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Is there a need to stabilize Flexible Working Arrangements?

A qualitative case study within the Swedish public sector

Karin Andreasson and Sara Hansson

Supervisor: Fredrik Lavén
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Graduate School

Karin Andreasson

*Master of Science in Management, Graduate School,
School of Business, Economics and Law, University of Gothenburg*

Sara Hansson

*Master of Science in Management, Graduate School,
School of Business, Economics and Law, University of Gothenburg*

Abstract

Work-life flexibility has influenced the way work is organized in modern organizations, which has led to a widespread adoption of the concept Flexible Working Arrangements (FWAs). While FWAs is a well-researched area, there are still significant limitations in previous literature. Previous studies on FWAs tend to focus directly on the implications of flexibility in relation to work-family conflicts. This study aims to broaden the understanding of how FWAs are used and understood in practice and the consequences of having a flexible work-life within the Swedish public sector. Drawing on a comparative approach to explore similarities and differences between employees and managers in relation to existing policies, this study contributes with several main findings. First, by taking the lens of boundary theory, employees' and managers' engagement in diverse types of boundary work practices could be explained. In addition, a kind of boundary loyalty has been identified where the employees gave accounts of a loyalty and respect towards the boundaries between domains. Secondly, the findings of this study point towards a need to stabilize the FWAs for a number of reasons. Lastly, this study may provide inspiration for future research of how the concept of FWA can be used and understood in practice, and the implications an increasingly flexible work-life can have for people working in an organization.

Key words: Flexible Working Arrangements, Boundary Theory, Technology, Swedish Public Sector

Introduction

Work is a central part of most people's lives, but how work is organized has gone through fundamental changes over time. The traditional work-life is built around a clear dichotomy, where work and home are being held in separate domains (Aronsson, 2018) whereas today's modern society is characterized by an ever-changing work-life with new ideas and models on how to structure work (Eurofound, 2017). Hence, flexibility has in recent decades become a buzzword in organizations (Lewis, 2003 pp.1) and still is. However, the increasingly flexible work-life also puts more pressure on the individual employee to take responsibility for both setting and communicating one's own boundaries (Allvin et al., 2006). Another issue concerns the mental difficulty employees may experience where unresolved work-related questions might be prevalent while one is engaged in other private matters (Sonntag & Krueger, 2006). This has made it apparent to employers that work and private domains are intimately connected (Rau & Hyland, 2002).

Many organizations have thus increasingly replaced fixed schedules, providing employees with the autonomy to decide when and where to complete work tasks (Rau & Hyland, 2002; Hill et al., 2008). For instance, employees can work from home, while commuting, at coffeeshops, at co-working spaces or in various places within the organization, facilitated by an increased use of media technology (Gerdenitsch, Kubicek & Korunka, 2015). Flex-time scheduling and homeworking arrangements are common FWAs, that enable workers to adjust when and where to perform their work to better accommodate additional life roles (Rau & Hyland, 2002). For employers, the implementation of such arrangements has been described as a way to gain competitive advantages by attracting employees to the workplace (Rau & Hyland, 2002). In addition, FWAs may contribute to an increased employee motivation (Ahmad, Idris & Hashim, 2013) and employee engagement (Ugargol & Patrick, 2018). Several researchers have highlighted positive outcomes related to the usage of FWAs. For employees, an increased employee control over work-time has been described as a counteract against stress (Powell & Cortis, 2017). Others have shown that some FWAs seem to reduce pressure from work and thereby decrease work-life conflicts (Russell, O'Connell & McGinnity, 2009; Allen et al, 2013). A positive correlation between flexibility and different parameters related to an individual's perception of work life has further been found, for instance a better perceived balance between the work domain and private domain (Fernandez- Creuset et al., 2016) and job satisfaction (Wheatley, 2017).

In academic research, the concept of FWA has commonly been described as an aspect of freedom and autonomy (Hill et al., 2008; Gerdenitsch, Kubicek & Korunka, 2015) but is yet also associated with external control (Gerdenitsch, Kubicek & Korunka, 2015). Most research have studied FWAs from a national and/or organizational perspective (e.g. Goodstein, 1994; Dex & Scheibl, 2001; Dalton & Mesch, 1990; Krausz, Sagie, & Biderman, 2000), while fewer studies have highlighted how FWAs actually are used and understood in practice from the workers perspective, especially in Sweden (Allard, Haas & Hwang, 2007). In addition, few comparative studies of the interaction between employees, managers and FWA policies have been identified in previous studies (Cooper & Baird, 2015). This paper aims to continue the debate and critique within the FWA literature raised by other scholars, namely the perception of FWAs as autonomous per se (Gerdenitsch, Kubicek & Korunka, 2015). Through the lens of boundary theory, how and why individuals manage the relationship between their work domain and private domain (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Clark, 2000) could be understood, as well as the implications of having an increasingly flexible work-life characterized by a combination of FWAs and technology (Hislop & Axtell, 2011). Drawing on previous literature on boundary work, one can further understand how boundaries can be negotiated and re-negotiated in practice through an iterative process (Lindberg, Walter & Raviola, 2017) which may explain how and why employees and managers in this case deal with diverse boundary work practices.

Since the area of FWA is particularly unexplored within the public sector (Colley, 2010; Powell and Cortis, 2017), this paper builds on a case study of the environmental department within the City of Gothenburg. The organization comprises several departments in charge of different governmental responsibilities, which manage and supervise the strategical environmental work within the Gothenburg region. During the last decades, FWAs have been a central part of the

way work has been structured and performed in this organization. The purpose of this study is to provide insights and in-depth knowledge of how municipality workers, meaning both employees and managers, use the flexibility provided in their everyday work-life. In addition, this paper seeks to broaden the understanding of consequences associated with having a flexible work-life in this organization. The purposes will be fulfilled by answering the following research questions; (1) *How are FWAs used and understood in practice?* (2) *What are the consequences of having a flexible work-life for the municipality workers within this organization?*

This paper is structured as follows. First, previous research bodies within the FWA field is presented, followed by an exploration of the theoretical foundation of this paper. Secondly, an outline of the methodological approach is given followed by a description of the empirical findings. Additionally, the most significant empirical findings are discussed with theoretical implications in mind, which sums up with a concluding section and suggestions for future research.

Previous Research on FWA

Previous literature on the FWA concept is important to bear in mind to fulfill the aim of investigating how FWAs are used and understood in practice, and the implications of having a flexible work-life. During the last decades, workplace flexibility has been a subject of interest for both researchers, practitioners, and public policy advocates (Allen et al, 2013). Research on FWA usually originate from two larger bodies of literature. One body extends from employers' point of view and ideas on how these arrangements contribute to effectiveness and productivity whereas the other body takes on employees' perspective based on the implications of having a more flexible work-life. FWAs are often introduced and adopted by organizations based on a business case argument (Lewis, 2003 pp.2). For employers, the implementation of such arrangements has been described as a way to gain competitive advantages by attracting employees to the workplace (Rau and Hyland, 2002). It has been suggested that employees who experience conflicting work-family demands are drawn to workplaces that provide FWAs (ibid). These arrangements are also commonly implemented as way to address various organizational performance measures, such as employing temporary workers to decrease labor costs (Valverde, Tregaskis & Brewster, 2000) or as a mean to measure employee turnover (Dalton & Mesch, 1990; Stavrou & Kilaniotis, 2010). In terms of employee performance, FWAs can both be implemented and established into an organization through a formal or informal process which can be perceived as a contributing factor that influences employee performance (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017). Other researchers that have taken an organizational approach have found a positive relationship between FWAs and increased employee motivation (Ahmad, Idris & Hashim, 2013) as well as for employee engagement (Ugargol & Patrick, 2018).

The concept of FWA has been used differently in different settings. The European Union policy on job quality advocates that employees should have the opportunity to exercise some control of their working arrangements (European Commission, 2012). In some countries FWA is even supported by legislation, where all employees are granted the "right to request" FWA (De

Menezes & Kelliher, 2017). Other studies have used data by OECD to show how some countries even go beyond legal minimum in providing family-friendly arrangements (Evans, 2001). The FWA policies most commonly cited among employers refers to the allowance of employees to change their working hours, for instance through flexi-time working or part-time working (ibid).

