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THE BLURRING BOUNDARIES OF WORK-RELATED AND PERSONAL MEDIA USE: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY ON THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The ongoing consumerization of information technology (IT) demands to rethink the traditional paradigms of media use at the workplace. Past research has focused on the use of company IT resources for personal purposes (e.g., 'cyberloafing') and primarily emphasized the adverse effects. This study takes a wider perspective and includes the use of personal IT resources for company purposes as well as other mixed forms of personal and work-related media use. We conducted interviews with 14 employees in 5 different firms and used a grounded theory approach to explore the blurring of boundaries between work and private life discussed in the wider social science literature. Our study demonstrates different attitudes of employees towards work-life blurring and suggests that social and mobile IT has a catalyst role in this process. We contribute to the past literature by providing a conceptual model for the context, the conditions and the consequences of this phenomenon. Practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Consumerization of IT, Social Media, Cyberloafing, Bring-your-own-device, Blurring of boundaries, Grounded Theory, Conceptual model.

1 Introduction

Consumerization of information technology (IT) commonly refers to the ongoing trend that media and tools¹ from the consumer sector infiltrate the corporate environment (Weiß and Leimeister 2012). According to a recent survey by Accenture (2012), 67 percent of the German employees use their personal devices for company purposes. In other countries this rate is even higher (up to 93 percent). From an enterprise perspective this can lead to situations where personal media use interferes with the company interests and thus leads to unfavorable outcomes—widely studied under terms such as non-work-related computing (NWRC) and cyberloafing (Lim 2002; Zhang and Bock 2006; Henle and Blanchard 2008; Ugrin and Pearson 2008; Bock and Ho 2009; Rajah and Lim 2011). However, more recently companies increasingly create strategies to deal with these phenomena and sometimes even encourage employees to integrate their personal media tools in their workplace, e.g. through ‘bring-your-own-device’ (BYOD) policies (Andel 2011; Burt 2011; Steinert-Threlkeld 2011).

The academic literature has widely studied media use under the theme of using company IT resources for personal purposes (such as NWRC and cyberloafing). The literature partly demonstrates the negative consequences such as a loss of productivity (Bock and Ho 2009) and often takes the position that such behavior must be deterred (Lee and Lee 2002; Zhang, Oh and Teo 2006; Ugrin and Pearson 2008; Hu et al. 2011; Shepherd and Klein 2012). In contrast, the use of personal IT resources for company purposes (such as BYOD) is a more recent theme that we find hardly represented in the academic literature. Some of the few studies focus on management strategies to deal with IT consumerization (Harris et al. 2012) and user-driven innovation (Brenner et al. 2011).

With this study, we particularly aim to explore the employee perspective on IT consumerization. We ask broadly: *what motivates employees to use (or not to use) personal media at the workplace?* Assuming that both themes from the literature cannot be viewed separated, we take an integrated approach which includes theme (1) the use of company IT resources for personal purposes and theme (2) the use of personal IT resources for company purposes in our study. We conducted interviews with 14 employees from five different companies in Germany and used grounded theory as a method to analyze our data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In line with the past social science literature (e.g., Ashforth et al. 2000; Chesley 2005), our analysis describes a blurring of boundaries between work and private life. The specific contribution of this study lies in highlighting this phenomenon for emerging social media and mobile tools. Our findings suggest that employees have different attitudes towards work-life blurring so that the use of personal media *at* the workplace and its use *for* company purposes (i.e., themes 1 and 2) appear highly related. Our results are aggregated in a conceptual model that provides further categories of boundary-blurring. Finally, we relate our findings to existing theories and derive implications from a practical standpoint.

In the remainder, we first review the themes of related work in section 2. In section 3, our grounded theory approach is described. Section 4 presents the results in form of a conceptual model. In section 5, we discuss the key findings and outline practical implications, limitations and future work.

2 Related Work

To gain an overview of the body of knowledge on personal media use at the workplace, we performed a comprehensive literature analysis prior to our study. We queried the online libraries CiteSeerX, EBSCOhost, ACM Digital Library, IEEE Xplore, JSTOR, Repec and Springerlink with combinations of 15 general search terms such as “personal”, “private”, “work” in English and in German as well as catchwords such as “cyberloafing” and “bring your own device”. In addition, we performed forward

¹ In the context of this study we understand “media and tools” as any means of communication that are based on information technology, including online social networks, smartphones, tablet PCs, desktop computers, telephone and email.

and backward searches where appropriate and queried the proceedings of the major IS conferences. After filtering, we had gathered 96 papers relevant to the topic, out of which we present a sample here.

