UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

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Having the workplace at home:
A case study exploring the boundaries between work & home during the pandemic period

Anastasios Naos

Supervisor: Ola Bergström
Master of Science in Management, Graduate School
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Master of Science in Management, Graduate School
School of Business, Economics and Law, University of Gothenburg

Abstract

Think about a morning walk before starting the working day, the number of calendars, the frequency of breaks or the clothes people wear to work; these among others are dimensions of where individuals draw the line between work and private life. Often small items, things people say, actions they take and places they restrict their professional selves are some of the activities individuals engage daily creating a mental, spatial and behavioural boundary between home and work. In this study, 27 respondents employed by a large corporation were interviewed about their boundary work after having experienced a sudden move of their workplace at home under the eventful year of 2020 with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, this case study explores and examines the different types of boundary activities the respondents were engaging in and how those boundaries changed based on the unforeseen situation of having to work from home. The report contributes to previous studies by adding to our knowledge of how work-home boundaries are set and managed to fit the respondents' needs to adjust to the new working situation and can also provide recommendations of how line managers can improve when managing people at a distance.

Keywords: Boundary work; boundaries; boundary management; home-working; employee management; distance; pandemic

Introduction

The year 2020 will be written in history as an eventful year with the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that impacted people's lives in a number of ways and specifically disrupted the home working situation by transforming home to a workplace. The fight against the pandemic has led governments to impose lockdowns on organisations, whole cities and societies encouraging, if not forcing, people to work from home that for some was for the first time in their professional lives. Recent studies have investigated the consequences of the move to home working in the context of the pandemic indicating that work-home balance is being affected and suggesting that home-working should keep being explored under the assumption that remote working practices will increase in the future (Allen et al., 2021). Remote working generates mixed feelings for the individuals and using a 'one-size fits all' approach is considered inappropriate (Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Phillips et al., 2002). Previous studies have used terms such as work-home/family conflict (WFC, FWC) to describe the conflict between the different domains and have focused on the health, welfare, stress and performance of individuals (Allen et al., 2000;

Netemayer, Boles & McMurrian, 1996) as well as elements that alleviate the conflict and contribute to work-life balance (Chen et al., 2009; Greenhaus, 1988). Investigating work-life boundaries and the idea that those are becoming more blurred between family, private time and work is an area that has been growing a lot in the last years and has been discussed by several researchers (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Hall & Richter, 1988). Hall and Richter (1988) describe in their work how people are creating domains that are permeable and flexible according to their desires, transitioning from one to another maintaining a work-life balance. Previous researchers have also acknowledged that home and work are not two separate domains distinct from one another but are interdependent and linked with 'permeable' boundaries (Kanter, 1977; Pleck, 1977). Having the workplace at home and in combination with technological advancements that facilitate a home-working setup results in blurring lines between the private and work spheres for the remote workers who are faced with a constant work availability leading to work-life balance challenges (Chesley et al., 2001; Galinsky & Kim, 2000). Remote workers create, edit and maintain their physical, temporal and spatial boundaries in order to achieve balance which depends on how individuals manage their boundaries (Nippert-Eng, 1996, Clark, 2000). Nippert-Eng (1996) in her foundational work at *Home and Work: Negotiating boundaries through everyday life* describes how boundaries are managed and defined as well as the meaning people assign on everyday day items (Nippert-Eng, 1996). In a similar concept, Clark (2000) developed the work-family border theory addressing how the integration and segmentation of the different domains influence among others the work-life balance followed by Ashforth et al. (2000) further expanding the research by looking into the daily transitions people do among different roles at home, work and other places.

Hence, understanding how individuals subjectively adjust and maintain boundaries, the boundary theory or boundary work offers an opportunity to explore how home-work boundaries change when workers are forced to move from office working to home-working in the context of the pandemic. Following this academic study individuals are placed across a continuum spanning from extreme segmentation where work and home are two totally distinct realms, to extreme integration where the two are intertwined to one amorphous sphere (Nippert-Eng, 1996). This unforeseen and abrupt move of the workplace at peoples' homes has challenged the boundaries between the private and working life and has clouded even further the dividing line between the 'normal' workplace and home, requiring workers to invent, adjust and maintain new boundaries and new ways to manage work, now from their private domains. Thus, the objective of this paper is to add to our understanding of the boundary work that respondents engaged under the recommended/forced transition to home working due to the pandemic.

Lots is yet to be leant on boundaries and boundary management practices to separate work and private and in the effort to investigate the above topics this study makes some contributions in existing academic literature. Although there is quite an amount of literature on work-home balance and boundary management, remote working is mainly a voluntary activity that individuals choose (La Pierre et al., 2016). Because of the forced move of the workplace to the individuals' homes, there is an opportunity to explore the boundaries and the boundary work the respondents engage under conditions which are not self-chosen.

With the increase of digitalization and the ease of access to tools that enable homeworking, boundary theory has shown that boundaries between the work and private domain become more blurry that can cause negative spillover effects and role conflict (Clark, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000). Individuals in order to cope with the above challenges, segment or integrate to manage the blurring yet the home working situation during the pandemic is leading to a paradox of

involuntary integration and unintended segmentation (Pamer F., 2020). Following the above argument, this study is aiming at creating a better understanding of how people manage their private and working life considering the home-working situation and how managers should possibly think and act when it comes to managing people at a distance (Hall & Richter, 1988).

Previous boundary theory studies have indicated that managing work-private boundaries and assigning meaning to items in order to adjust the physical, temporal and spatial boundaries is an individual choice (Nippert-Eng, 1996). A large group of studies have been looking into a person-environment fit perspective which suggest that when the workplace and environmental conditions align with the personal preferences of boundary setting then boundary congruence is achieved (Kreiner, 2006), leading to better health (Edwards and Rothbard, 1999) and decreased stress levels and work-family conflict (Kreiner, 2006; Chen et al., 2009). However, the individual preferences for boundary setting might not always be allowed by the external environment suggesting the focus should be on what the individual boundary enactments mean contextually for the respondents instead (Ammons, 2013).

Following suggestions of previous studies to explore what different boundary work patterns mean for the respondents' lives in the context of the pandemic, looking away from whether an individual segment or integrates, and in order to explore the aforementioned arguments, this paper will present a case study of employees having suddenly moved to home working. More specifically, delimitations were imposed and the study is aiming to explore the practiced boundaries between work and home and how those have adjusted to fit the home working situation for the respondents specifically during the examined period. Hence, the research questions of this study were formulated as follows:

- Have the boundaries between home and work changed, and how, during the pandemic period in 2020?

- Are there any strategies the respondents use to separate home and work when having the workplace at home?

To answer the above research questions a qualitative case study through online interviews will be conducted at a large Fortune 500 company using the boundary work theory as a framework since it helps capture how individuals subjectively design, maintain and adjust the boundaries between work and home creating a mixed or separate domains (Kreiner et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996), and how they flow between those domains adjusting the temporal, spatial and behavioural boundaries (Clark, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000). In the following section the boundary theory literature is being reviewed explaining the angle chosen for the study, followed by the setting introduction and thereafter the qualitative case study presentation. The findings are then introduced leading to the discussion and conclusion of the report with some limitations and suggestions for future research being featured.