The other body of literature has developed from research on work-life to highlight the implications and outcomes of having FWAs. The concept of FWA is commonly described as an aspect of freedom and autonomy (Rau & Hyland, 2002; Hill et al., 2008; Gerdenitsch, Kubicek & Korunka, 2015). Hill et al., (2008) defines workplace flexibility as 'the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks'. However, FWAs have also been associated with external control and as a restriction of autonomy (Gerdenitsch, Kubicek & Korunka, 2015). Thus, flexible working could be the result of supervisors, clients or colleagues demands rather than simply accounting for employees' freedom of choice (ibid). Flexible working can further be positively or negatively associated depending on the degree of control over flexible situations (Gerdenitsch, Kubicek & Korunka, 2015). In their study, flexible working was positively associated among the participants when they experienced a higher degree of autonomy and negatively associated when they perceived flexible working as a result of more external control (ibid). The influence of autonomy and control on the outcomes of FWAs have thus been a central debate within this research field (Donnelly, 2006; Peters, Den Dulk & Van Der Lippe, 2009; Gerdenitsch, Kubicek & Korunka, 2015). In Sweden, the concept of flexibility first settled over 30 years ago and questions about flexible working hours were given raised attention (Allvin et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the Swedish labor market is still highly associated with regular working hours and a permanent workplace, even though only one sixth of the employments account to those traditional agreements (ibid).

The work-family conflict literature commonly refers to employees' challenges of managing the integration of work and family demands (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Pleck et al., 1980; Bohlen and Viveros-Long, 1981; Kossek, Noe & Demarr, 1999). The work-family domain is a place where individuals may experience numerous personal or internal conflicts (Kossek, Noe & Demarr, 1999). A time-based conflict potentially arises since time spent on activities within different roles are distributed unequally (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Thus, time and schedule-related work domains as hours worked, inflexible work and shift work can interfere with family domains as children and spouse employment (ibid). Physical time dedicated to one role hence creates a difficulty to fulfill requirements of other roles (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Pleck et al., (1980) alternatively take on a gender perspective towards work-family conflicts where differences between men and women regarding the reported causes to work-family conflicts are highlighted. Bohlen and Viveros-Long (1981) further argue that the degree of acceptable flexibility combined with worker's needs, for instance employees with primary childcare obligation can potentially affect the prevalence of such work-family conflict.

There are researchers arguing that FWAs may contribute to both a positive and negative integration of the work domain and private domain (Hill, Hawkins & Miller, 1996; Russell,

O'Connell & McGinnity, 2009). Russell, O'Connell and McGinnity (2009) found that some FWAs reduce pressure from work and thus reduce work-family conflicts while Hill, Hawkins and Miller (1996) found that the majority of the mobile teleworkers studied considered mobility to have a positive influence on their personal life. Yet, the results in their study also showed variations and significant differences among subgroups of workers, where parents of young children considered mobility more favorable than workers who had a home office. Others found the opportunity for people to pursue a personal career as a positive aspect of flexible working, whereas workload and permanent accessibility were perceived as negative aspects of temporal flexibility (Gerdenitsch, Kubicek and Korunka, 2015). It has also been found that an increased flexibility tends to increase the work-intensity since workers respond to the responsibility of working more flexible by putting in extra effort to maintain good results for their employer (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

Even though the phenomenon of a flexible work-life and FWAs is a well-researched area, there are still significant research gaps to fill. Especially how FWAs are used and understood in practice and implications related to those everyday practices needs to be further explored. To provide explanations to how and why employees and managers deal with managing their work and private domain in practice, and to understand the implications of having an increasingly flexible work-life influenced by technology, boundary theory is perceived as suitable.

Theoretical Framework

Introducing Boundary Theory

Boundary theory serves as a very useful theoretical lens and tool when examining how and why people deal with managing the relationship between their work domain and private domain in practice. Throughout this paper, the terms 'boundary' and 'border' have been interpreted as synonyms. The notion of 'boundaries' has played an important role in both previous and more recent literature on work-family role management (e.g. Nippert-Eng, 1996; Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000; Clark, 2000; Trefalt, 2013).

Nippert-Eng's (1996) work sets the foundation for the recent studies within individual-level boundary management. Through the development of individual work segmentation or work integration, it has been found that individuals' mental classifications of work and family domains overlap in various degree (ibid). The concept of mental classifications can therefore not only be associated with individuals' day-to-day behavior but also with work-family conflicts because of individuals conscious and strategic choice to actively adjust and navigate the boundaries between roles in order to manage conflicting role demands (Piszczek and Berg, 2014). Kossek, Noe & Demarr (1999) further emphasize that the management of integrating work and family demands is a critical challenge that most employees are faced with. Individuals thus use different strategies in their boundary management which has been described by Kossek, Noe & Demarr (1999) as 'the strategies, principles and practices one uses to organize and separate role demands and expectations into specific realms of home and work'. These strategies have in previous boundary management research usually been separated into the process of segmentation and integration. A segmented boundary is when the boundary is clear

and strong, and the work domain and private domain mainly exist in separate domains (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). In turn, an integrated boundary is when the boundary is permeable and blurred, and the work domain and private domain is interrelated and overlapping (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). It has even been found that some individuals do not experience any distinctions between work and home both physically and psychology in time and space (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Calendar maintenance visualizes how individuals maintain a given relationship between work and home (Nippert-Eng, 1996). A more integrating strategy is to carry a small pocket calendar, accessible everywhere and to plot both work events as well as private events (ibid). A separating strategy of calendar maintenance is to have one calendar dedicated for work events and one dedicated for private events. These calendars are separated both in content and in location (Nippert-Eng, 1996). However, it has been argued in more current research that there can exist an array of options available to individuals regarding boundary management, which suggest that a behavior can cue multiple tactics (Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep, 2009).

One of the most central developments within the boundary theory literature is boundary work. Boundary work is the continuous and hands-on process in which classified categories are negotiated by individuals (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Hence, it is boundary work that allows categories and classification systems to be meaningful and change over time (ibid). The practices give meaning and concretize perceptions of boundaries between groups by placing, maintaining and challenging cultural categories (Nippert-Eng, 1996). This process results in the reality being divided into different domains that have different meanings for the individual creating and maintaining the boundaries (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). In modern research, Lindberg, Walter & Raviola (2017) has developed ideas on boundary work with the argumentation that different types of boundary work can be performed at the same time and within the same process, meaning that it is an iterative and dynamic process. Boundary work further builds on a recursive relationship between practice and boundaries, where the practice drives changes in the boundaries while the new formation of boundaries stabilizes and provide the new practice with legitimacy (Lindberg, Walter & Raviola, 2017). Thus, boundaries are not a priori given, they are the result and the condition of boundary work (Lindberg, Walter & Raviola, 2017).

Another development within the boundary theory literature has been made by Clark (2000) to fill the gaps and address the criticism of previous work-family theories. Most literature on work-family conflict has assumed that people are reactive and thus act in response to a situation rather than creating or controlling it (Clark, 2000). This theory questions this assumption by viewing people as proactive or enactive instead, meaning that the work domain and private domain are shaped and negotiated as they move back and forth between different domains (ibid). The work-family border theory place focus on how different domains or spheres influence each other, and how individuals manage and negotiate these domains and the borders between them as a way to accomplish balance (Clark, 2000). The term 'borders' has further been defined by Clark (2000) as 'a line of demarcation between domains, defining the point at which domain-relevant behavior begins or ends'. Border and domain creation as well as border management is further described by Clark (2000) as an intersubjective activity since both the work domain and private

domain activities often are executed with others. The borders can be separated into three main parts; physical, temporal and psychological borders (ibid). Physical borders are associated with walls of the workplace, temporal borders are related to working hours that sets the division of when work is done and from when the private sphere responsibilities start, and psychological borders concerns the rules set by people of the appropriateness of such as thinking patterns and emotions in one domain but not the other (Clark, 2000). Thus, these borders become more flexible if people are allowed to choose their own working hours, at which location they want to conduct their work and if they think about work when at home or vice versa (ibid).

Several studies have explored how individuals do “boundary work” in practice (Suchman, 1994; Clark, 2000; Trefalt, 2013; Galea et al., 2014). According to Clark (2000), border-crossing between the work domain and private domain occurs on a daily basis. Thus, it is the people who act as border-crossers that are shaping these worlds, molding the boundaries between different domains and decide upon the relationship to the world and its members (ibid). Transitions are made between the different settings, usually requiring people to tailor their focus, objectives, and interpersonal style to fulfil the demands of each (Clark, 2000). For some people, the transition is minor since the settings resemble each other, while for some, the work domain and private domain are contrasted to a larger degree (ibid). Although people shape their own environments to create a desired balance, they are at the same time shaped by the environments too (Clark, 2000). When there is no clear domain dominating, different domains are prevalent at the same time and blended (ibid). For instance, when feeding a child while taking calls from clients or when a person uses their personal experience in their work (Clark, 2000). On the contrary, employees can engage in boundary setting when conflicting work and non-work demands arise as an attempt to address the challenge of actively participating in multiple roles (Trefalt, 2013). Besides understanding the management of boundaries and how they are constructed, there is a need to allocate the actors involved in the definition of borders and domains, their roles and how they influence each other.