The literature we found can be clustered by two major themes: (1) Media use for personal purposes and (2) Personal media use for company purposes, see Table 1. Note that the first quadrant (using company IT resources for company purposes, i.e. classic enterprise computing) was not in scope of this study. Theme (1) is not separated because the ownership of the tool (e.g., whether an employee uses social media from a company PC or from his own smartphone) makes a differentiation difficult. In the following we describe these two themes.

Purpose / ownership	Company purpose	Personal purpose
Company resource	Classic understanding of IT use at the workplace (Not in scope of this study)	(1) Catchwords: Cyberloafing, NWRC; General references: Griffiths 2003; Chou et al. 2008; (1.1) Predictors: Lim, 2002; Zhang et al. 2006; Galletta and Polak 2003; Zhang et al. 2006; Kim et al. 2005; Zhang and Bock 2006; Henle and Blanchard 2008; Garrett and Danziger 2008; Guo et al. 2011;
Personal resource	(2) Catchwords: BYOD, Shadow IT Vogel, Koçoğlu, and Berger 2010; Brenner et al. 2011; Andel 2011; Burt 2011; Savitz and Viveros 2011; Hemsley 2012; Gyoery et al. 2012; Steinert-Threlkeld 2011; Harris, Ives and Junglas 2012; Burrus 2012	(1.2) Consequences: Mahatanankoon et al. 2004; Bock and Ho 2009; Rajah and Lim 2011; Belanger and van Slyke 2002; (1.3) Counter measures: Mirchandani and Motwani 2003; Young and Case 2004; Shepherd and Klein 2012; Xue, Liang and Wu 2011; Hu et al. 2011; Lee and Lee 2002; Ugrin and Pearson 2008; D'Arcy et al. (2009)

Table 1. Literature overview: Media use at the workplace

2.1 Media Use for Personal Purposes

Personal communication and media use at the workplace has been widely studied under terms like ‘personal web usage in the workplace’, ‘problematic Internet use’, ‘non-work related computing’ and ‘cyberloafing’ (Chou et al. 2008). Other studies even refer to this behavior as information technology ‘abuse’ or ‘misuse’ (e.g., Griffiths 2003; Kim et al. 2005; Lee and Lee 2002). These terms generally refer to the act of employees using their company’s Internet access during work hours for personal purposes such as visiting social network sites, entertainment sites, checking e-mail, or doing online shopping and gaming (e.g., Lim 2002; Rajah and Lim 2011). In general, the literature in this theme can be classified into (1.1) research that tries to predict non-work related media use, (1.2) research that investigates the consequences of non-work related media use, and (1.3) research that identifies measures to prevent from such behavior.

(1.1) Potential antecedents for predicting non-work related media use are manifold, yet revolve around the employee’s job attitude and job satisfaction. The predominant theories for studying user attitudes are the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980) and its successor, the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1991). Lim (2002) demonstrates that *organizational justice* has a significant impact on such behavior, suggesting that employees that are feeling to be treated unfair are more engaged in cyberloafing to compensate for this feeling. *Stress* also appears to be a significant reason for such behavior if the perceived sanctions against it are little (Henle and Blanchard 2008). Particularly, if the *level of anonymity* at the workplace is perceived as high, employees are more likely to engage in cyberloafing (Zhang et al. 2006). Galletta and Polak (2003) observe that (low) *job satisfaction* and *internet addiction* are good predictors. In contrast, Zhang and Bock (2006) find that job satisfaction is not a significant antecedent. Furthermore, men appear to be more prone compared to women, computer beginners more than experienced users (Galletta and Polak 2003) and higher-level employees more than lower-level employees (Danziger 2008).