Theoretical Framework

Working remotely is a topic widely discussed and remote work practices have been to a large extent implemented by organisations. The advance of digital tools, their efficiency and extensive availability have among other factors changed the way individuals work as well as where the work takes place (Olson-Buchanan, Boswell, & Morgan, 2016; Kreiner et al., 2009).

Prior to the pandemic, more than 50% of white-collar workers in Sweden were working from home full-time or part-time leading to an increase of 11% since the outbreak (Netigate, 2021). The extreme situation though has been that individuals have been forced and not voluntarily chosen, to move their workplace at home impelling remote workers to creatively design their offices at kitchen tables, sofas or bedrooms.

Even though home-working might have been attractive to some, applying the 'normal' boundaries and enacting the usual strategies separating private from home are not available, posing an extra dear to the ones who desired to keep the realms distinct and challenging the boundaries as well as blurring the lines between home, family and work. In this study the work-family boundaries are being investigated and by using the word family the report follows the lines of previous research that refers to family as not just the ones related through birth but also the ones considered friends or socially developed relationships including unmarried or cohabiting partners (Kossek & Lautch, 2012). In that direction the study reference to family corresponds the way other researchers refer to work-non work balance, work-life balance, private and professional balance (Kreiner et al., 2009, Allen et al., 2014).

Boundary theory is a social classification theory (Zerubavel, 1991; 1996) capturing how individuals create, adjust and maintain boundaries between work and family and in simplification the world around them (Ashforth et al., 2000; Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015, Kreiner et al., 2009). It has been used to describe role transitions separating those in micro and macro by the frequency of their transcendence, be it a daily commute to work or a promotion to a new role with more permanent effects (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). The literature on boundary theory further explains two key concepts that influence the transitions among boundaries and the roles that delimit a perimeter, how flexible and permeable those are as well describing how individuals create 'mental fences' to separate and manage the consequences of the separation (Kreiner et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Zerubavel, 1991). In the foundational study on work-home relations, Nippert-Eng (1996) explained how boundary theory can be used as theoretical lens to understand how individuals assign different meanings to work and home and she described how individuals engage daily in boundary work through her qualitative study Calendars and Keys: The classification of Home and Work. In this study, Nippert-Eng (1996) describes how the employees at the Lab create, take away and maintain the boundaries between work and home and by applying the integration-segmentation continuum she explains why some preferred to protect the boundaries while others were attempting to create an amorphous domain where all is one. In her qualitative study Nippert-Eng (1996) describes how individuals based on the type of boundary work they enact are falling across the integration-segmentation continuum, having the segmentors applying strategies such as keeping separate calendars or different keys and integrators using one calendar for private and professional reasons or having friends over for dinner and approaching work as a part of what they do. Consecutively, boundary management is described as the mechanisms the individuals use to assist them in navigating themselves in the environment around them and create, adjust their boundaries (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996).

Border theory (Clark, 2000) is a similar concept to boundary theory in terms of how both view work and family as socially constructed domains and address how individuals enact different strategies that allow them to create, edit, maintain their realms and they border between those. Clark (2000) describes how individuals are more proactive than reactive in creating the border between work and home which is similar to how Ashforth et al. (2000) explains that individuals have their own preferences on how to create those boundaries and the

relative strength in order to allow for either ease of access by constituting weaker border or maintain the separation by creating stronger borders (Clark, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000). In terms of differences, border theory as developed by Clark (2000), focuses on 'how individuals manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and border between them in order to attain balance' (Clark, 2000, p. 750) whereas as boundary theory focuses on the transitions between and within domains and roles (Ashforth et al., 2000). Also, border theory is focused on the work and family realm in contrast to boundary theory that expands to more personal domains than those (Nippert Eng, 1996). Apart from few differences these two concepts share a common base and set main ideas of keeping work and home as separate domains facilitates easier management of those borders whereas integrating work and family makes it easier to transition between the two. Additionally, the enacted strategies of the individuals can influence their well-being based on the meanings they attach to work and home, their preference in whether to segment or to integrate, contextual factors in terms of supply conditions of the environment as well as the fit between the individual and the environment (Clark, 2000; Kreiner, 2002; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Ashforth et al., 2000).

The boundaries between work and home are idiosyncratically being constructed within an ever changing environment that is shaped by social, cultural and institutional arrangements (Mills, 1959; Moen & Chermack, 2005). Individuals prefer to segment or integrate in their own ways keeping their temporal, physical, spatial boundaries unviolated or adjusted according to their preferences (Ashforth et al., 2000). But the boundary management preferences might not always be available and individuals might need to adjust according to surrounding environment changes and as Nippert - Eng (1996) describes might alter the meanings that are being assigned to work and home as well as change the way those meanings are being carried out. According to literature, when individual boundary preferences align with their environment, boundary congruence is achieved (Kreiner, 2006). This person - environment fit approach explains that integrating or segmenting is not good or bad but what is important is the fit between the person and environment. With the outbreak of the pandemic and the sudden move of the people's workplaces at home, the traditional boundaries have been challenged as well as the enacted strategies of the individuals. Hence, the home-working situation creates a misalignment of the segmentors' preferences to keep work and home separate leading to incongruence (Rothbard et al., 2005; Kreiner, 2006) whereas integrators might be more adjustable to the new situation or even thrive having the workplace at home. Although these studies have shown the importance of the fit between the individuals' environment and preferences, looking away from whether someone is an integrator or a segmentor and instead focusing on what the boundaries mean contextually for the individuals has been suggested by previous literature (Ammons, 2013).

Boundary work as defined by Langley et al. (2019) is the 'purposeful individual and collective effort to influence the social, symbolic, material and temporal boundaries, demarcations and distinctions affecting groups, occupations and organizations'. Boundary work can as well be applied at a collective level but given the study's focus on exploring the intra-individual boundaries, that set of literature hasn't been included in this study (Langley et al., 2019).

Following aforementioned arguments and suggestions, home-working is an area where the above theories and concepts can be applied to support exploring the boundaries between work and home. In this report a case study of employees having moved to home-working, due to government recommendations in the fight against pandemic is being presented. Applying 'boundary theory' as a framework, the report is aiming to explore the different types of

boundary work and what those mean for the individual lives. As will be discussed later on, individuals have developed strategies to support them to separate home from work, enhance their private domain or create one amorphous sphere where work and home is one (Nippert-Eng, 1996).

