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To Be, or Not to Be (In Office)

A qualitative study on how young professionals make sense of and enact work-life boundaries in hybrid work arrangements.

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Abstract

Hybrid work has become a defining feature of contemporary employment. Yet, little is known about how young professionals, who enter the labour market without established boundary routines, make sense of work-life balance under such arrangements. This study investigates how young professionals enact and negotiate boundaries in hybrid work contexts and how these enactments shape their interpretations of balance. Drawing on boundary theory and a qualitative, interpretive research design, we analyse semi-structured interviews to illuminate how individuals actively construct, adjust, and experience boundaries rather than merely comply with organisational conditions. Our findings reveal that balance is not achieved through strict separation of domains, but through selective permeability governed by personal agency, professional ambitions, and the contextual affordances of hybrid work. By demonstrating how boundary preferences and contextual constraints intersect, we extend current theorising on boundary management and contribute to literature that has historically centred on partnered or family-oriented employees. In doing so, this thesis advances a more nuanced understanding of hybrid work as a site where early-career employees continually negotiate meaning, autonomy, and belonging.

Keywords: Boundary theory, boundary management, hybrid work, young professionals, work-life balance.

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Concepts

Keyword	Definition
Work-life balance	Satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home (Clark, 2000).
Hybrid work	Ongoing switches between traditional and non-traditional work modes occurring in relation to both personal and collaborative task execution (Lauring and Jonasson, 2025).
Remote work	A type of work arrangement where the employee's work location is beyond the local commuting area of the occupying organisation (Allen et al., 2015).
Flexible work arrangements	A work option that lets work be outside temporal, spatial, or traditional boundaries of a standard workday (Shockley and Allen, 2007).
Young professionals	We refer to individuals who have completed a minimum of a bachelor's degree within the last two years and who work in white-collar positions structured around hybrid work arrangements.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The increased integration of digital technologies has altered organizational work practices, enabling employees to remain connected anytime and anywhere (Boyraz and Gilbert, 2024). This connectivity has supported the development of hybrid work arrangements, which combine on-site and remote work and, in doing so, reshape when, where, and how work is performed (Halford, 2005; Luring and Jonasson, 2022). Yet this “always-on” environment has intensified expectations of availability, blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, making it more difficult for employees to maintain separation between the two (Boyraz and Gilbert, 2024). As hybrid work challenges established assumptions about the time and place of work, the management of blurred boundaries has become a central issue in discussions of employee well-being, organisational practice, and the future of work (Sturges, 2012).

Existing research on work-life balance (WLB) and boundaries has largely focused on employees in more traditional work arrangements, often emphasising full-time workers with family responsibilities (Guest, 2002). Studies indicate that when temporal and spatial boundaries weaken, work is more likely to spill into personal life and complicate efforts to sustain a sense of balance (Sturges, 2012; Allen et al., 2021). For young professionals, these conditions are not a disruption to an established way of working, but the context into which they enter working life. They are beginning their careers in digitally mediated environments where expectations of availability are high, and boundaries are increasingly self-managed rather than institutionally defined (Kossek, 2016; Allen et al., 2021). At the same time, early-career employees face strong pressures to signal commitment and ambition, even as they place a high value on flexibility and WLB (Nieżurawska et al., 2023; Sturges and Guest, 2004). This convergence of blurred boundaries, hybrid work norms, and early-career expectations suggests that young professionals encounter boundary management challenges that differ from those of more established workers. However, how they navigate these dynamics remains insufficiently examined (Nieżurawska et al., 2023).

Societal changes are reshaping working practices. The COVID-19 pandemic normalised remote work, and many organisations have since embedded it within hybrid arrangements. More recently, however, major firms such as Amazon, Dell, and JPMorgan Chase have rolled back hybrid policies and reinstated office mandates, arguing that in-person presence strengthens collaboration and productivity (Staff, 2025). While studies link hybrid work to greater flexibility and autonomy, scholars disagree on its long-term implications (Purba et al. 2024). On the one hand, hybrid arrangements are found to create increased opportunities to manage work alongside personal responsibilities, for example, through reduced commuting (Boyratz and Gilbert, 2024). On the other hand, remote work, typically conducted at home, can blur professional and personal boundaries, making it difficult to sustain WLB (Robeiro et al., 2024; Allen et al., 2021). Understanding how employees navigate these tensions is therefore interesting for clarifying what boundaries mean in contexts where work is no longer confined to a single place.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Research on hybrid work's effects on employees' boundary management remains fragmented. While some studies suggest it enables employees to better prioritise personal time, others show that blurred boundaries between work and personal life can undermine well-being, thus demonstrating a gap that merits further research (Halford, 2005). Moreover, research on boundary management has focused primarily on individuals with traditional family roles who are already settled in their careers. Thus, much of the field still relies on assumptions about standard family setups and caregiving responsibilities, leaving other forms of boundary negotiation comparatively overlooked (Fisher et al., 2009). As a result, we know little about individuals at the beginning of their careers or in the transitional phase between education and full-time work. This period is particularly salient for the formation and negotiation of work-life boundaries, as young professionals often face limited autonomy, strong pressures to demonstrate commitment, and have not yet established stable routines for managing work and non-work (Smithson and Lewis, 2000; Sturges and Guest, 2004).

1.3 Purpose and Expected Contribution

The purpose of this study is to contribute to research on boundary theory by examining how young professionals make sense of and enact work-life boundaries within hybrid work arrangements. Existing literature offers limited insight into how early-career professionals navigate work-life boundaries in hybrid settings, highlighting a research gap. This study addresses this gap by analysing young professionals' boundary enactment and coping practices given the contextual influences of hybrid work. Theoretically, we contribute to the literature on boundary management by expanding research on individuals who do not yet occupy traditional family roles and by examining how boundaries are experienced and constructed early in one's career. Furthermore, we add to the emerging stream of literature that critically examines how identity and contextual constraints shape boundary management. Practically, we contribute by strengthening organisations' understanding of young professionals' expectations of hybrid work and by identifying potential gaps between organisational practices and employees' experiences. By illuminating how young professionals make sense of hybrid work arrangements, the study offers insights for designing hybrid work practices better suited to those entering the labour market.

To fulfil the study's purpose and contribution, we therefore aim to answer the following research question:

How do young professionals make sense of and enact work-life boundaries in hybrid work arrangements?

1.5 Delimitations

This study is subject to several delimitations that clarify its scope and analytical focus. First, it is geographically limited to Sweden, as all interviewees were employed within the Swedish labour market. This contextual focus provides a coherent institutional setting but restricts the transferability of findings to countries with different labour regulations, cultural norms, or hybrid work infrastructures. Second, the study is grounded in boundary theory and does not compare or integrate alternative frameworks within the field of WLB literature, such as role conflict theory or border theory. This theoretical delimitation enables conceptual depth rather than breadth, but

it narrows the interpretive lens through which the findings are understood. Third, because the study centres on employees' perspectives, it excludes employer viewpoints, managerial expectations, and organizational performance indicators. While this strengthens the study's alignment with its interpretivist epistemology, it limits insight into how organizational structures and leadership practices may shape boundary enactment. Fourth, although hybrid work can take place in a range of locations, the study focuses exclusively on boundaries negotiated between home and office. This analytical restriction was chosen to maintain conceptual clarity, ensure comparability across participants, and enable a deeper investigation of the most prevalent hybrid configuration among early-career professionals.

1.6 Study Outline

This study uses a qualitative, inductive design grounded in boundary theory, drawing on semi-structured interviews to explore how young professionals experience and manage work and non-work boundaries in a hybrid work context. This study is organized into six sections, being the following: 1) Introduction, 2) Theory, 3) Methodology, 4) Findings, 5) Analysis, and 6) Discussion.

2. Theory

The chapter first outlines the pertinent literature (2.1) and then introduces the theoretical framework that has been developed (2.2).

2.1 Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to critically synthesise existing research on young professionals, WLB, and boundary management, to consider what these bodies of work make visible, and what they leave in the shadows. Examining where these research streams converge and diverge highlights key assumptions, tensions, and gaps in how work-life boundaries in hybrid contexts are understood.

2.1.1 Young Professionals

Research on young professionals consistently highlights a tension between their interest in achieving WLB and the common experience of long working hours and considerable personal effort early in their careers. Sturges and Guest (2004) note that this group often enters the labour market with optimistic expectations of balance, yet quickly encounters norms of extended availability. As Sturges (2008) emphasizes, young professionals rarely receive structured organizational support for managing WLB, meaning that any equilibrium must largely be self-constructed.

These challenges are shaped by broader labour-market shifts. Smithson and Lewis (2000) show that young adults have come to expect precarious work and diminished job security as normal conditions, influencing both the expectations they bring to employment and the adaptations they make once working. At the same time, contemporary career discourse places growing emphasis on self-realisation. Farrugia (2021) argues that young people increasingly use work as a core site for identity construction, treating career discourse not merely as talk about jobs, but as a way of defining who they are and who they aspire to become. Similarly, Modestino et al. (2019) find that early-career narratives commonly revolve around exploration, risk-taking, and the pursuit of meaningful personal work. Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) mean that Generation Z entering the workforce reflects this pattern, seeking flexibility, engaging tasks, and opportunities for development while still valuing financial stability. Despite these dynamics, research on WLB has historically focused on partnered or caregiving employees, leaving the nonfamily lives of early-career workers relatively understudied (Guest, 2002). Expanding the work and non-work interface to include nonfamily domains can provide clearer insight into how individuals experience stress around work-life boundaries (Fisher et al., 2009).

Preferences for flexibility also feature prominently in early-career expectations. Nieżurawska et al. (2023) find that WLB programs are valued the most by young and highly educated employees whose decisions depend on whether organizations support both development and personal independence. However, Modestino et al. (2019) caution that early-career optimism often collides with organisational realities, as young professionals encounter heavier workloads, fewer developmental opportunities, and slower progression than expected. Such mismatches between

anticipated and actual job conditions can exacerbate dissatisfaction and strain, complicating efforts to sustain balance during the transition into professional life.

Finally, research on telecommuting underscores how reduced physical proximity can limit developmental opportunities. Cooper and Kurland (2002) show that professional isolation arises when employees miss out on informal learning, networking, and mentoring. Allen et al. (2015) likewise note that remote work can weaken interpersonal processes by reducing spontaneous communication and knowledge sharing. These findings illustrate that distancing work from shared physical settings may diminish access to everyday interactions that may play a crucial role in early-career development.

Although these studies illustrate dynamics in early-career work-life management, they raise questions about the contemporary relevance of much of the evidence. A limitation of the existing literature is that many influential studies on young professionals' expectations, labour-market experiences, and WLB stem from the late 1990s and early 2000s (e.g., Smithson and Lewis, 2000; Sturges and Guest, 2004). These works were likely conducted in organizational contexts different from today's post-pandemic labour market, where increasingly remote work models and digital connectivity have impacted early-career experiences. It therefore remains unclear whether their findings hold under contemporary working conditions.

2.1.2 Work-Life Balance

WLB has become a central concept in understanding how employees experience and navigate modern work, yet the notion of what constitutes "balance" remains contested. Sirgy and Lee (2018) observe that despite numerous definitions, most accounts converge on the idea that individuals participate in both work and non-work roles while minimizing interference between them. As Allen and Eby (2015) explain, the separation of work from the household introduced the very distinction between work and family life that later shaped the WLB discourse. Early research (e.g., Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985) conceptualised this interface primarily through conflict, arguing that incompatible role demands drain individuals' time and energy, thereby harming satisfaction across domains. However, more recent work broadens this focus beyond interference, highlighting enrichment and spillover processes through which resources and positive affect in one domain can strengthen functioning in the other (Sirgy and Lee, 2018).

Kalliath and Brough (2008) argue that the conceptual shift from family toward life aimed to broaden the scope of inquiry beyond those with caregiving responsibilities; however, this linguistic expansion also complicated what “life” encompasses, raising questions about the limits of the construct.

These definitional uncertainties are also mirrored in how balance is experienced. Jeffrey et al. (2010), Allen (2011), and Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) show that the perception of balance arises from the interaction between, on the one hand, organizational conditions and, on the other, home-based responsibilities, leisure activities, and personal orientations toward work. Guest (2002) distinguishes between objective indicators of balance, like hours worked, and subjective evaluations of whether roles fit together without conflict. These assessments can diverge; individuals may feel imbalanced under favourable conditions or balanced despite objectively demanding ones. However, Fonner and Stache (2012) challenge the notion of an ideal WLB, arguing that it may not exist in practice and oversimplifies a far more complex reality.

The consequences of WLB extend across both individual well-being and organizational outcomes. Guest (2002) links high WLB to greater job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and organizational commitment, whereas Sirgy and Lee (2018) link diminished balance with anxiety, burnout, and higher turnover intentions. Yet scholarly attempts to clarify the meaning of balance have increasingly revealed the construct’s inherent instability. Cunha et al. (2022) argue that WLB research still rests on the assumption that work and non-work are separate, incompatible spheres, an assumption increasingly challenged by hybrid work and pervasive digital connectivity, which blur spatial and temporal boundaries and call into question where work ends and life begins. Additionally, Casper et al. (2018) highlight that overlapping constructs are inconsistently labelled in WLB literature, undermining conceptual clarity and measurement. Collectively, these critiques construct a paradox in the literature: while WLB is treated as central to contemporary work debates, its conceptual underpinnings are presented as insufficiently aligned with the changing realities of work.