(1.2) Research on the consequences primarily emphasizes the negative outcomes and often takes a stance to reducing personal media use at the workplace (e.g., Lee and Lee 2002; Zhang et al. 2006; Ugrin and Pearson 2008; Hu et al. 2011; Shepherd and Klein 2012). Studies that actually show negative outcomes are fewer. Bock and Ho (2009) demonstrate significant negative consequences for job performance. In contrast, Mahatanankoon et al. (2004) find that such behavior has no significant impact on job satisfaction, nor on work efficiency. Few papers take a more positive stance, such as Belanger and van Slyke (2002) who argue that non-work related communication can be a part of organizational learning. Positive consequences were also observed by Rajah and Lim (2011) who demonstrate that employees that are cyberloafing are also more engaged in what they call compensating activities like helping other colleagues and conserving the company's resources.

(1.3) Common counter-measures to prevent from non-work related media use include technical and organizational arrangements. Behavioral studies in this field predominantly employ deterrence theories, i.e. a perspective that assumes that the higher the degree of certainty and severity of a sanction against undesired behavior, the less likely an individual is to perform it (Straub and Welke 1998). Mirchandani and Motwani (2003) identified a number of counter-measures in interviews with managers and scored them by their perceived efficiency. According to this study, Internet filters and a threat of laying-off workers are most effective. Young and Case (2004) find that internet usage policies (50%) and management training (20%) belong to the most frequently used measures. However, if counter-measures are perceived as unfair the intention to comply with them is low (Xue et al. 2011). D'Arcy et al. (2009) find that the severity of a sanction has a higher impact on the intention to abuse as the certainty. However, the study also emphasizes that deterrence theories are just suitable to explain a small part of that behavior. Hu et al. (2011) even found that deterrence measures do not have a significant impact on the intention to violate existing policies.

2.2 Personal Media Use for Company Purposes

The use of personal IT resources at the workplace is widely seen as a result of the ongoing IT consumerization trend (Weiß and Leimeister 2012; Harris et al. 2012; Burt 2011; Vogel et al. 2010, p. 25). Compared to theme (1), we find a more sparse academic literature and less theory in this emerging field. However, we can recognize three clearly distinct subthemes: use of unauthorized personal media (2.1) versus use of authorized personal media for company purposes (2.2), as well as the use of personal media for teleworking (2.3).

(2.1) The use of unauthorized personal media at the workplace for company purposes is—if at all—most commonly addressed in the academic literature under terms such as ‘shadow IT’ and/or ‘user-driven innovation’. Shadow IT refers to IT resources that are used within companies but outside the oversight of the IT department (Gyoery et al. 2012). The biggest challenges connected to these tools are commonly seen in potential security violations when these are as non-compliant to the policies of an organization (Harris et al. 2012). Guo et al. (2011) call this a nonmalicious security violation and find that the relative benefit for job performance is a good predictor for this behavior. Other authors also emphasize that such user-driven innovation can enable quick implementation of customized solutions (Brenner et al. 2011). Therefore, these innovations may also require specific IT governance approaches and a redefinition of the traditional roles of users and IT departments (Winkler et al. 2011).

(2.2) Given this trend, an increasing amount of companies finds ways for authorizing the use of personal IT resources within the organization. Such policies have recently attracted much attention under the term ‘bring-your-own-device’ (BYOD) (Andel 2011; Burt 2011; Savitz and Viveros 2011). BYOD brings about similar security and data privacy issues as other forms of (un)authorized personal media use (Andel 2011; Burt 2011; Hemsley 2012). Therefore, if personal devices shall be integrated into the company, some kind of middleware must be provided (Vogel et al. 2010, p.27). However, the literature connects a number of benefits with the authorization of such media use, such as increases in employee satisfaction (Burrus 2012) and productivity (Savitz and Viveros 2011; Steinert-Threlkeld

2011). Some authors also mention financial benefits for companies through savings on end user devices, so that BYOD policies should be encouraged (Andel 2011; Steinert-Threlkeld 2011).

(2.3) Increased mobility and IT use is also a recurrent theme in the extant literature on teleworking where employees use their own media and tools. Telework refers to those opportunities that workers are given to work from home rather than at an office location (Nilles 1992). Those employees who utilize technology to extend the workday after they arrive home are specifically referred to as ‘occasional home workers’ (Gray et al. 1993). Benefits of teleworking are generally seen in increased job satisfaction, increased productivity (through less commuting) and work-life balance— although the validity of these factors is not undisputed (Bailey and Kurland 2002). Drawbacks commonly relate to professional and social isolation (Bailey and Kurland 2002).

