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# Agentic interplay between hybridity and liminality in contemporary boundary work

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## Abstract

There is no doubt that digital technologies have an impact on boundary work, that is, the practices individuals develop to work up boundaries between ‘work’ and ‘life’. However, related research is still dominated by the integration–segmentation framework which may restrict our understanding of contemporary practice. To address this limitation, we use the concepts of hybridity (fusion) and liminality (in-betweenness) in combination to explore how their interplay may promote more nuanced accounts of how individuals work up their boundaries in contemporary everyday life. Our analysis of video diaries and follow-up interviews undertaken by 30 UK-based workers reveals an ‘agentic interplay’ of hybridity and liminality that is understood as an ongoing dynamic practice, sometimes *enabling* and sometimes *undermining* desired boundary work outcomes. We make three contributions, collectively offering a critical advancement in the work–life debate and the hybridity and liminality literatures: (a) further developing an understanding of boundary work as situated, creative and dynamic; (b) unpacking the agentic potential of the ‘black box’ of the hybridity–liminality interplay; and (c) expanding current understandings and applications of the concepts of hybridity and liminality.

## KEYWORDS

agency, boundary work, digital technologies, hybridity, liminality, work–life boundaries

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented uptake of digital technologies has led to increasingly remote and hybrid forms of work worldwide (e.g., Dale, 2021; Dobbins, 2021; Fayard et al., 2021). Boundaries between work and other spheres of life, including home and family (henceforth referred to as 'life'), break down or become increasingly blurred with the ubiquitous use of digital technologies (e.g., Adisa et al., 2019; Aljabr et al., 2022; Chen & Casterella, 2019; Chen & Karahanna, 2014; Prasopoulou et al., 2006; Reissner et al., 2021; Siegert & Löwstedt, 2019). This transformation of the workplace generates a need to revisit the practice of boundary management. Academic investigations of boundary management generally focus on the preferred styles of individuals such as separators and integrators (e.g., Kossek, 2016) that require tactics or strategies to implement (e.g., Allen et al., 2021; Choroszewicz & Kay, 2020). In this article, we aim to take a different perspective that emphasises dynamic practices rather than underlying personal preferences.

The popularly used term 'boundary management' suggests an essentialist view that boundaries between work and life exist as independent entities. In contrast, we adopt the term 'boundary work' (Nippert-Eng, 1995) consistent with a non-essentialist perspective whereby we do not presume particular boundaries already exist but that individuals 'work up' boundaries in their everyday situated practice. Just as work and life can be considered emergent distinctions constantly produced and reproduced in the flow of everyday life, boundaries are also negotiated and shaped through social interactions and practices (Leppäkumpu & Sivunen, 2023), requiring scholars to continually revisit current everyday meanings. However, whereas Nippert-Eng (2008, p. 16) argued that we 'abandon or adopt specific segmenting and integrating practices along numerous dimensions as needed and desired', her segmentation–integration continuum has been developed over time as individual preferred styles. This restricts our focus to practices that fall within the relatively narrow confines of this conceptualisation. Consequently, it has been argued that personal preference is more complex than a choice on this spectrum (Kossek & Lautsch, 2008) and we are likely missing other practices by which we navigate our everyday existence. For example, Cruz and Meisenbach (2018) found that those in volunteer roles deployed a practice of collapsing boundaries (in addition to segmenting and integrating). These authors conclude that their findings 'highlight serious challenges to quantifying any one individual as a segmentor, integrator, or collapser' (Cruz & Meisenbach, 2018, p. 201).

Understanding contemporary boundary work is important as extensive use of digital technologies within and beyond work is likely responsible for new phenomena such as burnout and technology fatigue (e.g., Sugden, 2020). Consequently, motivated by an academic and practical problem around contemporary boundary work, we build on, and extend, research that has looked beyond preferred styles of integration-segregation as a means of developing a fuller understanding of this navigation of contemporary work arrangements.

Contemporary accounts of boundary management—particularly focusing on the use of digital technologies—have begun to consider two new concepts: hybridity and liminality. The term 'hybridity' has been used to refer to the fusion of space and time, giving rise to new spaces of work (or 'workplace hybridity'; e.g., Halford, 2005) by enabling coexistence in two domains (work and life) simultaneously (i.e., when individuals undertake work- and life-related activities in the same space and time). A similar stream of literature focuses on the fusion of the online and the offline worlds, rendering distinctions between the two insignificant (Jordan, 2009). Šimůnková (2019, p. 40) has recently argued that hybridity is thus a 'universal contemporary human condition'. Liminality is similar in that it emerges from the erosion of boundaries, but is conceptually very different to hybridity; it is said to lead to an 'in-between' space whose primary characteristics are those of ambiguity and flexibility and that is often transitional (Izak et al., 2023; Orlikowski & Scott, 2021; Stein et al., 2015). Rather than being in two domains simultaneously, we are suspended between.

Here we are extending their potential beyond mere substitutes for integration or segmentation as fixed preferences. For example, researchers on hybridity in emphasising the breaking down of boundaries seem to then position this as an unvarying general way of working (e.g., Ateeq, 2022; Zamani et al., 2022). Here, we seek instead to position hybridity as a situated and dynamic practice. We see in liminality the importance of ambiguity and

fluidity—sometimes a context is interpreted as work and sometimes as life—and the potential for change. The idea of liminality as a continuously evolving process (Stein et al., 2015) fits with our idea of hybridity as dynamic. While these concepts have been introduced to the literature independently, here we develop their utility by considering them in combination as ongoing practices of active boundary work. We therefore pose the following research question (RQ):

*How can the concepts of hybridity and liminality help us explain contemporary boundary work?*

To address our RQ, we draw on a rich qualitative study involving video diaries and reflective interviews with 30 participants comprising Social Entrepreneurs (SEs) and Office Workers (OWs). Through our analysis we recognised that participants utilise the interplay between hybridity and liminality in a creative manner that can either enable or undermine desired outcomes. Our additional consideration of liminality offers an enriched conceptual lens to study how existing notions of *fusion* of boundaries can be supplemented by the *in-betweenness* of boundaries seen in the concept of liminality (e.g., Stein et al., 2015). This lens generates alternative, more representative understandings of contemporary boundary work (cf. Weritz et al., 2022; Zamani et al., 2022) than the two concepts alone can do.

Consequently, we make three contributions to the work-life debate and the hybridity and liminality literatures:

- a. further developing an understanding of boundary work as situated, creative and dynamic, going beyond individual preferences of segmentation or integration;
- b. unpacking the agentic potential of the ‘black box’ of the hybridity–liminality interplay to identify a range of ongoing practices; and
- c. expanding current understandings and applications of the concepts of hybridity and liminality which may be limited to narrow understandings (e.g., hybrid working in the context of organisations) and whose combination may serve as a lens to study other phenomena.

Below we review the boundary management/work literature and explore how hybridity and liminality have been studied in relation to this. We then explain our research design and methodology and present our research findings, outlining the different types of interplay that were found to either enable or undermine effective boundary work. We conclude with our theoretical and practical implications, and finally by outlining our study's limitations and directions for future research.