2.1.3 Boundaries

In its early development, the WLB discourse focused primarily on understanding the separation of work and family roles (Naithani, 2010). During the 2000s, Clark (2000) and Ashforth et al.

(2000) introduced two studies on boundary theory, which are now widely utilized in the study of WLB (Khateeb, 2021). These boundary theories analyse how individuals manage boundaries between work and family (Clark, 2000) and between the work and non-work domain (Ashforth et al., 2000), the latter used in this study. Boundary theory has since become the broader umbrella under which subsequent approaches to role navigation and domain transitions are commonly discussed. However, Allen et al. (2021) note that boundary theory, despite its broader framing, has not fully addressed earlier limitations, as much boundary scholarship continues to treat family responsibilities as the default non-work referent, restricting the theory's relevance to a wider set of life domains.

Contemporary research examines how employees manage boundaries between work and non-work, yet the strategies identified vary across studies. Kreiner et al. (2009) outline communicative, physical, temporal, and behavioural tactics; Languilaire (2009) mentions spatial, human, temporal, behavioural, cognitive, emotional, and psychosomatic strategies; Sturges (2012) identifies physical, cognitive, and relational crafting techniques; and Kossek (2016) proposes physical, psychological, and emotional styles. These differing classifications reflect the broader conceptual confusion that Cobb et al. (2022) identify within boundary management research, including widespread jingle-jangle fallacies, redundant constructs, and misaligned operationalizations that obscure theoretical clarity and hinder cumulative knowledge. Hence, these inconsistencies expose a gap in the literature, where the absence of shared definitions and dimensions prevents scholars from fully understanding how boundary strategies operate and evolve across different contexts.

Physical boundary management strategies involve modifying the material environment, such as creating designated workspaces or arranging objects to separate or blend work and home domains. However, these strategies rely on access to space, privacy, and material resources, conditions unevenly distributed across socio-economic groups, raising questions about who can realistically employ them (Allen et al., 2014; Fonner and Stache, 2012; Kossek, 2016).

Behavioural strategies entail intentional actions, including the use of technology, routines, or communication practices, to regulate when and how work and non-work roles are enacted (Kossek, 2016). Because they depend on ongoing self-monitoring and discipline, they place responsibility on the individual to maintain boundaries rather than on organisational structures.

Psychological strategies aim at mentally disengaging from work and redirecting attention toward non-work roles or restorative activities to sustain cognitive and emotional separation between domains (Kossek, 2016; Allen et al., 2014; 2021). Their effectiveness, however, is often compromised by workplace norms that valorise constant availability and blurred role expectations, making genuine detachment difficult to achieve.

2.1.3.1 Boundary Outcomes and Boundary Management Fit

When individuals are unable to enact their preferred boundaries, they are more likely to experience negative consequences. Such misalignment typically results in unwanted role blurring, cross-domain interference, and emotional strain, manifested as work-to-life or life-to-work conflict (Ashforth et al., 2000; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Kreiner et al., 2009). These effects highlight how limited control over boundary permeability can erode well-being and intensify strain. Conversely, when individuals can enact boundaries aligned with their preferences, boundary practices can yield enrichment-based outcomes. Resources, affect, or skills acquired in one domain can enhance performance or well-being in another, generating positive spillovers and supporting improved functioning across roles (Carlson et al., 2006; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001).

Despite boundary theory's emphasis on personal choice, Mueller et al. (2025) show that individuals often struggle to enact their preferred boundaries, resulting in low boundary fit and reduced well-being. This challenges the assumption that preferences naturally translate into behavior and exposes a key gap in the literature: how employees can be supported in turning boundary intentions into practice. Moreover, balance is not merely the absence of conflict but a subjective evaluation of whether expectations across roles feel coherent and sustainable. Perceived control is therefore central to how balance is experienced, rather than a simple consequence of formal arrangements (Kossek, 2016; Sirgy and Lee, 2018).

2.1.3.2 Contemporary Developments in Boundary Management

Boundary theory builds on role theory by shifting the focus from the roles individuals occupy to how they actively manage the tensions between them. Whereas border theory emerged from dissatisfaction with work-family strains and emphasises the physical, temporal, and organisational borders separating domains, boundary theory examines how individuals mentally

distinguish between life domains and how these distinctions shape experience (Allen et al., 2014). It conceptualises boundaries as socially constructed rather than fixed, highlighting how people interpret, negotiate, and sometimes blur them in response to personal circumstances (Clark, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000). Yet, as Allen et al. (2021) observe, the field has not entirely escaped its work-family origins, as much scholarship still treats family as the primary non-work referent, narrowing its applicability to broader aspects of life. Because this study explores how individuals subjectively navigate and shift between roles rather than the structural features that separate them, boundary theory offers the most appropriate analytical lens.

Kossek et al. (2012) argue that boundary theory's emphasis on individual construction risks overstating the degree of personal choice available to employees. She argues that today's work conditions, marked by constant connectivity, organisational expectations, and technological dependence, force individuals to self-manage boundaries without sufficient structural support. Extending this critique to boundary enactment, Kossek and Lautsch (2012) show that boundary management is shaped not only by structural pressures but also by individual preferences, identity salience, and organisational climate. They clarify how these factors influence boundary outcomes, arguing that perceptions of control strongly determine work-family experiences. By foregrounding identity, their work challenges the assumption that work and family are the primary domains of concern, demonstrating that other pursuits, such as friendships or hobbies, can be equally salient and require protection when negotiating boundaries.

Kossek and Lautsch (2008) further challenge the longstanding assumption that boundary management reflects a stable personal orientation toward either integration or segmentation. Earlier studies tended to conceptualise boundaries as relatively fixed, casting individuals as either blending their work and non-work roles or maintaining strict separation between them (Kossek, 2016). Kossek et al. (2006) argue that boundary enactment may shift across days, weeks, or life stages, suggesting that individuals move between integrating and separating domains depending on situational demands or personal preferences. Their alternating style positions boundary management as contingent rather than predetermined, raising questions about whether the integration-segmentation dichotomy can adequately capture how people navigate roles in practice. Kossek et al. (2012) extend this critique by arguing that boundary theory relies on typologies that assume stable personal preferences, yet empirical evidence shows that

boundary enactment is contingent, situationally driven, and therefore not adequately represented by the existing segmentation-integration dichotomy. Ashforth et al. (2000), however, conceptualise boundary styles as relatively stable orientations, implicitly reinforcing the very dichotomy that Kossek and Lautsch (2012) problematise. Kossek and Lautsch (2008; 2012) further highlight that boundary-crossing is often asymmetrical, such as when non-work enriches the workday while work is prevented from intruding on personal time. Although this perspective offers a more dynamic account of boundary processes, it complicates existing models. If boundaries are continually adjusted and context-dependent, it becomes unclear whether typologies can meaningfully categorise boundary styles or whether such fluidity undermines analytical precision.

2.1.4 Hybrid Work as a Boundary Context

Remote work was initially conceptualised as telework or telecommuting (Bailey and Kurland, 2002), but the expansion of ICTs (information and communications technologies) and constant connectivity normalised working beyond organisational premises. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift and established hybrid models in which employees alternate between working on-site and from home (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Although remote work has been extensively examined within the WLB literature, Allen et al. (2021) argue that research on hybrid arrangements and their implications for boundary management remains comparatively underdeveloped. They posit that the largely unplanned transition to hybrid work offers an opportunity to revisit core assumptions in boundary research. Empirical findings are mixed: while some studies suggest that working from home enhances WLB (Putri and Amran, 2021), others report blurred boundaries, heightened strain, and reduced role clarity (Grant et al., 2016; 2019; Palumbo et al., 2021). These inconsistencies denote that hybrid work introduces dynamics not fully addressed in remote work research, underscoring the need for further inquiry.

2.1.4.1 Contextual Conditions Shaping Boundary Enactment

Scholars suggest that individuals' boundary management practices do not simply be expressions of personal preference but to unfold within contextual conditions that can either support or undermine employees' capacity to enact their desired boundaries (Allen et al., 2021; Kossek, 2016). In particular, digital technologies have become a defining feature of this context. Rather

than merely facilitating work, they actively reshape how boundary management is negotiated, altering earlier assumptions about when and where work takes place (Allen et al., 2021). Kossek et al. (2012) mean that as connectivity intensifies, employees are increasingly required to self-regulate the separation of work and non-work domains. Kossek (2016) however warns that mobile devices and ubiquitous access foster “always-on” environments, dissolving the cues that once signaled the end of the workday and weakening employees’ sense of boundary control. Yet, these dynamics are not uniform. Piszczek (2017) demonstrates that the impact of technology depends on the alignment between organisational expectations and employees’ boundary preferences, where digital tools may extend autonomy for integrators who welcome fluidity across roles, while simultaneously constraining segmenters when after-hours responsiveness becomes an implicit or explicit norm.

Michaelides et al. (2024) extend this critique by acknowledging concerns that remote work intensifies boundary permeability and renders segmentation more effortful. However, the authors argue that such concerns overlook individual agency in technology use and ignore evidence that digital intrusions occur irrespective of physical work location. They mean that what is more important is the fit between employees’ boundary preferences and the contextual demands of their work environment (Derks et al., 2016; Hislop et al., 2015; Park and Jex, 2011). Consequently, although segmentation may reduce work-life conflict when conditions support it, its benefits diminish when organizational norms, expectations, or technological infrastructures constrain boundary control.

Boundary enactment is also shaped by role structures and physical environments, though scholars disagree on how these conditions enable or constrain individuals. Ashforth et al. (2000) argue that boundary flexibility and permeability are fundamental features determining the ease of moving between work and non-work roles, impacting the feasibility of segmentation and integration preferences. However, Allen et al. (2021) mean that structural roles are insufficient to alone dictate boundary outcomes, and that the availability of a dedicated workspace and the number of household members present significantly shape how individuals enact boundaries when working from home. Here, segmentation preferences become contingent upon environmental factors that serve to reinforce or undermine individuals’ strategies.

2.1.4.2 The Impact of Hybrid Work on Work-Life Boundaries

Delanoeije et al. (2019) caution that although hybrid arrangements are often promoted as a means of supporting better balance, they may also generate new pressures as work practices extend into the home domain. Their findings highlight this duality by showing that hybrid work can produce opposing boundary outcomes, with blurred boundaries increasing conflict, and teleworking days sometimes reducing work-to-home interference because employees find it easier to disengage from work at home than to re-enter it. These dynamics indicate that the impact of hybrid work on work-life boundaries remains theoretically and empirically unresolved.

Scholars increasingly locate the source of these divergent outcomes in the contextual conditions under which hybrid arrangements are enacted. Halford (2005) suggests that hybrid work can afford workers greater autonomy and flexibility in task management, yet these benefits materialise only when contextual features enable them. Kossek et al. (2006) similarly argue that flexible work practices are only effective when individuals possess sufficient boundary control; without it, flexible arrangements risk generating strain rather than alleviating it. Halford (2005) found that quiet home environments facilitated routine and individually focused work by reducing interruptions, whereas complex and collaborative tasks were more effectively carried out in the office, where managerial support was readily available. However, she argues that employees described feeling compelled to demonstrate their productivity remotely, which undermined informal workplace interactions and raised concerns about deteriorating collegial relationships when physical co-presence decreased. Sewell and Taskin (2015) capture this tension by showing how employees initially perceive homeworking as liberating yet internalise new forms of self-surveillance that did not arise when managerial oversight was physically visible. Bathini and Kandathil (2020) further demonstrate how such self-regulation becomes intertwined with organisational control logics, as teleworkers absorb intensified expectations under the guise of privilege, reinforcing both normative and technocratic forms of control even when working from home.

Digital technologies further complicate boundary experiences. Kossek et al. (2006) and Kossek (2016) argue that although connectivity theoretically enables employees to shape their own spatial and temporal boundaries, they may feel obligated to remain reachable beyond contractual hours to convey commitment, thereby weakening the very boundaries such policies aim to

protect. Wheatley et al. (2024) identify a similar autonomy-control paradox in hybrid contexts, wherein increased flexibility is counterbalanced by heightened monitoring and coordination demands.