Perlow (1998) claim that several actors usually are involved in an employee’s boundary setting, such as managers and spouses. Thus, managers can use different techniques to exert boundary control such as; imposing demands, monitoring and modelling desired behavior that they expect from employees. While managers may try to push the boundaries through boundary control to promote the work domain, some employees can make attempts to protect their private domain. According to Perlow (1998), employees can be divided into acceptors and resisters. Acceptors are those employees who accept boundary control, making work their first priority where work expectations always were aimed at being met (ibid). Resisters are those employees who at times make themselves inaccessible because they find their demands outside work more important (Perlow, 1998). Several actors as border-crossers, border-keepers or other domain actors could also be part of the negotiation of what constitutes the domains and where the borders between them are placed (Clark, 2000). Border-keepers can be found at work – managers – or at home – spouses - and are perceived as those who are most influential in the definition of border and domain. Clark (2000) argues that there can be disagreements both regarding what each domain constitutes and between individuals about the flexibility and permeability of the borders, how they are or should be.

Flexibility and permeability are two concepts affecting the process of transition between different roles (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). A role with flexible boundaries can be enacted in various settings and at various times, for instance a man working in a family business might be both an employee and a son at the same time during the day (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). Permeability refers to the degree to which a role is allowed to be physically situated in one role's domain, but psychologically or behaviorally present in another. For instance, an employee accepting private phone calls during work-time or an employee taking a work call at home (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). Additionally, role identity refers to the degree to which a role is associated with a specific persona, which includes specific goals, values, norms, beliefs and behaviors (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). Another important factor that highly affects boundaries and how they are managed in practice is technology.

Recent studies have taken the lens of boundary theory to understand how individuals make use of mobile communication technologies to manage the boundary between the work and private domain, e.g. the work of Hislop and Axtell (2011). Thus, the border between employees' work-life and non work-life has become more and more blurred due to development and use of advanced mobile technology (Hislop & Axtell, 2011; Currie & Eveline, 2011). The boundary between work and non-work can become blurred and unclear when mobile devices are used for both work and non work-related purposes in practice. In table 1 presented below, the most significant theoretical concepts used in this paper are presented and given a previous definition.

Table 1: Theoretical concepts

Theoretical concepts	Previous definitions
Borderless work-life	The term is a metaphor for organizations and work-tasks that has been detached from their traditional time, space and organizational delimitations and contexts – Allvin (2011)
Boundary blurring	It refers to the increased blurriness of the border between employees' work-life and non work-life - Currie & Eveline (2011)
Boundary crossing	Boundary crossing is associated with a person's transitions between domains – Suchman (1994)
Boundary setting	Boundary setting refers to a person's ability to manage and negotiate boundaries between different domains – Galea et al., (2014)

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to provide insights and in-depth knowledge of how municipality workers, meaning both employees and managers, use the flexibility provided in the organization in their everyday work-life. In addition, this paper seeks to broaden the understanding of consequences associated with having a flexible work-life in this organization. Since these aims will be fulfilled with the help of literature on boundary work, a qualitative research approach in the form of a case study in line with Flyvbjerg's (2006) arguments was decided to be a valid research method. Czarniawska (2014) holds forth case study research as a study of an

occurrence of a phenomenon, which coheres with the object of this paper's research. Furthermore, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues for the importance of a case study's closeness to real-life situations and detailed examination.

Data Collection

The data was collected through multiple methods and in order to obtain a clear and structured data collection process, it has been divided into three stages with different purposes and goals. The first stage was referred to as the archival research stage where internal documents such as policy documents regarding flex-time as well as socio-historical documents about the organization were gathered. This was an informative stage where the purpose was to gain an insight into the organization and its surrounding context and boundaries. The second stage consisted of 28 semi-structured, open-ended (Kvale, 1996) and face-to-face qualitative interviews fairly balanced between sexes, ages and professional background to secure validity. Both employees and managers were asked to notify their interests in participating in the study through an announcement on the department's internal intranet. The response frequency was high as both employees and managers from all levels of the department notified their interest in participating. In addition, to conduct a valid choice of participants an organizational map was used to ensure that participants from all levels of the organization were chosen, including managers from all the subdivisions. In total, 23 employees and five managers were interviewed, and the time duration of the interviews stretched between 36:23 min and 61:56 min. To structure and facilitate this process, an excel-sheet in form of an interview schedule was used to book in interview candidates continuously, and all interviews were held at the department to secure easier accessibility for the participants. Additionally, ethical concerns have been taken into considerations since this study aims to examine individuals' personal thoughts and ideas of how they manage the relationship between the work domain and private domain, which can be perceived as a quite sensitive subject. To obtain ethical safety in relation to the organization and the participants, the interviewees' names, personal information and answers have been managed highly confidential. In addition, the objective has been to obtain a sample size of at least 25 interviewees and observations in total to be able to assure that specific answers are not possible to retrace back to specific individuals, and to secure the validity of the study.

Further, since the aim of this research was to gain knowledge of the interviewees' perceptions and personal experiences, the interviewees held forth their views and opinions in their own words, and knowledge was constructed in the inter-action between the interviewers and the interviewee (Kvale, 1996). The intention with all interviews was to cover an as multifaceted view of the interviewees' experiences of FWAs in practice as possible, which has been the main logic when choosing the interviewees. However, as Kvale (2006) points out there naturally exists a power asymmetry between the interviewers and the interviewees, which must be acknowledged to achieve objectivity and to maintain an ethical approach. This was fulfilled in this study by letting the interviewees talk freely about certain topics, and by providing them with full attention. An important notion for this paper is that the term 'boundaries' is both empirically and theoretically driven. The interviewees spoke freely and used the term 'boundaries' when describing how they experienced FWAs in practice. However, the term is in

this paper also theoretically driven through the lens of boundary theory to explain how and why the participants engage in boundary management and boundary work practices.

Moreover, the interviews were recorded and transcribed with care to assure that quotations deployed are verbatim. Further, by recording the interviews the researchers could equip the interviewee with their full attention (Czarniawska, 2014a). Both researchers participated during all interviews, which was a strategic choice since both could contribute with follow-up questions which the other person might not had time to reflect upon while asking questions. Also, interview notes were written directly after the interviews to summarize the most essential and interesting parts of what the interviewee talked about. The qualitative interviews also created the opportunity to conduct a within case analysis by comparing subordinates with managers within this particular public organization to highlight both possible similarities and differences.

The third stage was referred to as the observational stage, where a number of observations were conducted at the office. Observations were made of the surrounding environment to observe how employees work at different sub-divisions, and during general weekly meetings where important information was given to all employees during a quite relaxed setup. The objective was to understand how organizational behaviors are prevalent in the working environment by observing and taking notes of managers as well as employees' activities, behaviors, and interactions with each other. This is in line with Watson's (2011) argument that practice is most accurately reviewed when the researcher is engaged in the studied field. Furthermore, Eisenhardt (1989) describe a combination of interviews and observations as a common approach for case studies. Silverman (2013) follow this statement by suggesting that a combination of data such as interviews, observations and documents can create a form of methodological triangulation in which data drawn from different contexts can be triangulated and thus reveal the 'true' state of affairs. This can according to some qualitative researchers improve the reliability of a single method (Silverman, 2013). However, when conducting ethnographic research there is a risk of emotions from the researcher being involved which may limit the perception of what is really happening. In this case, the conducted observations have been used in both the setting and findings sections to enable the reader to gain a better understanding of the specific context of the organization and the activities taking place at the workplace that provides evidence of a flexible working environment. Nevertheless, an important notion relevant for this study is that the observations were perceived as the most important source of information to enable an understanding of organizational behaviors and activities taking place at the workplace, whereas the interviews were used to comprehend potential differences among the employees' and managers own experiences and thoughts about FWAs in practice and boundaries between the work domain and private domain.