## 2 | THE BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT/WORK LITERATURE

Boundary theory proposes that we actively construct a boundary around the domains of work and life with individuals preferring different relative strengths of their boundaries (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2000). Strong boundaries help keep work and life as separate domains; weak boundaries facilitate transition between domains. The relative strength of the boundary is characterised by degrees of permeability and flexibility (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 2008). A boundary is permeable if elements of one domain can enter the other domain, sometimes conceived of as interruptions or intrusions (e.g., Chen & Karahanna, 2014). A boundary is flexible if it can be relaxed to meet the demands of the other domain (e.g., Reissner et al., 2021). Both permeability and flexibility reflect a combination of conditions of the domain and its boundary as well as an individual's willingness and ability to transition across the boundary into the other domain (Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2004), for example, to address interruptions.

Over time, research has positioned permeability and flexibility as strategies (e.g., Allen et al., 2021) by which individuals manage work–life boundaries in line with their segmentation–integration preferences. Kreiner et al. (2009) explain this as an individual with a segmentation preference seeks to prevent the flow or mix of elements from one

domain to another. Segmentation is characterised by low flexibility to leave one domain to attend to the other and low permeability of domain boundaries. One example would be to restrict work communication during non-work hours and/or outside the physical workplace (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). On the other hand, someone preferring integration seeks to allow elements from one life domain to flow or mix with another. Integration is characterised by high flexibility and high permeability. An example would be an individual who uses personal digital devices to undertake work-related matters while at home (Bulger et al., 2007). Thus, much of the existing research positions boundary work as reflecting a preferred boundary management style where individuals systematically differ in how they manage boundaries between domains (e.g., Kossek, 2016). This person-centred approach sees boundary work as 'a set of psychological characteristics organised into patterns' and a 'constellation of variables within individuals' (Kossek et al., 2012, p. 113). However, with evolving work contexts, this approach has yielded ever more classifications: for example, integrators who blend work and non-work roles, separators who separate work and non-work roles, cyclers who alternate between integration and separation, and role-firsters who routinely prioritise either work or home (Kossek, 2016). This increasing complexity reflects the need to accommodate situational factors as part of our understanding of boundary work.

Additionally, digital technology, presents different affordances to consider and negotiate within boundary work. However, despite the advent of more widespread use of more sophisticated technologies, researchers have continued to conceive of boundary management within the existing segmentation–integration paradigm.

Changes in work and life domains have created new conditions in which individuals manage boundaries that are increasingly blurred, particularly in relation to the workplace (Halford, 2005). This has been accompanied by a rise in less stable and/or more flexible working practices (Izak et al., 2023). One effect of this is that the physical and temporal boundaries around work are in many instances no longer enforced by organisations. With these organisational boundaries increasingly dissolved, the boundary between work and life is destabilised and workers must increasingly engage in boundary work within these different parameters (Clark, 2000; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Izak et al., 2023).

How they do so, however, is the subject of investigation and the literature identifies a number of different approaches which are worthy of further attention. On the one hand, it is said that blurred boundaries and digital technology require more active management but positioning on the integration–segmentation spectrum remains the focus (Derks et al., 2016). Other research points to forms of working that challenge the idea of a constant preferred style on the continuum. For example, in the context of voluntary work, new boundary management processes were identified with individuals collapsing boundaries to reflect multiple life roles which have similarities, for example, shared values (Cruz & Meisenbach, 2018). Others dispute the spectrum more broadly. Positioning boundary work as a proxy for more general management of one's individual performance, it is argued that this is neither a matter of segmentation nor integration 'but rather [...] the ways that relations of work and life are resolved' (Kristensen & Pedersen, 2017, p. 69).

Other research has sought to integrate the digital landscape into how the work–life interface is managed (as reviewed, e.g., by Cecchinato & Cox, 2020). This literature investigates the relationship between digital technologies and individuals' boundary work and its primary home has been the field of organisational behaviour rather than Information Systems (IS) (Gerlach, 2018). Both this more technology-focused area, and the wider boundary work literature, are dominated by cross-sectional quantitative variable-centred approaches (De Alwis & Hernwall, 2021; Gerlach, 2018) at the expense of qualitative and person-centred studies (Cobb et al., 2022). The latter can usefully show the more varied and nuanced boundary work deployed in the context of digital technologies. For example, Cousins and Robey (2015) adopt an interpretive approach to highlight how participants use a variety of personalised practices to match their particular situations through interaction with the affordances of their mobile devices. These studies demonstrate both the limits of trying to fit boundary work into preferred styles along the segmentation–integration continuum as a comprehensive framework and its failure to provide a satisfactory account of the role of digital technology.

This invites a more radical approach to examining how the contemporary worker negotiates work and life in the absence of the structures, objects and practices (such as those invoked by Nippert-Eng, 1996) which in the past have created seemingly objectively fixed boundaries (Duxbury et al., 2014). Here it is helpful to emphasise that the work-life distinction has always been a social construction rather than some naturally occurring phenomenon (Etzioni, 1961). Just as the Industrial Revolution is associated with the construction of a separate public sphere of paid work (Allen et al., 2014), the digital era is associated with the boundaries around this sphere having blurred or broken down.

In this article, we build on the qualitative work (e.g., Cousins & Robey, 2015) that specifically examines the relationship between digital technology and boundary work. Limitations in current understandings of boundary work might be usefully addressed by the deployment and combining of existing constructs, here liminality (Izak et al., 2023; Stein et al., 2015; Vesala & Tuomivaara, 2019) and hybridity (Halford, 2005; e.g., Jordan, 2009; Šimůnková, 2019), on which we focus in the next section. Specifically, whereas these concepts have until now been treated in isolation, we seek to explore and understand contemporary boundary work through applying them in combination.

### 3 | HYBRIDITY AND LIMINALITY TO EXPLAIN CONTEMPORARY BOUNDARY WORK

In this section, we review how the two concepts (hybridity and liminality) have been studied separately in relation to digital technologies and boundary work, which is what led us to our decision to consider them in combination in our own empirical work, presented later. We begin by reviewing relevant literature on hybridity.

Two kinds of hybridity are discussed in relation to digital technologies and work. 'Spatial hybridity' is a form of work that takes place across different locations (e.g., Zamani et al., 2022) and largely stems from Halford's (2005) work identifying three different space of work: office, home and online. This is enabled by the use of digital technologies and the spatial boundaries between work and life are diminished because work is taking place in traditionally leisure areas. Often there is an underlying 'temporal hybridity' here also as spatial freedom leads to ability to work outside the traditional '9-5'. This is the kind of conceptualisation that underlies current practice-focused accounts of contemporary work (e.g., Dale, 2021) such that, post-pandemic, there is more flexibility around places of work and more consideration given to remote working.

The second kind of hybridity is a form of work that combines online and offline working. While earlier accounts may have viewed this as one's work containing elements of both face-to-face and online work (e.g., in virtual teams; Griffith et al., 2003), more contemporary accounts discuss how digital technologies and face-to-face interactions are now thoroughly fused such that the distinction between online and offline practices as different kinds of work are no longer meaningful (e.g., Pink et al., 2022). Lindberg et al. (2017) illustrate this vividly in their description of the combining of imaging devices and embodied surgical procedures in the operating theatre. This idea is extended to considerations of the breakdown of boundaries between personal and professional identities in hybrid social media (Archer-Brown et al., 2018) such that Jordan (2009) has claimed we now live 'hybrid lives', enabled because the boundary between online and offline is thoroughly eroded. Šimůnková (2019) makes the point that online and offline are so thoroughly merged that we are not conscious of switching between them; an existential change. This goes far beyond the 'integration' envisaged in the segmentation-integration continuum.