2.1.5 Research Gap

Although boundary management is a relatively well-established field, the reviewed literature reveals three interconnected gaps that motivate this study. First, the field has historically focused on employees with family responsibilities, leaving young professionals comparatively understudied, despite evidence that their non-work lives are organised around distinct personal, social, and developmental priorities (Sturges and Guest, 2004; Smithson and Lewis, 2000; Farrugia, 2021; Gabrielova and Buchko, 2021). Second, although recent scholarship suggests that boundary preferences are dynamic, context-dependent, and often asymmetrical, empirical research has not yet sufficiently examined how such variability unfolds for early-career workers navigating contemporary workplace structures (Kossek et al., 2006; Kossek and Lautsch, 2008, 2012; Allen et al., 2021). Third, while hybrid work is now recognised as reshaping boundaries, the literature rarely integrates these insights with boundary management perspectives, resulting in limited understanding of how hybrid contexts afford or constrain the enactment of preferred boundaries and shape experiences of boundary fit or misfit (Halford, 2005; Sewell and Taskin, 2015; Fonner and Stache, 2012; Grant et al., 2019; Wheatley et al., 2023).

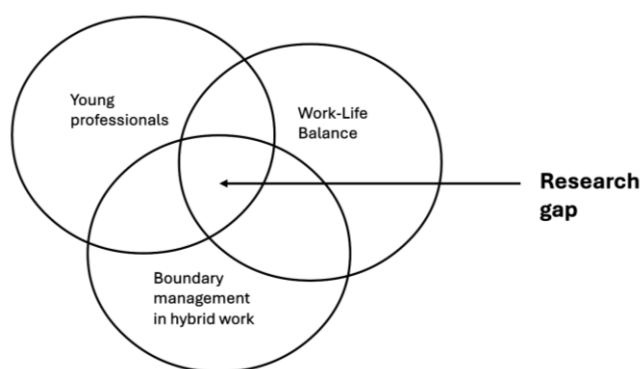


Figure 1: Illustration of research gap.

2. Theoretical Framework

To analyse how young professionals make sense of and enact work-life boundaries in hybrid arrangements, and to close the identified research gap, we constructed a theoretical framework (see Figure 1), inspired by Cobb's (2025) conceptual model for boundary strategy (mis)fit.

Boundary theory is concerned with how individuals create, maintain, and manage the boundaries separating work and non-work domains (Allen et al., 2014). These boundaries are socially constructed and may be shaped, blurred, or blended depending on personal and contextual conditions.

A central dimension of boundary management concerns individuals' boundary preferences, the extent to which they favour segmentation or integration between work and non-work domains (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Segmenters seek to keep work and non-work roles clearly separated, whereas integrators are more comfortable allowing the two to blend. Importantly, this is not a dichotomous choice but a continuum, with individuals positioned between the extremes of strict separation and full integration (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). These preferences influence both the desired permeability and flexibility of boundaries. Flexibility refers to the degree to which spatial or temporal boundaries can be altered or reconfigured, while permeability concerns the extent to which thoughts, emotions, or behaviours from one domain spill over into another (Ashforth, 2000). Permeability is directional and can be symmetrical or asymmetrical; for instance, an individual may tolerate work encroaching on personal time but resist personal matters entering the work domain (Kossek et al., 2012).

Individuals are not always able to enact their boundary preferences due to contextual constraints in either domain; hence, the need to distinguish between boundary preferences and enactment (Allen et al. 2014). This tension reflects what Kreiner (2009) describes as boundary fit, the degree to which an individual's preferred boundary style matches the demands and affordances of their environment. When preferences and environmental conditions diverge, individuals experience boundary misfit, resulting in negative work-life outcomes such as strain, compensatory strategies, or reduced feelings of control. Building on Kreiner's distinction between boundary fit and misfit, Cobb et al. (2025) have expanded the concept to capture the broader set of personal and environmental factors that shape these dynamics by developing a

conceptual framework that maps how fit and misfit develop, accumulate, and influence work and non-work outcomes.

Although numerous boundary typologies have been proposed, this study adopts Allen et al.'s (2014) framework, which differentiates physical, psychological, and behavioural boundaries. They show that much of the field's terminology is conceptually redundant and can be coherently synthesised within these three categories, hence our adoption of the typology. Moreover, given the lack of consensus on specific types of boundary tactics and strategies in the extant literature, we refrain from predetermining such categories before data collection and instead allow them to emerge inductively from our interviews, in line with the narrative and constructivist orientation of our study. This enables a more coherent engagement with the literature and addresses Cobb et al.'s (2025) critique that boundary scholarship has become terminologically redundant and conceptually fragmented.

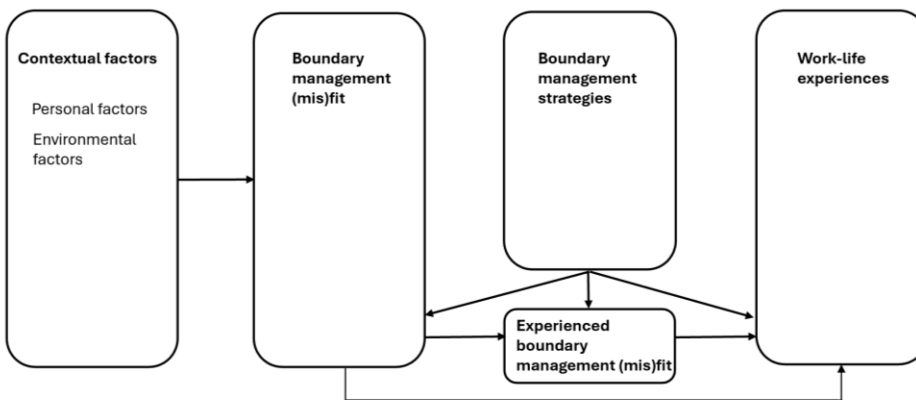


Figure 2: Theoretical framework inspired by Cobb et al. (2025).

Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework that guides this study by illustrating how young professionals make sense of and experience work-life boundaries. The model starts with contextual factors which influence boundary fit, and these are the intersection between personal factors, such as preferences, and environmental factors which influence the ability to enact these preferences. Personal factors refer to individual characteristics that shape preferred ways of managing the work and non-work interface. These include identity, values, and integration and segmentation preferences (Nippert-Eng, 1996), desired levels of permeability and flexibility (Ashforth et al., 2000), and tolerance for interruptions across domains (Kossek et al., 2006;

Olson-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006). Together, these preferences reflect how individuals ideally structure and regulate their boundaries. Contextual factors highlight the environmental conditions within which such preferences must be enacted. Hybrid work rearranges boundaries in ways that can both support and constrain preferred boundary arrangements (Halford, 2005; Sewell and Taskin, 2015), while the early-career stage introduces additional pressures related to learning, visibility, and proving commitment (Sturges and Guest, 2004; Farrugia, 2021). These contextual influences are central to understanding what forms of boundary enactment are possible for young professionals.

The interaction between personal and environmental factors shapes boundary fit, understood as the alignment between an individual's preferences and the boundary affordances or constraints of their environment (Kreiner et al., 2009; Kossek and Lautsch, 2012). Fit emerges when contextual conditions enable the enactment of preferred boundaries, whereas misfit arises when environmental expectations or limitations restrict what individuals ideally would do. In response to these conditions, individuals engage in boundary management strategies, understood as the behavioural, physical, physical, or psychological tactics deployed to navigate boundaries in everyday work-life arrangements (Kreiner et al., 2009). Rather than imposing predefined categories, this study identifies such strategies inductively. Finally, these processes culminate in a set of work-life experiences, which may include conflict, enrichment, strain, recovery, autonomy, or other outcomes noted in the boundary literature (Fonner and Stache, 2012; Grant et al., 2019; Allen et al., 2021). Because the literature conceptualizes outcomes broadly rather than strictly in terms of “balance,” this study leaves the category open and uses empirical coding to identify the experiences most salient to participants. The feedback arrow in Figure 2 reflects that individuals may learn from these experiences and recalibrate expectations, preferences, or strategies over time, consistent with the dynamic view of boundary enactment advanced in contemporary boundary scholarship.

3. Methodology

This chapter first outlines the scientific research approach (3.1) and methodological choices (3.2). It then details the generation of empirical material (3.3) and how it was processed and analysed (3.4). The chapter concludes with an assessment of the study's quality (3.5).

3.1 Scientific Research Approach

The purpose of this study is to explore how young professionals make sense of and enact boundaries in hybrid work arrangements. This focus requires an understanding of individuals' subjective perceptions, sense-making processes, and lived experiences as they continuously negotiate the relationship between the work and non-work domains. Our study is grounded in a constructivist ontology, in which work-life boundaries are understood as socially constructed and continuously negotiated rather than fixed or objectively existing; reality is therefore viewed as multiple and context-dependent, shaped through individuals' interpretations and social interactions. The study adopts an interpretivist epistemology to capture the subjective meanings that young professionals attribute to their boundary management, accounting for variation across individuals' experiences (Bell et al., 2019).

The study takes an inductive approach as it aims to develop new insights rather than testing predefined theoretical assumptions. This has required ongoing reflection on our research process and, when necessary, adjustments to the theoretical framework that underpinned our empirical work and subsequent analysis.

3.2 Research Method

A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was deemed most suitable for this exploratory study, as it foregrounds individuals' interpretations of their lived reality and offers the flexibility to probe emerging issues in depth. This format enabled participants to articulate their experiences in their own terms and provided access to sense-making processes, such as boundary negotiation, which are not directly observable (Bell et al., 2019). This approach aligns with the interpretivist epistemology and constructivist ontology adopted, both of which prioritise subjective meaning-making and the co-construction of knowledge (Scotland, 2012). Interviews were selected over surveys or observational methods because they allow participants to retrospectively explain how their work-life boundaries have evolved, offering insights that alternative techniques could not elicit. To ensure fidelity to participants' intended meanings, we invited clarification throughout the interviews and posed targeted follow-up questions to deepen emerging themes. Rather than striving for accuracy in a positivist sense (Scotland, 2012), the

analytical focus lay in capturing the contextual nuances through which participants constructed their hybrid work experiences.

3.2.1 Sampling Strategy

Initially, purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria (Bell et al., 2019) and could provide relevant insights. To mitigate the risk of self-selection and sample homogeneity bias, we deliberately sought variation across industries, organisational types, and educational backgrounds. In this regard, snowball sampling extended the recruitment of contacts, reduced the risk of clustering around a single professional context and strengthened the heterogeneity of perspectives within the sample (Atkinson and Flint, 2001).

Furthermore, the study's sampling strategy involved conducting interviews until a point of saturation was reached, meaning that additional accounts no longer contributed new insights to the developing category. At this stage, the category was seen as adequately developed in terms of its properties and its links to related categories, and further interviews did not appear to extend or refine the emerging interpretation (Bell et al., 2019). We did not find new insights after the 17th interview, giving us confidence that saturation had been reached. To ensure that all potential themes had fully emerged, we conducted one additional interview; however, even after the 18th interview, no new insights surfaced.

3.3.2 Selection of Participants

The sample consists of 18 participants (see interview sample in Appendix 3), where participants were selected based on their relevance to the study's purpose. All were young professionals who had graduated within the last two years and were currently employed in hybrid work arrangements. There were no formal requirements for how much on-site versus off-site the interviewees had to work, as variation in hybrid arrangements was considered valuable for capturing a broader range of interpretations of work-life boundaries. Thus, we did not systematically distinguish or compare participants based on contracted hours, which limits our ability to assess whether working time shapes experiences of hybrid work and boundary management. All participants held at least a bachelor's degree and were engaged in white-collar occupations, either part-time or full-time, across a variety of sectors and educational

backgrounds. Selection was guided by participants' transitional life stage, meaning that they had recently entered, or were about to enter, the labour market following their studies. Unlike studies that define young professionals primarily by age (e.g., Modestino et al., 2019), we adopt a career-stage perspective, as we reason that age alone does not capture individuals' position in their professional trajectory or the work-life transitions they are navigating. Our inclusion criteria ensured shared relevance to hybrid work while preserving variation in industry, role, and educational background.

3.3 Generation of Empirical Materials

Semi-structured in-depth interviews allowed participants to share their perspectives on hybrid work, routines, and boundary management. Each interview followed a flexible guide (see Appendix 2), designed to elicit participants' reflections, informed by existing literature on work-life boundaries (Clark, 2000), and pilot-tested to ensure relevance and depth (Kallio et al., 2016). The pilot interview served to evaluate the flow and formulation of questions, as well as their ability to elicit reflective and experience-based responses (Malmqvist et al., 2019). It also provided an opportunity to assess whether the opening, open-ended questions effectively encouraged participants to narrate their hybrid work experiences without leading them toward specific interpretations. Insights from the pilot study led to minor adjustments in wording, sequencing, and follow-up questions to enhance the guide's sensitivity to participants' sense-making processes. This refined the interview design and ensured that questions aligned with the study's interpretivist and exploratory purpose.

Interviews were conducted digitally via Microsoft Teams or in person, depending on participants' availability, each session lasting between 40-75 minutes. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and provided consent, with clear assurance of their right to withdraw at any time, and confidentiality was safeguarded through the anonymization of names and potentially identifying details, particularly important given the use of thick, context-rich descriptions that heighten the risk of deductive disclosure. The process of collecting empirical material was iterative as insights from early interviews informed refinements to the guide and the phrasing of follow-up questions.