When conducting qualitative research based on interviews and observations, the issue of generalization of data is present (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Silverman, 2013). An important notion is that the data produced in this study is only fully applicable within this particular organization and given context. Furthermore, the results found may be influenced by the fact that data is collected within a certain geographical area and from a resembling socioeconomic group of

people. This fact will further limit the study's applicability to other geographical areas within Sweden (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In addition, a central limitation for this case study object is related to practical issues, because of the inability to physically observe or follow the participants at home in their private life and when work tasks either are performed at home or at various other places. Being able to observe the employees further in their homes would have validated how the pronounced delimitations was maintained in their everyday life. Worth notifying is that all participants reflected and talked more about how the work sphere interfere at home than reversed which can be seen as a significant pattern in the data. Since the interviews were held at the workplace, the participants may have associated themselves more with their work role and therefore related the questions more excessively to their private sphere. However, for this study to be applicable in other contexts it is important to bear in mind that the reversed situation also could have been plausible.

Data Analysis

An inductive grounded theory inspired approach was used in this study. First, the data was analyzed without any theoretical considerations. Secondly, it was analyzed with the boundary theory framework in mind. The key task of the data analyzing process was to code the gathered empirical material (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In total, 23 interviews were transcribed and coded with codes close to the material. The policy-documents were further coded and codes were ascribed to both individual sentences as well as full paragraphs. The codes were written up in an excel document to provide a better overview and the codes that reoccurred were marked with the number of recurrences. Additionally, in line with the grounded theory process, memos that had been written down during the process were inserted into the document adjacent to the codes they corresponded with. Examples of first-order codes are *demarcation, blending, managerial control, accessibility, technology, stress, engagement and employee responsibility*.

After the initial coding, the material was processed again with an aim of searching for different themes found in the transcriptions. As patterns started to emerge, the codes found to have the strongest presence were chosen and divided into different concept groups that comprised several codes. During this process the codes and concepts were divided between employees, managers and documents due to the fact that different patterns emerged from the material. From these concept groups, several core categories emerged. The core empirical categories that are embedded with several concepts are *How FWAs are Used and Understood in Practice (1), Technology and FWAs Acting as Bridges (2), Technology and FWAs as Accessibility Drivers (3)* as well as *FWAs Influencing Engagement (4)*. The first-order concepts were treated as fundamental facts of the study, since they entail both descriptive information and the participants' interpretations of FWA's (Van Maanen, 1979). In the following part of the coding, the data was categorized based on the theoretical framework: *Boundary Work Practices, The Paradox of Accessibility, Engagement Contributing to Work-family Conflict, and Introducing the Metaphor Moldability*. The second-order concepts were interpreted by the researchers as theories and were used to organize and analyze the facts (Van Maanen, 1979). Furthermore, the organizing and explaining of the data was done by drawing on boundary theory, which was useful for the researchers to understand how the relationship between the work domain and private domain unfold in practice. These continuous shifts between empirical data, notes and

theory, enables a theoretically based analysis in which the theory is based on data (Silverman, 2013) which will assure that this study fulfills its purpose. Worth notifying is that the empirical categories are connected to the theoretical ones in the discussion section to show how they are interrelated.

Given the significant disparities between managers and employees in the material, this paper further builds on a comparative analysis where the differences between them are analyzed and contrasted with each other, but also with the documents that works as a sort of frame for the analysis. Additionally, to get an understanding of the context in which this study has been conducted in, a description of the setting is presented below.

The Setting

The environmental department is an organization with around 185 employees operating in the Gothenburg region. The department is part of the City of Gothenburg with about 55,000 employees and a turnover of 34 billion SEK. The organizational structure of the department is further important to bear in mind. The working activities are based on a mission set by politicians within the city of Gothenburg, meaning that political decision-making significantly influences both the strategic and operational work. The department's objective is to obtain a good life-environment for the citizens, and to minimize Gothenburg's negative health and environmental impact. The department comprises seven main businesses; environmental strategic work, supervision of food, supervision of housing environment, supervision of environmentally hazardous activities, community planning, environmental monitoring and international environmental cooperation. At the department, the division between men and women is prominent since 27 percent of the fulltime employees are men, and 23 percent of the employees have a partial leave employment supported by the Parental Leave Act or other personal circumstances. Further, since this is a public organization, the principle of public access to official documents is present which affects the daily working activities significantly. In line with this principle, the employees are required to answer external emails within 24 hours even during vacation leave and sickness leave, meaning that employees and managers are mutually responsible for delegating their email to colleagues when they are absence from work.

The organization continuously work on becoming more and more digital regarding such as systems and documents, making the department a precursor within the City of Gothenburg. Many of the interviewees have two separated mobile devices, one for private use and one for work-related use while some only have or use one mobile device for both purposes. During the last decades, FWAs have further been a central part of the way work has been structured and performed in this organization. As a new dimension to their flexible working environment, the department has recently introduced activity-based working (ABW) in which some parts of the workplace already are divided into different zones; active zone, calmer zone, and calm zone. Through conducted observations at the department of how the different floors are organized, the authors could gain a better understanding of how this way of organizing the workplace has been adopted in practice. All employees placed in ABW are able to decide in which zone they want to perform certain tasks based on their need for silence or need to have conversations with

colleagues or costumers. No personal items, papers, coffee cups should be left on the desks for more than two hours, and the belongings should be placed in separate small boxes. Since many employees no longer are constrained to a specific workplace, they are to a larger extent encouraged to conduct their work at other various places such as cafés, libraries or at home as long as they fulfill their requirements and attend common meetings.

There are general policy-documents for the entire City of Gothenburg regarding work time and flexible work time. The FWA policy documents work as a foundation and have been adjusted to fit the organizational mission of the environmental department, involving such as flex time, standard working time, overtime, flexi balance, flex and time reporting. The most established FWAs refer to an allowance of adjusting working time, which according to them is built on trust and mutual respect between the employer and employees. These arrangements are applicable under the condition that the adjustment do not interferes with organizational goals and demands. Additionally, the FWAs are only valid if the quality of work and service-level are maintained and not negatively affected by the flexible working time. Further, it is explained in more detail in the policy-documents about the opportunity for all employees to have flexible working hours between 06.00-21.00, although the standard working time is between 08:00-16:45. The range of the flexi balance account is also explained, where the positive balance can reach a maximum of 80 hours per calendar year and the negative balance can reach a maximum of 25 hours per calendar year. Based on data received from the department, the majority of the employees obtains a positive flexi balance whereas a minor share obtains a negative flexi balance. It is further stated in the documents that managers have a responsibility to continuously do follow ups with the employees about their flexi balance, but that they both have a mutual responsibility to ensure that the flexitime do not trespass the working time legislation. The organization has in recent years experienced re-organizations and faced some challenges with FWAs concerning home working and distance working. Thus, it has been acknowledged by the HR department that there is a need to develop new policy-documents concerning these areas to provide some guidelines for both managers and employees.

Empirical Data

How FWAs are Used and Understood in Practice

All participants said that they use the FWAs provided in terms of flexibility in both working hours and workplace, although their accounts of how they use these arrangements in practice and the underlying reasons for using them vary slightly. The FWAs allow the employees to adjust and adapt their workdays and workplace to other responsibilities that they have in life, for instance leaving and picking up their children at school. Furthermore, another common reason for using the possibility to adjust working hours was to work more than fulltime one or several days during a week to gain one or several extra days off another day, for instance by adding an extra day to the week-end or being able to take a day off without using vacation.

In my opinion, it is pretty nice to be able to either add an extra day off to the week-end or use an entire flex-day off once a month. The possibility to do that makes me happy,

and it also contributes to my balance between work and the rest of life. I aim at having a feeling that I am living a life all year around - Employee J

When observing the workplace, it was clear that both employees and managers everyday work practices were flexible in such ways that they arrived and left the office at various times during the day, worked in various activity-based zones or at other locations since many workplaces were empty. The policy documents gave another account of flexibility, where flexibility for instance was associated with working hours and allowance of flextime. However, the policy documents also stated that the flexibility should never be reached at the expense of organizational values and goals, which requires some kind of control. As described in one of the policy documents: “the flexible work-time cannot affect quality and service-level negatively” (translated). It was further described in the documents that managers are responsible for controlling and following up their employees' flexibility allowance: “the manager has an obligation to continuously follow-up and correct the flex account and overtime with the employee” (Flex Policy 2018, translation by authors).

All participants further held forth that a flexible working environment is the ideal situation, and that work would be hard to combine with other aspects of life if flexibility in working hours and workplace not was allowed. This view was common and shared among both employees and managers. However, an important notion is that this perception only applied for the managers when they reflected upon their personal situation without accounting for their professional role as managers. When managers reflected upon a flexible working situation in relation to their own lives, they described FWAs as solely positive and fruitful. However, when considering everyday managerial practices in relation to the home working agreement, an increased need of control was identified. The employees associated home working with autonomy and flexibility, whereas the managers associated it with control and a need of framing and alignment.

