Managing Work-Life Boundaries in the Digital Age

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For the first year in my senior VP job, I was really bad at keeping work-life boundaries separate. I was functioning as if the day never ended and work and life were always mixed together. Then my HR department at Global Pharma got after me and gave me an ultimatum warning: "If you want to kill yourself that's great, but you're setting a poor example and an unreasonable expectation for your people to do likewise. You are sending e-mails all the time, and you're generating them by staying on-line and working all the time." This gave me a wake-up call and what I learned to do instead of working at night or the weekends is to leave my laptop in the trunk of my car, in case there was an absolute emergency. I also told my peers and superiors, "Here's my home phone number if you need me, but I'm shutting off my cellphone." It's been a pretty successful strategy.

- "Joe Scott", a *separator*, commenting on his work-life management learning journey.

I am an engineer who works for a company that manufactures bicycles. It's an industry I am passionate about, since my main hobby is also cycling. Sometimes it is really hard to turn work off, since I care so much about the product we are producing. Also, because I've got constant connectivity, I can work anywhere, anytime. For example, if I'm going on a plane to go on vacation, I've got my computer with me and I try to do some work. When I'm on a business trip, I test ride bikes as part of my job, which can blur work-life boundaries as even when I am not test riding, I often do the same amount of riding for relaxation during personal time, so it is hard to separate personal from professional life.

- "Sally White," an *integrator*, on her blurred lines blending work and personal life.

I'm a quality managers for several plants located around the country. I travel several days each month to do quality audits and once done I fly home as quickly as possible to focus on family and give them more attention. I'm flexible, a volleyer… I focus where I need to focus when I need to focus.

- Ryan Swift, a *cycler*, and also a divorced dad who alternates periods of completely separating work from family while traveling, followed by weeks of being the primary caregiver for his daughter when not on the road

What's your work-life boundary management style? Are you a *separator* like Joe, striving for a greater divide between work and personal life? Or are you an *integrator* who prefers to blend work and nonwork roles, often choosing to work during vacations or, perhaps like Sally, selecting a career that overlaps with hobbies or personal life? Or maybe you or someone you know is a *cycler* like Ryan who experiences recurring patterns of separation to focus on work

followed by intense work-life integration. *Cyclers* often have jobs with seasonal fluctuations, such as an accountant working busily during tax season, or closing the books every financial quarter, followed by periods of higher work-life integration to focus on personal life.

Effectively managing boundaries can help you not only effectively balance your career with your personal life demands, but can also help you be more effective as a leader who manages others. Perhaps you have to manage a wide diversity of work-life styles in your group where individuals have many different work-life demands. Some of your members may answer electronic communications immediately regardless of the day or time, while others have tight limits on their availability, and you're not exactly sure when they will respond.

What about the style of your employer? Do have a job that could be characterized as *"work without boundaries"* in an "*always on workplace*"? Or does your organization have a work culture of the *vanishing vacation or weekend*, where individuals are expected to be on call and constantly available to work during personal times? Unfortunately, workplaces where people work regular hours and can completely disengage to focus on personal matters during nonwork time are becoming less common, unless individuals and leaders take active steps to create supportive boundary management cultures. Leaders and managers in general, play a critical role in championing work-life boundaries:

- as role models by how they manage themselves,
- by how they manage the work-life diversity of others; and
- by fostering an organizational culture of well-being and workforce sustainability.

In this article, I discuss the challenges leaders face in managing the attention, well-being, and energies of themselves on and off the job, as well as of their subordinates, peers, and teams. I begin with an introduction to managing boundary management styles-- a growing career

competency for personal and life effectiveness. This is followed by a brief overview of trends making work-life boundaries increasingly important for the effectiveness of individuals, organizations, and society. I then discuss the different types of boundary management styles. You will have the opportunity to diagnose your style, understand its advantages and costs, and consider strategies to increase your boundary control. I conclude with actions that leaders and organizations can take to foster healthy and inclusive boundary management environments.

WORK-LIFE BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT STYLES

Work–life boundary management styles are the approaches people use to demarcate work and nonwork role boundaries, in consideration of their personal identities and boundary control. Boundary control is the degree to which you control the boundaries between your nonwork and work roles. Boundaries can be physical such as being able to block off time periods where you don't check work email and can be completely away from the office. They can also be psychological such as being able to cognitively detach from your job to focus on your family, partner, or friends; as well as making time to just relax. Finally, they can be emotional where you can separate your feelings and emotions experienced during the workday from your home life, such as missing your child or loved one; or managing your mood by leaving a tough day at the office when you come home to be with family and friends.

Why are work-life boundaries growing in importance?

National statistics in the US suggest that growing numbers of employees around the globe are feeling increased work-life stress and need improved strategies for managing work-life relationships. For example, a *Families and Work Institute* study reports that 75% of working parents say they do not have enough time for their children (or each other). Furthermore, although women are in the workplace at historic levels, caregiving demands have not subsided.

Half of all children will live in a single parent household before the age of 18. Elder care is also rising as the population ages in many industrialized nations around the globe. Men also desire opportunities to integrate work and nonwork, as they are increasingly involved in caregiving. Studies reveal that many men seek improved work-life balance as much as women. Work-life interest also spans generations. Despite often being more connected than many older workers, a study by the IBM Institute for Business Value found that many members of the younger generations such as millennials value drawing a line between work and nonwork to be able to enjoy a life outside the office.