Many of these accounts, however, may position hybridity as a function of space and technology and structured by these materialities. In contrast, our research is focused on exploring how hybridity is mundanely (re)produced and indeed challenged by workers as they go about their everyday lives. Pink et al. (2022), in their account of social workers' hybrid work, highlight 'the improvisatory practice' of workers and, in a similar fashion, our goal is to identify and describe a form of agentic boundary work that may produce a range of different practices in different contexts and at different times.

Where hybridity is the combination of two previously separated entities, liminality is positioned as the state of 'being neither here nor there' or 'being betwixt and between the positions' (Turner, 1969, p. 95). Izak et al. (2023) coin the term 'liquid liminality' to describe this situation in the context of boundarylessness. Liminality is a time and space that is both ambiguous (neither one thing nor the other) and transitional. Orlikowski and Scott (2021) see the disruption of boundaries (in their case coming from the context of the pandemic) as leading to a new liminal condition that has 'generative potentiality'; previous norms no longer apply and therefore new configurations of work can be imagined. This is a temporary state that then leads to new practices. However, Stein et al. (2015, p. 2) from their research conclude that contemporary, digitally enabled work both enables liminality and induces a 'permanent liminality'; we are continually 'creating, maintaining and breaking in-betweenness'.

Consequently, the relevance of the two concepts (hybridity and liminality) in relation to work is predicated on precisely the characteristics that have presented challenges for examining boundary work: the rise of digital technology and the re-thinking of boundaries. They also offer the potential for greater understanding of the dynamic nature of such work in the context of digital technology, through rejecting a preference-based view of work practices and a deterministic view of technology. Instead, we consider the role of active agency in managing digital technologies (Gerlach, 2018) with the potential of unpacking different types of relationships between hybridity and liminality in contemporary boundary work. This includes considering how boundary work may vary across contexts (Butts et al., 2015; Derks et al., 2016; Hislop & Axtell, 2011), highlighting the methodological importance of being able to capture moments across different times and situations and of recording images, for example, of objects and practices, for later reflection (Izak et al., 2023).

Having reviewed how the two concepts have been studied in relation to boundary work, we now turn to present our research design and the methods we adopted to collect and analyse data, including how we creatively combined the two concepts to enable alternative understandings of contemporary boundary work.

## 4 | RESEARCH DESIGN

As noted above, much of the boundary work literature is dominated by quantitative studies that focus on variable testing (De Alwis & Hernwall, 2021; Gerlach, 2018), rather than interpretive qualitative studies that favour deeper analyses of complex phenomena such as that under investigation here. As Hedman et al. (2019, p. 1194) point out, methods should be deployed to generate rich data to enhance our understanding of 'everyday life with digital technologies and infrastructures'. A strength of qualitative research is its 'flexibility in the connections within and between the conceptual (ideas) and the empirical (data) that allows for a logic of discovery rather than only a logic of validation' (Van Maanen et al., 2007, p. 1146). This makes it suitable for uncovering practices that fall outside existing knowledge (in this area largely influenced by Nippert-Eng's (1996) integration-segmentation framework). We use data from video diaries and follow-up interviews undertaken by 30 UK-based research participants (presented in more detail in Section 4.1), drawing from a larger dataset from a funded project entitled 'Digital Brain Switch', whose aim was to examine the implications of digital technologies for boundary work. In line with the interpretive qualitative tradition, we did not collect two types of datasets (video and interview) for triangulation purposes but for completeness (Symon et al., 2018).

Video-based research is an increasingly popular approach (Christianson, 2018) that valuably supplements other methods through capturing naturally occurring events, processes and practices as they unfold in real time, including non-verbal aspects of communication, 'emotions and complexity' (Roberts, 2011, p. 679), unstructured or disjointed lines of thought and other details which may not be recalled in interviews (Toraldó et al., 2018). Video methods can therefore address situations where participants may not be cognizant of everything they do and how they do it (LeBaron et al., 2018). This is particularly useful when seeking to understand the use of material objects (here, digital technologies) as video data capture the social and the material as mutually embedded (e.g., Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). Video diaries, therefore, constitute a useful tool for a detailed examination of participants' everyday

practices of boundary work. Follow-up interviews embedded these videos in participants' wider everyday narratives. This is in line with our general interpretivist perspective (following, e.g., Cousins & Robey, 2015) in which human experience is the central focus of research and reality is subjective, multiple and socially constructed.

## 4.1 | Data collection process

Driven by the assumption that working arrangements shape individuals' boundary work in the contemporary context, we focused on two groups of individuals positioned on the two extremes of the flexibility spectrum: Social Entrepreneurs (SEs), who work typically from home or other non-traditional workplaces (e.g., coffee shops) and do not have standard working hours, and Office Workers (OWs), who typically work from their office during standard working hours. Although we do not examine occupational characteristics (specifics of different jobs) in detail, we thought that our focus on different working arrangements in our two groups (with SEs having seemingly more flexible boundaries, and OWs more traditional ones) would allow us to uncover a breadth of different experiences. Following best practice in the field (see Saunders & Townsend, 2016 on sample size for interviews; and Zundel et al., 2018 on sample size for video diaries), we recruited 15 participants from each group. In our briefing sessions before the video diaries commenced, we asked participants to film different roles and activities across all aspects of their lives and how technology, in its different forms, influenced switches between life domains. Where possible, we asked them to record what they saw in front of them rather than narrate switches after the event (see specific instructions to participants in Appendix A). An individual debriefing session was conducted once the video diary was finished to check how our participants felt after filming and discuss their reflections on the experience of taking part; contemporaneous notes of this were kept and used to inform the follow-up interviews.

Each participant produced a series of videos filmed over at least a week; some took longer than a week to produce filming over 7 days. The number of videos per participant varied considerably (from 8 to 153) and within that, the length of each video also varied, with some very short (a minute or so) to some very extended, running to over 30 min. Most delivered a mixture of videos of varying length, in line with our expectations given the brief. The number of videos received was unconnected to the (research) quality of the data; short collections often contained detailed and reflective accounts. Film quality was broadly similar across the dataset; all participants were provided with the same model of videocam, chosen for its ability to produce decent images across a range of filming situations, rather than their own devices. Footage was reportage in style, reflecting different filming locations and the nature of the brief. This included activities when participants used other devices and were on the move.

Each participant was subsequently invited to an interview a few weeks after the end of the video diary. The intervening time was to allow participants (where possible) to review their video data and select a few extracts for discussion at interview. Most asked us to select for them; our criteria were videos that included 'moments of success, failure or puzzlement' or other 'instances worthy of comment' (Fry & Ketteridge, 2009, p. 477). Aiming to embed videos in their wider narratives about participants' everyday lives, interviews involved open-ended questions about their career, technology use, their meaning and experience of work-life balance, and the role of technology in this (see our project's interview protocol in Appendix A). More detailed accounts of our methodology can be found in two publications of ours (Whiting, Roby, et al., 2018; Whiting, Symon, et al., 2018), as well as on our project's legacy website.<sup>1</sup>

## 4.2 | Data analysis process

All data (videos with transcribed commentary, debriefing notes and the interview transcripts) were uploaded to NVivo 10 for analysis. Our approach to analysing our data was influenced by the principles of thematic analysis