If you want to align a group of people and direct them in a specific direction, clear instructions and perhaps some repetition is necessary. I think it is enough that the employees email me and tell me at which location they plan to work. But we are seeking an effect where employees start to analyze their working environment and realize that it is a benefit to be able to work at various locations such as their homes. We also emphasize control, as an employer you need to know where your employees are. It is not really about controlling them, but we need control over the situation. - Manager E

Another common pattern among the employees was that the majority of the participating employees related the increased flexibility that FWAs provide with an increased level of stress. This was described as the less attractive side of having a system that builds on flexibility and autonomy, where lack of clear expectations was referred to as the main stress trigger. Thus, the majority of the employees gave accounts of a situation where flexibility at times has been accomplished at the expense of stability. Another downside described by some employees with the flexibility provided is the fact that employees easily can end up with a negative flex account balance, which was perceived as another stress trigger. When having a negative flex account,

several employees stated that it is difficult to obtain a positive flex account balance again due to the need of working more than scheduled time to catch up, which often collides with the employees' other responsibilities in life. As an example, Employee G reflected upon her stressful situation and stated that *"I should probably do something about it, it is a very stressful situation since I now have a negative flex account balance with minus 20 hours"*. On the other hand, most of the managers faced a reversed situation where it was challenging for them to use the benefits of having a positive flex account balance since extensive workload prevented them the possibilities to clock out the extra hours.

The managers further emphasized a need to align the managerial group with shared values and standardized policies for the entire organization regarding the flexibility allowed. Yet, the managers still expressed various ways of implementing the FWA policies in practice which indicates that the implementation process obtains flexibility in itself.

We have had several discussions in the managerial groups about flexibility, where we started to ask every manager in the organization what their perspectives and ideas were. Then we decided the frames for what flexibility that we should allow. Now it is up to every manager to implement it in their group of employees. - Manager D

A common pattern among the participants was that they all stated different practical ways of managing their relationship between the work domain and private domain. All participants further gave accounts for how FWAs have connected work with other dimensions of their lives in practice. The flexibility provided in the FWAs combined with modern technology in the form of laptops and mobile devices has made it possible for them to work at any place in any given time hardly without any practical issues. The participants perceived this as a fantastic opportunity, facilitating their interaction between the work domain and private domain.

Honestly, the flexibility provided here at the environmental department is the best thing that ever happened to me. It is so nice to be able to combine work with the rest of life, and oversleeping is not an issue here, because no one will notice if I am at the office an hour later than usual. - Employee L

However, the opportunity with FWAs has also contributed to what is described by the employees as a boundary setting issue in practice. Thus, setting boundaries of when to work and when to engage in private matters and at which location was described as something that requires a lot of time and effort from the employees. As Employee R expressed it, *"I work very much with myself to recognize signals. Sometimes I have to be really determined and decide for instance that I cannot look at emails on the buss on the way home for the rest of the month"*. The majority of them said that they set limitations for work and private life by having one mobile device dedicated for work matters and one for private matters. Some employees also stated that the process of setting frames for work and private life is something that can be learned over time and many of them gave an account of how they continuously work with demarcation, which provides boundaries that are clearer step by step.

I guess it is a lifelong struggle. When the new technology enables us to take work physically with us to our homes, we have to live with putting up boundaries. But I have really evolved when it comes to setting those boundaries, even my manager has noticed that I have developed a better structure, which has decreased my stress-level. But it requires a lot of time, some people are slow learners. For me it is very easy to level-up in tempo and disrespect my boundaries, but nowadays I am so much better at finding time where I can rest and recover. It feels okay now, but this is something I have to think about my entire work-life. - Employee I

In contrast, a majority of the managers expressed a different perspective on the boundary setting process. Boundary setting is not something that the managers stated that they reflect upon significantly since they felt that it is part of their role as managers to be more accessible for work during non-work hours and to obtain an overall larger workload compared to the employees. Another boundary process that was shared by both managers and employees is associated with the blending of boundaries. Both employees and managers described it as common to bring the work domain into the private domain. For instance, when they physically work at home both during working hours and non-work hours. It was expressed by both employees and managers that by bringing the work phone and the laptop home, one has the opportunity to maintain control over the email inbox and the calendar which some emphasized as very beneficial.

This weekend for instance, it was perfect for me that I had the opportunity to bring work into my private life. Because my daughter who is in middle school had a concert with her brass band, and I had to come with her to the concert because she is not 100 % comfortable in her band. Then I could use the possibility to work for a few hours, which was a great opportunity for me. - Manager A

Many of the participants also expressed that they mentally cross boundaries without physically working in the home domain for instance. Thus, to switch of work mentally at home was experienced as both challenging and time consuming, especially for the employees.

I notice sometimes that I lay in my bed at night and think about work, instead of thinking about my children. I am always very aware if there is a deadline for instance. But maybe I should put this time and energy on other things that I also value. For instance, I do not lay in bed at night and think about my old mum, which maybe would have been more valuable for me to think about. - Employee R

The employees perceived that the flexibility provided by the employer is built on trust and loyalty which they truly value to maintain since they wish to continue with having FWAs in the future. In relation to this, the policy documents further highlighted that the FWAs are built on mutual trust and respect. As held forth in one policy-document: “A flexible work-time builds on trust and mutual respect between the employer and employees under the condition that the length and location do not interfere with organizational demands” (Flex Policy 2018, translation

by authors). That is why the time aspects was described as more central during home working than at the workplace.

If I am working from home and I leave to do some laundry, the time aspect is always present. I definitely notice that I leave to do laundry for 10 minutes, whereas if I am at the office and bump into a colleague and talk about something not work related for 10 minutes the time aspect is not as important. If I am at home I feel bad for not working. - Employee L

Technology and FWAs Acting as Bridges

The modern technology of today combined with FWAs have changed the way people are able to conduct their work, both in relation to time and space. This notion was shared by both employees and managers but accounted for both positive and negative outcomes. Many of the employees described that technology in the form of laptops and mobile devices have created many opportunities such as home working and a better easiness to manage the work and life puzzle with family, hobbies or friends. However, negative outcomes were also held forth regarding increased accessibility and the shift in demarcation of when to perform work or non-work tasks from the workplace to home.

Ever since we received emails in the mobile device and the landlines disappeared it has more meant that one needs to set boundaries for oneself. Before the actual workplace has been that boundary. When I left work, I was not accessible at my work in the same way. It has meant that one has to become more disciplined simply with what is work and what is not work. – Employee I

The managers highlighted the opportunities created through technology which for instance have enabled them to stay connected at home and catch up work tasks and answer emails that they have not had time to complete at the physical workplace. On the other hand, most of the employees´ experienced that the main issue with their increased accessibility and connectivity to work is related to the difficulty to just switch off work and set proper boundaries for themselves since they all bring their mobile devices provided by the employer home daily. Although many employees claimed that they consciously make attempts to switch off by such as hiding the email notifications, they still felt that the managers more frequently should clarify what is expected from them or not in relation to accessibility to reduce unnecessary stress. For instance, most employees addressed the issue with sending emails during evenings or weekends.

It has been discussed on a few occasions, no matter when you work but wait to send the email because you do not need to send it in the evening. Even if you think that it is a pleasant feeling to be done with it, it is not certain that you need to send it until the next morning. - Employee F

The flexibility provided by FWAs and modern technology in relation to the employees seem to have created a managerial issue, where the managers struggle to handle the increased flexibility.

As a result, the responsibility to set boundaries has mainly shifted to the employees themselves since a clear dichotomy between the work domain and private domain no longer exists. One of the managers gave an explanation to the difficulty in setting managerial frameworks and claimed that uncertainty is a major part of the dilemma.

It feels like there is some kind of paradigm shift where we do not really know what it will lead to, and we are at the end of the industrial community we have had with the permanent offices and workplaces. There is a lot going on and we try and try, but we do not have any solutions yet, or so much on our feet that we can say that this works. And here comes the public sector that usually falls behind but that now is trying to keep up in the forefront, and see how we can work and think about that work-life balance so that everyone can feel good about themselves, that they have done a good job and then go home. – Manager E

Technology and FWAs as Accessibility Drivers

Many of the employees reflected upon accessibility in relation to FWAs and whether they are expected by the managers to be accessible or not when their normal workday is completed or when they are on vacation leave. This required a lot of time and effort from them. Most employees described that the technological devices provided by the organization enables them to constantly be connected to work both voluntarily and non-voluntarily, even during non-work time. Communication tools used at the department on a daily basis such as outlook and Skype were further described by both employees and managers as ways to facilitate a greater accessibility and communication stream among the participants.