3.4 Material Processing and Analysis

All interviews were transcribed using an AI-assisted transcription tool to ensure efficiency and consistency. The tool was used within secure, password-protected storage, after all files were anonymized. To comply with GDPR guidelines, all recordings were deleted after being transcribed. Transcripts were subsequently reviewed and manually checked against the audio recordings to ensure accuracy and to capture contextual nuances such as tone, pauses, and emphasis to ensure fidelity to participants' accounts. This approach enabled precision and familiarity with the material. Transcripts were first examined manually and then cross-reviewed by each researcher before being coded. Peer debriefing sessions allowed us to challenge assumptions, compare emerging interpretations, and identify areas of convergence and divergence, thereby enhancing the analytical rigour and depth of our interpretation.

The coding followed a combined thematic and narrative approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008). Initially, a thematic analysis was conducted through careful and iterative readings of each transcript. The combined use of thematic and narrative analysis enabled the exploration of resonances and differences across participants' accounts while also tracing how they constructed and gave coherence to their boundary-related experiences. The semi-structured interview format supported this analytic approach by enabling participants to articulate how they interpreted hybrid work and managed the fluid boundaries between work and non-work life. Open codes were written to capture key ideas, expressions, and meaning structures within each participant's account. Each researcher coded the transcripts individually before engaging in co-analysis and negotiated coding to stabilize interpretations and ensure interpretive consistency and analytical rigor. We however acknowledge that our interpretive role inevitably shaped which narratives were treated as salient. Rigid coding procedures were avoided to preserve the contextual richness and emergent meanings of participants reflections. Individual case summaries anchored the codes in each participant's narrative, ensuring contextual depth and coherence.

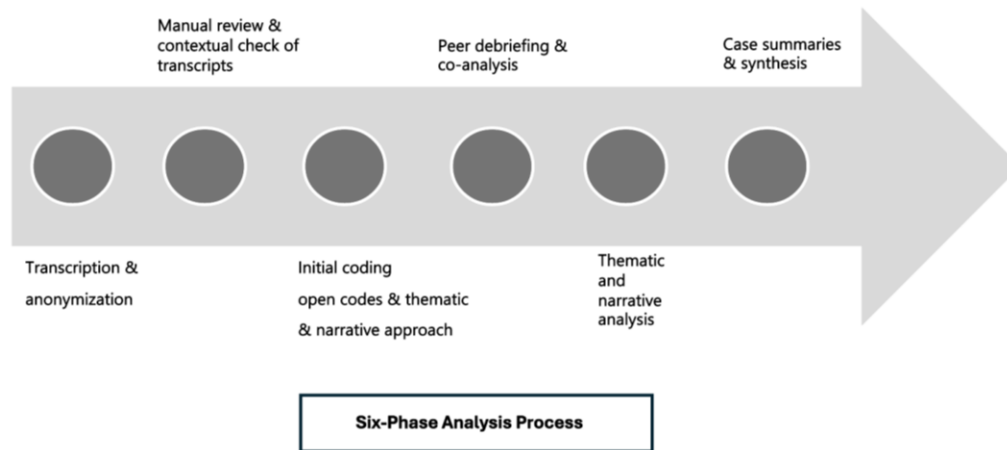


Figure 3: The study’s six-phase analysis process, inspired by Braun and Clark (2006).

3.5 Quality of the Study

We have assessed the study’s quality using the four aspects of trustworthiness outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

3.5.1 Credibility

As the study centres on individuals’ sense-making, credibility refers to the extent to which interpretations faithfully reflect participants’ perspectives and lived experiences (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Relying on self-reported accounts introduces potential limitations, including retrospective rationalisation and social desirability bias. Interviews also constitute a constructed interaction rather than a naturalistic setting, which may lead participants to present idealised or overly rational narratives rather than tacit routines underlying everyday practices (Bell et al., 2019). Within an interpretivist paradigm, such issues do not constitute methodological flaws but reflect the epistemological emphasis on depth and meaning rather than objective measurement. To enhance credibility, we engaged deeply with the empirical material through iterative readings, negotiated coding, and peer debriefing to examine and challenge emerging interpretations collaboratively. The semi-structured format further enabled participants to clarify meanings during the interview, reducing risks of misinterpretation.

3.5.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings may apply to other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It has been supported by providing “thick descriptions” of the research context

and the phenomena being studied. In line with qualitative research traditions, the responsibility for judging transferability rests with the reader.

3.5.3 Dependability

Dependability, which concerns the stability, transparency, and traceability of the research process over time (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), has been supported by peer discussions and supervisory feedback. These acted as inquiry audits, scrutinizing methodological choices and interpretations throughout the research process to test that analytic decisions were systematically reasoned and not arbitrarily derived.

3.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the degree to which findings are grounded in the empirical material rather than shaped by researchers' personal biases or theoretical predispositions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Reflexivity was practiced throughout the research process, involving continuous reflection on our assumptions and how our own hybrid work experiences might influence interpretation. The negotiated coding sessions helped minimize idiosyncratic interpretations by requiring both authors to justify analytical claims with reference to the data.

4. Empirical Findings

This chapter presents our empirical findings, starting with how young professionals construct and interpret work-life boundaries (4.1), followed by an exploration of how hybrid work influences these boundaries (4.2), how hybrid arrangements are experienced in practice (4.3), and ending with participants' reflections on the evolving role of the workplace (4.4). Additional empirical quotations that substantiate these themes can be found in Appendix 4.

4.1 Making Sense of Work-Life Boundaries

4.1.1 Finding a Balance

When describing how they made sense of WLB, participants spoke in metaphors and emotional terms rather than referring to formal policies or fixed criteria. Felix depicted balance as ensuring that work and personal life “don’t tangle with each other”, while Aaron characterised imbalance

as “constantly treading water, like you’re drowning”. Other participants framed balance as having sufficient time for their personal life and the ability to keep work at a manageable level, allowing space for personal activities:

“To have sufficient time to rest myself and get to do the stuff I like to do outside of work. So that's balance for me”. (Kim)

“I would say that, in essence, work should be part of your life, but it shouldn't be the whole of your life”. (Moa)

Furthermore, the majority of interviewees associated balance with keeping their work and personal lives separate, particularly in the sense of preventing work from intruding on the latter:

“I can have my own personal time after I'm working, and my personal life and professional life are separated as long as I want it”. (Harini)

“To me, it means being able to separate your work and home life, like all your stresses, from the workday, not bringing them into your after-work activities and constantly thinking about them”. (Selma)

When further delving into their preferences for separating or integrating work and non-work, most interviewees described instances where they would allow or purposefully integrate their personal life into their work to some extent. This could occur through, for example, taking personal phone calls during work hours or talking about personal matters during lunches and breaks with colleagues:

“Sometimes I meet my friends for lunch somewhere else. [...] Even if I'm going with my colleague for ice cream or coffee, we just chat around random stuff, and that's completely unrelated to the work world”. (Harini)

Importantly, several interviewees expressed how blending their personal lives into work felt enriching and allowed for a feeling of greater balance and well-being overall. Kiana and Sanna describe how this has allowed for effective breaks from work:

“Because I'm able to integrate (my personal life) somewhat into work, I feel like I get effective breaks at work when I get to sit and chit chat with my colleagues, or I can go and take lunch with my sister, and it's not frowned upon”. (Kiara)

On the other hand, a small number of participants expressed how they enjoyed the integration of work into their personal lives and not seeking such a distinct segmentation between the two. For these individuals, work itself was meaningful, and integration felt both natural and desirable. Paul goes further to question if the very notion of “balance” is feasible or a desirable state between work and life:

“I don’t really view it like work versus life. [...] Work is a large part of life. [...] Things outside my main work that would be classified as work feel like play”. (Paul)

4.2 Boundaries in a Hybrid Work Context

4.2.1 How Hybrid Work Influences Boundaries

When asked how they manage boundaries to maintain a WLB, several participants emphasized the importance of being able to “leave work at the office”. Working on-site was often described as the clearest way to mark that the workday was over. Hassan, for instance, highlighted how having a physical office evokes the feeling of “clocking in and clocking out”, creating a clearer start and end to the workday:

“When you're in the office, you're working, and then after that, you just leave the office, and you're done working. [...] Everything work-related gets removed the second I walk out of the office”. (Hassan)

However, when working from home, participants described difficulties in setting boundaries, resulting in a sense of blurring work and home. This was often accompanied by a reduced sense of agency or control over how the two domains interacted:

“What bothers me the most about working from home is that it blurs the lines quite a bit on when the end time is. [...] I don’t really turn off my computer properly”. (Livia)

Participants explained that the office supported segmentation not only through physical separation but also through behavioural cues. Being surrounded by colleagues and managers created a sense of accountability and made non-work activities less likely to intrude on work. However, at home, these cues were absent, removing the implicit social monitoring that helped participants regulate their behaviour:

“At our office, it does look strange if you're sitting with your phone all the time, especially when the CEO could walk by, and that's a bit embarrassing. I realized when I worked from home that I just gravitated to doing something else. [...] You need to be more disciplined at home”. (Joshua)

Segmentation at the office was reinforced by social visibility norms, whereas home environments demanded self-discipline and self-generated cues. Even when participants attempted to replicate physical boundaries at home by creating separate workspaces, many described feeling emotional residue of work lingering in space, making it difficult to detach simply by stepping away from the desk:

“It's physically separated. (But) I still have the memory in the back of my head that every time I'm in the room (home office), it gives me signals of stress, like, for example, you have been in a place where you have a bad experience. For me, it's like this every time I go in there”. (Sanna)

Moreover, participants described how digital connectivity further contributed to this blurring. They describe how work-related cues, such as late-evening notifications, could surface at any moment, keeping them mentally alert and prepared to respond. These participants described feelings of “always being at work” simply because they were constantly connected. Sanna described how late-evening messages made her feel “always at work”, attributing this feeling to the uninterrupted digital access that flexible work arrangements demand:

“When somebody at, for example, 8 PM sends something, saying it's very urgent and important, and I open it, and I mean, yeah, I'm at work again. I'm always at work, to be honest. When you are flexible, you're connected to the internet or connected to (Microsoft) Teams, you're at work”. (Sanna)

4.2.2 Enacting Segmentation When Working From Home

Some participants described actively trying to enact physical boundaries to separate work and non-work. For many participants, who were often living in small spaces, this meant deliberately designating specific zones for non-work activities or setting personal rules, such as avoiding work in areas associated with rest or leisure:

“I created a setup in my room. [...] There's a very clear, almost a line you can draw between where my work ends and where my private life starts”. (Kiara)

“I only have one room; it's my sleeping place, my working place, my hangout place, it's all in one”. (Felix)

However, this strategy was not feasible for most young professionals, due to limited space and resources. Moreover, behavioural boundary tactics emerged as the most consistently observed among participants. For example, participants relied on concrete actions such as muting notifications or removing work artifacts to signal the end of the workday and prevent work from intruding into personal time:

“I try to turn off notifications and (Microsoft) Teams or Slack, these channels we use for online communication, to not feel like it's intruding on my supposedly free time”.
(Aaron)

“I put away all my other (work) devices, like my other laptop and phones. [...] And I also remove personal objects from my desk. I have basically started putting all of them in a bag, so that I don't have them visibly on my desk”. (Felix)

4.2.3 Allowing Integration Through Intentional Breaks

Participants noted that the office not only supported separation of work and life but also enabled integration through natural breaks, which were largely absent at home. Several participants described how the office environment contained natural breaks such as fika or lunch that created pauses during the workday and allowed brief moments of non-work to blend into work in a controlled way, something that was missing when working from home:

“When you work at the office, then you have certain time slots. We have fika or lunch, or just normal breaks, but when you work from home, these kinds of breaks are not part of your routine in the same way”. (Mona)

“I need triggers, like external people who get me out of work to have lunch at the office. [...] But when I'm working at home, I may get too lazy, or it feels more comfortable to do the work and finish it”. (Sanna)

Many young professionals, therefore, introduced intentional breaks when working from home to mimic the natural ones that would occur at the office and to allow non-work to blend into work in ways they experienced as positive:

“Working from home gives me time for other things, I can go to the gym straight after, or even during a longer lunch, and I still finish my work”. (Aaron)

Breaks became deliberate opportunities to relax boundaries and weave personal activities into the workday, and the autonomy to choose how to use them made this integration feel purposeful and manageable.