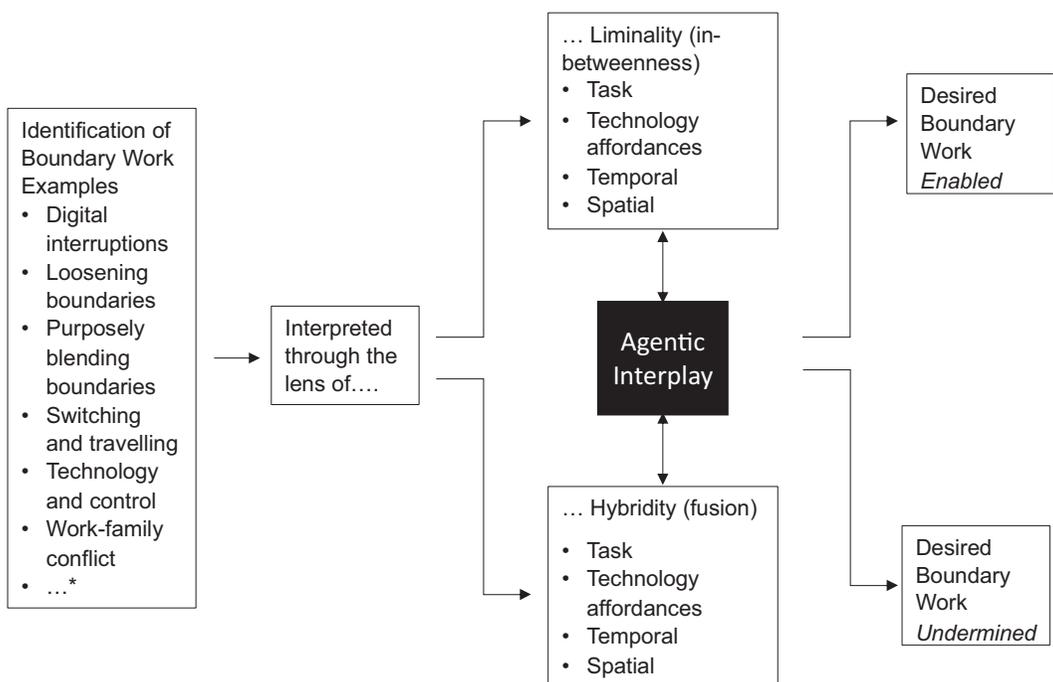
<sup>1</sup>Our project's legacy website: <http://www.scc.lancs.ac.uk/research/projects/DBS/>.

(Braun & Clarke, 2021) and involved semantic, data-driven coding (identifying instances of boundary work), followed by latent, research-driven coding (investigating aspects of hybridity and liminality within boundary work) that enabled conceptually driven interpretations in line with our RQ. Our analysis process is presented diagrammatically in Figure 1 and explained further below.

In our initial trawl, we looked to capture video and interview excerpts in which participants made some reference (either verbally or by showing us) to situations in which there was some form of boundary work. During this initial process, which resulted in more than 30 semantic codes (with some illustrated in the first box in Figure 1), we particularly focused on the interaction between a person and their digital devices as they navigated everyday life. This resulted in a collection of excerpts commonly dealing with boundary work.

We then sought to use our two selected concepts (hybridity and liminality) to interpret in more detail the nature of this boundary work. Our analysis was driven here by applying the main characteristics of the two concepts. We isolated the hybrid and liminal elements of the boundary work being undertaken by considering situations of fusion (for hybridity) and in-betweenness (for liminality) and coding for the main characteristics identified in the literature for the two concepts. We coded for 'task', 'technology affordances', 'time' and 'space' for both concepts, based on our own review in Section 3 for hybridity, and on Stein et al. (2015) for liminality.

This analysis led us to identify a constant interaction between the two (which we term 'agentic interplay') resulting from the participants' creative agency in using the fusion offered by hybridity and in-betweenness and ambiguity offered by liminality to achieve the desired outcomes of their boundary work. Note that here by 'desired outcomes', we mean the effective achievement of the objectives of their boundary work. This could be a sense of effective working or avoiding feeling guilty or feeling in control of one's time etc., etc., depending on the person and situation at the time. This is not then our imposed definition of a general 'good' outcome, but the participants' situated desired outcomes. Through open coding at this stage, we identified several types of interplay presented in Figure 1 as a 'black box' and unpacked in Section 5. Sometimes this agentic interplay worked for them but



**FIGURE 1** Qualitative analysis process.

\*The codes that appear in this box are just a few examples of over 30 semantic codes.

sometimes it did not, and they failed to achieve their desired outcome. We coded this as either 'enabling desired outcomes' or 'undermining desired outcomes'.

In Section 5, we use these final two categories to present the different types of interplay we identified.

## 5 | AGENTIC INTERPLAY OF HYBRIDITY AND LIMINALITY

Our analysis identified a variety of mundane practices that constitute different ways in which hybridity (fusion) and liminality (in-betweenness) were flexibly (co-)produced in a situated and creative way. Whereas in some cases this interplay enabled desired boundary work, as judged by our participants, it also engendered problems, undermining desired boundary work in our participants' eyes. We explore the two categories by presenting examples from our sample of the different types of interplay of hybridity and liminality that led to the two outcomes. However, this cannot be a comprehensive list. Rather than isolating all potential forms of interplay, our aim here is to emphasise the situated and agentic nature of the hybrid-liminal interplay, while also recognising the limits to creativity and agency that may undermine desired boundary work. Additional extracts are provided in Table B1 in Appendix B for each type of interplay.

### 5.1 | Interplay of hybridity and liminality that enables desired boundary work

The first type of interplay we discuss here was where *liminality enabled hybridity*:

So, while I'm at work I always keep my phone in front of me so that I can check it but at the same time I always put it on silent... but I can still see if the screen goes bright. I can see someone calling or someone texting and most of the times I will instantly stop to check my phone and see who called or who texted or who it was. I might not reply straightaway, but I will definitely check.

(Pari, OW, interview)

Here, there is a fusion of leisure and work activities, spaces and times through the affordance of the portability and small size of the smartphone. Liminality comes from the phone being both on (and monitoring social life) and off (silent, so not actively present). Pari has actively utilised the potential liminality of her phone to produce a hybridity that allows her to monitor what is going on in her leisure life while at work. The presence of the liminal phone makes hybridity possible and Pari can choose whether to enact this hybridity or not.

A similar type of interplay is one in which *liminality maintained hybridity*. We observed this in Leanne's example below. The video shows us Leanne sitting on the sofa with her laptop in front of her and a view of the television which she will be watching with her daughters and the voiceover informs us:

So, it's Sunday afternoon, and I've got a few pieces of work to do. So, I thought I might come into the lounge and do my pieces of work ... I'll just pootle away on my laptop while [the kids are watching TV]. At least then I'm in the same room as the family and I feel like we're spending some time together... I've chosen to do a task I don't need to spend a lot of concentration on, it's just picking up a few bits and bobs.

(Leanne, OW, video)

In relation to hybridity here we have a fusion of home and work spaces, times and activities through the affordance of laptop portability such that work can take place in a leisure space at the weekend. In relation to liminality, the task is ambiguous: is Leanne working or is she watching the TV/children? Leanne has chosen an activity

for her kids that does not require active attention from her, and activities for work that do not require focused thought from her. The use of the word ‘pootle’ also positions the activity as liminal; it is like work but not work, it is semi-work. While this example is similar to Pari’s in that the two participants use the affordances of a device to create hybridity, for Leanne, it is not that the device is placed ‘in between’, but it is the task that provides a liminality that is found to make hybridity easier to maintain.