While most scholarship in the work-family field has focused on work-family conflict, my research shows that managing work-life boundaries can provide a path to reduce role conflict and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, organizations, and society! Effectively managing work-life boundaries can not only reduce work-life conflicts, but can also reduce stress, burnout, addictions, mood disorders, and enhance mental and physical health. Organizations can often benefit as effectively managed work-life boundaries can lead to higher employee engagement, reduced turnover, talent attraction, a more diverse workforce, and reduced health care and leave costs, as well as absenteeism.

Trends Transforming Work-Life Boundaries

Five trends in the nature of work are transforming work-life relationships, requiring greater self-regulation of work-life boundaries. These include the rise of boundarylessness, work-life customization, psychological control over working time, the fragmentation of work- and nonwork interactions, and diversity and inclusion.

Theme 1: Boundarylessness. Work and nonwork roles are increasingly blurred and overlapping. The proliferation of mobile communication devices (laptops, tablets, smart phones)

and social media are transforming work and nonwork relationships. These changes have not only made work more portable, diffusing into more hours of the day, but have also made it easier to work during personal time and space, such as while commuting, when in "third places" such as restaurants, and during vacations. Globalized work systems have also expanded the boundarylessness of work by increasing the times when many workers are available for work over a 24-7 period, leading to more schedule variability and dispersion of work hours. Is it possible that too much flexibility and blurring boundaries today has led to a "flexibility con" where there is too much work and nonwork overlap for effective workplaces?

Theme 2: Work- life customization. This trend reflects the fact that policies enabling employees to work nonstandard and specialized hours has become the new job standard. Organizations need to offer a menu of workplace flexibility options providing greater choice to craft your working time. Historically, companies set relatively uniform schedules for employees with little choice allowed. Today many employees want and are working in personally tailored ways to match growing variation in preferences for flexibility in the location, scheduling, amount, and timing of work. Parents of young children sometimes, for example, leave work in the late afternoon to pick kids up from school and then continue working again after dinner. Single employees might want a sabbatical for the month of August to sail in the Great Lakes or take a trip to Asia, Europe, or the US. Immigrant employees might want to take a month off at the holidays to visit their family in their home country.

Theme 3: Psychological control over working time. Although companies may be offering employees greater opportunities to restructure their schedules or work from home using flextime or telework policies, an irony is that this use doesn't necessarily lead to employee psychological perceptions of *job autonomy and control* -- the ability to actually control the

boundaries governing the place and time of work. There is a tension between employees and employers in socially navigating norms regarding what flexibility policies are formally provided by the organization that theoretically offer control on paper and the degree to which organizations actually give employees discretion to control their boundaries. Research is showing that it is not enough to merely have access to workplace flexibility policies that blur time and space boundaries to experience boundary control. Use of formal flexibility policies does not necessarily lead to boundary control over when you are "on" and "off" work and how you work. Employees may feel pressured, for example, to check email or telework at night or the weekends, while not formally establishing a telework arrangement. They may not choose to use formal arrangements, as some may fear they would not be seen as career oriented, yet they still lack boundary control if they are feeling pressure to be online. Employees may also be accustomed to psychological control from the workplace. For example, recent news articles report that Sunday evening has become the new Monday morning for returning emails or being contacted by peers and co-workers or checking to see if there is a Monday morning meeting.

Theme 4: Work-life fragmentation. This trend highlights the fact that work has become more transactional, short term, and episodic with the increased use of mobile communication technologies. Cell phones and email have increased the pace and frequency of work and family interactions during the day. Historically, many people would go to work and focus on their job with little interruption, and when not at work, they could focus on their personal life by shutting off from work during evenings, weekends, and holidays. Now there is a rise in daily work-life interruptions, with easy switching back and forth between work and personal texts, emails, and websites, often resulting in fragmented and brief attention, and process losses from lack of sustained focus on the work or nonwork role. Studies suggest that constant interruptions from

communications can harm productivity by making employees more likely to make errors and reduce task flow.

Theme 5: Diversity and inclusion. A growing number of employees hold increasingly diverse identities and work-life situations motivating them to need and want to blend work and life in different ways to manage social identities which are culturally supported at work. It is important for organizations to not only formally offer workplace flexibility policies and the permission to customize schedules as suggested in the work-life customization theme, but to actively support differences in boundary management styles as a diversity and inclusion mater. Employees need to feel supported in how they are managing work-life relationships as a diversity matter. For example, some individuals may want to control the degree to which they disclose personal aspects of their life at work until they feel safe to be "out" – such as being lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, or transsexual (LGBT). This may lead people to prefer to segment their work and personal life and share very little about their nonwork life on the job. Conversely, others may be very open that they would not feel comfortable working for a company that wouldn't support diversity in sexual identity and orientation.

Working in a different time zone to your family and friends can cue a desire to integrate work and nonwork by, for instance, occasionally Skyping during work hours that are the most suitable times to connect with your geographically distant family and friends. While some employees would want to hide the fact they are making a long personal call during the work day, others might want to be open that they are connecting with family while on the job. Geography in living arrangements is also a work-life diversity issue. Some dual career couples may have one partner who needs to be able to telework from a different city on Monday and Friday afternoon or every other week to be able to live with their partner, and not feel their productivity is

impeded for not maximizing face time. This arrangement might be very different to their co-workers' work and living arrangements. Given these trends, organizations, managers, and employees face increased choices over determining the extent to integrate work-life boundaries.