4.3 Work-Life Experiences in Hybrid Work Arrangements

4.3.1 Enrichment Gained From Working Hybrid

Despite the challenges of managing boundaries in hybrid work and participants’ differing preferences for segmentation or integration, several interviewees reported feeling more productive when working from home than in the office:

"I go into the office on days when I know I don't need to be super, super productive. [...] I can say of the bat that I'm more effective at home just productivity-wise than I am in the office. So sometimes the transition from being really productive at home and knowing I need to go into the office can make me very anxious". (Kiara)

For several participants, this meant that the office was no longer the default place for getting work done, but rather a space they chose primarily for social reasons. Harini, for instance, explained how her decision to work from the office was driven less by task demands and more by a desire to connect with colleagues:

“I go to the office whenever I feel that I haven’t seen my colleagues in a long time, that’s when I go”. (Harini)

We observed how several participants explained that working from home helped them “recharge” socially, conserving energy so they could be more present, engaged, and motivated when they did go into the workplace:

“When I’m at the office, I appreciate it more, I talk to people, I feel part of something. If I had to be there every day, I’d be drained”. (Isabel)

“Since we do, like, half the week at home and have a week at the office, you can be relaxed at home and then recharge your social battery and then go out and be very social”. (Kim)

While only about half of the participants described feeling more productive in their work when working from home, many more expressed that home-working days made them more productive in their non-work lives. During the self-structured breaks mentioned earlier, participants described using this time to “keep up with life” and to deal with non-work-related tasks:

“It’s the best, you can be very productive. If I do laundry on Friday, then I have nothing to worry about on the weekend, and you can truly enjoy your spare time”. (Kim)

“When I’m home, I can use breaks to do small things, like vacuuming or cooking. It helps me feel like I’m keeping up with life”. (Sanna)

This suggests that working from home enabled interviewees to experience greater benefits in their personal lives because of the convenience and flexibility it offered.

4.3.2 Flexibility and Control

Participants frequently described hybrid work in terms of flexibility. Rather than referring to formal policies, they spoke about having more control over where and when they worked - that is, greater spatial and temporal flexibility in how they organised their work- and non-work lives. For many, this flexibility enabled them to prioritize non-work activities and to “say yes” to personal opportunities and commitments that they considered meaningful in their private lives:

“I mainly chose this job because of the flexibility. As I’m in a long-distance relationship, I can meet my boyfriend and work from there. [...] This allows me to manage my personal life because I can be mega flexible, like I don’t have to say no to plans. I can say, sure, I’ll bring my laptop, and I’ll work from there”. (Kiara)

“When I want to do beach volleyball tournaments, I have so much more flexibility to play because I can travel on a Friday and work from the train or the car, and I wouldn’t have been able to do that if I were working in person with designated hours”. (Selma)

Moreover, flexibility also enabled young professionals to reclaim time that would otherwise be spent on commuting, which several participants described as directly enhancing their well-being. Remote work afforded longer sleep, more exercise, and a calmer start to the day, which participants associated with a greater sense of balance and improved mental health:

“When I do home office, I can basically sleep one and a half hours longer. [...] I must wake up much earlier when I go to the office because it’s quite far away”. (Felix)

“If I don’t have to commute, that’s already one less stress factor; I can use that time for sleep or exercise”. (John)

However, although participants associated hybrid work with greater autonomy and improved WLB, its effects on boundary flexibility were more complex than expected. Many interviewees noted that implicit expectations to be physically present at the office limited how flexible hybrid work truly was in practice:

“It’s flexible, but you can’t really abuse it. [...] You should still be seen in the office”.(Kiara)

“We can work from home, but I feel like people notice if you’re not there. [...] You should show your face”. (Moa)

“It’s ‘flexible’, but not really. You can stay home, but it’s better if you go in”. (Joshua)

This illustrates how flexibility can become a double-edged sword: while hybrid arrangements expand boundaries spatially and temporally, implicit expectations reduce the actual flexibility of boundaries. A similar pattern emerged when participants struggled with productivity at home. Non-work distractions often led to feelings of guilt and anxiety, prompting individuals to work beyond regular hours to compensate:

“If I’m not productive at home, I feel like I owe the company that time, so I keep checking emails later”. (Aaron)

“When I don’t get enough done in the day, I feel bad and end up opening my laptop again at night just to catch up”. (Mona)

This sense of personal discipline was echoed by other participants who emphasized that the continuous effort to manage non-work distractions and uphold boundaries can itself become mentally draining and divert focus from work, simply to ensure they stay on track:

"Sometimes it does feel like I spend a lot of effort making sure that I sit with the work I'm supposed to do as opposed to doing something else. [...] It could be very annoying".

(Hassan)

4.4 The Changing Meaning of the Workplace

When asked about their ideal work arrangement, most participants indicated a clear preference for hybrid work. Several also questioned the logic behind employers who insist on full on-site presence, perceiving such requirements as unnecessary or outdated:

"I don't think it's very modern to have a super strong on-site requirement. If you're not working in production or have customers on site, then why should we have so?". (John)

"It sends a cultural signal to me, if my employer doesn't offer a hybrid that they kind of want to control their employees". (Livia)

On the contrary, having the option to work hybrid was to several participants associated with status, autonomy, and managerial trust. They expressed it as a symbol of recognition and responsibility, where flexibility signalled that management trusted their ability to work independently and deliver results without constant supervision:

"I have the view that if you can work hybrid, then you are more important, because I do see it as a benefit, like a salary. I think if you have the option to work hybrid, I will see that person as having a better job. [...] I associate being higher up in the company with having more flexibility". (Selma)

Many participants viewed hybrid work as a non-negotiable condition for future employment, expressing that they would either decline a position lacking flexibility or struggle to envision themselves remaining long-term in such a role. A few participants also voiced concern about how they might adapt if required to transition from a hybrid setup to a fully on-site position:

"The flexibility of the hybrid job that I have [...] has given me a privilege that I'm very afraid of giving up in the future with other jobs. Assuming that I will switch jobs because

one does throughout a career, I'm definitely afraid. Afraid of landing a job that is not as flexible, that doesn't offer hybrid, and I think that will impact my career". (Kiara)

However, not all participants viewed hybrid work positively. Some expressed a preference for working entirely on site, while others highlighted a key drawback of hybrid arrangements: arriving at the office only to find few colleagues present. This limited their opportunities to build relationships, stay informed about organisational dynamics, and engage in workplace politics:

"I'm probably not the person who values hybrid work the most. [...] I generally think people should be at work to form a culture, meet people, and have fun. [...] You miss out on unplanned meetings and social interaction at work, for example, meeting people in the kitchen. [...] You notice a lot more when you're in an empty room than if you're in a room with a lot of other people". (Joshua)

"I don't know how to explain it. [...] I don't feel comfortable (at the office). I don't know my colleagues because I don't spend time with them as most of my work is remote". (Hamid)

5. Analysis

This study aimed to investigate how young professionals made sense of work-life boundaries in hybrid work arrangements. This section presents our findings in light of previous research. It begins by discussing contextual factors (5.1), boundary (mis)fit (5.2) and boundary strategies (5.3). Work-life experiences (5.4) are thereafter treated before the section concludes by demonstrating how hybrid work reshapes the meaning of work and the workplace (5.5).

5.1 Contextual Factors

5.1.1 Personal Factors

Participants showed that boundary preferences were neither fixed nor internally coherent but shifted across situations and domains, echoing Ashforth et al. (2000), Clark (2000), and Nippert-Eng (1996). Consistent with Allen et al. (2015), most participants located themselves somewhere in the middle of the integration-segmentation continuum. A notable pattern within these shifting

orientations was the prevalence of asymmetrical permeability. They welcomed some flow of non-work into work, while showing far less tolerance for work intruding into personal time. The asymmetry in participants' boundary preferences supports Clark (2000), who argues that individuals rarely seek uniform permeability; rather, they tend to prefer openings in one direction more than the other. Ashforth et al. (2000) similarly emphasize that people often desire greater protection from work intruding into personal life while being more accepting of personal intrusions into work.

Consistent with Cobb's (2025) emphasis on identity and personal values as central determinants of personal factors influencing boundary fit, in their work-life experiences, participants underlined the importance of having time and opportunity for non-work, such as hobbies, seeing families and friends, and not allowing work to overwhelm that. The metaphors of "drowning" because of work overwhelming the non-work domain and the fear of non-work "tangling" with work, emphasise the salience of agency in determining their boundary fit. Another personal factor shaping preferences concerned the high value they assigned to spatial and temporal flexibility, which they viewed as essential for sustaining the lifestyles, identities, and relationships that matter to them at this life stage.

Even though hybrid work placed greater responsibility on participants to regulate boundaries between work and non-work, almost all expressed a clear preference for working hybrid. Several were even skeptical of organisations that did not offer such arrangements, describing them as outdated or overly controlling, underscoring the importance they attach to flexibility.

The understanding of balance as managed, selective permeability provides the foundation for how participants later make sense of hybrid work and its role in their everyday well-being. This aligns with young professionals who seek work that can be integrated with exploration, personal interests, and self-development rather than treated as a separate, purely instrumental sphere (Modestino et al., 2019; Gabrielova and Buchko, 2021). It also links to findings that young employees tend to value arrangements that support both development and personal independence (Nieżurawska et al., 2023), and to boundary literature emphasizing autonomy and psychological control as central to perceived effectiveness and well-being (Kossek et al., 2006). A final key aspect of the personal factors that influence young professionals is the emphasis they place on

socialization and meaning-making in the office. Several participants described the physical office as a key site for social connection, informal learning, and belonging, consistent with findings that early-career employees rely on the workplace for identity formation and demonstration of ambition (Farrugia, 2021; Modestino et al., 2019). The office was not only where they met colleagues and “felt part of something,” but also a symbolic stage on which to appear committed and ambitious, for instance, by being visibly present on certain days or for important meetings. It is also where participants chose to integrate non-work by talking about personal life with colleagues, taking lunch breaks with friends, and even answering personal phone calls.

5.1.2 Environmental Factors

Two contextual conditions were particularly influential in shaping participants’ boundary experiences: the hybrid work arrangement and their early-career position. Participants consistently spoke of hybrid work as synonymous with flexibility, using the term to describe both temporal and spatial autonomy. This flexibility allowed them to shape work around personal rhythms, reserving office days for social interaction and visibility, and home days for focused tasks, recovery, or conserving energy. Such experiences reflect research showing that hybrid and remote work enhance perceived autonomy by enabling individuals to structure work in line with personal routines and preferences (Kossek, 2006; Nakrošienė and Butkevičienė, 2016; Wheatley et al., 2023), and can facilitate a tailored alignment between work and non-work domains (Grant et al., 2019; Purba et al., 2024). In early-career contexts, where daily habits and professional identities are still being established, this capacity to customise how and where work happens appears to be especially important.

At the same time, the hybrid environment significantly increased boundary permeability, particularly when work occurred in home spaces typically associated with rest or leisure. Participants frequently noted difficulty detaching from work and described how their workstations left “emotional traces” in bedrooms or living areas. For young professionals living in small apartments or shared accommodation, domestic distractions and the absence of distinct work zones further blurred spatial and psychological boundaries. These findings align with studies showing that home-based work weakens role-transition cues and heightens spatial and symbolic overlap between domains (Halford, 2005; Grant et al., 2019; Palumbo, 2020).

Technological connectivity compounded this permeability. Participants reported that late-evening notifications and digital communication created a lingering sense of being “always at work,” echoing Derks and Bakker’s (2014) findings that mobile technologies heighten work-to-non-work intrusion. Kossek (2006, 2016) similarly argues that flexibility does not guarantee psychological control, as employees may feel compelled to remain available after hours to signal commitment. Bathini and Kandathil (2020) extend this by showing that remote workers often internalise expectations of constant connectivity and self-discipline. Together, these findings indicate that hybrid work creates environmental conditions in which flexibility coexists with intensified work-to-non-work intrusion, making boundary protection more demanding.

Hybrid work also altered the meaning of autonomy by creating what Sewell and Taskin (2015) describe as the autonomy-control paradox, in which employees enjoy more discretion over when and where they work yet face heightened expectations of availability. Although hybrid work enabled more personalised routines, it intensified subtle pressures to remain reachable, particularly for early-career workers seeking to demonstrate commitment. These dynamics diminished boundary control by allowing work-related concerns and emotional residue to spill into non-work time, consistent with Sarbu’s (2018) and Vyas’s (2022) observations that work-from-home arrangements erode the sanctity of domestic space. Participants also noted that digital connectivity was not uniformly negative, as instant communication sometimes enhanced efficiency and control. This nuance reinforces Kossek’s (2006, 2016) argument that flexibility yields positive outcomes only when accompanied by psychological boundary control experience that varied across participants in the hybrid environment.

The perceived flexibility of hybrid work was further constrained by implicit visibility pressures tied to early-career status. Participants frequently reported feeling compelled to be physically present in the office to demonstrate commitment, reliability, and ambition. Many described guilt when working from home and feared appearing less dedicated or less visible, mirroring Sturges’ (2012) and Halford’s (2005) findings that workplace cultures emphasising visibility and long hours can undermine the benefits of flexible arrangements. For young professionals, the office served not only as a site of social connection but also as a setting where legitimacy, belonging, and professional identity were negotiated (Farrugia, 2021; Modestino et al., 2019). Consistent with Smithson and Lewis (2000) and Sturges and Guest (2004), early-career employees had

limited boundary control and relied heavily on organisational cues regarding appropriate behaviour, making them especially sensitive to visibility norms. Consequently, spatial and temporal autonomy coexisted with identity- and career-driven pressures to be present, reinforcing that the benefits of flexibility depend on the psychological experience of control (Kossek et al., 2006), which was unevenly distributed across participants.

