in the company (individual) affects the collaborative boundary work enacted by the group. It is also seen how the relationships among the employees (which changed when working remotely), have an effect on the relationships between manager and employee. Hence, this research builds on the need to extend research on multiple boundaries at a time. Finally, little attention has been paid to the linkages between different types of boundaries, where it has often merely been stated that several boundaries co-exist (Langley et al., 2019). This study accounts for the linkage between, for example, collaborative and competitive boundary work. Here, we display how one turns into the other over time. Also, configurational boundary work is created with the aim to create collaborative boundary work over time. Without this perspective, linkages such as these would have gone unnoticed. Thus, it is considered important to describe the complexity of social life in boundary work, which also is in line with what Langley et al., (2019) mention as important for the future of boundary work literature.

As pointed out by Langley et al. (2019), most studies concerning boundary work focus on situations and contexts where people seek to influence already existing boundaries. However, in this study, we demonstrate a setting and context where less visible boundaries define the organization, and what happens when such an organization has to rely on technology and working virtually. Boundary work enacted in these kinds of settings (without considering all kinds of agency) can lead to unintended consequences such as (and in our case), an organization moving to a setting with much more distinct, clear, and visible boundaries. Therefore, this study offers an opportunity for managers to draw knowledge from as well as

aid them in refining their skills when it comes to configurational boundary work. In practical terms, this means that managers can benefit from considering several parameters, such as time and space as well as materiality, as this study shows that virtual conditions largely differ from the office environment and can thus not be treated the same. Furthermore, companies should consider making use of togetherness, which we see can be created in small units as well. This is especially important for small businesses in expansion, as the findings can serve as a guide for how they can keep their competitive edge and at the same time allow themselves to grow. The findings can be of value for bigger companies as well, demonstrating how they can make use of togetherness in small units as a way of organizing.

Future research

As previously mentioned, there are not many studies made on boundary work where non-human agency is taken into account and put into focus. As this study has tried to bridge this gap in research, more studies have to be made regarding this subject matter. Thus, future research should consider a more socio-material and open view regarding the notion of boundaries and boundary work, and explore the opportunities that material, spatial, social, and temporal boundaries could mean for the study of organizing. Especially so in those cases where boundaries are not as prominent, or where project management is relevant since these contexts showcase boundaries that are constantly being reworked. This paper represents an effort to open up the discussion regarding this matter. The future will reveal how the consideration of agency regarding material, time and space boundaries will play a part in understanding organizational life.

Using other methods when collecting primary data could add value to future research, such as making observations, shadowing, and conducting video analysis. In line with Langley et al., (2019), these methods can aid the researchers to get a closer look at the boundary work unfolding in an organization. Future research could also benefit from the use of emerging technologies such as tracking devices and proximity sensors, which help in collecting larger sets of interactional data and thereby is a valuable asset for in-depth observation. Thus, enabling a greater understanding of the boundaries and boundary work taking place in an organization.

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