We are actually supposed to check our email every day, according to the principle of public access to official documents but if I have vacation leave I ask someone else to check my email. And it is not everybody who does it like that, some check the email anyway. But I am determined with that. Then I am not supposed to check my emails, and someone else need to take care of it. – Employee E

The managers expressed that they in turn have more responsibilities and expectations on themselves in relation to accessibility as part of their organizational role as managers. All top managers shared a common view that being accessible more or less constantly is included in their role even when they are on vacation leave. Because most managers stated that they only use one mobile device in practice dedicated for both work and private matters, it can be interpreted as if their boundaries between the work domain and private domain blends and even diminish in time and space.

I feel that in my mission, it is part of my responsibility to act if something should happen. I have been through a number of difficult situations with employees involved, if you are in the top management you need to be prepared for crisis, so that is why you always have the mobile device on for the most part and is accessible when you are in the management team. – Manager D

An important notion is that the policy documents regarding FWAs do not highlight accessibility aspects concerning when and where all workers are expected to be accessible for work, and what guidelines to apply. This was expressed by the employees as an uncertainty factor that drives some of them to be more accessible than expected, which was expressed through actions such as constantly bringing the work phone home and regularly checking emails even during non-work time.

FWAs Influencing Engagement

Regarding the actual work tasks, most employees and managers expressed that they perceive their work as both fun and meaningful, and that they have a strong engagement to their work although it was portrayed quite differently. While most employees held forth a personal engagement for environmental issues combined with a societal engagement, the managers emphasized a more professional engagement. According to the managers, this is a regulatory authority that is not able to save the world, but with a mission to develop the strategical environmental work in the City of Gothenburg.

Here we need to limit employees that consider that our mission is to save the world, when we are an authority. One is so engaged, over-engaged in one's mission. That is not possible, because it is the politicians that has the power to influence. – Manager D

For some employees, this engagement has made it more difficult for them to separate work and other aspects of life since the work domain and the private domain have become increasingly connected when they are engaged in the same things in both spheres.

Even during my spare time I am engaged in the same things that I work with. It can at times be difficult since you can think of things during your spare time that you want to bring to work. That is not negative in itself but there are dangers with that. I know that because during my previous work it was more unclear when it shifts to spare time. I still have very clear connections between what I work with and what I am interested in during spare time. -Employee R

In comparison, a majority of the managers expressed that they generally do not mind working on evenings, weekends or vacation leave. As manager B expressed it “*I identify myself very much with my work, it has become a very central part of my life*”. Their professional engagement for work combined with the perception that work is fun therefore seem to have eased the potential negative effects of working more than fulltime and during non-work time for managers.

I like my work very much, so I do not experience it difficult at all to work when I am home because it is equally difficult to do the laundry or clean at home or it is even more fun to work than to do the laundry. – Manager A

Discussion

The aim of this case study was to gain an understanding of how FWAs are used and understood in practice, and the consequences of having a flexible work-life in this organization. The empirical data presented above provided the study with several main findings that will be presented below. The results in this study show that this organization fully embraces a more flexible working environment through the introduction and implementation of FWAs, such as flex-time scheduling and homeworking, which coheres with Rau and Hyland's (2002) statement about common FWAs. The concept of flexibility is in this case grounded in the empirical data and refers to both managers and employees' autonomy to decide when and where to complete work tasks, already highlighted in previous studies of Rau and Hyland (2002) as well as Hill et al., (2008). However, they are simultaneously framed by existing policies on FWAs that provides them with guidelines about the flexibility allowed and under which conditions. Interestingly, it is first when these arrangements are used by employees and managers in practice that similarities and differences become revealed.

Boundary Work Practices

A significant finding of this study is that practice change boundaries over time when actors mold and shape the FWAs into more desired conditions. As results shown, there are no fixed boundaries between the work domain and private domain and the relationship between the domains therefore changes over time. This coheres with Nippert-Eng's (1996) claim that boundary work allows categories to be meaningful and change over time. Thus, boundaries are not a priori given, they are the result and condition of boundary work (Lindberg, Walter & Raviola, 2017). This study builds further on these findings through a description of how actors engage in different boundary work practices depending on their organizational role and responsibilities, which will be elaborated on further in the following sections.

Both employees and managers constantly commute between the different boundary work practices identified; boundary setting, boundary crossing, boundary blurring and boundary diminishing but as results shown, how they commute in practice differ quite significantly in a given time and space. The organizational structure of the environmental department and how work is organized coheres with Alvin's (2011) definition of a borderless work-life in which organizations and work-tasks have been detached from their traditional time, space and organizational delimitations and contexts. This has been enabled by the technological devices and FWAs provided, meaning that the work domain boundary which used to be connected to the physical workplace now is linked to the private domain boundary in the private sphere. Thus, the work domain has entered new time and space dimensions, erasing the clear dichotomy of a more traditional work-life where work and home are being held in separate domains described by Aronsson (2018). Based on the empirical data, this has created more challenges to manage the relationship between the work domain and private domain since technological devices enable managers and employees to perform their work practices anywhere at any time. The data points towards that modern technology and FWAs both function as bridges between the work domain and private domain, linking the boundaries between the two in everyday life. As results shown, it is their coexistence in practice that makes it possible to obtain such a

flexible work-life. It seems as if the continuous introduction of FWAs to the organization enables more and more flexible boundaries, as highlighted by Clark (2000) although she did not account for the role of technology for the flexibility of boundaries which this study also emphasizes.

Using the findings of previous boundary work studies of how multiple boundary work can be executed simultaneously (Lindberg, Walter and Raviola, 2017), the results provide evidence of a recursive relationship between boundaries and practice, meaning that the relationship between the work domain and private domain influence what is being done in practice and vice versa which can be understood as boundary work. As a response to the employees perceived increased responsibility for setting and communicating their own boundaries, similar to the finding by Allvin et al., (2006), this study contributes to previous studies by highlighting the fundamental issues with this responsibility. Thus, all of the participating employees engage in a boundary setting process which is a time-consuming process that requires a lot of effort from them. For instance, one employee expressed that it is an active and conscious choice to not look at emails on the way home for the rest of the month while another employee has developed a structure to separate the work and private domain, which means that the employees all have various tactics for separating domains. This is an interesting finding similar to Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep's (2009) claim that there can exist an array of options available to individuals regarding boundary management, which suggest that a behavior can cue multiple tactics. The process of boundary setting can further be understood as a segmentation process, where employees attempt to shape and stabilize their own working environments by actively maintaining a clear and strong boundary between the work domain and private domain, which similarly has been described by Nippert-Eng (1996). Building on the work of Hislop and Axtell (2011) regarding the role of technology for domains that either are integrated or segmented, this study provides evidence of how a majority of the employees aim to maintain a segmented boundary but still continuously integrate the work domain and private domain. This means that a clear and strong boundary can be present by for example having one mobile device dedicated for work matters and one for private matters, while the work domain and private domain at the same time can coexist in one or several domains. For instance, it is common for the employees to bring their work phone home on a daily basis, which can be seen as a form of boundary crossing. However, the idea is to keep the work phone switched off or on silent mode, which can be seen as some kind of boundary setting. Yet, work has still entered the private sphere which means that the work domain and private domain have become integrated.

However, for the managers boundary crossing is even more prevalent where different domains are further integrated in practice. As argued in previous research, an integrated boundary is when domains are interrelated and overlapping (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Hislop & Axtell, 2011). As results shown, most managers expressed that they rarely reflect upon a boundary setting process and viewed their organizational role as a contributing factor. This suggests that this organization possess what can be seen as an institutionalized image of the managerial role where a professional identity is visible for all managers and dominating even in their private domain. Interestingly, the results point towards the fact that one boundary process is shared by both employees and managers, the so-called boundary crossing process. They all express that

they engage in boundary crossing processes blending work and private domain when working from home, thus acting as acting as border-crossers on a daily basis. This finding is similar to Clark (2000) describing of border-crossers as actors who take part in negotiating what constitutes the domains. It is clear that both employees and managers are required to tailor their focus and objectives when making transitions between different settings, which further has been emphasized in the study by Clark (2000). In addition, the managers appear to find the transition between settings as more minor because their spheres resemble each other more than for the employees who consider that the work domain and private domain are contrasted to a larger degree. This last finding contributes to the work by Clark (2000) through the identification of different organizational and institutionalized roles as mentioned above, and the impact these roles have on employees and managers boundary work practices. The different types of borders brought up by Clark (2000) are all prevalent in this case and closely associated with flexibility. The physical borders are crossed when employees and managers engage in homeworking, temporal borders are trespassed when working hours are conducted both at work and home and psychological borders are blended when employees and managers have work in mind at home or vice versa. However, the statement by Clark (2000) that boundary crossing occurs when there is no clear domain dominating can be questioned in this case. Especially the managers express that their work sphere often is more dominating than the private sphere, while the employees actively work at maintaining a boundary between the work domain and private domain through a clearer demarcation. As an extension to the process of boundary crossing, a boundary blurring process has been identified.