COMPETING PERSPECTIVES: IS INTEGRATIION, SEPARATION, OR A COMBINATION BEST?

Integration perspective. Although the idea that every employee has a distinct boundary management style is a relatively new area for research and practice, it builds on several existing competing historical perspectives on how to manage work and family relationships. The *integration perspective* argues that blending work and nonwork roles can lead to positive outcomes by facilitating flexibility to combine work and nonwork however works best for the individual. Yet one challenge with this approach is that employing organizations have historically been characterized as "greedy workplaces" consuming individuals' personal time. This problem is particularly an issue for individuals who highly identify with their career. Economic pressures are also at play. Many employees face rising workloads, particularly in firms that laid off personnel during the recent downturn and never quite adequately staffed up, or alternatively those in a start-up. In such contexts, work is never quite done even if you work 50, 60, or even more hours a week.

With growth of technology to facilitate work-nonwork integration, it is unclear whether the rise of these "integrating" and boundary blurring devices (phones, tablets, laptops) are a help or hindrance to work and nonwork well-being. On the one hand, a work cell phone allows someone to take a phone call from a soccer game. Yet this same cell phone also makes it harder to ignore a work-related email or not be available for an important call during vacation.

The same goes for connectivity enabling *nonwork to work crossover*; that is, the physical, emotional, or cognitive carryover of personal life to the job (e.g., being concerned about a child's health or sick parent while at work). Even when not facing a medical issue, it is sometimes difficult to ignore a friend's more recent Facebook post, or not take a teenager's text asking whether they can go to a friend's home after school, instead of doing homework. These examples suggest that contrary to some suggestions in the popular life-balance literature, "integrating" boundaries may not necessarily lead to reduced work-life conflict. Indeed, too much integration can actually increase such conflict!

Blurring boundaries via work-life integration can also lead to "job creep," where your job creeps or spreads into your personal life. This can result in what is known as "overwork," or working more than is desirable for your well-being, with too much integration. Too much boundary blurring may lead to challenging working style choices, like trying to do quality work on a critical work project at the last minute while watching the Super Bowl on television. Of course, a benefit of being able to integrate is that the individual doesn't have to completely miss out on time with family or the game; it just takes longer to finish the work project.

Separation perspective. The *separation* perspective, in contrast to the *integration perspective,* emphasizes that many individuals need role clarity in order to focus on the role at hand, given limited psychological resources such as time and energy. Such research suggests that being fully focused on each domain and keeping them segmented can reduce dysfunctional cross-domain interruptions and work-family conflict. It also enables people to more easily psychologically detach from the other domain (e.g., not think about work when at home, in order to recover mentally and be able to transition to the more pressing domain). Researchers supporting separation of work and nonwork roles argue that this approach is helpful for high

quality role experiences and avoiding work-family conflicts. Separation enables people to focus exclusively on the work realm or the nonwork realm without competing pressures. Scholars argue that some individuals have psychological preferences for work detachment to enhance well-being. Studies show that having some separation helps many people recover from work and also improves mental and physical health, as well as sleep quality.

Separation between work and nonwork was for many decades, the norm in most workplaces where employers set standardized work schedules such as from 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. for employees. Yet separation may not work for everyone or indeed many people, and can make individuals captive to employer dictated work-scheduling and organization regimes. It can also reinforce gender roles, where women and men who focus on domestic tasks may find it hard to also engage in breadwinning. Workers engaged in caregiving, homemaking, or community volunteering may also face barriers in workplaces that do not allow for some integration.

Continual separation from work when at home may often not be really realistic. Many people have long commutes, constant demands to keep up with monitoring work emails and texts, and the expectation to answer them to show conscientiousness, particularly if coworkers do so. Similarly, a single parent at work can't easily separate from day care contact while working during a case of child illness or a school snow day.

It may be overly simplistic to argue that separating is always best; or integrating is preferable. Managing work-life boundaries involves multiple factors of people's complex lives. Neither strategy in isolation may be a way to reduce work-life conflict. Effective work-life strategies vary depending on an individuals' configuration of identities, behaviors, and contexts.

Synthesizing the integration and separation perspectives. Historically many work-family studies emphasize a single "variable approach" to capturing work-life styles—that is,

individuals' styles typically were studied with one measure at a time, implying that people always separated *or* integrated roles. Another approach to such research was for an individual to assess how central work is to them. If s/he rated him or herself as highly work-oriented, researchers generally assumed that s/he cannot also be nonwork or family-oriented. Yet my research shows that many individuals today, especially women and growing numbers of men, are *dual centric* and synthesize their identities in styles across multiple, linked aspects of their lives. This means they have high identification with both their work and nonwork roles. Given this, a single measure of how much you identify with work or nonwork roles may not capture the complexity of their boundary management styles. This is because some people work in contexts where they may be engaged in both separation and integration at different points in time.