Methodology

Setting

Bright Co. (pseudonym), the company in focus throughout the article, is an international company operating globally and having its headquarters in Sweden. The company was founded in the early of the 20th century with the safety of people inside and outside the car as its guiding principle. Today, Bright Co. employs approximately 40,000 employees globally with more than 12,000 being based at its head offices in Sweden where this study is focusing on. In 2020 with the outbreak of the pandemic, Bright Co. following governmental regulations in the fight against the virus, issued recommendations that were impelling its employees to work full time from home and perform their daily working activities from their private domains. Bright Co. is a company that is generally in favour of flexible working practices and specifically home-working having policies in place that contribute to employee welfare. Moreover, Bright Co. is heavily focused on the employee working experience and is very keen on creating working conditions that support a work-life balance. However, the pandemic has imposed a swift change of how individuals were called to approach work and the sudden move of the workplace at people's homes has disrupted the work-life situation for many, creating a new 'normal'. The context of this sudden move to home-working in a company where work normally takes place in the office, offers a good opportunity to study how employees manage the blurred lines of separation between the two domains.

The individuals' traditional boundaries are being subjected to change making it hard to follow their 'normal' strategies separating between work and home. This unforeseen situation sets the scene for boundary work management as it challenges the boundaries between work and private as well as the enacted strategies of the individuals. Hence, the setting presents a good example of how boundary work can be applied and guided by the boundary theory as lens, the study is aiming to analyse the changing borders due to the sudden switch to home-working. As we will see later, there were several practices that the Bright Co. employees engaged in as well as examples of how the boundaries were adjusted to fit the new situation.

Research Design

In order to give sufficient answers to the research questions and to conduct an exploration of boundaries of the individuals under the studied period, a qualitative case study was deemed appropriate as a research design (Silverman, 2011). Understanding the boundary work of the Bright Co. employees in home-working would ideally be done through following their everyday lives and having access to their normal realities. However, due to the circumstances such an approach of closely observing the employees was not available. Because of the explorative nature of the study, sending out standardised questionnaires to all employees to capture their boundary work was also quickly identified as challenging, since the employees were not necessarily familiar with the concept and questions of what boundary work they

performed would not support the study's nature. Asking questions in such a way to make it possible to understand and analyse the type of boundary work that employees performed as well as the effects of the different types was difficult to extract through regulated questions and thus interviews were chosen as the primary source of data collection. The interviews were open-ended allowing the interviewees to speak freely without being interrupted and in order to capture their experiences and interpretation of the situation (Kvale, 1996; Silverman, 2011). In this way the researcher was able to get access to the employee's stories about the home-working situation and how they dealt with the challenges and the new reality.

Since the study relies on interviews performed solely online due to the pandemic restrictions, it creates certain challenges such as the risk of missing out details of the conversations (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Computer assisted interviews don't accommodate for understanding body language and soft parts of the conversations as well as coming closer in the dialogue and getting an understanding of the context in which the respondents live and work. Also, respondents might not feel comfortable in opening up and sharing information about their private lives to a stranger and considering the fact that the author is an active employee of Bright Co. the respondents may not want to be fully transparent and honest with revealing their inner secrets. However, people at the time of the interviewing were working from home and were already relatively used to having online conversations through media platforms making it less likely for such biases to appear and allowing participants to be more open to personal topics and (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Additionally, the fact that people were used to computer based dialogues made it much easier for the researcher to schedule the interviews.

Analysing the boundaries of individuals based on their narrated stories poses another potential challenge in the sense that boundaries are subjective. What a boundary is for one person might not reflect the preferences of another and thus they cannot be taken for granted. In a similar manner, boundary work and specifically the strategies that the individuals enact in order to paint the limits of where one domain starts and where another ends might be dependent upon several factors, including boundary preferences between work and private life, age of the respondents, family conditions as well as their work roles. Therefore, careful analysis and interpretation of the respondents' stories was ensured in order to understand how boundary work is changing as a consequence of the sudden move to the home-working situation.

Interview preparation

A questionnaire with individual themes of questions was put together prior to interviewing the first interviewee. The themes were split into five, starting with some opening questions on the background of the employee's work and home situation, followed by more specific questions to understand the boundary setting between work and home as well as in which ways and under which circumstances those boundaries are allowed to be transcended or crossed. The third theme would include questions on the interviewee's daily routines and the daily practices he/she engages in order to create and set boundaries between work home separating or integrating those two spheres or realms. The fourth set of questions would focus on the interviewee's self and whether he or she shows a different mask or disguised identity based on whether being at home or at work. Lastly, questions on parental or cultural norms would be asked in order to understand underlying reasons that might influence the boundary setting and the ease of their transcendence or permeability. As a 'cool-off' question for smoothly ending the interview conversation, an evaluative question would be posted on what is the most positive reflection

with working from home and vice versa, aiming to provoke and extract an understanding of the interviewee's values.

Pilot study

Before the actual interviews, a pilot study was conducted to understand whether the questions serve the intended purpose and whether they are clear for the interviewees. The questionnaire initially consisted of a total of 76 questions, some open ended and some binary, which were significantly minimised to the amount of 5 after engaging in the first pilot interview. Also, the flow of the discussion did not follow a strict agenda but left room for discussion and reflection (Kvale, 1996). A first question on the interviewee's background sparked the conversation and the interviewee started discussing about working life from home and how it has changed with the pandemic. The interviewer used the 76-long set of questions to guide the conversation where needed but did not break the flow or interrupted the interviewee while speaking.

The first interviewee was a close friend of the author and to thoroughly test the process the interviewer followed the steps intended for all the interviews. The pilot participant was contacted through an email, with a short explanation of the interview's purpose as well as a short presentation of the topic and once a confirmation email from the interviewee was received, the meeting was booked through Microsoft Teams, based on interviewee's availability and for initially 30' minutes (was extended to 45' based on flow of conversation).The day of the interview, a short repetition on the topic to be discussed was given, the 5 sets of questions were presented and after asking the interviewee whether it was fine to record the session for allowing the interviewer's full attention on the discussion, the session would start.

Data collection

The data for this study was collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews. To understand the boundary work practices of the participants in this study the author conducted 27 semi-structured interviews in the form of online conversations, with the interview group consisting of employees from different levels in the hierarchy (Table 1), diverse occupations and with a variety of home/life configurations (Table 2). After performing 23 interviews, few themes were starting to repeat and an extra 4 interviews were performed to ensure information is not useful or relevant anymore, a method referred to as saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Given the research questions of the study and ensuring that the sample is not biased towards certain groups of people a reasonable representative sample was collected with employees from the studied company. To ensure variation in the types of boundary work employees from several hierarchical levels were selected, in different ages and genders, and with roles representing different parts of the organisation in terms of tasks, roles and functions. Boundaries between work and private might be dependent upon several dimensions and thus ensuring the sample is representative is of high importance. Nippert-Eng (1996) describes that boundaries are placed in certain ways when there are extended work demands that might lead respondents to segment or integrate accordingly. A promotion to a managerial position for example, might entail a greater investment of one's personal time to work, more thinking of work while at home and more socializing with work colleagues outside work hours (Nippert-Eng, 1996).

Table 1. Interview Overview.