Although the office offered clearer physical and symbolic boundaries, hybrid arrangements made participants feel less anchored there. Because they were present less frequently than others, some began to interpret the office as a place where they did not fully “belong,” which in turn intensified discomfort, reduced their motivation to go in, and triggered a self-reinforcing cycle: the less they went to the office, the more alienated they felt upon returning. In this way, belonging became a boundary mechanism that undermined rather than supported segmentation. Being seen on site was still interpreted as a sign of commitment and ambition, particularly in early-career roles, leading several participants to feel guilty when working from home and to fear appearing less dedicated. This dynamic mirrors Sturges’ (2012) and Halford’s (2005) observations that workplace cultures that privilege visibility and long hours can undermine the protective potential of flexible work policies. This insight extends existing boundary management research by showing that hybrid work introduces belonging as an additional boundary mechanism.

5.2 Boundary (Mis)Fit

Building on the contextual conditions outlined above, this section examines how young professionals experienced moments of boundary fit, when work arrangements aligned with their preferences, and boundary misfit, when contextual constraints impeded preferred enactments. Consistent with Kossek and Lautsch (2012) and Olson-Buchanan and Boswell (2006), misfit arose when desired segmentation or flexibility was overridden by environmental demands.

A central pattern of misfit emerged in relation to participants’ strong preference for segmenting work from non-work. While many valued hybrid work for the flexibility it provided, they struggled to maintain preferred separation in practice due to environmental conditions such as small living spaces, domestic distractions, and digital accessibility. These constraints limited their capacity to enact segmentation and created a mismatch between intentions and actual

behaviour, echoing Allen et al.'s (2014) observation that boundary preferences often exceed individuals' ability to implement them. Participants described moments where work tasks drifted into evenings or where the presence of a partner disrupted focus, illustrating a lack of boundary control (Allen and Eby, 2015) and challenging earlier assumptions that individuals can freely exercise agency in setting their own boundaries (Clark, 2000).

Boundary misfit also surfaced in relation to technological connectivity. Even when participants preferred to disconnect, subtle expectations of responsiveness-experienced as implicit norms rather than explicit demands-led to unwanted permeability across domains. This reflects Kossek's (2016) and Bathini and Kandathil's (2015) findings that teleworkers may internalise a moral pressure to remain available, treating responsiveness as a form of compensation for the privilege of flexibility. Participants frequently encountered tensions between their desire for protected personal time and their felt obligation to monitor messages, generating psychological strain.

At the same time, participants experienced moments of fit. For instance, home days enabled focused work and integration of energising non-work activities, aligning with their preference for selective permeability. These episodes demonstrate that hybrid work can support boundary alignment when contextual conditions match personal values and preferences (Fonner and Stache, 2012). Across the interviews, boundary misfit was felt most acutely when preferences for segmentation, identity needs, and environmental constraints collided. These misalignments produced feelings of guilt, strain, and diminished detachment (Kossek, 2016), reinforcing that hybrid work's flexibility was a double-edged sword: enabling autonomy in principle while complicating boundary enactment in practice.

5.3 Boundary Strategies

In response to the moments of fit and misfit described above, young professionals actively experimented with different ways of managing their boundaries. Rather than relying on a single approach, they described assembling and adjusting a mix of tactics over time, reflecting how hybrid work required ongoing negotiation rather than fixed routines. This aligns with Kreiner et al. (2009) and Kossek and Lautsch (2012), who portray individuals as active shapers of their own boundaries rather than passive recipients of workplace conditions.

Physical boundary management strategies were commonly used, as also demonstrated by Allen et al. (2021), but in our material, they often appeared to be the least effective. As Fonner and Stache (2012) underline, access to the resources needed to enact boundary strategies is shaped by socio-economic factors. Our findings reflect this. Kossek (2016) likewise highlights that limited spatial or material resources can hinder employees' ability to implement effective home-based boundary strategies. This may suggest that organizations with hybrid work policies may need to support such employees by providing tools or guidance to help mitigate these constraints.

We observed that behavioural strategies were most used and often more effective than psychological ones. This likely reflects the difficulty of simply detaching from work, whereas behavioural tactics such as limiting ICT notifications offer concrete actions that make boundary-setting more achievable in practice. In line with Michaelides et al.'s (2024) observation that working from home may require more effortful segmentation strategies, some participants described consciously developing tactics related to their mobile phone use for non-work purposes. Working from the office was sometimes experienced as a "panopticon" type of control system, where participants felt observed by organizational members and therefore used their devices less. When physical or behavioural strategies at home failed, often due to lost focus and phone use, participants sought out professional environments such as universities, acting as a different panopticon: the professional atmosphere itself seemed to reduce distractions and support more focused work.

Generally, participants with strong segmentation preferences were those who struggled the most to construct boundary management in line with their preferences. They found it difficult to control permeability between work and non-work domains, and frequently experienced challenges in self-regulation (Allen et al, 2015). By contrast, participants with strong integration preferences generally seemed better able to psychologically distinguish between domains. Although they occasionally faced boundary management challenges, they still valued the opportunity to integrate work and non-work when this integration remained under their control. Several participants deliberately developed strategies to integrate selected aspects of the non-work domain into the work domain because this produced positive work-life experiences.

5.4 Work-life Experiences

When misaligned preferences and strategies undermined their ability to work effectively, several participants recognized how this caused productivity losses throughout the workday, which in turn led them to postpone tasks to non-office hours. This postponement created guilt and psychological strain due to a lack of work detachment (Kossek, 2016), further diminishing their perceived impact on their work-life experiences.

While participants who struggled to set boundaries reported experiencing conflict between work and non-work, those who managed to align strategies with their preferences often described considerable enrichment, with positive spillover effects (Kossek, 2016) for their well-being. Building on Purba et al. (2024), our findings indicate that many young professionals experienced productivity gains when working from home, noting benefits in both work tasks and non-work activities, as time saved on commuting could be redirected toward household responsibilities, personal routines, or rest. Flexibility, particularly the ability to work from anywhere and match working hours to energy levels and daily rhythms, was frequently described as a key driver of enrichment. Another important benefit concerned the ability to “reload” their social battery while still enjoying the socialization and collective belonging associated with occasional on-site work.

Interestingly, despite the challenges linked to hybrid arrangements, most participants regarded hybrid work as their preferred format compared to fully on-site or fully remote arrangements. Many identified strategies that enabled hybrid work to function positively, which we argue is largely because hybrid work allowed them to design their arrangements in ways that aligned with their lifestyles and the conditions associated with being a young professional.

These observations refine the boundary literature by illustrating that enrichment in hybrid work is not simply a by-product of flexibility, but a function of perceived control over boundary enactment, thereby advancing theoretical explanations of why hybrid work can be experienced as both liberating and demanding.

5.5 The Changing Meaning of Work and Workplace

Interviews with participants revealed a shifting meaning of both work and the workplace. Several participants framed the physical workplace as a site for social connection and belonging, echoing research showing that early-career employees use work to form identities and signal ambition (Farrugia, 2021; Modestino et al., 2019). The workplace also functioned as an opportunity to psychologically and physically detach from work after hours: once the laptop was closed at the office, it was not reopened later, and work permeated the home domain to a lesser extent. Some participants further noted the symbolic aspect of being on-site, arguing that physical presence conferred a greater “stamp” of ambition than performing the same tasks from home, where efforts were less visible. In this sense, the office became not merely a space for social interaction but a stage for performing the professional identity early-career workers seek to construct (Farrugia, 2021).

In contrast, working from the home domain sometimes increased productivity, as participants were less exposed to co-worker distractions, and more time could be used for household tasks due to the absence of commuting. This matches findings that young professionals value flexibility and the ability to organize work around personally meaningful routines rather than merely occupying time at the office (Gabrielova and Buchko, 2021; Nieżurawska et al., 2023). However, we also observed participants who experienced reduced productivity at home. In these cases, diminished self-control in resisting distractions such as laundry or phones, combined with the absence of social monitoring from co-workers, appeared to undermine focus.

The possibility of alternating between sites, reaping social benefits at work and productivity or recovery benefits at home, led hybrid work to be framed as a vehicle for individualism, enabling participants to shape work around lifestyle aspirations. Flexibility was viewed as a mechanism that made such individuality possible, allowing combinations of work with interests such as travel. Work thus appeared to shift from being a separate sphere to becoming an enabler of lifestyle, aligning with accounts of young professionals who integrate work with exploration, self-development, and personal interests (Modestino et al., 2019; Gabrielova and Buchko, 2021). This also corresponds with research showing that highly educated younger employees value arrangements that support autonomy and independence (Nieżurawska et al., 2023) and Kossek et al. (2006), who emphasise psychological control and autonomy as central to wellbeing. For some

participants, the very flexibility that afforded autonomy also generated identity-related pressures, suggesting that perceived autonomy may coexist with symbolic obligations that produce misfit even when preferences and behaviours appear aligned.

Employers' offering of hybrid work also carried symbolic value. Permission to work remotely became a proxy for trust, a lens through which participants interpreted how their employer regarded them. Hybrid flexibility enabled some to claim a subject position as valued and competent, whereas restrictions were read as signals of mistrust or surveillance. While the literature touches upon subjective interpretations of WLB arrangements (Guest, 2002; Fisher et al., 2009), this symbolic dimension appears underexplored and indicates that hybrid work functions not only as an operational arrangement but also as a communicative act shaping identity and relational dynamics. In early-career contexts, where work is central to expressing authenticity and testing possible selves (Farrugia, 2021), such signals become particularly consequential. This contributes to boundary theory by showing that hybrid work arrangements carry symbolic weight that shapes identity formation. It furthermore suggests that boundaries are not only behavioral tools but also communicative resources through which early-career employees make sense of their place in the organization.

However, organizations risk weakening identity construction, culture, and the sense of “we” when those who embody these elements are sparsely present on-site. Employers with strong brand identities, which may enhance attractiveness to talent, should consider how such risks might be mitigated while retaining remote work options. More broadly, if hybrid arrangements reinforce individual autonomy, how will the collective sense of “we” be affected?

6. Discussion

This chapter presents the study's conclusion (6.1), theoretical contributions (6.2), practical implications (6.3), limitations (6.4), and avenues for future research (6.5).

6.1 Conclusion

Our findings suggest that the dominant work-family lens in work-life research fails to adequately reflect the experiences of young professionals in hybrid roles. Classic formulations position non-work, especially family responsibilities, as a source of interference, framing permeability from

non-work to work as an unwanted intrusion and a threat to productivity (Clark, 2000; Ashforth et al., 2000). This assumption has also influenced contemporary boundary scholarship, where asymmetric permeability is typically interpreted as protection of the more valued domain (Kossek and Lautsch, 2012). By contrast, the young professionals in our study actively initiated and welcomed non-work permeating their workday, describing such integration as energising, restorative, and supportive of both performance and wellbeing. Crucially, this was not because non-work was more salient or “worth protecting,” but because chosen integration served as a form of mutual enrichment, a way to sustain motivation, identity, and emotional equilibrium across both spheres.

Viewed through our conceptual framework, these findings illuminate how personal factors (values, identity, life stage) and environmental conditions (hybrid flexibility, spatial constraints, digital reachability, visibility pressures) interact to shape boundary preferences, fit, and misfit. Hybrid work afforded opportunities for selective integration, yet contextual constraints frequently undermined participants’ ability to contain work expansion into personal time. This made permeability deeply directional, where permeability of non-work into work was experienced as enriching, while permeability of work into non-work represented loss of control. Moments of fit emerged when participants could use hybrid arrangements to align boundaries with personal rhythms and identities. Misfit surfaced when organisational norms or material conditions restricted this agency. In response, participants engaged in adaptive, improvisational boundary strategies, that aimed not simply to defend domains but to restore psychological control.

This study shows that hybrid work transforms boundary management from a question of preventing conflict to one of managing expansion and cultivating enrichment, revealing a more dynamic, life-stage sensitive understanding of how young professionals construct meaningful work-life arrangements.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution

First, we offer a conceptual refinement that challenges how boundary preferences are typically understood in hybrid work contexts. Segmentation and integration orientations were initially treated as relatively stable (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Ashforth et al., 2000), while later studies

acknowledged that preferences could shift and take asymmetrical forms (Kossek and Lautsch, 2012; Olson-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006). However, asymmetry has typically been viewed as a reactive adjustment to contextual pressures rather than a chosen preference. Our findings extend this understanding by showing that early-career employees deliberately construct and favour asymmetrical boundary configurations. Rather than reluctantly accepting permeability in one direction, young professionals intentionally design uneven boundaries that support identity formation and lifestyle ambitions. This challenges the assumption that balance is a normative ideal and opens space to theorise boundary preferences as intentionally uneven rather than equilibrium-seeking.

A second contribution concerns the individual-centred analytical lens adopted in this study. Existing scholarship typically embeds boundary management within organisational or family-centric frames, thereby obscuring how boundaries are interpreted at the level of personal meaning-making. By foregrounding young professionals' subjective interpretations of hybrid work, we extend theoretical understanding of how individuals construct the significance of flexibility, presence, and autonomy, and how these interpretations shape boundary enactment. In line with Dumas and Perry-Smith's (2018) call for more attention to personal contexts in boundary research, the study demonstrates that sensemaking itself is a central mechanism through which work and non-work boundaries are formed and sustained.