We also found from interviewing people that some would say, "Yes, I integrate but I don't control this strategy. I really would like more separation but my job or family situation doesn't allow me to have much control over my life strategy. I have a job where I am on call on the weekends, and there is no way I can separate from work, for example, even when I am only supposed to be off." One example of this situation involves public social workers who had to be readily available to "call in" to respond to a report of child neglect. Even though they were not formally scheduled to work on the weekend, they were "on call" and forced to monitor work calls even while mowing the lawn. They could not entirely separate or detach from work even if they wanted to as the design of their jobs afforded low boundary control. An individuals' boundary management style reflects their particular combination of: work-life interruption behaviors, boundary control, work-life identities, technological dependence, and need for time for self.

FLEXSTYLES DIAGNOSTIC TOOL AND TYPOLOGY

In this section, I overview the five factors comprising the flexstyles diagnostic tool that can help you understand your boundary management style. I define each of these components below and how they relate to a typology of boundary management styles based on these items, each with a higher and lower control subtype, and some of the advantages and costs of each style. In Table 1, a sample question and definitions are given for each factor to help you better understand the components shaping the patterns of your work-life boundary management styles. I elaborate on each and at the end of the section. You can complete questions in Table 1 to determine if you are *an integrator*, *separator*, *cycler* or a *hybrid firster*, whether you have higher or lower control, and if the way you are managing boundaries fits with your identities.

Insert Table 1 about here

Boundary control. The first factor, **boundary control,** refers to the extent to which you perceive that you are in control of how you manage the boundaries between your work life and personal life. Early research on boundary management typically asked people to rate how they managed boundaries without separating out perceived boundary control. This was problematic as what individuals do in life is not always their choice. If you have an inflexible job where you are expected to take calls from overseas in the middle of the night, you have little boundary control over when you work. Or if you are a single parent or the only caregiver for an elderly parent, living far away from your relatives, with no family or professional backup, you may also have little boundary control between work and personal life as you must be available for *nonwork to work* interruptions whenever needed. For example, if your child or parent needs to go to a the doctor, you must be able to interrupt work and adjust work schedules in order to care for your family.

Boundary control is also key to shaping the outcomes of flexstyles. Generally low boundary control results in lower well-being. Indeed, studies consistently show that people who

feel in control of their life situations have better psychological and physical health, as well as overall well-being.

Work-Nonwork Interruption Behaviors

The second factor relates to how you manage work to nonwork interruptions. There are three main types: *integrators, separators,* and *cyclers*. Each of these have subtypes that either vary in the degree of perceived control over boundary crossing between work and nonwork.

Integrators. Do you have a high frequency of work to nonwork interruption behaviors and/or a high frequency of nonwork to work interruptions? For example, do you check work emails often at home, even when not required by your boss? Do you also often check personal emails or texts at work throughout the day? If so, you are probably an *integrator*.

There are two types of *integrators*; if you are a *high control integrator,* then you are a *Fusion lover* – someone who enjoys integrating. If you are a low boundary control *integrator*, you are *reactor*. *Reactors* often feel they are putting out fires and responding to both work and nonwork demands and often juggling competing demands within each domain. *Reactors* would likely prefer more separation, as the lack of control may be diminishing well-being**.**

Separators. Perhaps you tend to have a low frequency of both work-to-nonwork and nonwork-to-work interruptions, such as rarely taking a work call at home or a home call at work. Then you are likely a *separator*. There are two types of *separators*. *High control separators* are *dividers***.** If you are this type, then you are able to give each role its priority by focusing on work when at work and your home life when at home. If you are a *low control separator,* you might be a *captive,* an individual who is forced to separate. An example would be an employee who works in a customer facing job such as in food service and is unable to take calls from his or her child while at work to be able to confirm they got home from school.

Cyclers. Perhaps you are neither of these pure styles. Instead, you separate during some weeks or time of the year and other times regularly integrate work and nonwork. If so, then you are a *cycler***.** Besides the accountant example given in the introduction, teachers and professors are often *cyclers* driven by the intense start-up of the school year and intense shut down period of exam grading. Retailers also tend to be *cyclers* with the peaks of holiday shopping and the slack of January. These are just a few examples of the many professions that can prompt employees to be *cyclers*. Most *cyclers* experience prolonged separation between work and nonwork during habitual peak work times, with these mountains of work followed by periods of higher work-life integration. During these times, *cyclers* then focus on friends or partners they didn't have time to be with, or family such as parents with children during summer or school breaks. Someone can also cycle weekly to allow for involvement in nonprofits or exercise, such as regularly leaving mid-day on Thursdays to volunteer at a charity, or to play in a tennis league for a few hours, and then working from home the rest of the afternoon.

Other examples of *cyclers* involve cycles of living arrangements. For example, perhaps a married couple has jobs in cities located several hours apart. Living apart and focusing on work from Monday through Thursday separates work and nonwork, yet on Fridays they both telework integrating work-life boundaries in order to be together. Another example is someone who is divorced and has shared custody children whose parental custody alternates every week. Some weeks an individual would separate to focus on work and, during other weeks, the person would engage in high integration juggling school schedules and caring for children alongside their job demands every day.

There are two main types of *cyclers* – quality timers and job warriors. *Quality timers* are able to both separate to focus on work or family when needed, as well as integrate when their

dual roles demand this. In many workshops I have led, working parents with toddlers identify themselves as *cyclers* trying to carve out focused quality time and yet needing to integrate work and nonwork roles when working. Another type of *cycler* has lower control: *job warriors*, individuals who have constant recurring *cycles* of heavy job peaks that wear them out and they become overcommitted to work demands for lingering periods of time. Even when their jobs have a lull, it may never be quite long enough to fully recover, as these individuals often lack control over either the timing, amount ,or nature of work. For example, professors may lack control over the end of the term peak work demands of wrapping up teaching their classes and grading, together with their research and administration duties.