Role	#Interviews
Junior manager	6
Middle level manager	9
Senior manager	4
Consulting partner	3
C-level business support	2
Line manager	3
Total	27

Also, the nature of the job and occupational norms play an important role on how the boundaries are placed between work and home. A more bureaucratic administrative work encourages segmentation while a more demanding 'greedy' (Coser, 1974) line of work fosters integration. Choosing employees with diverse family/work backgrounds is also important to understand why boundaries are placed in certain ways. The demands of spouses at home, the sacredness assigned to family and kids, a single parent living with the kids or a two-parent family influences the way people draw the line between home and work.

After conducting a couple of interviews and in order to identify more participants that could support me in obtaining more information on the researched topic, I used a method referred to as 'snowballing' (Kvale, 1996). Snowballing is a technique to expand the interviewee sample by asking one conversant to propose others for interviewing which eventually helped me get access to more employees practicing boundary work daily.

Throughout the interview conversations I protected the participants' personal information ensuring confidentiality by anonymizing the data and using pseudonyms whenever referring to specific people. Anonymity can act as a power technique that enables the researcher to silence the interviewees and interpret the information according to own interests (Brinkmann, 2007) thus the data obtained were handled with care excluding interpretations that did not reflect the true stories of the interviewees.

Following ethical guidelines, I used an informed consent (Brinkmann, 2007; Kvale, 2006) ensuring an understanding for the research topic, the participation in the study, and the methods of obtaining the information. Participants were also informed that the participation is voluntary and that they had the right to leave the conversation at any point. Also, they were made aware that the information obtained would be recorded, transcribed and stored in a secure way and deleted after the end of the study. The consent agreement was presented to all participants at the start of the interview. Most of the respondents signed the agreement and agreed to have the session recorded, two out of the 27 denied the video recording and handwritten notes were taken instead. Lastly, due to the request for confidentiality within Bright Co., anonymity was kept throughout this research.

Data Analysis

The total number of respondents was 27, all of them were white-collar employees with university degrees. They were roughly equal numbers of males and females (13 and 14 respectively) with ages spanning from early twenties to late fifties with varied life

configurations (Table 2). Based on the integration-segmentation continuum presented by Nipper- Eng Christina, the respondents' enacted boundaries fell between the polar sides of the spectrum with some flowing back and forth and with no respondent separating or integrating work from life and vice versa in a similar way. Attempting to understand whether the participants are integrating or segmenting in their daily lives led me to look into the boundary work they engage with the activities they do, things they say and actions they take to separate work from life and the opposite.

The analysis of the data occurred in three phases, based on a grounded theory approach for data collection and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The first phase consisted of transcribing the interviews, coding and revisiting the material. Once the transcripts were made, I started looking into identifiable patterns and I saw that respondents were approaching home working in several different ways. Some of the respondents were less affected by the sudden change/move of workplace at home and some were more frustrated trying to balance work-private life, which initially seemed to be grounded in their individual family situation, i.e. if they had kids, living with a partner or being single. The respondents also seemed to enact very different strategies in order to cope with the working from home situation.

In the effort to explore this emerging hypothesis, respondents were grouped in four categories based on their family life configurations constituting the second phase of my analysis (Table 2). By summarizing and grouping the data in these four categories, I saw that the boundary work and the enacted boundaries that the single participants chose were sometimes practiced by the married or cohabiting partners with kids under three. Similar were for the other initial groups based on the home-family set up. Further analysing, respondents seemed to use the same kind of boundary work across family situations which led me to look away from whether respondents were married, were living alone or had kids and instead tried to identify why and how the respondents used the boundaries they did. A new pattern then emerged which in order to explore, the categories were once again reorganized based on the different types of boundary work performed by the respondents leading to the last phase of the analysis.

In this last phase, the categories were grouped according to the type of boundary work enacted and what emerged was three categories/strategies the respondents applied at several points in time: a) guarding the private, b) over and above, and c) elevate family. These strategies were enacted by the respondents in different degrees, some were practiced more than others, and within the same categories there were few differences between the respondents' enacted strategies to maintain the boundaries. The 'guarding the private' group was leaning towards the segmentation pole, keeping work outside the life domain and using activities and boundaries to maintain the separation (Nippert-Eng, 1996). In contrast, 'over and above' was leaning more towards the integration end, treating both worlds as one single amorphous domain with very few, if any, boundaries separating private/family from work (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Lastly, the 'elevate family' group was found to be more in the middle of the integration-segmentation continuum enhancing family and allowing private to pour into work leaving work to its own domain.

Table 2. Life configurations.

Structure	#Number
Singles, no kids	4

Married/cohabiting, no kids	13
Married/cohabiting, kids under 3	5
Married/cohabiting, grown/school aged kids	5
Total	27

Findings

The analysis of the data has revealed a clear pattern of boundaries that the respondents in this study were applying under the sudden move to home working. Based on the pattern of the boundaries implemented by the respondents several themes of strategies emerged that were enacted during the pandemic period, driving/adjusting the physical, behavioural, mental and temporal separation between work and home. These were, first, *guarding the private*, a strategy employed by the respondents to maintain the distinction between home and work, not allowing the intermixing of the professional and private sphere, keeping the domains to their own circle. Second, the *over and above,* a strategy enacted by the respondents being heavily invested in their work, over integrating work into the private domain with little to none infringement of private into their professional sphere. This strategy manifested in two manners, the *eager over and above* who were deeply infused into their working roles, defining their work as who they are as people and then *tentative over and above* who were enacting this strategy in the absence of better or other alternatives. Third, the *elevate family*, was the strategy enacted by the respondents who aimed at enhancing their private domain by borrowing time from their work sphere and mixing the two in the favour of their personal circle allowing little to none infringement with work related activities. In the following sections the strategies will be analysed in further detail.

Guarding the private

One widely applied boundary work strategy was guarding the private/family from work intrusions as well as the opposite. This group of respondents was trying to keep work and private separated most of the time falling largely on the segmentation part of the continuum. It was mostly applied by the single respondents as well as some married or cohabiting respondents with none or grown kids who valued their private/family time more than work and didn't feel happy with work intruding their lives more than it did by having the workspace at their place. Similarly, the respondents enacting this strategy did not like private matters mixing into their work domain either, and were trying at all times to keep them separate.

> I like to keep things where they belong. Work should be at the office and home is where I can be my private self [interview 2].

> I don’t like to have my working space at home [...] and I would definitely prefer to keep work separate by actually leaving the flat. And now that I have to work from home, my family knows that my working room is out of reach till the work is done. This way I limit mixing the two [interview 1].

> I just need to get my things done. And when it comes to colleagues it's only a few I let close to me. I don't need to spend more time with them than I already do. They are my colleagues and that's it. I try to do my job and go home [interview 4].

Considering the circumstances of having work always present, the respondents enacting this strategy were visiting the office at least twice a week to maintain their well-established boundaries and routines, they were taking few personal breaks, they were having a morning walk before the day starts, to mentally switch to work and they would close/hide the computer every afternoon. Starting the day would also mean preparing for work in a similar way as when going to the office, by taking a shower, wearing 'working' clothes and having a cup of coffee before switching mentalities.