It is the combination of technology and FWAs that contributes to the blurring of boundaries, meaning that the way technology and FWAs are used in practice in both the work domain and private domain results in the boundaries becoming blurred and unclear. This is similar to Hislop and Axtell's (2011) finding about how temporal borders are blurred and unclear although this study shows how both physical, temporal and psychological borders can be blurred in time and space. For instance, in this case one employee stated that the boundaries between the work domain and private domain has become more unclear and blurred since the physical, temporal and psychological borders are crossed when being engaged in the same questions both at work and during spare time. Another contributing factor to the blurring of boundaries is the allowance of both a positive and negative flex account balance stated in the policy documents. It can be interpreted as if a large positive flex account has been enabled by blurred boundaries since many employees and managers have expressed that they check their emails at home, without accounting for this as homeworking, which makes the boundary between what is work and non-work more unclear. There are even indications in this study of how boundaries have diminished in time and space for a majority of the managers. For example, the managers expressed to a larger extent than the employees that they only use one mobile device for both work and private matters. Nippert-Eng's (1996) example of calendars and keys has been used to explain strategies for managing the work domain and private domain. However, the timeliness of referring to calendars and keys is questioned in this paper which is why this study has developed and adjusted the visualization of boundary work practices by referring to modern technological devices, which is perceived as more adequate in modern research. The usage of one device for both work and private matters can be seen as an integration process where the work domain and

private domain blends and even diminish in time and space. Thereby, for the managers it is no longer about setting or crossing boundaries, the domains are tied so closely together that the transition between the work domain and private domain happens unintendedly. A type of loyalty towards the boundaries has further been identified. Hence, this finding contributes to the boundary literature by adding a dimension of loyalty and respect from the employees towards the boundaries. As results shown, a majority of the employees' state that being able to choose when and where to work results in a sense of respect to maintain the reliance from the employer. Thus, several employees choose not to work from home because they do not feel that their efficiency is as high at home as at the office. The results also show that the time dimension is more present in the home domain. The employees describe time management as more important when they work from home due to the fact that they strive to maintain the freedom given from the employer by meeting work requirements. For instance, when doing laundry at home at office hours, time is perceived as more important than when having a private conversation with a colleague at the office due to the fact that the boundary loyalty is maintained by being present at the workplace.

By adding another perspective of how boundaries are dealt with in practice, the role of different actors in the boundary setting process can be revealed. Some aspects of the data points towards the idea of managers as border-keepers, similar to Clark's (2000) description of managers role as border-keepers for the employees. However, they seem to be very kind border-keepers because the employees obtain a high level of control and responsibility over their own flexibility regarding when and where to work. In addition, the data highlights that the managers do not act as border-keepers to themselves but rather as 'border-erasers' by engaging very little in boundary setting and much more in other boundary work practices. The managers express a desire to obtain boundary control through an alignment and provision of a managerial framework with standardized policies throughout the entire organization regarding the FWAs. This finding can be seen to cohere with Perlow's (1998) statement that boundary control can be exerted from monitoring and modelling. However, the results of this study also show that managers lack of boundary control over employees' usage of FWAs in practice seem to have made the arrangements too flexible at the expense of control and stability. As a result, the employees have mostly taken the role of being their own border-keepers with individual responsibility and control over their boundaries. The employees and managers do not share a common view of what each domain, the work domain and private domain, constitutes and do not agree upon the level of flexibility and permeability of the borders, as claimed by (Clark, 2000). While the managers mainly promote the work domain by for example sending emails on evenings and weekends, the majority of the employees act as resistors to protect their private sphere by hiding email notifications or making themselves inaccessible, as addressed by (Perlow, 1998). Findings of how FWAs are used and understood in practice point towards a presence of different boundary work practices. However, an additional discussion of the consequences of having FWAs is necessary for a more grounded understanding of the concept. Both positive and negative outcomes have been found and presented in the sections below.

The paradox of Accessibility

The results of this study points towards an increased accessibility for both employees and managers due to technology and FWAs. This accessibility provides both positive and negative outcomes for employees and managers, which creates an interesting paradox. FWAs have been introduced into the organization as a mean to increase the flexibility and enhance a balance between the work domain and private domain but have on the other hand contributed to an increased work-family conflict. With the technology provided in the form of laptops and mobile devices, employees and managers are able to stay connected to work constantly if preferred since work-tasks have been detached from their traditional time, space and organizational delimitations. This constant connectivity is described by Alvin (2011) as a borderless work-life. Furthermore, this study show that one main outcome of this borderless work-life is an increased accessibility emphasized by both employees and managers as a positive aspect. They are able to work from home or at other various places during their worktime and still be accessible to complete work-tasks, answer emails and communicate with colleagues. The employees further highlighted that this has enabled them to obtain a more flexible work-life and individual control over boundaries, which many perceive enhances their balance between the work domain and private domain. These findings correspond with existing FWA research on autonomy (Russell, O'Connell & McGinnity, 2009; Hill, Hawkins & Miller, 1996).

In terms of negative outcomes with the increased accessibility, this study has identified a disconnection between managerial guidelines, the policy documents and actual every day work-practices. The policy-documents do not provide any guidelines regarding when the employees are supposed to be accessible or not, which could be one of the reasons why verbal benchmarks by managers regarding accessibility are not met by the manager themselves in practice. For instance, work related emails are often sent to the employees during late evenings or weekends even though the employees not are expected to be accessible at that time which have caused many of the employees an increased stress-level. For many employees, it has resulted in a decreased ability to disconnect from work and a perception that work accessibility is necessary even during non-work time which in turn seem to have increased their work-family conflicts. This finding is similar to Gerdenitsch, Kubicek and Korunka's (2015) discussion about permanent accessibility where being accessible constantly is perceived as a negative aspect of temporal flexibility. Yet, this study contributes to the existing work-family conflict literature on FWA by adding a dimension of stress caused by the ability to constantly be accessible combined with unclear managerial guidelines, which has not been found in previous studies. The managers on the other hand feel that being accessible more or less constantly is part of their institutionalized role as managers and therefore do not mind checking emails on vacation leave or at home. A majority of the managers therefore seem to identify themselves with their work role more than their private role due to shared values, norms and behaviors which coheres with Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate (2000) findings about role identity. It is even expressed by one manager that it is more fun to work than to do the laundry which creates a more positive correlation between FWAs and accessibility. Thereby, the outcomes of the increased accessibility differ between the employees and managers. The term accessibility can further be associated with the concept of permeability, which refers to a roles ability to be physically present in one roles domain, but psychologically present in another (Ashforth, Kreiner and

Fugate, 2000). The permeability in this case is associated with the professional role being present at home for managers, for instance taking work calls at home, which can be seen to be institutionalized and taken-for-granted in the managerial role. The employees in turn express a desire to not receive or answer emails during non-work time, which could be interpreted as a search for clearer boundaries where managers help them to set boundaries and restrict their accessibility. Another concept that is significant in this study and closely aligned with accessibility is engagement. This study has identified a relationship between accessibility and engagement, where an increased accessibility influences different types of engagement both among employees and managers.

Engagement Contributing to Work-Family Conflict

In terms of engagement, most employees and managers expressed their work as both fun and meaningful and held forth a strong engagement for their work although it was portrayed in different forms. The empirical data in regard to engagement revealed three types of engagement; personal, professional and societal. The results points towards the fact that a strong personal and professional engagement appears to contribute to a decreased ability to disconnect from work and to a perception that work accessibility even during non-work time at times or often is necessary. The societal engagement can on the other hand be separated from the other types of engagement and is more seen as a motivational factor for joining the organization.