Altogether there is an extensive body of knowledge on the use of personal media *at* the workplace (theme 1) and also an emerging field of works that deal with use of personal media *for* work purposes (theme 2). Notably, we found hardly a paper that would fall into both categories and thus connect the two themes. Also, there is an ongoing dispute on some of the positive and negative effects in both fields, especially regarding effect of job satisfaction on personal media use, the effectiveness of deterrence measures, the acceptance of security and privacy risks as well as the effects on productivity. These ambiguities motivate us to research more into understanding the employee perspective on this emerging phenomenon.

3 Methodology

In the following we explain our methodological approach for collecting and analyzing interview data. Our choice for a qualitative approach was motivated by its suitability for exploring complex phenomena. Also, interviews appear very suitable to explore such sensitive topic due to the possibility of the researcher to create an atmosphere of mutual trust (Myers and Newman 2007).

3.1 Data Collection

We conducted a total of 14 interviews with employees from five different firms (i.e., two to three per firm). Firms were sought from different industries in Germany (manufacturing, real estate, logistics and information technology) and contacted partly formally via email and partly informally through the personal networks of the authors. In the sense of a theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, p. 45) we iteratively approached employees and targeted at different hierarchical levels and departments. The subjects taking part in our study (9 male, 5 female) were on average 35.5 years old and belonged 5.9 years to their current companies. Half was in a business and the other half in an IT role, 4 working on management level and 10 on employee level. More detailed demographics are presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Sample description (company size, period of employment and job position)

Interviews took place between February and May 2012. They followed a semi-structured guideline including the four major paradigmatic categories that grounded theory (GT) recommends (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 96). This guideline was adapted and extended throughout the time of data collection as new insights and questions emerged. The interviews (each lasting about 20 minutes) have been recorded and transcribed, resulting in total 99 pages of transcription. We complemented our interviews with information from a short questionnaire for each interviewee and information from the company

websites (e.g., on company size, industry, employee role and BYOD governance regulations), which has also been considered in the data analysis procedure.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis started parallel to the data collection. Grounded theory aims to use data for constructing theory rather for testing it (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 57). We perceived that such bottom-up approach is particularly suitable given that the field of interest (i.e., themes 1 and 2) has rarely been studied in its entirety. Given that GT prescribes to study a phenomenon without any pre-research literature review (Urquhart et al. 2010), we intended to construct a model free from preconceptions (which might be reflected in some of the concept names). Atlas.ti software was used to support the coding procedures.

Coding was performed according to the three steps recommended by GT: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 58). First, data was open-coded sentence-by-sentence by using constant comparison, i.e. concepts were identified and assigned to text fragments. For example the quotation “*Well, certainly I often try to distract myself, cause I’m stressed out or I just need a break from what I’m usually doing.*” was transferred into the codes: *distraction*, *need for a break* and *work content*. (Note that the interviews were conducted and coded in German language.) Concepts with a small semantic difference and a low frequency were merged. Similar concepts were grouped into more abstract mid-level categories.

GT approaches differ in what follows. In axial coding, mid-level categories are related to a higher-level coding paradigm. Since we recognized that Straussian paradigm would not fit well our data, we moved to a Glaserian approach with more customized high-level categories. Additionally, theoretical codes, which represent the relationships between high-level categories, were introduced. According to Glaser’s approach, the core category is the one with the most relationships to other categories (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.116), which was the *attitude towards blurring of boundaries* in our case. Finally, in the step of selective coding, concepts that exhibited only weak relationships with the core phenomenon were eliminated. Figure 2 displays the number of different codes (both before and after selective coding) by interviews and demonstrates the ‘theoretical saturation’ we achieved (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p. 65).

