Chapter 3
Teleworkers' Boundary Management:
Temporal, Spatial, and Expectation–Setting Strategies

Kathryn L. Fonner
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, USA

Lara C. Stache
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, USA

ABSTRACT

Building on boundary theory, this chapter analyzes the open-ended responses of home-based teleworkers (N = 146) to identify the temporal and spatial strategies used by teleworkers to manage the boundary between work and home domains, and the expectation-setting strategies teleworkers use to uphold this boundary with family and work contacts. Teleworkers used temporal routines and physical space to segment work from home domains, but also maintained a degree of permeability between work and home domains in order to preserve the flexible benefits of their work arrangement. Teleworkers employed direct and indirect strategies with their families and colleagues to manage the work-home boundary. Relationships between boundary management choices, demographic variables, work-life conflict, and life-work conflict are also examined.

INTRODUCTION

Telework is a virtual work arrangement in which employees use technology to perform their regular work outside of the organization's physical boundaries (Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). It is increasingly prevalent in the U.S. (World at Work, 2009), and has been lauded for providing employees flex-

ibility and autonomy. While these are clearly desirable job attributes, they also heighten the tension between employees' work responsibilities and personal obligations, and increase the need for effective management of the work-home boundary. This may be especially true for home-based teleworkers, as their work and personal domains occupy the same physical space (Raghuram, Wiesenfeld, & Garud, 2003).

To follow, we explore the boundary management strategies home-based teleworkers use to negotiate the boundary between home and work spheres. Building upon boundary theory (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000), we identify the ways that home-based teleworkers use temporal, spatial, and expectation-setting strategies to establish and sustain the work-home boundary. The goal of this study is to expand current knowledge regarding how teleworkers use time and space to manage the intersection of work and home, as well as to identify the strategies teleworkers use to set expectations with family and work contacts regarding their work-home boundary. The study also extends previous research by examining how demographic variables are associated with the use of temporal and spatial strategies, and how temporal/spatial strategy combinations and expectation-setting strategies are linked to teleworkers' work-life and life-work conflict.

BACKGROUND

Boundary theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which individuals create boundaries around work and home role domains in order to facilitate transitions between roles (e.g., Ashforth, et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Boundaries help to delimit the scope and perimeter of an individual's role in a particular domain and can influence their psychological and physical movement between roles (Ashforth, et al., 2000, p. 474). In general, boundaries are defined in terms of their permeability and flexibility. Boundary permeability is the extent to which the domain or role enables an individual to be physically located in one domain but psychologically and behaviorally involved in another domain or role (Pleck, 1977). For example, permeability occurs when a wife accepts phone calls from her husband at work, or a father accepts work-related calls at home (Winkel & Clayton, 2010). Boundary flexibility is the degree to which spatial and temporal boundaries are pliable (Ashforth, et al., 2000), such that an individual can be cognitively or behaviorally removed from one domain in order to meet the demands of another domain (Bulger, Matthews, & Hoffman, 2007) or can easily transition from one role domain to another (Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2010).

To date, boundary management research has largely focused on the ways that boundaries are enacted to either segment or integrate work and family role domains. This research has predominantly been conducted in traditional, or collocated work contexts, with a focus on the management of "boundaries that exist between individuals' work and their (personal) lives outside of work (i.e., work-nonwork boundaries)" (Hecht & Allen, 2009, p. 840). This body of literature has examined how individuals enact boundaries in order to segment and separate home and work roles, or to allow those roles to become integrated and overlap, and the individual and work-related outcomes associated with those role boundary choices. Examples of complete segmentation or integration are rare (Rau & Hyland, 2002), and a range of integration and segmentation approaches represent a viable means to cope with work and personal demands (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Because there may be costs associated with integrating work and family roles, individuals may develop boundary management strategies to separate role demands and expectations into home and work spheres (Ashforth, et al., 2000). Segmentation reduces the blurring of role boundaries and therefore may help individuals cope with different expectations within each role domain (Hewlin, 2003), limit interruptions (Rothbard & Edwards, 2003), diminish the spillover of emotions from one sphere to another (Ilies, Wilson, & Wagner, 2009), and allow for the development of full personal lives (Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005). Based on these advantages, individuals may adopt various temporal, spatial, behavioral, and communicative tactics (e.g., Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009) aimed at segmenting work and

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