Even though employee engagement can result in numerous positive organizational and personal outcomes, some of the employees claimed that their engagement at times makes it challenging for them to disconnect from work. Thus, it can be interpreted as if their engagement may be a contributing factor to arising conflicts between the work domain and private domain. This is an interesting finding that challenges previous studies within the work-family conflict literature that mainly has focused on conflicts concerning flexibility and time aspects. The results of this study show how the flexibility provided in FWAs can intensify employees and managers engagement because it no longer is restricted with any time and space delimitations. This contrasts with the results of previous studies of how FWAs contribute to a positive interaction between the work domain and private domain (Russell, O'Connell & McGinnity, 2009; Hill, Hawkins & Miller, 1996) and previous findings of a positive relationship between FWAs and employee engagement, held forth by Ugargol & Patrick (2018). The empirical data further provides evidence of how some sort of organizational stabilization process is needed to manage employees' and managers' engagement or even over-engagement found in this organization. Since managers possess a larger amount of control and insights in how the environmental department as an authority can affect the environmental work within the Gothenburg region, findings suggest that it is easier for them to separate their personal and professional engagement. Thereby, the results points towards the fact that the managers seem to have a greater ability to cope with the potential negative outcomes associated with engagement during FWAs than employees. Further, since the employees seem to have an increased individual responsibility and control over when and where to conduct their work tasks is perceived to have contributed to some of the employees struggle to obtain clear boundaries between what is work and not because they easily can become over-engaged in the same environmental issues both at work and home during their spare time. This finding distinguishes from Gerdenitsch, Kubicek

and Korunka's (2015) claim that flexible working is positively associated if one experience a higher degree of autonomy. Even though many of the employees feel that they have a high degree of autonomy to decide when and where to work, they still seem to struggle with obtaining clear boundaries between what is work and not with this increased individual responsibility and control.

The findings in this study point towards a need to stabilize the FWAs due to several reasons. First, the employees are faced with a critical challenge when the responsibility of managing the relationship between their work and private domain mainly is placed on themselves. Secondly, being accessible and highly engaged have further given rise to new work-family conflicts for the employees which is why it is necessary to provide managerial guidelines as a way to prevent such conflicts. Interestingly, the managers on the other hand did not relate their constant accessibility and professional engagement with conflicting work and private demands due to their strong identification with their managerial role. Thirdly, the policy documents in turn hold forth a combination of flexibility and stability in the form of control, where flexibility is emphasized for the employees but at the same time framed by a managerial responsibility to follow up the employees' flexibility allowance. Additionally, to explain the above-mentioned findings in a more descriptive way, the metaphor *Moldability* is introduced below.

Introducing the Metaphor Moldability

Concerning previous research within the boundary theory literature, several researchers have explained how and why individuals engage in boundary management to deal with the relationship between their work and private domain (e.g. Nippert-Eng, 1996; Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000; Clark, 2000; Trefalt, 2013). In addition, current research has acknowledged the role of technology in how to deal with the boundary between domains (Hislop & Axtell, 2011) and explained boundary negotiation as an iterative process (Lindberg, Walter & Raviola, 2017). Yet, based on the empirical data, this study contributes with interesting findings of how and why different actors engage in diverse types of boundary work processes in practice that change over time which seem to depend on their organizational roles and responsibilities. In terms of previous research on FWA, many researchers tend to have focused directly on the implications of having FWAs in relation to work-family conflicts (Hill, Hawkins & Miller, 1996; Russell, O'Connell & McGinnity, 2009). This study has on the contrary first explored how FWAs actually are used and understood by individuals in practice to identify such implications. This paper further continues the debate and critique within the FWA literature raised by other scholars, namely the perception of FWAs as autonomous per se (Gerdenitsch, Kubicek & Korunka, 2015). The interaction between the terms flexibility associated with autonomy and stability associated with control appears central in this case, and to better comprehend and visualize the relationship between the two terms, the metaphor *Moldability* is introduced to make sense of how work and the private domain are managed and dealt with in practice under FWA conditions. In Merriam Webster's dictionary, the term is defined as 'the property of being moldable'. The metaphor illustrate a major contradiction in the data; on the one hand an increased flexibility in the form of FWAs, and on the other hand the search for a stabilization process of these arrangements. In this study, both employees and managers can influence and mold their own boundaries between the work domain and private domain.

However, the FWAs within this organization not only embraces flexibility but also provides a frame for the flexibility allowed. Thus, the interaction between flexibility and stability is constantly present which is why a stabilization process of FWAs appears to be needed in this organization. This study has identified a search for a process that involves everyone in the molding process to create a desired shape of the flexible conditions. It can be interpreted as if the FWAs have been set into a mold when being introduced and implemented into the organization. However, as these arrangements are used and understood in practice by both employees and manager, a need and desire to stabilize FWAs becomes visualized and apparent.

Conclusion

This case study has shed light on how employees and managers within the Swedish public sector manage the boundaries between the work domain and private domain in practice. In addition, the consequences of having a flexible work-life has been central for this paper. Thereby, the findings provide contributions to both the boundary theory literature and previous research on FWAs. As results have shown, the terms flexibility and stability are closely aligned and the introduction of FWAs has provided evidence of how flexibility within this organization has been established without accounting for a stabilization process of these arrangements. This leads into the main contradiction of this study; on the one hand an increased flexibility in the form of FWAs, and on the other hand the search for a stabilization process of these arrangements. The metaphor *Moldability* has been used in this paper to gain a better understanding of the relationship between flexibility and stability, and to understand why a stabilization process of FWAs appears to be needed in this organization which involves everyone in the molding process to create a desired shape of the flexible conditions. Hopefully this will contribute to a broader discussion about the relationship between flexibility and stability during FWA conditions in practice.

The discussion about practice relates to the first aim of this paper, which was to investigate how FWAs are used and understood in practice. As results shown, both employees and managers engage in boundary crossing on a daily basis where one or several borders as physical, temporal and psychological borders are crossed. For instance, a common pattern for both employees and managers is to cross the physical border by engaging in work at home through homeworking. However, differences in the boundary setting process are more prevalent. Besides crossing boundaries, the employees engage in setting boundaries between the work domain and private domain which is perceived to be a time and effort consuming process. The managers in turn identifies themselves with their professional role even in their private sphere to a higher degree than the employees do. Therefore, most managers rarely reflect upon a boundary setting process at all, which can be seen as an evidence of a more present and dominating work sphere. In addition, the usage of FWAs and technological devices in practice has resulted in the fact that the work domain and private domain becomes increasingly integrated which has given rise to other boundary work practices, namely boundary blurring and boundary diminishing. This study's contributions to the boundary theory literature is therefore that different actors engage in diverse types of boundary work processes in practice that change over time which in this case seem to depend on their organizational roles. In addition, a kind of boundary loyalty was

identified where employees show a loyalty and respect towards the boundaries to maintain the reliance from the employer of deciding when and where to complete work tasks.

Both positive and negative outcomes of having FWAs have been identified, which is related to the second aim of this study. The purpose was to examine the impact and consequences of having a more flexible work-life in this organization, which leads into the second main contribution. Interestingly, the employees experienced the negative consequences of having a flexible work-life in relation to accessibility and engagement to a much larger degree than the managers did. The managers in turn gave accounts of a much more positive associations with having a flexible work-life, which has been identified as an outcome of their managerial role and professional engagement. The implementation of FWAs into the organization has been identified as some sort of ideal working environment. However, the results points towards that a stabilization process of these arrangements is needed to frame the flexibility. This leads into a number of practical implications. By adding a stabilization process to the flexibility provided in an organization, employees and managers may have a better ability to mold and shape the FWAs into a desired shape that fits the needs of the people. Managers needs to take into consideration both the positive and negative outcomes with having a flexible work-life. It should not be up to the employees themselves to obtain full employee control and responsibility over their own boundaries, which is why a suggestion is to share this responsibility. The most suitable practices for this department could therefore be discussed and negotiated by both employees and managers to meet their various demands and expectations. Another practical implication relates to the organizations more daily activities and ways for managers to stabilize the FWAs. A more flexible work-life will require clearer guidelines to stabilize every day practices that address things that previously have been taken for granted due to traditional time and space limitations. For instance, by highlighting expectations and requirements regarding when it is appropriate to send and answer emails.

Regarding future research, a long-term perspective of how FWAs are used and understood in practice, and the impact of having an increasingly flexible work-life both in other public and private organizations is needed. In addition, it would be of great interest to investigate the long-term health effect of having these arrangements and whether they actually improve the balance between the work domain and private domain as intended or not. The perception is that most research has taken a national or organizational perspective in terms of efficiency and productivity, but it can be considered as highly interesting to examine the actual people working in the organizations further and how these arrangements are used and understood in practice because employees' well-being in turn is related to efficiency and productivity. Lastly, the comparative analysis in this case between employees, manager and policy-documents has provided the study with interesting findings of both similarities and differences which therefore also may be of interest for future research.

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