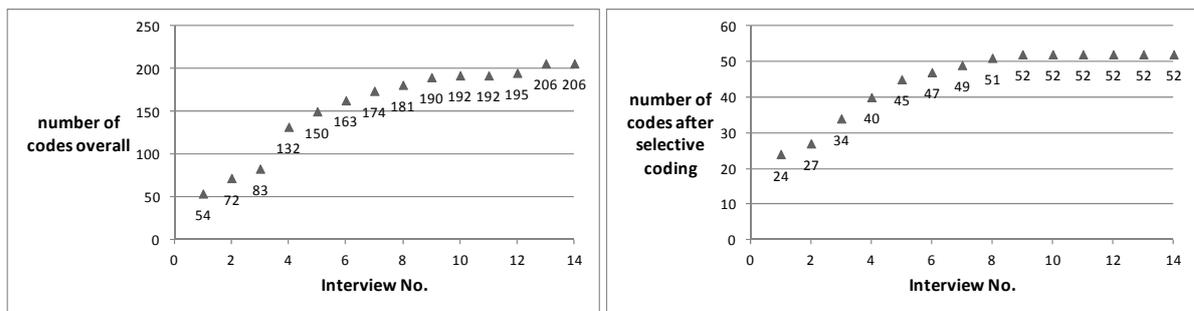


Figure 2. Saturation of codes over the interviews

4 Results: A Conceptual Model of the Blurring of Boundaries

The result of the coding procedure is a model that describes the behavior of personal media use at the workplace including when it occurs, which preconditions must be fulfilled and how they are driven, see Figure 3. The model contains six main categories, 14 sub-categories and 46 concepts. The main categories refer to the context, preconditions, triggers, the forms of boundary-blurring and consequences, which are arranged around the core phenomenon: the employee’s *attitude towards blurring of boundaries*. Arrows represent relationships of the main categories which were derived from the theoretical coding. For each concept we report in brackets the number of occurrences in interviews (maximum 14) and in company cases (maximum 5), which allows to infer the relative

importance of a concept. For reasons of brevity, 10 concepts and two mid-level categories have been omitted in the presentation of this paper (for the entire model see Schalow 2012).

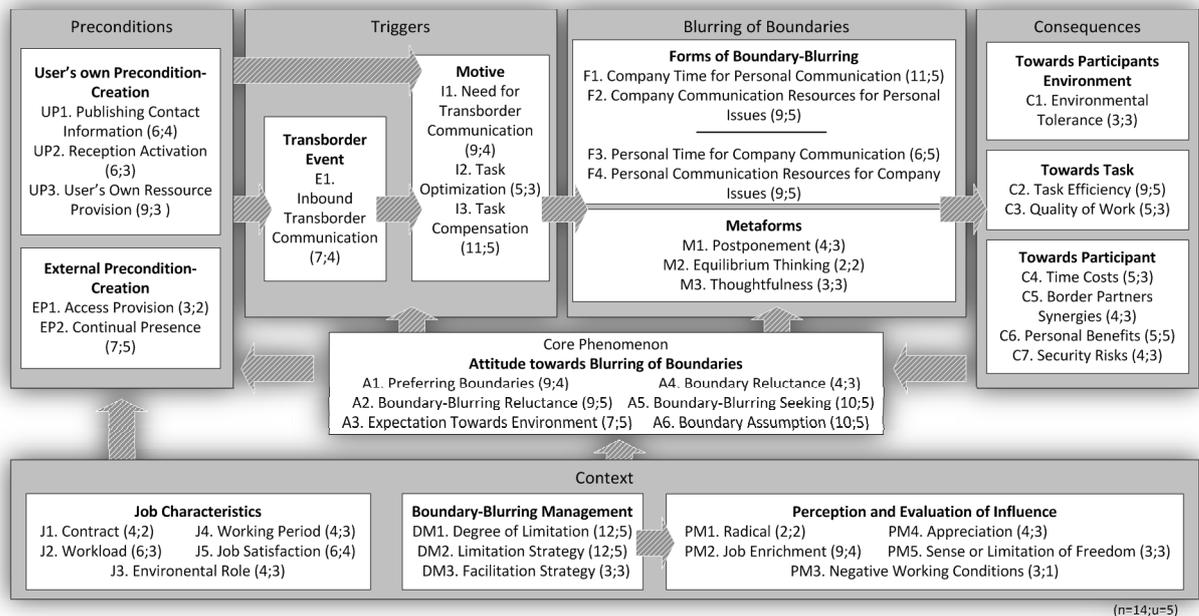


Figure 3. Conceptual model

According to the logic of our model, the preconditions influence the triggers for different forms of boundary-blurring. Each form of boundary-blurring leads to specific consequences which are evaluated by the employee. This evaluation in turn has an impact on his/her attitude. External influences by the context can have an impact on his/her attitude as well and can determine preconditions that are outside the sphere of influence of the employee.

