

In managing boundaries between work and home, technology can be both 'friend' and 'foe'

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When it comes to managing boundaries between work responsibilities and home life, technology is our "frenemy."

Technology, specifically [mobile technology](#), can be alternately used to maintain, erase or manage home and work boundaries along a spectrum.

That's according to ongoing research by the University of Cincinnati to be presented June 17 at the Work and Family Researchers Network Conference in New York City by Stacie Furst-Holloway, UC associate professor of psychology. Co-authors with Furst-Holloway on the research are Elaine Hollensbee, associate professor of management; Suzanne Masterson, associate professor of management; Sung Doo Kim, doctoral student in management; Daniele Bologna, doctoral student of psychology, all of UC; and Therese Sprinkle, assistant professor of management at the University of Dallas.

In ongoing research, titled "Strategic Use of Mobile Technology to Manage the Work-Family Boundary," the team has found that full-time working employees can engage in several

strategies when using technology to manage work-home boundaries. These include

- Collocation, which occurs when an individual reports being physically present in one domain while cognitively and behaviorally engaged in both domains. This may include engaging in both work and personal tasks while in the home domain, e.g., doing laundry in the midst of a work project or responding to a work-related e-mail while attending a child's sports event.
- Distancing, which occurs when an individual either turns off the technology or changes the setting to make oneself unavailable in one domain when engaged in the other.
- Crossing, which connotes when an individual uses technology as an aid in moving from one domain to another. As an example, an individual may use [mobile communications technology](#) to bridge between work and home domains by accessing work e-mails via a laptop or smartphone near the end of the workday to respond to a request or complete a task before becoming fully engaged in the home domain.

According to Furst-Holloway, "These strategies were often perceived as a help in navigating work-home boundaries. For instance, with collocation, an employee might be in the same physical space as a spouse, being present when needed for the personal relationship, but alternating that with work completion. It allows for greater perceived control of work flow and information required to be better prepared upon returning to the office."

She added that "crossing" was perceived as being similarly helpful, providing a bridge for smooth travel between domains and making passages

between one domain and another easier.

However, technology was also perceived as a hindrance to being fully present in either domain due to its addictive potential.

These findings were derived from in-depth, qualitative interviews of 33 working professionals. Just over half of these were full-time employees of a Cincinnati regional healthcare facility, while the rest were full-time employees (working for a variety of firms) enrolled in a part-time MBA program at UC. All were interviewed relative to their use of technology as well as their perceptions, preferences and experiences in regard to work-home boundaries.

The next step in this research will consist of a quantitative survey of approximately 500 full-time employees regarding self perceived outcomes of using the above strategies, the frequency with which employees use the above strategies, the impact of these strategies on work and life outcomes, and how others, such as supervisors, coworkers, and even significant others perceive an employee's use of mobile communications technology.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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