In the next example, we see how *liminality hides hybridity*. As David tells us:

I’ll do a load of emails but I’ll save them in the drafts folder and then I’ll send them the next day because what I didn’t want to do is to send them at night because then... something I’ve read about creating expectations about when people think you’re working. And they’ll say, “oh that’s interesting, he’s working, I’ve just got an email from him, he’s working I’ll just ping him back to get a view from him on...”

(David, SE, interview)

Here, we see a temporal hybridity as work emails are created during leisure time. The emails produced, however, are in a state of liminality. They are temporally suspended; composed but not received so are yet to fulfil their communicative function. David is actively managing his visibility through temporal liminality by choosing when to send emails, giving the illusion of having boundaries and maintaining control over his own time.

The final interplay, we note here, that leads to desired boundary work was one whereby *hybridity created liminality*. We see this with Denise who, in the video, is still in bed but showing us her iPad screen as she checks her email and social media:

So, before I go into work, I’m going to have a look at my emails. I like to do that. I don’t like any surprises when I get into work. Have a look at my home emails as well just to see what’s going on and see that actually there’s an email from my daughter. She’s a lawyer and it’s into my home emails but it’s actually a work thing because it’s about some case law and disabilities... so I’m going to put that into my work emails so I can deal with that when I get into work.

(Denise, SE, video)

Again, the portability of the tablet enables the bed space to become a hybrid space of relaxation and work, where both personal and work emails come together in a hybrid task. This hybrid space enables activity that is neither wholly leisure nor work. Denise actively utilises this liminal (transitional) time to prepare herself for the day to come and reassert her work–life boundaries, deciding what will count as work and what as leisure (also illustrating that boundaries must be constantly recreated). Here hybridity has enabled a liminal moment—a time of transition in an ‘in-between’ place of suspension of normal boundaries, allowing the shifting of focus from one domain to another in a phased way.

The examples in this section illustrate the different ways in which hybridity and liminality can be creatively brought together in a situated fashion to achieve (desired) boundary work. We identify hybridity and liminality here as therefore mutually enabling. Hybridity may facilitate liminality by creating the conditions for ambiguity and invisibility that allows creative boundary work, while through ambiguity and similar processes, liminality may facilitate the emergence and maintenance of hybridity in a controlled way. While digital affordances may create the possibility of hybridity and liminality, it is individuals’ creative enactment of this possibility that constitutes boundary work.

## 5.2 | Interplay of hybridity and liminality that undermines desired boundary work

Our first example in this category is about a case of *liminality producing uncontrolled hybridity*:

I don't mind working from home in the evenings, if it's, you know, for a big meeting that's coming up, and it's something that just needs to be done. But I'd fallen into some bad habits earlier in the year, that I was just every night, logging on to my computer to work while I watched television. I'd just be mucking around with emails and that sort of thing, and I wasn't... I was only half watching television and half working, and in the end, it was rather a waste of time, really.

(Liz, OW, interview)

Liz here discusses a fusion of leisure and work activities through the affordance of laptop portability that has enabled spatial and temporal hybridity. Such hybridity has created for Liz a liminality that she does not find helpful or creative. Rather, it feels like ambiguity means neither work nor leisure is being fully accomplished. In some sense the opposite of participants like Leanne in the previous section, Liz has not ceased working in the evenings but has chosen only to work on activities that can fully be categorised as serious work (not in any way liminal) and on which she will fully concentrate away from leisure activities. In this case, uncontrolled hybridity is the result of ineffective liminality, which has led to a reassertion of boundaries.

While the previous type of interplay was about liminality producing uncontrolled hybridity, the next type of interplay is about *lack of liminality triggering uncontrolled hybridity*. To illustrate this, we use an extract from Stephen's video diary, who sits on the sofa with the TV on and his laptop on his knee, facing the television and explains:

OK, we're at 11 o'clock. So much for going through emails for an hour. I suppose if you asked my wife, she'd say "this always happens." So [she's] been down, up and down and she's gone up to bed now. Essentially what's happened is that [I went online to deal with] two or three particular emails that require a considered response. I'm in a chat at the moment [...] with another colleague about some stuff we're doing [...] he's just come through with a few comments "cos he can see that I'm online." So that's the other thing. You're kind of fair game whenever you're doing a little bit of work, if you're online, just accept it that sometimes that happens. Obviously, I could tell him "look I'm busy, forget it," but as I'm doing an email and other stuff, I'll flip into answering that as well.

(Stephen, SE, video)

A fusion of family and work activities has been created here through the affordance of laptop portability that enables spatial and temporal hybridity. Stephen's intention may have been for some form of hybridity in the home space. However, unlike Leanne (previous subsection), Stephen has not confined himself to liminal tasks having gone online to provide 'considered responses' to emails and then lost control over the liminality of his online presence by signalling both visibility and availability. His visibility online has allowed others to identify this as a work time. He may think there is an ambiguity about whether he is working or not, but his wife interprets Stephen as purely working and recreates boundaries by leaving the 'hybrid lounge' for the leisure space of the bedroom. Here hybridity has been undermined by a failure to identify liminal tasks (cf. Leanne) or reduce visibility online (cf. David) such that the interplay has not been successfully enacted.

In contrast to examples in the earlier section that showed how liminality created hybridity, we also found that too much *liminality could prevent hybridity*. We join Cressida in her house, hovering near her laptop, as she continues her story of an errant engineer:

And here I am again half an hour later I'm still waiting for the engineer who was promised at 8:00 o'clock, but then again, he was promised yesterday. So, I'm going to start my work, and it's going to be very difficult to concentrate [...] So, I'm just walking over to my laptop which is waiting for me. My plan today is that I go out and do some work at the Royal Festival Hall with my colleague [...] [later] On the phone to British Gas, my engineer is apparently coming. My entire morning has been broken

up by waiting for the arrival of British Gas who I've had to call six times. I'm sure you're very interested in this but transitioning on glue!

(Cressida, SE, video)

Similar to participants who used liminality to transition between home and work (and vice versa), Cressida is aiming for a hybrid home/workspace but waiting for the engineer means she cannot fully transition into this and is stuck in a liminal position of neither being quite at home nor at work. The imminent arrival of the engineer maintains the space as home while she is trying to transition the home space into a hybrid home/workspace.

In our final example, we explore an interplay whereby *uncontrolled hybridity creates an unwelcome liminality*, a suspension of normal time. Jez films himself sitting at his PC as he wearily tells us:

It's about 7.30 and I realise I came back about 5.30 and just got sucked into the computer again. So, I spend too much of my time online but anyway I had some chats with my friends, did some work-related stuff, it's all blending together. But I think I need to go and get some food.

(Jez, SE, video)

For Jez, online friends and work activities are juxtaposed creating a hybrid environment where both work and leisure can be pursued at the same time. This fusing together, however, is experienced as 'too much of my time online' living a liminal existence, a limbo that suspends normal time (2 h go past quickly) and that has no contact with outside spaces and physical necessities like food. Jez here indicates he has ceded control over his desire to live a balanced on/offline life to technology which 'sucks him in'. Uncontrolled hybridity has created unwelcome liminality.