4.1 Core Phenomenon: Attitude towards Blurring of Boundaries

The attitude describes how an employee evaluates the blurring of boundaries. Three major types of attitudes exist—sometimes even in parallel—among individuals: a reluctant attitude, an affine attitude, as well as an environmental expectation. Reluctant attitudes are expressed by employees that *prefer boundaries* (A1) and exhibit a *boundary-blurring reluctance* (A2). One interviewee that prefers boundaries and limitations states “I welcome drawing the line, therefore I’m able to say, this task is finished and [...] will [not] be carried on [...] [later at home].” Concurrently a reluctant attitude can exist towards blurring of boundaries: “Disadvantageous is of course, [that] this black-white separation what we had in the seventies, eighties, just disappears.”

The affine attitude is described through the codes *boundary reluctance* (A4) and *boundary-blurring seeking* (A5). Most of the interviewees mention that they are seeking some form of boundary-blurring: “[...] the company has some impact onto the personal life and vice versa. It’s simply a part of it. And it should be.” Additionally, some people are reluctant towards boundaries: “Well, how I’m experiencing it [personal communication at the workplace], I think, it is part of today’s life.”

Employees also have certain *expectations towards their environment* (A3) and make *boundary assumptions* (A6). Some interviewees state that they expect others to use work-related resources for personal purposes: “Everyone is using it [internet for personal purposes]. And at least people that I know, well I don’t know anybody who would say: I don’t use it.” Others assume existing boundaries and limitations by the company management: (A6): “But that’s legitimate [using the company computer for Facebook]. As long as it is limited to some minutes.”

4.2 Preconditions

Specific preconditions must be fulfilled to facilitate the process of boundary-blurring. Preconditions can be created by the employee or by the company. Employees often *publish their contact information (UPI)*, for example when giving a personal mobile number to a customer, which is a common precondition. Most communication resources also need to be prepared for a boundary-blurring behavior, e.g. an employee first needs to *activate the reception (UP2)* of company emails on his/her personal mobile phone. Boundary-blurring also depends on the *user's own resource provision (UP3)*, e.g. some employees deliberately bring their own devices to the workplace: “[...] *I prefer using my personal device because I'm simply a lot faster.*”

On the other hand, preconditions can be created by the company through remote *access provision (EPI)*: “*Yes, we have the possibility to access company internal computers from home, using our personal computers.*” However, for this purpose *continual presence (EP2)* of a corresponding home technology is needed, “*some colleagues don't have internet access or something at home. Insofar they are limited.*”

4.3 Triggers

Triggers refer to the events and motives that make employees perform a boundary-blurring behavior. One motive is a *need for transborder communication (I1)* e.g. for informing someone from the other environment: “*When I'm ill, I'll send my firm a short message.*” *Task optimization (I2)* is a motive that aims to improve task performance, e.g. because employees are more familiar and more efficient with their tools “[...] *because I'm much more faster. And that's why I'm using it [my Mac] for such project things.*” People also sometimes use boundary-blurring for *task compensation (I3)*, which is often related to an emotional state “*because when I'm stressed and I need a break [then I do personal things].*”—Motives it turn can be preceded by events such as an *inbound transborder communication (EI)*. In that case, the employee reacts with described forms of boundary-blurring. For instance, employees are contacted directly or via a communication resource and decide to respond or ignore that event: “*Well, most often it's just a reaction to an event. Meaning, if I'm getting a message onto my personal phone [then I need to respond].*”

4.4 Blurring of Boundaries

The process of boundary-blurring is reflected in the employee's behavior, which we divide into specific forms of boundary-blurring and metaforms. Forms of boundary-blurring refer to the specific act of crossing a boundary between personal and work-related activities; metaforms are on a more abstract level and influence the forms of boundary-blurring in a general manner. Typical *forms of boundary-blurring* can be using *working time (F1)* or *company resources (F2)* like communication tools for *personal purposes*. Interviewees mention forms of boundary-blurring for personal purposes more often compared to forms that refer to company purposes. They also use *personal time (F3)* or *communication resources (F4)* for *company purposes*: “*I'm doing it [using company resources for personal purposes] the other way around, too. Thus I read my mails that are for business purposes at weekend as well.*”