Third, this thesis refines Cobb et al.'s (2025) conceptualisation of boundary management fit by emphasising that it is not boundary strategies themselves but the alignment between preferred and enacted boundaries that determines whether boundaries operate as developmental resources or sources of strain. Existing models acknowledge contextual conditions, yet they do not fully account for the identity-related mechanisms that shape whether individuals experience fit. By demonstrating that boundary enactment is intertwined with identity construction, the study shows that boundaries function as symbolic and relational artefacts. Incorporating identity into the concept of fit offers a more holistic theoretical account of why individuals pursue certain boundary configurations and how these configurations become consequential in hybrid work environments.

6.3 Practical Implications

The findings offer practical implications for organizations and HR functions employing young professionals and designing hybrid arrangements.

First, hybrid work arrangements interact differently with individuals' boundary-management strategies. Young professionals vary in their preferred levels of integration and segmentation, and these preferences shape both how they use hybrid work and how they experience it. For hybrid arrangements to function successfully, organisations must therefore design them at the level of the individual user. Hybrid work becomes an individual hygiene factor. If the arrangement does not accommodate employees' personal boundary preferences, it risks becoming a source of friction rather than support. Recognising and adapting to these differences, rather than imposing a uniform model, is essential for practitioners.

Second, our findings show that unclear hybrid expectations lead employees to question what is acceptable. This ambiguity can foster stress, perceptions of organizational hypocrisy, and a sense that working from home is permitted in theory but discouraged in practice. We therefore recommend organizations to explicitly communicate guidelines that clarify when and why employees are expected onsite, and what constitutes appropriate professional behaviour when working remotely. This can help reduce cognitive burden, support healthier boundary enactment, and align organisational intentions with employee interpretations.

Third, organisations should reconsider the role of the physical workplace. Our findings indicate that as hybrid arrangements shift where work occurs, the workplace becomes less a site for task execution and more an arena for culture-building, identity reinforcement, and social connection. Yet our findings show that young professionals who come to the office seeking collaboration or belonging may instead find an empty or fragmented workspace. To prevent the erosion of workplace meaning, practitioners should deliberately cultivate opportunities for collective presence that enable identification and belonging to develop.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are subject to several limitations. First, we examined an inherently subjective process. As external observers, we were not able to fully access participants' sensemaking processes.

Second, despite efforts to remain faithful to participants' meaning structures and to reduce interviewer bias through careful methodological design, some degree of subjective interpretation is unavoidable. The analysis of participants' narratives may have led us to accentuate or downplay certain elements of their sensemaking, for example, the extent to which hybrid work arrangements were perceived to influence their sense of identity in the workplace. The interpretive lens of us as researchers inevitably shaped the final presentation of the findings.

Third, our sample includes both full-time and part-time employees. While this variation may, in theory, introduce differences in how individuals experience hybrid work and manage work-life boundaries, we did not observe systematic distinctions in our interview data. We did not separate respondents based on the number of hours worked, nor did we control for this variable, as our qualitative design prioritised depth of experience over comparative measurement. Ideally, a more homogeneous sample, either exclusively full-time or part-time workers, would have enabled clearer attribution of differences to work hours alone. However, such sampling was not feasible due to access limitations.

Finally, the study does not aim to examine long-term changes in boundary practices, as data were collected at a single point in time. This temporal delimitation precludes conclusions about how interpretations and practices may evolve as careers progress, but it remains appropriate given the exploratory purpose and resource constraints of the thesis.

6.5 Future Research

This study highlights several avenues for future research that may advance understanding of boundary management in hybrid work contexts, particularly for young professionals navigating the early and formative stages of their careers. We hope that our findings encourage further inquiry into how boundary theory can illuminate the complexities of emerging work practices and identity construction in this group.

Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to examine how young professionals' boundary preferences evolve over time and how these developments interact with changing professional identities and meanings attributed to the workplace. Boundary preferences are unlikely to remain static - they may shift as individuals accumulate experience, renegotiate work expectations, or transition into new life and career stages. A longitudinal design, incorporating repeated qualitative interviews, as Bell et al. (2019) suggest, would enable researchers to track how boundary enactment and sense-making evolve as young professionals settle into hybrid work or encounter new contextual demands. Complementary diary or experience-sampling methods could further capture day-to-day fluctuations in boundary management and provide insights into how boundaries are enacted, for instance when hybrid workers respond to after-hours messages, switch locations, or disengage from work. Such designs would clarify when, how, and why individuals renegotiate boundaries and deepen understanding of the long-term implications of hybrid work for identity formation, organisational attachment, and the stability of boundary practices.

Moreover, our study raises critical questions about how hybrid work practices reshape organisational culture, shared meaning-making, and employees' experiences of belonging and collaboration. This is because our findings suggest that young professionals often used flexible arrangements to prioritise personal convenience over collective engagement. Future research could explore hybrid work's impact on organisational culture and belonging. We align with Allen et al. (2015) in arguing that understanding the effectiveness of remote work in hybrid arrangements requires careful attention to the nature of the work itself and the contextual factors shaping how hybrid practices are enacted.

Finally, future studies would benefit from examining boundary management using quantitative methods that account for differences in working hours. While our study included both full-time and part-time employees, we did not control for this variation. Investigating whether hours worked influence boundary enactment, preferences, or perceptions of work-life experiences would provide a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics. Additionally, a comparative study between young professionals and more established workers could illuminate how career stage, accumulated experience, and differing life circumstances shape boundary practices and interpretations of hybrid work.

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8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Use of Generative AI

Generative AI has played a supporting role in the feedback, writing, and research process of this study, in line with the Stockholm School of Economics' guidelines on the responsible use of artificial intelligence and large language models (LLMs).

8.1.1 Purpose and Scope of AI Use

Throughout the thesis process, we have used ChatGPT as a linguistic and structural support tool. Its use was limited to improving language flow, grammar, and clarity of formulation. We have not plagiarized or copied any AI-generated text. Instead, AI suggestions were used as inspiration and were always critically reviewed, rewritten, and adapted to our own reasoning and writing style. In certain cases, we prompted ChatGPT to help us refine formulations of our own original text. In these instances, we explicitly instructed the model not to add or remove any information, and we carefully reviewed all suggestions before integrating them. ChatGPT also provided general feedback on the structure of our interview guide, the combination of theoretical frameworks, and the conceptual distinctions between theories, such as border and boundary theory. Importantly, we have never entered any copyrighted material or the work of other authors into the model. When dividing writing tasks between us, we occasionally used ChatGPT to identify potential repetitions or overlaps in the text to ensure internal coherence. This process allowed us to maintain consistency in language and style across chapters.

8.1.2 Ethical Considerations and Data Protection

We have taken consistent precautions to protect the integrity of our interviewees. No personal details, names, or identifiable information were ever entered into ChatGPT or any other AI tool. All prompts were anonymized and formulated at a general level. This approach ensured full compliance with GDPR and the SSE ethical research guidelines regarding data protection and confidentiality.

8.1.3 Identified Risks and Mitigation Strategies

We have identified four main risks with using AI in this report, and we present strategies used to mitigate these risks:

Risk of breaching confidentiality or personal data protection

There is an inherent risk that sensitive qualitative data could be compromised if entered into an AI system. To mitigate this risk, we have strictly avoided inputting any personal or identifying data into AI tools. All content was anonymized, and AI was used only for general text refinement.

Risk of overreliance on AI in the analytical process

There is a risk that excessive dependence on AI for interpretation could weaken our analytical contribution as researchers. To reduce this risk, we solely used AI for linguistic and structural support. All theoretical development, coding, and analysis were conducted independently by the authors.

Risk of Bias or Inaccuracies in AI Output

AI-generated text can contain factual errors or reflect biases embedded in training data. However, we carefully reviewed all AI-generated suggestions, fact-checked, and cross-validated academic sources against them before inclusion to mitigate this risk.

Risk of Unintentional Plagiarism or Lack of Originality

AI can produce text similar to existing sources without proper attribution. We did not use any AI-generated text verbatim. ChatGPT was used only for stylistic feedback, while all analytical and theoretical content was developed by us and verified manually.

8.1.4 Reflections on Learning and Outcomes

We perceive that using ChatGPT throughout the writing process has enhanced the clarity, precision, and coherence of our thesis. It has helped us save time on mechanical editing tasks, allowing us to dedicate more effort to analysis and critical reflection. Importantly, interacting with AI required us to re-read and refine our work multiple times, which deepened our understanding of both the content and the nuances of academic writing.

8.2 Appendix 2: Interview Guide With Questions

For the interviewer:

- Explain that this interview will be recorded, all personal info and company name redacted, and to interrupt if questions.
- Give 1 or one-sentence overview of what our research is.
- Ask for consent to record and inform when recording.

Introduction and Demographic Questions:

1. What does WLB mean to you?
2. Tell us a bit about your background.
 - a. Age
 - b. Gender
 - c. Current and previous pursuing degrees and schools
3. Tell us a bit about yourself professionally.
 - a. Current workplace and position
 - b. Main daily responsibilities?
 - c. Organization, industry, and field of the workplace

Work Arrangement Factors:

1. What does your typical weekly work schedule look like?
2. What are your current hybrid work arrangements?
 - a. Do you feel you have control or influence over when and where you work? Why?
3. What is the nature of the arrangement? Are there any organizational policies regulating hybrid work (approximately how often and how much)?
 - a. Is it formal/ informal?
 - b. Concrete or flexible?
 - c. Do you decide?
4. How does distance work look for you? Coffee shop/office, etc. What's the location?
 - i. Habits
 - ii. Materials enabling the hybrid work: desk, chair, phone, laptop.

Questions Regarding Boundary Preferences:

1. How do you manage the boundaries between your work and non-work life?
2. Does working hybrid influence your boundary management? If so, how?
3. Do you have a way of managing boundaries between your work and non-work life when working from a distance?

Questions Regarding WLB:

1. Do you feel that working in a hybrid environment influences your WLB in any way?
2. In the research, they find that some people prefer to separate/integrate their work and non-work roles. What would you say your preference is? Do you have a preference?

- a. Are there specific actions or measures you take to separate/integrate, work/ non-work domains?
 - i. If yes: why and what actions do you take?
 - ii. If no: why?

YP' Perspective

1. Do you perceive any impacts of hybrid work on your career?
 - a. Does working hybrid influence you socially at work?
 - b. Does it affect your sense of identity in the workplace?
 - c. As a young professional?
 - d. Boss/coworkers/ college
2. Does the hybrid arrangement impact you when considering an employer?
 - a. Why?
3. Do you have a preference for hybrid, fully remote, or fully on-site work, and why?
4. What advice would you give to organizations looking to hire young professionals regarding hybrid work arrangements?

End of the Interview.

1. Do you have any questions for us?
2. How did you experience this interview?
3. Do you have any feedback for us regarding how this interview was conducted?

8.3 Appendix 3: Interviewee Sample

Table 1: Interviewee Sample.

Nr	Name	Age	Gender	BSc Degree / University	Year Graduated (BSc)	MSc Degree / University	Year Graduated (MSc)	Industry	Position
1	Aaron	25	Male	Lund University	2024	Stockholm School of Economics	Still studying	Electric car	Executive Trainee
2	Felix	23	Male	Stockholm University	2024	Stockholm University	Still studying	Food	Sales Developer
3	Hassan	24	Male	Stockholm School of Economics	2024	Stockholm School of Economics	Still studying	Industry / Mining	Executive Trainee
4	Harini	24	Female	Delhi University	2023	Stockholm School of Economics	Still studying	Financial Services	Digitalization Intern
5	Hamid	29	Male	University of Budapest	2023	Stockholm School of Economics	Still studying	Industry / Mining	Executive Trainee
6	Isabel	24	Female	Ecole de Management Léonard de Vinci	2023	Stockholm University	2025	Research / Advisory	Revenue Developer
7	Jack	23	Male	Södertörn University	2023	-	-	Research / Advisory	Revenue Developer
8	John	25	Male	Karolinska Institutet	2023	Karolinska Institutet	2025	Management Consultancy	Management Consultant
9	Joshua	23	Male	Stockholm School of Economics	2025	Stockholm School of Economics	2025	Management Consulting	Management Consultant
10	Kim	24	Female	Royal Institute of Technology	2024	Royal Institute of Technology	2024	Fintech	Product Expert
11	Kiara	23	Female	Stockholm University	2024	-	-	Research / Advisory	Revenue Developer

12	Karla	24	Female	Uppsala University	2023	Karolinska Institutet	Still studying	Life Sciences	Consultant
13	Livia	25	Female	Stockholm School of Economics	2024	-	-	Management Consulting	Management Consultant
14	Moa	24	Female	Stockholm School of Economics	2023	Stockholm School of Economics	2025	Food	Product development
15	Mona	24	Female	Stockholm School of Economics	2023	Uppsala University	Still studying	Research	Retail Analyst
16	Paul	24	Male	Lund University	2024	Stockholm School of Economics	Still studying	E-commerce	Executive Intern
17	Sanna	31	Female	Alborz University	2023	Stockholm School of Economics	Still studying	Academia	Project Manager
18	Selma	24	Female	University of Hawaii	2024	Royal Institute of Technology	Still studying	Life Sciences	Management Consultant

8.4 Appendix 4: Quotes Gathered from the Interviews

Table 2: Quotes Gathered from the Interviews.