The examples in this section have unpacked practices whereby the interplay of hybridity and liminality has undermined desired boundary work. The difference with the previous section is that when individuals were not in control of either hybridity or liminality, their boundary work was undermined. This lack of control either came from technology (see Liz and Jez's examples above) or from other people (see Stephen and Cressida's examples; although it is arguable that Stephen's problems also came with technology). Additionally, in all these examples liminality in particular is not well-executed, being either over-whelming or non-existent. This demonstrates two important aspects of boundary work. First, that human agency in relation to boundary work is of course limited and here we need to consider also material agency. Second, that hybridity works best if it is paired with an effective liminality, that is some element of liminality but not overwhelming.

Across both sub-sections we should note that what we report here are situated instances, not necessarily regular occurrences or fixed habits that distinguish between consistently adopted strategies. Consequently, it is not that some people are always effective at boundary work and others always not. We have produced deliberately detailed examples here to illustrate the many factors that may affect the mutually enabling or disabling interplay of hybridity and liminality and to indicate that creative solutions will vary according to situation.

## 6 | DISCUSSION

### 6.1 | Theoretical implications

What does the above analysis tell us about how the concepts of hybridity and liminality can help us explain contemporary boundary work? Much existing literature is insufficient to fully unpack the practices that constitute this phenomenon, mainly due to a narrow focus on segmentation and integration. New ways are needed to examine this phenomenon particularly given the prevalence of digital technology (e.g., Kelliher et al., 2019). Our novel approach considers the properties of hybridity and liminality in combination to study boundary work. This offers new understandings of how contemporary boundary work is conducted in ways that extend and supplement existing research

focused on segmentation and integration and other individual classifications. Below, we further explicate our theoretical contributions by expanding on three aspects of our research:

- a. further developing an understanding of boundary work as situated, creative and dynamic beyond segmentation and integration;
- b. unpacking the agentic potential of the 'black box' of the hybridity–liminality interplay; and
- c. expanding current understandings and applications of the concepts of hybridity and liminality concepts.

Our first contribution is to demonstrate that hybridity and liminality through their *interplay* constitute contemporary boundary work. This develops critique around the work–life distinction by shifting the conversation from boundary flexibility and permeability (common terms in the boundary work literature, e.g., Allen et al., 2021; Cousins & Robey, 2015; Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2004; Prasopoulou et al., 2006) to individuals creatively using fusion and in-betweenness to work up boundaries. In the case of desired outcomes, the specific interplay between hybridity and liminality created situated forms of controlled boundary work. Hybridity and liminality were mutually enabling. In the case of desired boundary work being undermined, individuals were not in control of either hybridity or liminality (or both). Control was either lost or ceded to other entities (humans or technology). Uncontrolled hybridity and poorly performed liminality tended to result in undesired outcomes. In some cases and situations, this could lead eventually to the abandonment of hybridity and the reassertion of more traditional boundaries between work and home (e.g., see Stephen's wife or Liz's evening work). These different types of interplay show evidence of how Stein et al.'s (2015) liminality influences, or is influenced by, the hybridity we all experience in contemporary everyday practice (e.g., Šimůnková, 2019), extending relevant literature on hybridity as fusion (Halford, 2005; Jordan, 2009).

Our second contribution is to unpack the agentic potential of the 'black box' of interplay between hybridity and liminality in contemporary boundary work. Both concepts have received attention in the IS field (e.g., Orlikowski & Scott, 2021; Weritz et al., 2022). We found that participants utilised the interplay between them in a creative and dynamic everyday manner and as a situated process, though not always achieving their desired outcome. While we are clear on distinguishing between how the interplay may achieve or undermine desired boundary work, it is important to note that, given the creative nature of each individual's production of the interplay, there could be all sorts of further combinations of hybrid spaces, tasks, times and technologies with liminal spaces, tasks, times and technologies. We see that as a positive aspect of our qualitative approach and ensuing findings, emphasising the myriad opportunities and options for individuals in their everyday boundary work.

In order to develop the potential of this agentic interplay, we need to unpack its constituent parts and how they work together. To that end, we have identified both the hybrid and liminal elements of our participants' boundary work to highlight their agency and creativity in bringing these together. While digital affordances may create the possibility of hybridity, it is individuals' creative use of this possibility in combination with liminality that constituted desired boundary work. This is a situated process with participants deploying a range of strategies that achieved outcomes that varied in terms of their desirability, both what kinds of outcomes were desired and whether such outcomes were successfully achieved. Our findings do not support the rigidity of the segmentation–integration boundary management style classifications, nor did our participants adopt only one type of hybridity–liminality interaction or consistently achieve their desired outcomes. Whilst being assigned a distinct boundary management style may be helpful in raising awareness of its pros and cons (e.g., Kossek, 2016), it also suggests a degree of permanence or inflexibility that potentially undermines individual agency. These classifications have been found wanting given the influence of digital technology, leading to continual modifications and expansions (Cruz & Meisenbach, 2018). We present individuals' agency here as truly creative, not as pre-determined by personal preferences.

Our approach provides useful insight into how hybridity and liminality can be used creatively as dynamic and situated practices to manage boundaries effectively and to avoid undermining one's own boundary work. It highlights the role of agency in responding to the specifics of a particular context (e.g., the interplay between roles, other

people, times, spaces, tasks and digital technology), bringing back a focus on the relevance and use of artefacts in line with Nippert-Eng's (1996) analysis. Key to this were our methodological choices—involving video diaries and interviews—which allowed us to go beyond participant recollection at interview and written accounts (e.g., De Alwis & Hernwall, 2021) to observe the range of different activities in which our participants were engaged, as well as the artefacts they used. The video diaries gave us access to practices of boundary work that varied depending on the situation, leading us to realise that boundary work is much less predictable than segmentation and integration which tend to be presented as stable individual preferences (cf. Allen et al., 2021; Choroszewicz & Kay, 2020). Our methodology also allowed us to see patterns across our dataset as reported here which would not be visible to individual participants. Further, these wider patterns of boundary work problematised the work–life distinction, inviting us to rethink how Nippert-Eng's (1996, p. 569) 'territories of self' could be reimaged.

While already proposing hybridity and liminality as central concepts in boundary work, we also expand current uses of these concepts in various ways. First, in relation to hybridity. Individuals develop a form of hybridity to manage their mundane everyday activities, challenging a dominant view of hybridity as something externally imposed such as a work context involving working partly from home and partly in the office (cf. Fayard et al., 2021; Zamani et al., 2022). Scholars have long suggested that technology is so integral to our lives that it becomes invisible, meaning that we are not conscious of switching between our offline and online selves (Jordan, 2009) and different (work and life) domains (Šimůnková, 2019). Our data demonstrate that the type of hybridity suggested by Jordan and Šimůnková does not come in a one-size-fits-all format; individuals can creatively adapt it to their circumstances, as shown in our examples of boundary work that produces desired outcomes. Our study thus demonstrates that hybridity can be creatively produced by individuals to accommodate a specific situation.

We also extend understandings of liminality. Participants created different types of liminality according to specific situations and these played a significant role in their boundary work, and its effectiveness (or not) in achieving a desired outcome. Whilst hybridity might be seen as a form of integration (but with some important differences), liminality is very different from segmentation. Its 'betwixt and between' quality means that a task or time can be neither here nor there. As with Yanik's (2011) examination of a nation state's positioning in hybrid/liminal terms, our study shows how these qualities mean that liminality is full of opportunities. Critically, we find that hybridity and liminality are synthesised and embraced through simultaneous interplay in contemporary boundary work.

## 6.2 | Practical implications

Our findings illustrate the transformative potential of digital technologies in everyday life (e.g., Davison, 2020) demonstrating how the interplay of hybridity and liminality is practised in contemporary boundary work. This implies particular kinds of practical implications.