Hybrids: Role Firsters. Finally, there is also a hybrid subtype of how people respond to interruptions, where some are asymmetrical; that is, interruptions in one direction but not another. What determines which role (e.g., work) crosses over to interrupt another (e.g. nonwork) depends on which role is more important to a person's identity. For example, depending on whether one is work centric, family centric, or nonwork centric (e.g., a tri-athlete; key church volunteer) this individual would regularly engage in patterns of separating to protect the role with which they have highest identification, placing that role first in priority and using behaviors to guard that role from interruptions; while at the same time being very open to let demands from the primary role cross over to take over time and energy from over life roles, when role demands are high to support its prominence. Being a *firster* involves putting your role primarily over another in a manner that shapes choices over whether and how to interrupt roles and engage in boundary crossing behaviors to support that role. There are three types of firsters.

Family firsters put their family needs over their job nearly all the time. A family firster is someone who never allows work interruptions to enter into family time, yet regularly interrupts

work time when needed to manage family demands. They risk family creep into their job and may face the midlife realization that they have sacrificed themselves so much for family that they cannot catch up in their careers.

Work firsters put their work schedule first and let work creep into personal lives, but have few personal life interruptions at work. If you are a *work firster*, you may need to take active steps to avoid the risk of becoming a workaholic. My research shows that work firsters have lower perceptions of well-being and that they have poorer perceived fit between work and personal life.

A third type of firster is a *nonwork eclectic*. This style involves placing your personal life ahead of work or family, perhaps by being highly engaged in your church, a hobby, or some other avocation like a start-up business separate from your "real job."

Work and Family Identity Centralities

The third factor of boundary management is your career and nonwork identity centralities. Balance means different things to different people and it depends on what we most value in life. You may be *work-centric, family-centric, dual-centric,* or *other nonwork-centric* (someone who identifies most with an avocation like a nonprofit, or hobby more than your job or family.). If you are *work centric*, you focus time and energy on the work role, as that is what drives your identity. *Family centric* individuals make career decisions that are virtually always family first. Just because someone is *family-centric* or *work-centric*, however, it doesn't mean that they don't value their jobs or families. A *family-centric* person is not necessarily a bad employee, nor is a *work-centric* person necessarily a poor family member. It just means that these individuals draw most of their identity and life validation from excelling in the role for which they have highest centrality.

Employees who identify with both work and family are *dual centric*, a tendency that is increasingly common. When people are *dual centric*, they constantly strive to give their best to each work and nonwork role. Employees thrive when their employer or manager does not force them to choose between excelling at their jobs or excelling in their family and personal life.

Technological Dependence

Recently I have validated two new scales to reflect changing work life developments. Table 1 presents an illustrative item from a "Technological Dependence" scale which is designed to assess the degree to which you are constantly connected to a personal technology communication device. As expected, *integrators* have higher technological dependence than *separators*. My research shows that graduate students have the highest technological dependence, higher than undergraduates or employees. Many are juggling school jobs and families or partners.

If you is too connected to technology s/her risks also being bogged down by TASW – Technology Assisted Supplemental Work – whereby the communication devices that are supposed to provide time savings and facilitate work efficiency can often increase work demands. For example, often phones and laptops or tablets are synced, and email can be duplicated and thereby needs to be deleted on both personal and work devices. Or by having your phone available on the weekends makes it easier for colleagues to contact you during nonwork time when you might be relaxing.

Need Time for Self

The "Need Time for Self" measure captures the degree to which you need to carve out regular personal time for yourself, in order to foster positive mental health and well-being. Work-life research has under-examined the importance of leisure time and time for recovery for

personal relaxation, so I created this scale to measure this. The reasoning is that if you feel you do not have time to develop friendships outside of work, exercise, or just relax to take care of yourself, particularly if you place a high value on needing time for self, you are unlikely to have healthy work-life boundaries. The inclusion of a "Need Time for Self" scale in boundary management assessment provides a more fine-grained analysis of nonwork time, and better captures the fact that nonwork time is often divided between not only family time (which is a commitment even for both single and married people as most have parents and relatives), but also personal time for self.

RATING YOUR APPROACH: WHAT'S YOUR WORK-LIFE BOUNDARY STYLE?

Having reviewed the definitions of each of the five factors, now it may be helpful for you to complete the items in Table 1, using the scale in the table. Of course, precisely measuring your style may require a longer psychological assessment, but these questions give you a good baseline. Once you respond to the items, consider if you are a *separator, integrator, cycler,* or *a firster,* your level of boundary control, and your use of technology and need for time for self. Below I discuss the advantages and drawbacks of each style, which is summarized in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Advantages and Drawbacks of Styles

Every style has benefits and downsides and over the course of your life, styles may shift after you go through a life change, such as new job, health scare, new boss, divorce, child birth, or marriage.

Integrators. As Table 2 shows, *integrators* can be seen as effective employees as they frequently answer emails quickly, but a downside is they often seem rushed and face switching costs. Switching costs are process losses from toggling between two tasks that you are trying to

do simultaneously, often in terms of the time it takes to get fully up to previous speed on a task after transitioning to it from a different task. An example would be trying to do high value work, like writing a paper while checking email and, as a result, the paper doesn't get written until after midnight because the employee experienced lower concentration, flow, and focus.