Metaforms influence the point of time, the location or the media used. Interviewees state that in case they are motivated to perform a blurring of boundaries, they are able to *postpone* the point of time (*M1*): “[*I will postpone this personal stuff to another moment.*] Or in the afternoon, when most of the work is over or when I have a break.” Additionally, employees exhibit some kind of *equilibrium thinking (M2)*: “*If somebody uses these social media networks at the workplace in an excessive way [for personal purposes] then this relation of work and personal stuff gets somehow imbalanced.*” Individuals sometimes evaluate a potential blurring of boundaries with respect to other factors, thus they show some kind of *thoughtfulness (M3)*: “*I'm not doing personal stuff if I have much to do, if I know there is a task that has to be finished, there is a problem I have to work on.*”

4.5 Consequences

Forms of boundary-blurring lead to specific *consequences*. Consequences can refer to the environment, the tasks and the employee (participant) himself. The environment could be family or colleagues that demonstrate their *tolerance or intolerance (C1)* of a boundary-blurring behavior: “*I think if my boss recognized that I am exaggerating [with doing personal stuff] I guess it would not be too good.*” However, if someone is using his personal media tools for work-related purposes, this can also lead to increases in *task efficiency (C2)*: “*Because I’m very familiar with media I am working personally with.*” In parallel employees can feel more motivated so that the *quality of work (C3)* increases: “*I would say, people are motivated if they have the possibility to phone for personal purposes in the meantime or to check anything on the internet.*” A better work-life-balance is mentioned as another positive aspect: “*Well, chances are that work-life-balance is optimized significantly.*” But some people say that a blurring of boundaries means a decrease in quality of life when work is often done at home: “*One risk is, of course, that too much work is done at home, [...] and then there is no compensation.*”

Consequences on the employee level relate first to *time costs (C4)* if personal issues are dealt with during work hours: “*If somebody is talking about personal issues much and often, that is working time which is lost.*” In contrast, we call it *border partners synergies (C5)* when a blurring of boundaries leads to mutual benefits for the company and the employee. One manager states for example: “*I prefer that a colleague uses the internet for a short time to manage buying concert tickets [...] instead of saying at 5:30 p.m. ‘Well, it’s home time’.*” Consequences regarded as *personal benefits (C6)* refer to the employee: “*Because I stay late at work, for me, it would be positive of course, if I could realise some [personal] stuff here [at work] [...] because otherwise I won’t manage these things.*” *Security risks (C7)* comprise consequences that arise for instance because company data is saved on personal devices which can easily get lost.

4.6 Context

The *context* has an impact on the attitude as well as on preconditions and triggers. Contextual job characteristics mainly refer to work-related tasks or personal tasks. For instance, for flexible working *contracts (J1)* time based costs can occur if an employee uses this working time for personal purposes: “*There are no rules on it, but, I say we have a flexi-time arrangement here, which implies, that it doesn’t matter [...] when you come and when you go, the main point is you have to deliver your work.*” Interviewees also state it becomes more difficult to use media for personal purposes at work if they had a higher *workload (J2)*: “*I don’t do personal stuff if I have a lot to do, if I know, there is a task, that has to be finished.*” On the other hand, a long *working period (J4)* is often mentioned as reason for doing personal business: “*Well, because I spend the majority of my time here at work, the personal part at work is somewhat higher.*”

Some companies influence the behavior of their employees by some kind of *boundary-blurring management*. The *degree of limitation (DMI)* indicates how much a possible blurring of boundaries is limited or even facilitated. This ranges from a complete tolerance “*And this [doing personal stuff at the workplace] is not counted and nobody is talked to because of that.*” to very restrictive policies “*The use of personal devices is basically not allowed [here].*” Other employers *facilitate (DM3)* forms of boundary-blurring, which can sometimes even imply serious pressure: “*These guys are pressurizing to be accessible all the time [even at home].*”