We have explained in other publications that the video diary method proved not just to be an insightful research design, but was also directly helpful to our participants (Whiting, Roby, et al., 2018). We found that the video diaries acted as reflexive artefacts (Toraldó et al., 2018), such that through viewing self, individuals became more aware of their own practices. Our findings here may similarly encourage individuals to pay more attention to their own boundary work. The insights from this research suggest that individuals could be more conscious of what they are trying to achieve so that they can find the right roles, people, times, spaces, tasks and digital technology to produce desired outcomes. There is also an important role of reflection here in learning about the consequences of one's own boundary work. Our study design allowed participants time and space to think about what worked and what did not, encouraging the development of new strategies. Our main insight with respect to practical implications then is for individuals to consider the ideas of hybridity and liminality in their own boundary work, enabling insights into their own practices and the possibility for personal re-adjustment that may not be in line with the prescriptive advice often seen in the professional press. Importantly, rather than aiming for 'perfect' boundary management and work–life balance—a goal that is often unachievable and can lead to anxiety (Ford & Collinson, 2011)—our identification of

creativity and improvisation in use of digital technologies for boundary work should encourage individuals to use hybridity and liminality in ways that work for them on a sustainable basis.

### 6.3 | Limitations and future research directions

While the agentic interplay of hybridity and liminality has provided new understandings of contemporary boundary work, the practices we have identified here are not exhaustive and future research could and should expand this repertoire. There are also limitations around the study design. First, our research did not examine how job-related characteristics and different occupations in different industries may impact the development of these practices. Employing a case study approach could enable an exploration within a single organisational context that could shed light on the boundary work of professionals in specific industries. Second, given our study took place in the UK, our findings may not be relevant in other cultural contexts where expectations around technology use and work-life priorities might differ significantly. We would therefore encourage researchers to investigate boundary work in different cultures to understand how cultural assumptions may influence practices and whether the creative use of hybridity and liminality is confined to Western societies. Finally, although our focus here has been on technology use, our theorisation has mainly been around reconceptualising boundary work rather than digital technologies per se. This has two implications: First, there is room to extend this analysis by taking a more thoroughgoing sociomaterial approach (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) to understanding the role of technology in producing boundaries and boundary work. Second, we cannot say from this research design whether hybrid/liminal practices are confined to the use of digital technologies or might be found more generally within boundary work. There is potential for a comparative study here to ascertain the boundaries of our findings in this respect.

Whilst our article starts to unpack the 'black box' of the interplay between hybridity and liminality, we fully acknowledge that this is a starting and not an end point. Further research can hopefully build on the findings here to examine such interplay in different contexts and as involving different actors (e.g., family, friends and clients). In fact, the interplay may provide new conceptual opportunities enabling colleagues to examine other IS phenomena beyond the work-life debate.

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#### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The project metadata statement is available here: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/46687/>.

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## APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL DETAILS RELATIVE TO DATA COLLECTION<sup>2</sup>

### 'Digital Brain Switch' Project: Instructions to participants for video recording

#### *What do I need to do?*

What we would like you to do is to record and narrate 'a week in your life' using a digital video camcorder. The recording will take place at various times over the course of a week and at a range of locations (including your home, your workplace and other places that you may visit).

#### *What sorts of things should I focus on?*

We would like you to focus on the different roles that you have across a range of settings (both physical such as home vs. office and digital such as online communities). These could include:

- Home, for example, as a parent, sibling or partner, and so forth.
- Work, for example, as a colleague, manager, team member or mentor, and so forth.
- Leisure, for example, as a friend, club member or team player, and so forth.
- Community, for example, volunteer, campaigner, committee member, and so forth.

Think about how you manage these different roles. This might be:

- Physically, for example, through what you wear or your location.
- Digitally, for example, through using technology such as mobile phone, computer, netbook, iPad, and so forth.
- Mundane, well-established routine, new or interesting.

#### *What should I film?*

What we would particularly like you to film are:

- Transitions between different roles, in particular how you do this physically (e.g., moving between different places) and through your use of technology (e.g., use of different devices, different programmes or different social media or email accounts).

<sup>2</sup>These and other additional documents are available on the project's legacy website: <http://www.scc.lancs.ac.uk/research/projects/DBS/>.

- Situations when it is difficult to switch between these different roles—for example, this could be what you might think of as ‘switching off’ at the end of the working day or when you are doing one thing but thinking about another.
- Your commentary on these transitions—we do not need a commentary on everything but we would like you to feel free to talk about what you are doing and to explain your thoughts, particularly to explain what role(s) you are switching—or trying to switch—between.

Within these general themes, it is up to you to record what you like, but what we are most interested in is seeing what you do as it happens, rather than retrospectively. We are also particularly interested in seeing your interaction with different technologies.

However, feel free to say what you like, and to record for as long as you like. You can record in long or short takes or simply record what is happening in front of you. Feel free to be creative—there's no one ‘right’ way to approach this. The exercise should be interesting and fun, not a chore.

To summarise: please film as it happens:

- Transitions between roles, using digital technologies and in the real world.
- Situations when it is difficult to switch between roles.
- And include your commentary on these.

*What about confidentiality?*

Just as your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act, we also need to consider the impact of your recording on other persons and organisations.

Therefore please:

- Do not film anything of a confidential, sensitive or highly personal nature including such material at your place of work.
- Do not film children (unless they are your own children and both parents give their consent to their appearance—in this instance we will discuss with you about how such film will be used in the research).
- Avoid filming others unless in a public place where other people might reasonably expect to be observed.
- Do not film in shopping centres or in an areas with high security status.

*What equipment will I receive?*

You will receive a digital video camcorder. This will be charged and ready to use. It will have a pre-installed 32 GB memory card which will record about 6 h of footage at high definition. You will also receive a small tripod, an AC charger and a USB charger.

*What should I do with the data I record?*

Please keep the data on the camcorder's memory card so that we can upload it when we get the camcorder back from you. We also ask that you make a copy of the data for your own records and keep this on your own computer.

*What happens at the end of the week?*

We will arrange for the collection of the equipment from you at a mutually convenient time.

We will invite you to have a brief chat with us on the phone to check how things went. You will also be contacted to arrange a longer face-to-face interview, either in your home or at your office, whichever you prefer. This will be an opportunity to discuss the recordings in more detail.

*What if I have other questions?*

Thank you for participating in our project.

If you have any queries about these instructions or about the project more generally or your participation in it, please do not hesitate to contact the project team on [phone number] or [project email address].

## ‘Digital Brain Switch’ Project: Interview Protocol

### *Background*

- How would you describe your occupation? (What do you study?)
- Tell me about your life outside of work/study?

- Would you say your 'self' at work/university was similar or different to your 'self' at home?
- What kinds of technologies enable your work/studies?

#### *Work-life boundaries*

Discussion of video excerpt relating to work-life boundaries:

- What does work-life balance mean to you?
- Tell me about how you manage your work-life boundaries?
- Can you give me an example of a time when your work-life boundary strategies broke down?
- What would help you manage your work-life boundaries the way you want to?

#### *Transitions/Switching*

As you know, one of the main focuses of our project is how people manage switching from one domain of their lives to another, for example, from work to home, or from one work role to another, or from work to local community (or from university to home), and so on. Some switches might occur within different domains (e.g., switching across tasks at work) or across different domains (e.g., between home and work life). Some switches might be quite long transitions (e.g., commuting to work/university), but others may be quite sudden and quick.