Separating styles. Styles that use full (*separators*) or partial separating (*firsters*) of boundaries to support a role(s) have the advantages of looking focused and professional when separating their roles. Yet they can sometimes face a stunted life and not fully develop as "whole people," particularly for pure *separators*, as this makes positive spillover of synergies between roles unlikely since they manage their lives as separate silos. They also may face under-development in whatever family or work role they routinely place as lower priority. Overly work-focused people may not, for example, devote sufficient energy and time to enjoying vigorous exercise, finding a life partner, or to relishing their romantic or family relationship(s). Conversely, overly family- and nonwork-focused individuals can also be marginalized for not being flexible or willing to blur boundaries, such as taking an email or call during personal time, unlike their coworkers who are willing to do so, during a client deadline.

All *firsters*, where one role is prioritized over the other, and boundaries are managed to focus on these demands first to the detriment of time and attention to other roles, may not reap the benefits of positive work family enrichment – the sharing of skills, behaviors, and resources from one role to another. While early research mainly focused on work-family conflict, more recent studies suggest that positive dynamics between work and nonwork are important to consider. For example, having a job where you get recognition and a paycheck can provide positive emotional and financial resources for home. Or having a loving and happy home life can prompt employees to bring a positive mood and a social support system to the job.

Cyclers. *Cyclers* are highly flexible and, if they have boundary control, allocate themselves to peak work or nonwork demands as they need for quality time. However, they can face confusion over which role to focus on, and their peers or families can sometimes be confused over which mode they are in. *Cyclers* also can face exhaustion from managing the peaks and valleys of their work, and not having time to adequately recover from peak demands.

Another drawback of individuals with styles with lower boundary control is that these individuals experience lower work-life fit and lower perceived time adequacy. They may also face lower well-being as they may not have the chance to create time for self or have the ability to realign energy and time with identities that matter most.

MAKE A CHANGE: STRATEGIES FOR GREATER BOUNDARY CONTROL

Using the diagnostic tool and reflecting on the benefits and costs of your style may help you to consider how well your style is working, and whether you might need to make changes in how you manage your work and life boundaries.

Time Management Values Assessment and Seeking Stakeholder Input

Conducting a time management values assessment exercise is another effective way to understand what kind of changes you would like to make. Personal time allocation data is helpful to identify where you might want to make change. In this exercise, you reflect on and record each evening for a week how you have spent each of the last 24 hours, which adds up to 168 hours over a week. These activities can include sleeping, commuting, working, and spending time exercising or with families and friends, and so forth. Then you can make another life pie on how you would *prefer* to spend your time. If you are spending far more time on tasks that have low value alignment, this suggests that new boundary management and life strategies are needed.

Stakeholder input from work colleagues and family can also provide meaningful insights. If your family members are often complaining that you are working too much during nonwork

time, it is probably a sign that something is not working well in how you are managing work-life boundaries. Similarly if your work colleagues feel it is hard to work with your style as part of a team, their input may suggest you might need to explore some of the tactics I discuss in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Increasing boundary control supports alignment with identities and values, which enables greater well-being and performance. Table 3 provides different physical, mental, and social boundary management strategies to enable higher control. Below, I will examine highlights to augment the many ideas in the table. Some of the most important strategies individuals can use are to better manage their transitions and transition time, use time buffers, and manage expectations.

Managing Transitions, Using Time Buffers and Setting Expectations

Transition times are declining between work and nonwork roles. Transition time, is the time taken to transition between a work task, such as answering a work electronic communication on your cell phone, and a nonwork role, such as watching a child's sporting event. People are now working while commuting, by talking on their cell phones while driving and working on their laptops on buses, trains, and in planes. This travel time used to be time to listen to the radio, read the newspaper, or just relax. With home offices and smart phones, individuals can look at a work email during personal time while at home and have their whole mood and focus of attention shift back to work if they read an upsetting work communication. *Managing transitions* by focusing in the moment on one role is a useful strategy and involves preparing yourself mentally and emotionally to move from one role to another. For example, when driving home from work, you can actively try to disconnect from work problems and begin to think about how to be emotionally ready to socialize with family and friends.

Creating *time buffers* – that is, enabling slack as you switch from work to nonwork or between work meetings (such as scheduling a 10 minute break between conference calls and appointments so they are not scheduled back to back) – can enable you to have better boundary control. By having a time buffer and a little slack, if a meeting runs over or a negative work event happens, it is less likely to immediately pervade family and personal life. We tend to schedule ourselves too tight. Scheduling our day to include some time slack as we transition from a work role to a nonwork role means, if we are stuck in traffic on the commute home, we are less likely to get upset that we will be late for the babysitter or restaurant reservation. Transition time and time buffers reduce stress and help support positive work-life boundaries.

Another useful strategy is *managing expectations* effectively to focus on roles and tasks that matter most to you. Most of us want to be liked and think that saying "yes" to requests will make people like us. Yet if we are overloaded it is important to not further overcommit and say "yes" to everything else. Women in particular tend to say "yes" to service work, which some scholars have labeled *nonpromotable tasks*. Being a *pleaser* by overcommitting to extra-role tasks that help others, though are not core to your job, can burn you out, thereby diluting your energy for your "real work." Remember the old *rule of three* adage – that most tasks take three times longer than you think they will. This underscores the merit of negotiating and striving to allow yourself time buffers and slack by, for instance, giving yourself long deadlines, managing expectations, and not overpromising.