> I am an extremely routined person, so I like to keep my schedule the same no matter if I go to the office or not [interview 5].

> I try to go to the office to get back to my normal routines, I am switching to work where I focus my energy and leave it there when I return home [interview 5].

> I like to dress up for work, maybe not wearing a suit but definitely not pyjamas. I like to separate the home outfit from work and feel more professional [interview 7].

The respondents would also use an exercise activity at the end of the working day to help them break from work, similar to using the commute from work as a way out of the office walls. With this approach they would not get stuck on work after hours and would disengage from their screens. Weekends were also very important for this group, which were strictly private and would not allow thoughts or work-related activities to intrude those. Common among the respondents enacting this strategy was that they would either use two mobile phones and separate calendars or mute notifications of social accounts or emails depending on which domain they were at that point.

> My evening exercise is a hard stop from work. I usually go to the gym at 18 and then I don't return to my computer [interview 9].

> Weekends are always a private thing. Screens, computers, everything shuts down. I have a very intensive week and I need these two days to rest my head and spend it with my loved ones [interview 10].

> I have two mobiles, I had my private phone from before with all my private contacts pictures etc. and I did not want to mix those up. So I keep my private and professional totally separate [interview 12].

Apart from the boundary activities the respondents were engaging with to set apart private from home, they also engaged in efforts to maintain the separation when working from home. As Lina explained, 'I have told my family that my home office is out of reach unless it's a real emergency, and I keep repeating every day'. The respondents who did not have any specific

boundaries before pandemic and were leaving private at home when going to office and the opposite, were really quick in installing strict routines to keep the domains distinct. Commuting to work became a morning walk around the block and the return to home an afternoon exercise. Similarly, cleaning the desk station and removing any working peripherals from common view became a sign that the working day was over. Maria repeated often that 'this is temporary and I would like to return to the office but until then I am doing my best to keep things separate'

As with the other strategies, there was some amount of within category variation but all in all *guarding the private* meant working at the office as many times in the week as possible, taking few personal breaks, using separate mobiles and calendars, having strict routines and private weekends as well as leaving all work-related thoughts within the bounds of the 9 to 5 realm. The afternoon exercise and the morning walk was also a common routine for the respondents enacting this strategy. As Georgia described, 'it's easy to get sucked in work, as there are always things to do, having strict routines is my way to control my day'.

Over and above

Another strategy enacted by the respondents was the over integration of work into private and family domains, with a small amount of the integration of the opposite. Considering the constant availability of work into their lives by having the workplace at their kitchen tables, living rooms or kids' rooms, these respondents were comfortable with having work pouring into their private time and some of them even desired in doing so. The group of respondents enacting this strategy had different roles, from junior to line managers, consultants and roles in business executive support having heavy and mild workloads to attend to. The 'over and above' group was further broken down into two categories based on the type of the boundary work engaged: the ones being *eager to over integrate* and the *tentative*, who were doing so reluctantly and in the absence of better or other alternatives.

The eager

The respondents that fell under this category saw themselves deeply infused into their work, they enjoyed being so and they rarely regretted approaching work in that way. This group was allowing work to infringe on their private time without so much of the opposite. These respondents treated both domains as one and they would refer to their roles as who they were as people, as George describes: 'It's just who I am as a person, my job is what I do'**.** They would work without specific timelines, think about work all the time and let work take their whole day. The morning would start early with having coffee while scrolling on the first emails, if having family, preparing breakfast while having a work-related phone call and then would start the working day as if they never stopped from the previous day. Lunch would be in front of the laptop and the day would continue in a similar way till afternoon where they would break for a walk or an exercise but then they would restart and continue till they felt that what they were doing was done.

> I love my job and I love working. I know how it sounds but I actually like delivering every day and feel like I am contributing to my team [interview 15].

> I am answering phone calls during breakfast and I am finalizing the presentation while having dinner [...] my mind is always somewhere else instead of whether the

> kids have eaten [...] I am bad at saying now I am home or put a stop, it's just who I am as a person [interview 20].

> In the afternoon I usually go to the gym but then when I return home, I would work a couple hours more. It's actually relaxing when the family has switched off for the day and I am totally undistracted [interview 17].

Having the workplace at home, for these respondents it was natural that they would continue working after hours, putting in long hours and continuing similarly on weekends. The respondents were either married or cohabiting with partners that had either similar jobs, no kids or heavy responsibilities at home or if they had then their partners would attend to those, leaving them undistracted to continue their work. Some of them had verbal contracts with spouses and family, that since the office exists at home they should be treated as if they were not there. Respondents who had grown kids and were enacting this strategy described that they would never work as much when the kids were small but nowadays they felt like they were not in their need any longer. As Maria explained, 'my kids don't want to hang out with us (parents) any more, they have their activities and friends which actually frees lots of my time that I put in at work'. When it comes to mobiles and calendars, this group of respondents were using one mobile phone for both work and private use, as well as one calendar with all their important events visible at all times.

> My partner knows the nature of my job, it's quite demanding and I need to be constantly available [...] we have agreed that I can do more home related things on the weekend [interview 13].

> My girlfriend and the dog don't interrupt me, they know the rules! She brings me lunch and makes sure the dog goes out for his walks and I take full responsibility on weekends [interview 21].

> Imagine me having two phones and separate calendars (laughs), I would be lost! With so much work and meetings to attend to I need to make sure I have the control [interview 7].

While the respondents enacting this strategy knew that Bright Co. was not per se expecting them to work round the clock, they felt that work was something they were passionate about and they were acting so, out of their own initiative and interest. Respondents in this group acknowledged that they could not continue working at such a pace forever and would like to be better at separating. Some of the respondents had experienced burn outs from colleagues or even someone in the close family and understood the strain that this was having on them and their relationships. However, the boundary work for this group was limited and private was intermixing with work into one amorphous domain.

> I was bad at separating before, now it's even worse. Having my office at my kitchen table constantly available I just can't help it, but I love what I do, it's what I am passionate about [interview 22].

> I know it can take a heavy toll on you, my best friend was under a burn out period and it's not something to take lightly. Always aware of it and making sure it's under normal levels [interview 25].

Compared to those who sought to maintain the separation between the two domains and were engaging in boundary work daily creating new routines and making sure private and home were kept as two different realms and were not mixing more than they did by having the workplace constantly available, the *eager over and above* would be comfortable with work pouring into their private sphere and even desiring it. This group was heavily invested in work and engaged in very few boundary setting/or protecting activities. The respondents in this group enjoyed working from home, they were saving time from commuting which allowed them to work more, had few breaks, no strict routines, using one mobile and all in one calendar and they were thinking about work at all times during the day and even at night. In contrast to 'guarding the private' this group would see weekends as extra time to finalize their work deliverables and the after-hours as focus time without distractions from the family. Also, the respondents enacting this strategy would not see work as stress or feel that Bright Co. is forcing them on being available 24/7 to over deliver but it would be their own passion and initiative that would drive their physical, temporal and behavioural boundaries.

