

Boundaries, work and the rest

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Abstract. This position paper takes its starting point in the definitions of **work**, and of **boundaries** often found in CSCW and HCI literature. By looking back at the case of parental leave planning and on my writings from the past 10 years, I discuss how these definitions need to be reconsidered, and I summarize ways of doing that. From an understanding of the groups and communities involved, rather than from an understanding of the “places” of home and work, or from pre-perceived qualities of the two, can we understand the boundary drawing and how it is supported through collaborative technologies. Further examples will be discussed in the workshop.

Introduction

The current position paper is based on a number of cases that I have carried out over the past 10 years in cooperation with others. These cases in one way or other address the boundaries of work and home. And they address the understanding of boundaries as such. The cases include parental leave planning, urban/land use planning, other citizen services as well as situations where people work from home as well as from an office of some sort.

In (Borchorst et al. 2009, Borchorst & Bødker 2011, Bohøj et al 2010, Bødker & Grönvall 2013), we summarize the case of parental leave planning as an empirical domain. In this case we have worked with timeline design, the timeline being neither primarily about work nor about fun and happy engagement outside work. The papers are working with participation of two different user groups, families and civic servants. There is significant difference between the frequency and perspective of use of the two groups of users: Where caseworkers handle many

sets of documents and much information regarding many parental leaves and the rules behind them, on a daily basis; it is indeed the case that to parents each childbirth and child is unique, and to be enjoyed in the best possible ways. "At the same time parental leave takers see themselves as in a situation of hardship" (Borchorst et al 2009), "making sacrifices for each other and their child. They use other parents in similar situations to ease this trouble and to share experience. This latter is somewhat in contradiction to how the above philanthropic citizen may set out to give advice and share. Accordingly the direct sharing of plans and experience among friend has been our main focus thus far, and we have seen the timeline as a secondary tool for caseworkers."

In several places we discuss the challenges of doing participatory design in this boundary space where we have on the one hand the daily use of case workers, and on the other the infrequent, yet quite intense use as when families for rather brief but intensive periods of their lives engage with the planning of their parental leave.

I will use this case and other to discuss the role of home and family life versus that of work, in particular when it comes to introducing technologies to support collaboration and participation. First I will step back a little however, and look at some of the assumptions that are often made when research and design move on the boundaries of home and work.

Home, work and fun

In my NordiCHI keynote (Bødker, 2006), the starting point for discussing work and not-work was the observation that much of third wave HCI was more or less grounded on the idea that all the good stuff was all the non-work design whereas design in relation to work was way less exciting and much more old-fashioned. I made the point there, that it makes sense to understand better how the non-work design processes and technologies permeate back into work, and not just how we should step out of work and only design for fun.

In my work with Leysia Palen (Palen & Bødker 2007) we developed this further: We pointed out how the realm outside of work is clearly so complex that it eludes naming and is defined mainly by negations: "everything but work." We continue: "If work is the site of efficiency and rationality, then the "rest of life" might also then be something else. That *work* should be effective, while emotions belong to the "rest of life" mirrors ideas that evoke the most old-fashioned Tayloristic conceptions of industrial work, at the same time that work today takes many other forms." We point out how home/family life seems over-idealized, given, for example, Hochschild's (REF) discussions of how some American parents try to escape the time trap (and emotional turmoil) of home with its complex and

aggravating scheduling requirements by spending more hours at work, where at least they can lean back and have a coffee.

“*Home* offers as convenient (though probably just as inaccurate) a term as *work* in referring to a place or state where much of life occurs. *Leisure* is often understood in contrast to *work* as well, but this choice of term fails to hold because *work* serves not only to refer to employment, but also to describe a general state of action that is broader than employment, too. So *home* serves to be a contrast to “work-as-employment,” but *homes* most certainly not the same as *leisure*; home is the place for yet other kinds of work.” This latter point is further emphasized in the (Borchorst et al. 2009) paper where we point out that parenthood is often connected with hardship, and shared among new parents as exactly that, rather than as fun, relaxation and engagement.

In addition to this understanding, Bødker & Grönvall (2013) discuss situations where families are divided and where hence, the family situation may in other ways be one of hardship since sharing of e.g. a family calendar may be highly problematic.

In summary, home is not about all that is not work, neither is work the only place where efficiency e.g. is at stake. Neither is it the case that work is old fashioned and boring as a challenge for design whereas the rest of life is interesting and fun. In the next section, I move on to explore boundaries in general, and boundaries between work and non-work in particular. Accordingly I suggest that it is not as such the difference between *home* and *work* that is interesting in understanding the work that happens in the home, or for that matter the non-work that happens at work.

Boundaries

In several of my works, I have used CSCW based framings of boundaries, such as Star’s notion of boundary objects: Boundary objects (Star & Grisemer, 1989; Star, 1989) are often (though not actually by Star herself) seen as addressing objects and information that cross boundaries between communities. As discussed by e.g. Lee (2005), this seems oversimplified, and a “sailing across” boundaries is not all that happens. Lee suggests a focus on boundary negotiating artifacts that push or strengthen the boundaries.

In (Bødker et al., 2003) we build on Barth’s conception of boundaries, coming from anthropological settings, in the study of an organizational setting. The main argument of Barth’s perspective is to focus on contexts and situations in which boundaries are generated. The focal point of his claim is that boundaries define a group rather than the cultural core of this group. Organizational boundaries become visible in organizational structures and rules, and they exist as invisible

patterns between individuals and different groups of people. Boundaries, for example, separate one work domain from another, and one profession from another. Or they can be drawn between groups of people defined by shared interests. Boundaries outline the identity of the community and are marked because communities interact with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished (Barth, 1969). (Bødker et al 2009): "Compared with other studies focusing on borders or boundaries, this perspective is more dynamic in that it does not take borders for granted, but argues for technology designed to support the borders, which might exist. Clement & Wagner similarly look at boundaries that are enforced by organizations, e.g. with the purpose of reducing complexity. They call this fragmented exchange (Clement & Wagner, 1995). Neither of these two ways of looking at boundaries primarily focus on boundary crossing capacities. Rather, they study how technologies may enforce or move boundaries for various reasons, in the same way as Lee's (2005) boundary negotiating artifacts". In (Borchorst et al. 2009) we looked at boundaries, the way boundaries get maintained and changed in the case of parental leave, the roles of technological artifacts in these boundary negotiations, and in particular the way future technological artifacts may change the landscape.

With this perspective in mind I suggest to look at the groups that work in or with the home and see how they draw the boundaries with other groups, be these parents who do the planning of a parental leave, their relatives and friends who somehow support them in this, the professionals in the municipality who work to make sure that their plans are compliant with rules and regulations or the professionals at the workplaces of the parents who make sure that the leave plans comply with labor contracts and specific work arrangements in the workplace.

From such an understanding of the groups and communities involved, rather than from an understanding of the "places" of home and work, or from pre-perceived qualities of the two, can we understand the boundary drawing and how it is supported through collaborative technologies. Further examples will be discussed in the workshop.

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