Job and Family Role Creep

Boundary control can also be increased by consciously using separation to countervail job and family "creep," whereby one domain creeps over or in other words intrudes on the other to the point where you cannot give full attention to that role. One effective strategy is to separate

physical boundaries by having a separate communication device, such as one cell phone or tablet for work and one for nonwork. Another approach is to leave your work cell phone out of the bedroom at night so you won't be tempted to check work email as soon as you wake up (or during the night). A third tactic is having an away message on your work email while you are on vacation or taking a weekend off, letting people know that you are offline.

Overall, finding the right style involves first processing the diagnosis of your current situation, as you cannot make change without understanding the status quo. Then you can reflect and set goals on whether you would like to integrate or separate more, or reduce peak work cycles and gain more boundary control. You can experiment and self-monitor your behaviors with different boundary management control tactics. Finding a role model and engaging in peer coaching can also be helpful. You can then reflect on whether the strategies are working and repeat the cycle of experimentation as part of an ongoing learning-feedback loop. Employees who feel comfortable being open about their experimentation can communicate this to their managers and peers so that they can support experimentation. Managers might want to role model their own experimentation or take steps to foster open dialogue with their colleagues.

Finally, it is also important to note that excessively high workload and role overload may mean that merely tinkering with boundary management styles might not improve outcomes. Sometimes, particularly after a major career or personal life change, you might want to assess whether some new boundary management strategies can be experimented with or if some broader work-life change is needed.

BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Not managing boundaries can deplete employees' energy, result in lower engagement and well-being, greater conflict, poorer teamwork and communication, and higher turnover**.** Table 4 shows boundary management strategies that leaders and organizations can put into action. A first

step is for leaders and managers to identify their own boundary management style to understand how to increase their own and their team's boundary control, as well as to better support members' work and nonwork needs. For example, in an organization I advised, the Vice President would sometimes send an email out Sunday evening calling for an early morning work meeting. Because the scheduling and communication of the meeting was random, many workers felt the leadership style resulted in low boundary control as they couldn't enjoy their weekends. They felt forced to check emails during personal time. After the team did the flexstyles assessment, the leader heard from the team that they felt stressed by this and he stopped setting up meetings at the last minute.

Insert Table 4 about here

Another strategy is to find out about employees' work-life values and develop perspective taking or the ability to empathize with subordinates and co-workers about their work-life needs. Many managers may want to check their own values and assumptions about face time and meetings as a way to assess productivity. They can support diverse boundary styles by striving to focus on creating a results-oriented work environment where *how* you manage boundaries is less important than the quality of work that is done. Managers can achieve this by setting and communicating clear expectations about boundaries and performance. Understanding work-life boundaries is one way managers can manage workforce diversity to create an inclusive, healthy work environment. Managers should also take care to be sensitive to burnout, heavy workloads, and long hours.

There are a number of family supportive behaviors that managers can engage in. These include managers acting as a role model by emphasizing the importance of personal work-life well-being in their own actions. Managers can also provide social support by being emotionally present for employees who want to share at work an intimate (good or bad) family or personal

life experience. Leaders can demonstrate instrumental support by openly supporting the use of flexible schedules and telework as a normal way of working. Finally, managers can ensure employees know what is expected of them and that they have the resources and support needed to complete their work as efficiently as possible. Employees might then experience less stress. They and managers together also may be more open to developing creative work-life solutions of cross-training and getting rid of legacy work that may be not adding high value.

Organizations can benefit from providing a menu of flexible work options for increasing employee control over work patterns. These need to be actively supported by management as a regular way of working and not a special accommodation. This approach creates a culture of social support valuing work life and career well-being. For example, a major corporation in Germany stops its servers sending emails after work hours in order to promote work-life separation. This is an example of a holistic organizational strategy to stop integration. Organizations need to take proactive steps to change the design of work to ensure it fosters positive work-life relationships where individuals do not feel they have to sacrifice their family and personal life in order to perform effectively in their jobs.

CONCLUSION

This article has noted that one of the most important challenges that many professionals, leaders, and other employees currently face is managing their work-life boundaries. This is because such boundaries impact the attention, well-being, and energies of themselves, their families/partners, and their teams. Leaders and organizations can foster enabling conditions for boundary control by supporting a diversity of boundary styles for a healthy and productive work environment. Managing work-life boundaries and letting employees shape boundary control, is increasingly important for career effectiveness so that employees do not feel burnt out, depleted, and unable to craft a life that works outside of their jobs. Organizations and employees need to

view developing competencies in managing work-life boundaries and inclusive work-life cultures as central to fostering effective careers.

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Table 1. Flexstyles Diagnostic Tool: What's Your Boundary Management Style?