This table of quotes has served to guide our analysis, beyond those quotes that were chosen to be included in section 4.

Interviewee	Quote
Aaron	"I like feeling part of society. [...] At the office, there are colleagues; at a café or library, there are people around me, even if I'm not interacting with them".
Felix	"It's perceived better to work in the office. I would assume if I want to climb up the career ladder, people definitely want to see that I'm also being there and showing my face in the office and talking to people".
Felix	"Small talk is quite important to get the feeling of the people you're working with, because otherwise it's lost, you don't necessarily know what others are doing or have a vibe with them".
Felix	"It's perceived better to work in the office. [...] showing your face and talking to people matters if you want to climb the career ladder".
Hassan	"A big part of career progression is office politics and human interactions, so it's important to be on site and connect with people".
Isabel	"People like to come to the office because they know they don't have to. [...] they want to see people because everybody has good relationships and the freedom to do what they want".
Isabel	"When you're starting a career... it's important to have relationships with colleagues. [...] to talk with people and be around people that are not your personal life".
Jack	"If you're going to work fully in the office, you need the social aspect set up a social club that plans things, that's how you'd get young professionals to work five days a week in the office".
Jack	"I would choose hybrid over remote, but I still wouldn't take full in-office".
Joshua	"Most of our client work is digital, and as I work with companies that are usually not in Stockholm, we can do the meetings online. I do most of my work on my computer, so I can work from a lot of places."
Joshua	"I like being at work, but a no-work-from-home policy would bother me. [...] Hybrid is positive to balance a trip or time at my summer house, though it's not very important to me".
Joshua	"They realized people who worked from home didn't really get into the work culture; as I'm new, they want me to be there a lot".
Kiara	"I can work anywhere inside the EU, anywhere in Sweden for sure. No one really cares when or where you're working, as long as you deliver."
Kiara	"When I've logged off, my weekends are for me only. I put my Teams status as 'Do not disturb,' and then everything gets blocked out".
Kiara	"I don't think I'll ever be open to a completely in-person job ever again. [...] For the next five years, I will require to be hybrid... it really aligns with my lifestyle".
Kiara	"There are times that I do miss having a bigger corporate vibe. [...] I'd want more team building, more community, and I think that's impacted by the hybrid nature of our jobs".
Kiara	"There isn't such a tangible identity when you are hybrid... you are almost just like a digital number... when you're working from home, I don't really feel like I'm working for [company]".
Kim	"I'd be sad without the option, but it wouldn't change my career path; hybrid helps me recharge at home and then be more social at the office".

Livia	“During weeks from home, I’m missing out on some key conversations. [...] those usually come organically when just talking to people. For fulfilling social needs, it’s not very good to work from home”.
Mona	“There are people who have started working at my office that I haven’t even met. [...] People kind of forget about you in the long run when you work too much from home”.
Sanna	“At home, I don’t waste time on social talk; I just sit and finish everything faster.”
Sanna	“The days that I choose to go to the office are usually the days that lots of people are there, so that I can actually know the atmosphere”.
Aaron	“It’s not necessarily about home. It’s more about the room. If I’m at my parents’ place where they have more rooms than one, I can enjoy sitting there and studying, for instance, in another room than my bedroom. I think it has something to do with where I sleep and where I work if I see my bed, because that’s the problem with my student apartment, it’s so small”.
Aaron	“I don’t view my work as something completely separate from my private professional distinction. If it’s not about sensitive information, I kind of enjoy it. It’s like when you’re studying as a university student. Even if I’m sitting down, I might be sitting down studying with two or three friends”.
Felix	“(It) technically means that you have everything sorted out in your work life and private life, and that it kind of balances each other and that they don’t tangle each other together.”
Felix	“Friends I invite to, so it’s basically a room. It’s also quite spacious, but where I do a lot of stuff also think, OK, how can I separate it? Because my laptops are here, my phones are here, but here’s also a place where I want to relax or sleep. But that might not be ideal, but it’s the only place I can keep them”.
John	“For me, work should definitely be separated from my life, but my life maybe should not be separated from my work. It’s kind of like a double standard thing”.
Hamid	“I should work from 9:00 or 10:00 AM to 2:00 or 3:00 PM. During this time only I focus only on my work, so I won’t do anything about my personal life”.
Hamid	“I have a different email and Microsoft Teams account for my work. When I’m not working, I turn that off and focus on my personal life”.
Harini	“We are super transparent with that I have had so many thesis meetings from the office. So I am kind of mixing stuff and then, during lunch, of course, that’s lunch”.
Harini	“I usually don’t have boundaries with non-work, I’m happy to mix it with my work. But I do not like to mix my work with my non-working hours”.
Hariri	“I would not mix my work and personal life because I’m not getting paid for that. [...] I can deal with that during my working hours, but not now. Even if they pay me, I will still not do that.”
Hassan	“Unless there’s a high level of urgency, I would never do it from home. If I’m working, then I can’t scroll on my phone. I don’t think that working hybrid is good for my career in the long term, as I would have to create artificial boundaries, which can be substantial and an additional mental drain”.
Hassan	“Working from the office is my general preference. When you leave the office, it’s done; you’re not working anymore. The problem with working remotely is that sometimes that separation is hard to create”.
Isabel	“I’m not going to share my whole life with my colleagues, but I think it’s important, especially when you’re working at home, to have relationships with the people you’re working with”.
Isabel	“I prefer when people know a bit about my life, not everything, but knowing that people in the office know a bit of me makes it more comfortable to come to the office and feel that we’re the same”.
Joshua	“What I try to do now a lot is leave my computer at work, it forces you not to work when you get home. I try not to have my personal stuff on the desk”.
Livia	“It’s so easy to be available when you can be available, you probably should sometimes have to be more explicit, ‘I’m going home now, and I won’t be available until tomorrow.’”
Livia	“Sometimes it’s more like the other way around, my work life spills into my personal life, I check my phone when I’m out with friends in a bar”.

Paul	"My preference is to blend them, it would feel like a waste if the largest part of your life, work, is not something to be shared or enjoyed with other people".
Paul	"In business, you're almost forced to integrate different things, spending time with people, going to events with your friends, these things sort of blend".
Aaron	"I realized when I work from home, that I'm more focused, less distracted by people coming by or random conversations."
Felix	"When I'm in my non-work times, it's hard for me not to think about work. Sometimes it just comes up, or I have ideas, so then I write them down".
Hariri	"Hybrid with my own flexibility... not forcing fixed days. [...] If I had four job options, I'd choose the most flexible; if not, I'd take the job but plan to leave in two or three years".
Hassan	"I have a to-do list in my notebook that I carry with me, so if an idea comes up, I write it down. Sometimes it's difficult not to have clear boundaries, for example, applying for jobs while doing projects for my current company".
Isabel	"Honestly, I'm not like creating boundaries; sometimes I'm thinking about what I need to do tomorrow. It doesn't mean it's negative; sometimes I'm happy because today I did something good".
Isabel	"When you're too much on remote, you could have the habit of being in your bed checking emails. I don't think it's too bad, but it can create habits where you can check everywhere".
Kiara	"I have a work laptop, but I use my private phone to call just because it's easier and I'm more reachable on my phone".
John	"I just shut down my computer, and then I was like, okay, bye. Then I put my setup aside and continue life. Our team also writes in the chat 'hey, I'm logging out', so it's very confirmed".
Livia	"I don't check my computer on Saturdays or Sundays, and I also turn off my cell phone".
Moa	"I really don't like spreading out my work supplies all over the home. I have my spot for it".
Moa	"When I'm not working, I shut down the screen, pack my things in a tote bag, and put it in the wardrobe so I don't see it. I would never want to live with traces of my work".
Selma	"When I'm working from distance, I like to go to a coffee shop, then home, maybe the library sometimes from the car or train".
Aaron	"Working from home lets me travel somewhere over the weekend, get Friday from home distance."
Aaron	"Hybrid improves my WLB. [...] I'd prefer on-site with informal flexibility to work from home when needed. [...] make sure you can incorporate some kind of flexible arrangement".
Aaron	"You could say the more you work remotely, the higher the propensity to socialize with colleagues when you're actually at work".
Hamid	"University has a more professional atmosphere when I am at home, it's hard to manage time because sometimes I need to cook or maybe family calls. My home atmosphere is not professional".
Hamid	"I've tried to make a separate space for my work from my personal life or family, or school, so I can concentrate more on my work better".
Hariri	"When I'm working from home, I can take a break to make lunch or go for a walk, and that makes me more balanced for the rest of the day."
Hassan	"Integrating work and non-work gives more flexibility - that's what I would like".
Joshua	"Normally speaking, working hybrid wouldn't really affect me. For me, it's more a psychological thing that I want to switch off from work, not that I am physically not present".
Joshua	"I did realize when I worked from home on a Friday that I started getting extraordinarily unproductive and just gravitated to doing something else. The boundaries kind of melt together, you need to be more disciplined at home".
Joshua	"It's boring to work from home. You miss out on unplanned meetings and kitchen chats... you notice being alone much more than in a room with other people".
Kiara	"I like not having to take the metro every day; that's easily an hour I can put somewhere else."

Moa	"It's beneficial to choose if I want to work off-site or on-site. As long as no one is forcing me, I'm happy, it's about my flexibility and autonomy".
Mona	"When I'm home, I eat better and drink more water; it's small, but I feel healthier overall."
Sanna	"At work, I would like it to be more integrated because it would make me feel better. [...] If I see a family picture or I take a call, and I get good news, for example, or I hear a warm voice from my father, I would be more cheered up."
John	"Usually we work around nine to five, but it's relatively flexible. We can take off an hour early and finish that hour at home later, or come in earlier and leave earlier".
Selma	"I can travel on Friday and work from the train or the car. [...] I wouldn't have been able to do that with designated hours in person".
Aaron	"I like feeling part of society. [...] At the office, there are colleagues; at a café or library, there are people around me, even if I'm not interacting with them".
Felix	"It's perceived better to work in the office. I would assume if I want to climb up the career ladder, people definitely want to see that I'm also being there and showing my face in the office and talking to people".
Felix	"Small talk is quite important to get the feeling of the people you're working with, because otherwise it's lost, you don't necessarily know what others are doing or have a vibe with them".
Felix	"It's perceived better to work in the office. [...] showing your face and talking to people matters if you want to climb the career ladder".
Hassan	"A big part of career progression is office politics and human interactions, so it's important to be on site and connect with people".
Isabel	"People like to come to the office because they know they don't have to. [...] they want to see people because everybody has good relationships and the freedom to do what they want".
Isabel	"When you're starting a career... it's important to have relationships with colleagues. [...] to talk with people and be around people that are not your personal life".
Jack	"If you're going to work fully in the office, you need the social aspect set up a social club that plans things, that's how you'd get young professionals to work five days a week in the office".
Jack	"I would choose hybrid over remote, but I still wouldn't take full in-office".
Joshua	"Most of our client work is digital, and as I work with companies that are usually not in Stockholm, we can do the meetings online. I do most of my work on my computer, so I can work from a lot of places."
Joshua	"I like being at work, but a no-WFH policy would bother me. [...] Hybrid is positive to balance a trip or time at my summer house, though it's not very important to me".
Joshua	"They realized people who worked from home didn't really get into the work culture; as I'm new, they want me to be there a lot".
Kiara	"I can work anywhere inside the EU, anywhere in Sweden for sure. No one really cares when or where you're working, as long as you deliver."
Kiara	"When I've logged off, my weekends are for me only. I put my Teams status as 'Do not disturb,' and then everything gets blocked out".
Kiara	"I don't think I'll ever be open to a completely in-person job ever again. [...] For the next five years, I will require to be hybrid... it really aligns with my lifestyle".
Kiara	"There are times that I do miss having a bigger corporate vibe. [...] I'd want more team building, more community, and I think that's impacted by the hybrid nature of our jobs".
Kiara	"There isn't such a tangible identity when you are hybrid... you are almost just like a digital number... when you're working from home, I don't really feel like I'm working for [company]".
Kim	"I'd be sad without the option, but it wouldn't change my career path; hybrid helps me recharge at home and then be more social at the office".

Livia	“During weeks from home, I’m missing out on some key conversations. [...] those usually come organically when just talking to people. For fulfilling social needs, it’s not very good to work from home”.
Mona	“There are people who have started working at my office that I haven’t even met. [...] People kind of forget about you in the long run when you work too much from home”.
Sanna	“At home, I don’t waste time on social talk; I just sit and finish everything faster.”
Sanna	“The days that I choose to go to the office are usually the days that lots of people are there, so that I can actually know the atmosphere”.