Tentative

In comparison to the ones eager to over integrate and let work infringe into their private lives, this group would be reluctant to go over and above, they would be questioning whether that is really what they want and they would flow back and forth on the integration - segmentation continuum. Also, compared to the 'eager over and above', they would more easily allow private life to intermix with work. Some of 'tentative' respondents were seeing this strategy as a way to get ahead of the curve, putting some more hours now that would show later in their performance reviews and make them stand out from the crowd.

> I enjoy my job, I really do and sometimes I might go a bit over the top [...] having the workplace at home does influence it but I would say I am ok with it [interview 23].

> The pandemic will not be around forever, same with the extra shifts we probably all pull these days but on a positive note these extra hours makes me look better at work, I am getting noticed [interview 18].

Unlike 'guarding the private' this group would be fine with having private phone calls during working hours or a business call during dinner and similarly to the 'eager over and above' they would stay working for some more hours in the evening. However, they would sometimes resent their actions and they would question whether they should really do so. The respondents enacting this strategy or falling under this category, were mainly married or cohabiting with no or grown kids. The roles these respondents had were ranging from junior to senior managers and consultants that had mild to moderate workload. The 'tentative' respondents would be fine with having their workplace at home as they could flex their time schedules according to their needs avoiding the hassle of commuting every morning. As Sofia described, 'I used to spend

two hours daily driving to work, now I can decide how and where to invest that time and it's usually to that additional PowerPoint presentation (laughs)'.

When working at the office these respondents would mainly leave work at those premises when checking out but working from home had changed that for them. Having the workplace where they are their private selves and having work constantly available would make it difficult for them to disengage and in lack of better or other alternatives they would keep on working. This group had a desire to dedicate a lot of time to their partners, family and friends as well as spending time doing their hobbies but due to the circumstances, they were unable to do so. They also felt the pressure that being 'green'/active at their pc's meant that they should continue delivering, feeling guilty if they wouldn't or if their computer status would go idle when others were online.

> You know, it's that green little icon in Teams (communication platform) that betrays your status. When I see my manager or other colleagues online, it makes me feel guilty that I am not or if someone texts and I don't respond knowing that my computer is on [interview 19].

> Everybody knows I love golf, it's my passion. Under other circumstances I would log off as early possible and go for a match or to the driving range [...] it becomes work instead [interview 26].

For the 'tentative', home was always considered a private place but due to the circumstances they were fine to let work pour into their private lives. The respondents enacting this strategy would not have any specific routines unlike the 'guarding the private' who would take a shower and a walk around the block. This group would wake up just in time for their first meeting, dress in their comfortable home outfit and would not spend a great amount of time on preparing themselves. They would eat breakfast and lunch while having their daily meetings and would take more personal breaks compared to the 'eager over and above'. Their end of day would be signalized by closing the computer lid without hiding the computer leaving it visible on their desks, kitchen tables and sofas. However, as the respondents described, their end of day was not a real hard stop, as due to the restrictions for socializing with friends and family as well as the limitations to practicing their favourite hobbies they would instead continue working. As Elliot described, 'my living room sofa is a meter away where my partner is watching reality shows (laughs), it's either that or work. The choice is simple!'

The respondents in this group would spend time working on weekends but not necessarily. They would prepare their working week on a Sunday and they would finalize some presentations on a Saturday afternoon. Their working week would be similar to 'over and above' putting in extra hours but just because they did not have something better to do instead, as Maria describes, 'when I get bored, I will check some emails and maybe I will finalize that presentation I have left for some time'. The 'tentative' respondents with not very demanding private life or family that could take care of themselves would find themselves stuck by the computers filling in some downtime working, instead of switching off.

> I am sleeping longer these days, waking up right before my first call and usually eating breakfast while at it [...] similarly for lunch, it's usually over a meeting [interview 9].

> I would say I take more breaks than before but I also compensate for those later in the day when the family is asleep. So my working day doesn't really stop at 16, I will continue till late evenings occasionally [...] either way there is not much you can do with the pandemic ongoing [interview 16].

> There were those days where my phone would ring at 15 and a friend would propose an afternoon activity or plan a night out, now it's all series and movies with my partner (laughs) which I am done with so working actually sounds like a good alternative [interview 24].

Compared to the 'eager over and above', who very eagerly were intermingling their lives private with work and were treating all time and space as multipurpose (Nippert-Eng, 1996), the 'tentative' respondents were having mixed feelings or contradictory thoughts when it comes to overly integrating. This group was acknowledging that the pandemic was a factor influencing their ways of approaching work and were aware or were looking at it as something temporary. Common characteristics among this group of respondents enacting this strategy were loose routines but still existent, lazy mornings but eager to pull extra hours during evenings, having hobbies and activities they loved to spend time on instead of working but due to circumstances were unable to and low maintenance private life. Weekends used to be spent with loved ones and friends but the restrictions had shifted their focus to work which according to them could be something that would help them stand out or position them as good employees. As Martin describes, 'I cannot use my vacation time as vacation for me means flying to a warm country and I cannot meet friends and go out so I invest in my job instead'.

Elevate Family

Another widely applied pattern among the interviewed respondents was the 'elevate family'. The respondents enacting this strategy were found on the other side of the boundary work spectrum in comparison to 'over and above'. The group with the strategy to 'elevate family' was integrating personal/private into work, allowing little to none intermixing of work into their private sphere. Respondents enacting this strategy were found mostly among the married or cohabiting with kids under 5 as well as some with grown kids living at home, and who were using the working hours for a lot of personal related activities enhancing the private life levels.

The respondents in this group were happy working from home as it allowed them to be close to family and loved ones and gave them more time to attend to personal activities. For them skipping traffic, not having to look for clothes the next morning and stress to work or juggle between home chores, kids activities and important project presentations was what they defined as quality of life. This group had either quite heavy demanding private lives with young kids and family to attend to or were viewing work as something important to them but family would always come first. The respondents would do what was needed for their job but not the extra and having the workplace at home would allow them to invest that extra time in family related tasks instead.

> Early mornings, stress to prepare breakfast, find what to wear and then get stuck in traffic [...] I really don't miss those things! I love taking my time in the morning, enjoying a day before I actually start my working hours [interview 8].

> A two-hour meeting where I just had to listen, now can be combined with a walk in the park enjoying the sun and nature [...] I am free to add all the things that make me happy and take me away from the work stress [interview 11].

The respondents enacting this strategy would prefer or not go to office at all, work Monday to Friday at home and with every opportunity would add rewarding tasks in their day, spend time with family or engage in private activities. As Eva described: 'I am stuck with this new Netflix series, with every possibility I will steal sometime and watch an episode'. Respondents would also aim to have stress free mornings to eat breakfast with family, would work till lunch time with quite a few breaks here and there and would finalize by 16 or even earlier if nothing was urgent. Some of the respondents with the strategy would take Friday afternoon off and spend time with family instead. As Lina describes, 'being at my age I am very careful of the time I spend for Bright Co., my job is important to me but so is my family'. Weekends would be similar for all the respondents enacting this strategy, laptops would shut down on a Friday, all work-related thoughts would be paused and Monday would be the first time to go into that mentality again.