Use this scale for each item: 1 - *Strongly disagree*; 2 - *Disagree*; 3 - *Neither agree nor disagree*; 4 - *Agree*; 5 - *Strongly agree*

Work-Life Factor	Definition	Sample Item	Interpretation
1. Boundary Control	The degree to which you feel in control as you manage the boundaries between your work life and nonwork life.	*I control whether I am able to keep my work and personal life separate.*	Ratings of: - 1 or 2 suggest lower control - 3 suggests medium control - 4 or 5 higher control
2. Cross- Role Interruption Behaviors - Work to Nonwork Interruptions - Nonwork to Work Interruptions	The degree to which you engage in cross-domain boundary crossing interruption behaviors for a) work to nonwork roles & b) nonwork to work roles.	*a. I work during my personal or family time.* *b. I take care of personal or family needs during work.*	Ratings of: - 1 or 2 indicate lower cross role interruptions - 3 suggests moderate interruptions - 4 or 5 higher interruptions
3. Career-Family Identity Centralities	The degree to which your identity is *work-centric, family-centric, dual-centric*, or *neither family- or career-centric* but some other avocation.	*I invest a large part of myself in my work (work-centric).* *I invest a large part of myself in my famly (i.e., have a family-centric identity)*	Ratings of: - 1 or 2 indicate lower role centrality - 3 medium centrality - 4 or 5 higher centrality People higher on both work and family roles are *dual-centric*. Those lower on work and family centrality are nonwork eclectics
4. Technological Dependence	The degree to which you are dependent on mobile communication devices.	*I constantly have my personal communication device on to keep up with texts, emails or calls.*	Ratings of: - 1 or 2 indicate lower dependence - 3 moderate - 4 or 5 is higher dependence
5. Needing Time for Self	The degree to which you perceive having time for yourself is important for well-being.	*It is very important for my well-being to have time for myself.*	Ratings of: - 1 or 2 indicate lower need for time for self for well-being - 3 moderate need - 4 or 5 higher need

Table 2. Boundary Management Work—Life Flexstyles

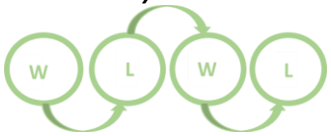
	Boundary- Crossing Interruption Styles					
	Integrators	***Cyclers***	***Separators***	***Hybrids: Role Firsters***		
						
1. Level of Boundary Control						
- High to moderate	*Fusion lovers*	*Quality timers*	*Dividers*	*Work firsters*	*Family firsters*	Other Nonwork Interest
- Low	*Reactors*	*Job warriors*	*Captives*	*Misaligned Identities*		
2. Common Tendencies						
- Advantages	Can do attitude Available whenever needed	Engaged Very flexible	Reliable Look focused, professional	Ability to focus and do one role well Less work-life conflict		
- Downsides	Switching costs Potential for role overload Can feel exhausted & rushed	Burnout , exhaustion, chaotic Peaks and valleys, leads to lack of recovery Limited buffers with potential for overload and "ball dropping" of other life roles during peaks	Rigid, not adaptable Lack of work-family positive cross-over enrichment	Countervailing role creep Under-development of whole self Workaholism for *work firsters* Career sacrifice for *family firsters* & *Nonwork other-centric* individuals		
3. Technological Dependence	High	Peaks and valleys of electronic tethering	Low	Asymmetrical		
4. Need Time for self	Low	High for quality timers, limited episodes for Job Warriors	Moderate for Dividers , likely for Captives	High for *Nonwork other-centric* individuals, Can be low for other styles, especially those with dependent care demands		

Table 3. Self- management Strategies for Personal Boundary Control

PHYSICAL	MENTAL	SOCIAL
Use technology when necessary - avoid TASW (Technology-assisted Supplemental Work).	Strive for mindfulness to be physically present and in the moment wherever you are working. Similarly, during personal time, psychologically detach from work to focus on family and personal life.	Let others know when you are available and how to contact you during emergencies/critical times when unavailable.
Separate by using different devices for work and personal life.	Organize time to focus on priorities (high value work) when you are most alert.	Set and manage expectations to provide boundary slack.
Separate by managing space boundaries (e.g., closed door to home office).	Conduct a time management assessment to align time with central roles & identities.	Find a role model or peer for social support.
Allow for transition times (also known as time buffers) between roles.	Set aside time in your calendar to focus on yourself (e.g., exercise, lunch).	Avoid mixing work and personal social media.
Turn off email and distracting devices for working periods.	Organize blocks of time to focus.	Offer quid pro quo substitute coverage to trade off with a friend at work or home to have a back-up when you need it (e.g., someone to cover a meeting at work or pick up your mail when you are traveling and vice versa.)

Table 4. Strategies Leaders and Organizations Can Use to Support Employees' Work-Life Boundary Styles

Leaders and Managers can:	**Organizations can:**
• Take time to learn about co-workers' work-life styles, values, and needs.	• Provide flexible options for increasing employee control over work/life patterns.
• Be aware of boundary management styles when managing others and working in teams.	• Develop cultures that focus on results-oriented work and not face time alone.
• Set/communicate clear expectations about boundaries and performance.	• Embrace a diversity of boundary management styles without stigma.
• Provide: → Emotional support → Role modeling → Instrumental support → Creative work-family management → Provide performance support	• Educate others on social differences in boundary management when team building.
• Create back-up systems and cross-training for key roles.	• Implement work design that gives employees greater boundary control.
• Engage in perspective taking to better understand work-life styles as a workforce inclusion and diversity issue.	• Manage employees in different locations/time zones in a way that supports work–life wellbeing in that social locale.

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