- This is what switching means to us but what does 'switching' mean to you?

Discussion of video excerpt relating to switching:

- What do you think triggers your switching?
- How much control do you have over your own switching process?
- What role do your technologies play in this switching process?
- Did completing the video diary reveal aspects of your switching not realised before?
- What would help you manage switching the way you want to?

#### *Research Process*

Discussion of implications of the methodology

- How representative was the week of videoing?
- Were there any incidents/events you are surprised we did not highlight or that you would particularly like to talk about now?
- Is there anything that you feel might have been of importance to us that you have not been able to capture in your diaries, and if so what/why?
- Do you think videoing yourself has had any effect on your work/studies or personal life?

## APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

TABLE B1 Additional extracts for each type of interplay.

Extracts of interplay that <i>enables</i> desired boundary work	
Liminality enabling hybridity	<p>When I am at work, I quite often have my personal email open, as well, because it could be that someone's arranging dinner, and we need to book a restaurant, or sort out a babysitter... So yes, it's allowing for a bit of give both ways... (Kath, OW, interview)</p> <p>Here we are at work, mobile and my phone, personal one, just sitting here sometimes because it sometimes comes with me to meetings sometimes, doesn't it. It varies but the work one always does while I'm here, else it's reversed when I get home. (Patrick, OW, video)</p>
Liminality maintaining hybridity	<p>Well, it's good in the way that I... so there are pros and cons, again. You know, it's good because when I'm watching my son swim, I can watch him and I can field my emails, you know, so it means that it takes the pressure off of how much I've got to do in a day, because I can manage it like that. (Fiona, SE, interview)</p> <p>I tend to watch a program at about 10 o'clock on Sunday night when I do the ironing and with the iPad which is which is constantly with me so I'll be doing the ironing and when the adverts come on I tend to check Facebook and Twitter again and then I shall head upstairs about 11, half 11. (Rachel, SE, video)</p>
Liminality hiding hybridity	<p>So, the last couple of weeks, because I've got deadlines at uni, with exams and then essays. I've put an out-of-office thing that says "I'll be checking my emails at 9 am and 8 pm. If you need me urgently, contact me on the mobile." So, although I'll still be checking the emails, the impression I've tried to create, is that I would not respond to them until after those [hours]. To try and cut down on that kind of constantly available emails all the time. (Rachel, SE, video)</p> <p>And I came home, got my iPad out straight away. If I sit here in my dining room, I can't go online because the Wi-Fi doesn't reach this far in the house, but I just use my iPad to make some notes and then the notes are all in one place rather than bits of paper all over the house. And then I can follow up on that when I'm ready. (Jane, SE, video)</p>
Hybridity creating liminality	<p>So, in the morning, it's pretty much, you know, home mum focused on getting everyone out the door and everything is ready for the school for the... for the morning ahead. Apart from that little bit I do in the morning before I wake up to know what I'm expecting at work, that's probably the only time I think about work until I get in the car and then drive to work, and literally I have a five-minute drive into work, so... (Leanne, OW, interview)</p> <p>Here we go, it's Monday morning. It's about five to eight. So, this is part of my transition from my weekend to my week at work. That's Westminster Abbey. This is the streets of St James's on Westminster. Really quiet now, because it's going to work time. So, six forty-two from [home town]. I checked my work emails and work texts on the train and I've just been prepped to get myself a coffee, wake myself up a little bit. (Charles, OW, video)</p>
Extracts of interplay that <i>undermines</i> desired boundary work	
Liminality producing uncontrolled hybridity	<p>OK, this is my morning off... but I just got a text from my boss saying that something's happened at work and she's responding to an email but before she does she wants me to read through it, um, in case I have any "advice" in her words. Some people might be annoyed by that, it's their day off and they get a text saying "do some work for me." I genuinely am not, I'd much prefer that she did contact me and got me to read through stuff [...] So, she's sent me an email, I'm going to go and read it, see what it says and then—it'll probably be about 10, 15 minutes of work, it really won't be much at all [then] I'll try to get back to my gaming. (Anna, SE, video)</p> <p>So, it's one of those beasts. It's created—I don't want to say Frankenstein or monster because it's a great tool. You just have to know how to tame it. You know, tame the digital monster kind of thing, because it can be amazing, but it can also be the end... I can see why. I see</p>

TABLE B1 (Continued)

Extracts of interplay that undermines desired boundary work	
	<p>now, one of the things which I try and not do is go and have a meal with my girlfriend and have my phone out and check my emails. I haven't come to that point yet, and when I see couples around me doing that, I'm like dude, what are you doing... (Mark, SE, video)</p>
Lack of liminality triggering uncontrolled hybridity	<p>I just got home there and watched a film for an hour or so whilst continuing to check the emails on my phone, which is kind of the bane of my life, probably one of the worst decisions I've made getting this kind of wireless phone, which I didn't have before. Because there's always access to emails and kind of checking if something has come up or if something has come in. You've now a way of knowing if something important happens, I get a phone call, but I tend to continue to check and respond as they come in which I guess generates just more and more emails of kind of slightly never-ending. (Sam, SE, video)</p> <p>I suppose my lesson was learnt when I left [my earlier job] because it was, pretty much, a constant. Whereas where I am now, I know that I can put it down. You have to train yourself to put it down. And train yourself not to look at it... But there was time when I was different... the [smartphone] was there and my wife would just go mental a little bit: "why don't you sit in a different room? Just you and your BlackBerry, you'll be very happy together." Whereas now, like I say, at weekends, I put it down and put it to one side. I very rarely get a domestic, a personal, text, because I've got another phone for that sort of thing... I had to force myself down that avenue, because it was taking over. (Barry, OW, interview)</p>
Liminality preventing hybridity	<p>So, my relaxing afternoon has turned into me going onto my phone. I couldn't be bothered to get up and get my iPad which is only a few steps away. It's now 5.30 and I've spent most of the afternoon checking e-mails and ordering items for my golf day um prizes. So, not very successful sitting down and relaxing but in a moment I'm going to download my last e-mail and then I will er hopefully switch off for a bit. (Fiona, SE, video)</p> <p>I find that email is the biggest trigger for a switch in terms of changing task. If I do block task, I've set aside three hours to look through a document or to comment on it, for example. Email is the one, well, apart from phone call, someone approaching me from the team, email is the biggest thing that will divert my attention to something else so I try, I have a pop-up window in the bottom that comes up. (Alice, OW, interview)</p>
Uncontrolled hybridity creating unwelcome liminality	<p>While she is going through that I'm actually access my e-mail account from her computer so here we go, accessed. I'm just checking some e-mails so I'm picking up where I left off this morning really and doing [consultancy name A] sorry the [consultancy name B], confusing my roles there, checking through some of the e-mails that I put in a temporary folder a while ago. I'm just working away through level three e-mails really and I shall continue to do that for a while and then I shall keep you posted [...] It's 9.22... the digital world sucks you in and you have to deal with it. Also struggling to switch and addiction. (Michael, SE, video)</p> <p>Oh god, I think I'm going mad and maybe need an analyst. I did promise that I was going to do a brain switch and leave the computer three hours ago... I didn't, I got sucked in again. I've still been there hours later. Typed up some notes, sent them to some people, set up a new Facebook group for work. (Jez, SE, video)</p>