> While I am on a call, I will do the dishes or put on the laundry machine or go to the supermarket for the weekly groceries [...] I get so many things done while at the same time I am in a boring meeting that in the office I could not avoid [interview 10].

> There will always be more work and new tasks to deliver, it's important to remember that it's just a job and there are more important things in life to invest your time on [interview 20].

> I am redecorating the kids room so lots of my time goes there and the home office gives me the flexibility to do so [...] I usually don't start a big task related to work after 15 o'clock, things can wait until the next working day [interview 21].

Interesting with this group of respondents was that even though they would let private mix with work, they would not let the opposite crip back to their personal time and would be very aware if doing so. Also, among some of these respondents, would be a couple that would use the office as personal time for themselves, an opportunity to step away from family and do some private chores such as go for a haircut or do some work on their boats or even plan a family getaway on the weekend. As Nick explains, 'I love working from home and being close to my family, going to the office is my free social time, Nick's time'.

Compared to 'over and above', having the workplace at home, the 'elevate family' would feel that it was actually alleviating stress, let them plan their schedules according to their desires, spend lots of time with the ones most important to them and enjoy what they were referring to as the true work-life balance. Important for these respondents was that work was kept at its own domain, meaning the workspace was restricted at a specific corner of the flat or at the basement leaving room for the personal/private time around.

> I keep work retained in the basement, that is where Bright Co. exists [...] I don't like work creeping into my home more than it does but on the other hand I am happy I can be home close to my kids [interview 16].

> I love my kids and family, don't get me wrong [...]But working from home gets heavy sometimes so I find my way out on my boat, fix some things and spend some working hours that otherwise would be in useless meetings [interview 26].

Whether these respondents were working from home or were going to the office, they were trying to fit personal errands into their days and specifically with restrictions and the pandemic ongoing working from home was ideal. Key characteristics of this strategy was the constant infringement of work with private related activities, more personal breaks, having one mobile phone and calendar that are full of private appointments and thinking family as the top priority. The 'elevate family' physical, temporal and behavioural boundaries were driven by their focus on family, enhancing their quality of life and limiting the time that their job was taking from their private time.

Discussion

Home-working is not a new situation but the sudden move of the workplace at home due to the pandemic outbreak has challenged the boundaries between work and home for the remote workers. In this paper a case study of 27 respondents employed at the head office of a large Fortune 500 company was presented, who due to governmental recommendations in the fight against COVID-19 were forced to work from home. This rapid change and the lack of choice to work from home is the phenomenon in focus. Specifically this study has examined the boundaries between home and work and has explored the different types of boundary work that the individuals were engaging during the pandemic period.

Previous research has been conducted through quantitative methods with questionnaires and surveys while in this study a qualitative study approach was applied (Edwards and Rothbard, 1999; Clark, 2002b; Kreiner, 2002). As the focus was the exploration of the boundaries, the stories and experiences of the respondents' were important and in order to identify how boundary work was changing as a consequence of home-working, the employee's narrations were collected through semi-structured open-ended computer assisted interviews. Guided by the boundary theory lens the respondents' home-work boundaries were then carefully analysed and interpreted.

The careful interpretation of the respondents' experiences led to the identification of strategies that the individuals were enacting during the studied period in order to create, edit and maintain their temporal, spatial and behavioural boundaries as well as different activities and meanings they assigned in everyday realities. This confirms previous studies that refer to the idiosyncratic nature of boundary creation as well as the effort of the individuals to create distinct domains that are delimited in order to maintain the balance (Kreiner et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Clark, 2000). Specifically, the qualitative case study has revealed three major strategies that the individuals enacted under the studied period that had few within category differentiation. Considering the fact that the workplace was now in the individuals' home there was an effort from many of the respondents to keep work within the bounds of 9-5 and were very careful to not exaggerate. Some respondents saw the new home-working

situation as beneficial since it supported them in elevating and enhancing their private life levels and others found it difficult to keep the domains distinct. Furthermore, the results of this study indicated the boundary management activities that the individuals engaged in, assisting them in shaping and handling their work and family responsibilities (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015).

Answering the first research question on whether and how the individual boundaries have changed, the findings have indicated that boundary work is an ongoing process. The physical location where work takes place has changed, suggesting that it would be more difficult to maintain the boundaries between work and private-family life. However, the boundaries between work and private life did not change. They were maintained through boundary work, which had only changed character. The respondents' boundaries have been challenged due to the rapid transfer of the workplace at home but through the boundary work strategies they enacted they generally maintained the boundaries. Individuals that were used to keeping work within the company premises by using the commute to and from work as disengaging activities, were now using a morning walk or an afternoon activity as the mental transition to their professional roles. Additionally, respondents would visit the company offices once or twice a week in order to maintain their traditional boundaries and routines. Hence, the boundary work that the interviewed sample was enacted had transformed its nature in the effort to maintain the 'normal' boundaries of the respondents.

As mentioned above, the qualitative study has revealed three major strategies that the individuals enacted under the studied period which support in answering the second research question on whether there were any strategies used by the respondents. Initially, the intention of the study was to explore the different types of boundary work which was achieved and through that process several common strategies were identified. To some extent, these strategies follow the research conducted by Kossek and Lautch (2008) on the work-family enacted strategies. According to the research three broad 'flexstyles' were identified, the 'integrators', 'separators' and the 'volleyers' which were basically a representation of the extent to which the individuals were intermixing the private and work realms in terms of both physical and psychological aspects (Kossek & Lautch, 2008). According to Kossek and Lautch (2008), the 'integrators' were intermixing heavily private and work, 'separators' were aiming to keep the domains intact and the 'volleyers' were floating back and forth. Similarly, this paper has identified three major strategies, the *guarding the private* who would maintain the separation, the *over and above* who would overly integrate and the subcategory of the *tentative* who would integrate in lack of better alternatives. Additionally, the individuals have resorted to actions that would assist them in separating work from home and alleviating the blur between the two domains by closing the computer lid at the end of day or even hiding the computer and any peripherals to help them disconnect after the working day.

The above follows recent research that implies that the extreme situation due to the pandemic might entail the need for creating new ways to separate work from home in order to maintain the balance and reflects the research which underpins the importance of disconnecting in order to recover (Cho, 2020; Sonnentag & Fitz, 2007). Moreover, the results indicated that respondents used strategies creating a physical separation of the workplace at home by having a designated office area and not blending work items in other parts of the house. These strategies are also following the research about recovering that were presented by Sonnentag, Kuttler, and Fritz (2010) who described how creating spatial boundaries assisted in work detachment.

