Chapter 56
Boundaryless Work and the Role of Mobile ICT

Ragnhild Mogren
Stockholm University, Sweden

Camilla Thunborg
Stockholm University, Sweden

ABSTRACT

The change of structures of work towards fewer boundaries in time, space and tasks are sometimes referred to as boundaryless work. ICT is pointed out as one cause of this tendency. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the role of mobile ICT in the forming of the borderland between work and non-work and the identities formed in relation to this borderland: how is mobile ICT used in work and non-work, how is this use related to the forming of a borderland between work and non-work, what are the characteristics of the identities formed in this borderland? Narratives of experience of mobile ICT practices are analysed by means of social theories. The results show that mobile ICT is used as a boundary object between work and non-work. In distinguishing between functions and artefacts, between time and space, different identities are formed: extended work identity, border identity and boundaryless identity.

INTRODUCTION

The present chapter focuses on adults using mobile ICT in work and non-work practices and the identities formed in relation to the borderland between work and non-work. Several researchers have pointed out the importance of understanding adult learning as ongoing processes in daily life (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Engeström & Miettinen 1999; Sawchuk, 2003). The forming of identity in relation to learning has been elaborated the last decades, especially in theories where learning is defined as participation in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Most studies concerning this view of learning have focused on already existing practices with a long historical and cultural tradition. In this chapter, social practices formed by the use of mobile ICT are discussed, leading up to questions about what a social practice is as well as how it is formed in the daily life of working adults.

BACKGROUND

The changes of structures of work towards fewer boundaries in time, space and tasks are sometimes referred to as boundaryless work (Allvin et al., 2006; Hagström, 2007; Ohlsson, 2008). The emergence of the network society is, together with other structural changes related to post-industrial society, pointed out as a source of this tendency (Aronsson, 2005).

The research of Allvin et al. (2006) points out that traditional structures – such as time and space – tend to be replaced in the "new working life" by actors' setting boundaries of their own. In her research on teleworkers and freelance reporters, Hansson (2004) studied the characteristics of work conditions in flexible work settings and how the actors handled these conditions. Hagström (2007) focuses on the different kinds of competence needed to orient oneself and act autonomously in boundaryless work settings. His results indicate that the more boundaryless the work context is, the greater the demand is for collective and existential competence.

Some studies related to boundaryless work are concerned with the problem of coping with the border between work and other spheres of life. According to Allvin et al. (2006), a general feature of these studies is the tendency that work intrudes on non-work rather than the opposite. Kylin (2007) studied the interaction between work and non-work in home-based telework. Her study shows that flexible work arrangements seem to bring about a need for new ways of differentiation, since the boundaries are needed both to structure and legitimise work and to mark detachment from work.

Fenwick (2006) studied workers in boundaryless employment and their daily negotiation of tasks, objects, knowledge and relationships. She calls these processes "nomadic movements" and argues that these should be characterised as *working* the boundaries rather than setting them, because in boundaryless work people and contexts are always changing. Salamoun Sioufi and Greenhill (2007) discuss the role of ICT in boundaryless work practices in terms of nomadism. From their point of view, the concept of nomadism brings to the fore the actors' conditions of crossing boundaries, as well as constituting new boundaries by means of the use of ICT. According to them, the crossing of old boundaries and the constitution of new ones contribute to the formation of an identity as a nomad.

The Rise of the Mobile Network Society

In the middle of the twentieth century, the first communication satellite was launched. For the first time ever instantaneous communication from one side of the world to the other was possible. According to Giddens (1999) instantaneous communication is not just a means of conveying information more quickly, its mere existence alters "the very texture of our lives" (Giddens, 1999, p. 11); it has an impact on the big systems as well as on the most personal parts of our lives.

Today, wireless communication technology is spreading round the world faster than any other information and communication technology. Mobile ICT[1] has within the last ten years moved from being a technology used by a privileged minority to being a mainstream technology (Castells et al., 2006). The cell phone has evolved from function as a substitute for voice communication into a "multimodal, multimedia, portal system of communication" (Castells et al., 2006, p. 245), offering tools for web browsing, e-mail service, music listening, photography, video recording, calendaring and more. Ling and Donner (2009) describe the rise of the cellphone era in terms of two phases, the first concerning connectivity: the amount of people connecting to each other via cellphone technology increased very rapidly during a fairly short period of time. The other phase is characterized by reachability: according to Ling and Donner (op.cit.), the cellphone has

13 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/boundaryless-work-role-mobile-ict/46618

Related Content

Autoethnography as a Methodological Approach in Adult Vocational Education and Technology
Robin S. Grenier (2016). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 42-50).*
www.irma-international.org/article/autoethnography-as-a-methodological-approach-in-adult-vocational-education-and-technology/167780

Promoting and Implementing Self-Directed Learning (SDL): An Effective Adult Education Model
Viktor Wangand Patricia Cranton (2012). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 16-25).*
www.irma-international.org/article/promoting-implementing-self-directed-learning/68824

Evaluating Teaching in Adult Education
James B. Martinand Royce Ann Collins (2011). *Encyclopedia of Information Communication Technologies and Adult Education Integration (pp. 824-837).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/evaluating-teaching-adult-education/46612

A Call for the use of Technology within Mathematics and Science Preservice Teacher Methods Courses
Darci J. Harland, Ydalisse Pérezand Cheri Toledo (2012). *Developing Technology-Rich Teacher Education Programs: Key Issues (pp. 357-377).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/call-use-technology-within-mathematics/61935

Management Leadership and Employee Satisfaction: A Correlation Study
Amber Joy De Armond Hillard (2021). *International Journal of Adult Education and Technology (pp. 1-14).*
www.irma-international.org/article/management-leadership-and-employee-satisfaction/282527