Interviewees *perceive and evaluate the influence* by their company in different ways. For example, when the perceived influence of the company regulations were stated as high, they often also mentioned a more *radical (PM1)* attitude towards it: “*I guess otherwise I would do it [personal things at the workplace] secretly.*” Others associate the company’s influence with *negative working conditions (PM3)*, for example when restricting access to job relevant materials from home: “*That was obstructive. I have to say it so clearly. Well, if you first have to go to the respective persons and beg*

them: Could you provide an access for me?” But, boundary-blurring management can also be appreciated (PM4): *“I appreciate the employer for restricting to use these channels for personal purposes.”* If employees recognize that there could exist some restrictions, but there are not, they perceive this situation as a *sense of freedom* (PM5): *“Therefore you’re feeling better, a lot more relieved”* or this sense is restricted because of existing limitations: *“I always perceive it unpleasant, if you know, you only have a restricted access.”*

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Our grounded theory study on the use of personal media at the workplace was motivated by the recent IT consumerization trend and the ambiguities of the past literature related to this topic. In particular, the literature clearly separates between the two themes of personal media use *at* work and personal media use *for* work purposes. Based on the analysis of 14 interviews with employees of different firms, our findings suggest that closely related to both themes stands the blurring of the boundaries between work and private life. This, we argue, also militates for viewing both themes inherently related. That is, employees who use personal media at the workplace may also be more willing to use similar media and tools for work purposes in their personal environment. Conversely, those employees who refrain from using company resources for personal purposes during work hours may also be less willing to use their personal time and resources for company purposes. In fact, this interrelationship was also emphasized by some of our interviewees who stated that *“[...] on the one hand you spend personal time for the company. And that's why indirectly one must also have a right for this [i.e. to use Facebook on the company PC].”*

While our findings are consistent with the related social sciences literature that has investigated blurring more generally with regards to time, space and means of labor (e.g., Ashforth et al. 2000, Chesley 2005), we specifically illuminated this phenomenon from an IS perspective with regards to emerging social media and mobile tools. Our results suggest that these emerging media and tools can be seen as a catalyst in the ongoing blurring of work-life boundaries. Our analysis spawns the *attitude towards blurring of boundaries* as the core phenomenon to explain different employee behaviors. We found that some employees are reluctant to boundaries and *seek blurring of boundaries* while others are reluctant to a boundary-blurring and *prefer boundaries*. We believe that this property might be a key variable to explain personal media use across both themes identified in the literature. It might also help to explain some of the ambiguities in the literature on the positive and negative outcomes. For example, personal media use—be it surfing social media websites at work or BYOD—might have a positive effect on productivity and job satisfaction, *only if* the employee is also willing to accept a blurring of boundaries. Conversely, if the employee is not prone to blur boundaries, teleworking and other forms of mobile IT-enabled work are potentially less effective.

Apart from this novel construct, we also find many commonalities between our model and the past literature in the IS field. In line with the theories of reasoned action/ planned behavior, we found an attitude (*attitude towards blurring of boundaries*) as the main antecedent of a behavioral intention (the intention to use personal media at/for work). Regarding deterrence theories, our results confirm that deterrence measures (*boundary-blurring management*) are only effective to the extent to which they are accepted (cf. Xue et al. 2011). Any measures that go beyond this point would make employees use personal media despite these regulations, which is vividly illustrated by the following statement: *“I’m online all the time [...] and even if I could not use the company computer, I would do it via my smartphone.”* In this sense, emerging social media and mobile tools call for a paradigm shift compared to the past deterrence views that merely focused on the (mis-)use of company resources.

Practitioners can learn from our study that policies on personal media use at the workplace should possibly leave enough flexibility for the individual to decide on the media and tools that he/she wishes to use. Managers should explicitly consider the individual attitudes of their colleagues and their personal boundaries when setting up team collaboration. This also implies that past deterrence policies and one-size-fits-all approaches for the whole company are less likely to succeed.

Limitations of our study mainly relate to the sample, the potential biases of self-reports and other limitations inherent to a qualitative approach. Especially the sample of 14 interviews from German companies demands caution when generalizing our findings to other micro or macro contexts. Future work should research more into the antecedents of the employee attitudes and investigate how different personal traits, task characteristics and the company context might influence this phenomenon.

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