Another contribution that this paper is aiming to make is in regards to the boundary fit approach instead of person-environment congruence (Kreiner et al., 2006; Rothbard et al., 2005). Following suggestions of previous studies for future researchers that investigate work-family boundaries to look away from whether individuals integrate or segment and instead look in the context of what the boundaries means for the individuals' lives. Last, the study is adding a small contribution to existing literature in regards to suggestions for management when managing at distance (Haul & Richter, 1988, Kreiner et al., 2009). The transfer of the workplace at home has challenged the boundaries of the individuals, who through enacted strategies strived to maintain. As the findings suggest, for some individuals the process of maintaining the boundaries felt as an easier task than others suggesting that remote workers might benefit from management support. Hence, line managers as a first step should acknowledge the suggestion that home-working is approached differently per individual, dependent on how they manage their work and private domains under normal circumstances. Also, management and companies in a more general sense, should support employees with managing and reducing conflicts created between work-home with some suggested ideas being to normalize the working from home hours (Haul & Richter, 1988). Individuals and managers should negotiate and agree on the timeframes they are expected to be available creating a boundary between work and private life. Also, as the findings indicate, some individuals were quite routined following their 'normal' activities as prior to the pandemic whereas others were struggling to maintain the separation. Management could thus support by encouraging individuals to attend seminars on personal planning and have sessions discussing how to create clear boundaries between home and private domains (Haul & Richter, 1988, Kreiner et al., 2009).

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that need to be noted and could be considered as inspiration for future research. Firstly, due to the pandemic situation the data was collected solely online through computer assisted interviews following a qualitative approach. Qualitative research allows for collecting the respondent's stories and narrations and is in line with the purpose of this paper. However, only a small amount of research has used qualitative approach to explore work-family relations and future research can look into more qualitative combined with mixed methods studies as recent research suggests (Neal, Hammer, & Morgan, 2006). In addition, the data is self-reported narrations of the interviewed sample and the boundaries examined are subjective to the individual perspectives. Although the data collected follows the aim of this study it could be interesting for future researchers to capture data also from the surrounding environment of the interviewee i.e. family members, co-workers.

In terms of the interviewee sample, the respondents were all white-collar employees of the studied company and Swedish citizens. Although it's a multinational company, the fact that the employees were only Swedes might account only for one perspective and future research could look into adding more nationalities or people from the same company but from another country. This way we could see if there would be any interesting differences between the various company offices. The study has taken into account the different respondents' ages when investigating the boundaries between work and home but not the genders. Future research could look into the strategies enacted by men and women focusing on their experiences when it comes to enhancing family or after-hours availability.

Another limitation of this study that needs to be noted is the selection of the company as well as the interviewed participants. The company was chosen because of ease of access and

the respondents were initially close colleagues of the author that with the method of 'snowballing' (Kvale, 1996) referred to others which enriched the sample and added variation in terms of positions and organisational fields. Although the studied company and the selected participants fit for the purpose of this study, it would be interesting to see whether similar experiences are described to future researchers who are totally external to the company.

As mentioned above, the main method for collecting the data was through online interviews. Despite the fact that at the time of the pandemic respondents were familiar and relatively used in having online conversations, it would be interesting for future researchers to have access to respondents' home-working environment and be able to follow their everyday realities.

Additionally, due to the pandemic situation, the results of this study and to what extent can be generalized beyond the studied period is not possible to convey. This study is based on a single case study and under the extreme circumstances of people being forced temporarily to work from home makes it difficult to say for a fact whether the results can be applied to home-working in general or a limited only within the pandemic period. Consequently, the respondents' enacted strategies described in this study as well as their home-working context are delimited by the pandemic period. However, the results can still add to our understanding on the boundary work of the respondents' and future research could investigate whether these strategies were there from the first place or were just accelerated by the situation.

Implications for theory and practice

In spite of the limitations presented above, the results of this study can still offer some learnings indicating a fertile ground for future research. In terms of practical implications, the findings underline the importance of detaching from work in the evening hours as well as the need for personal breaks to stretch and exercise. Having the workplace at home and in lack of professional home-working set up, individuals should ensure that they have enough exercise and consider releasing eye-stress from long hours in front of the computer. Additionally, individuals should consider adding mental transition activities in their working day to assist them in turning on and off their working self. Some helpful strategies might include a morning walk before starting the day or an evening exercise signalling the end of the working day. Also, booking several breaks during the day for stretching and exercise as well as for a sufficient amount of time for lunch would be suggested.

The enacted strategies presented in the study further describe that some individuals might have more difficulties in separating work from home which can provide some learnings for management. Seeing colleagues online in the digital tools used for work can be a source for stress or subconsciously pushing the employees to work long hours making them unable to detach themselves. Managers should agree with the team on specific rules for the working hours and encourage employees to disengage in order to relax and recover. Also, as the findings indicate and due to the pandemic situation there is a lack of social interaction which leads to feeling of disconnection and loss of purpose. Management should install frequent social checks, ensuring that employees interact with their colleagues and fellow employees creating a sense of belonging even at a distance. Additionally, managers should adapt their way of managing the employees in a way that creates security and safety for the latter's jobs.

With respect to the implications for theory, the results of the study indicate that the respondents enacted several strategies in order to separate/segment work from home considering the fact that their workplace had moved in their private areas. The respondents who had established boundaries prior to pandemic were adept in finding new routines and adjusting

their working day to fit their new normal. This could suggest that the integration-segmentation approach could be viewed as a skill or a strategy that could be trained or taught. Research on the topic could add to our understanding on whether segmenting as a tool would be related to improved work-life balance and it could contribute to the newer research on ways to empower employees to manage their working day as well as assessing boundary management styles that fit best (Kossek, 2016; Kossek et al., 2012). Management could consider creating training occasions that support employees in their home-working situation assisting them in adjusting their enacted boundary strategies to their work situation (Kossek et al., 2012).

This study is conducted during the pandemic situation and as such the strategies that have been described are bound by it, however they suggest that individuals are adjusting their working day in such a way that fits their preferences and needs thus suggesting that since more and more companies are providing home-working possibilities, educational training on work-life balance might be useful. Concluding, there is a need for more research on boundary management, boundary strategies and how those can be applied in order to support individuals achieving a work-life balance.

Conclusions

This study focused on the boundary work among a sample of employees who were forced to switch to home-working during the pandemic period following governmental regulations in the fight against the virus. The extreme situation and the rapid transfer of the workplace in the individuals' homes has disrupted the working 'normal' for the respondents and has challenged the boundaries between work and home. In that direction, this study has fulfilled its purpose by providing the boundary work literature with a qualitative contribution of how the respondents of a multinational company have responded to the situation. Individuals have enacted certain strategies in order to create, edit and maintain their spatial, temporal and behavioural boundaries according to their needs. Among those were, the *guarding the private*, *over and above*, and the *elevate family* who based on the boundary work they engaged under the studied period have been grouped under common identified strategy patterns. Given the circumstances, these strategies are difficult to be generalized and are therefore delimited by the pandemic. Future research can further investigate and add to our understanding of the boundary managing strategies of remote workers also outside of the pandemic context, taking account of the assumption that home-working options will be of larger availability in the years to come.

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