Boundary-less work and digital mobile media

A qualitative exploration of employees’ work-life balance in the context of constant online availability

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ABSTRACT

Digital mobile media have a major influence on organizations today. The technology has enabled a flexible work environment where employees can get work done without the limits of time and space. The boundary-less working conditions have come with possibilities but also resulted in new expectations of extended work availability. Previous research has shown that a blurry line between work and time off can cause stress and make it difficult to recover from the job (Dettmers, Bamberg and Seffzak 2016, 291; Mellner 2016, 156).

The purpose of this study is to continue exploring the boundary-less working environment in relation to digital mobile media. This is an exploratory study aiming to understand how and why employees use work-related smartphones and emails after working hours. The aim is also to investigate employees’ reasons to be connected to the job during spare time.

This study is qualitative and based on interviews with Swedish employees working for a multinational company. As a theoretical framework, the study highlights boundary theory, social influence model, social learning theory, digital mobile media and globalization.

The findings showed that employees with international job contacts experienced that they should be occasionally available after working hours but not because of peer-pressure from co-workers. The participants had different reasons for being available during time off, such as wanting to help colleagues in another time zone, being curious about a project or planning for upcoming working days. None of the participants experienced negativity of sometimes being available to work during the spare time and they believed that it is important to disconnect after working hours, to have time to relax.

Keywords: availability, boundary theory, digital mobile media, social norms, stress, workplace culture
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Introduction

Globalization, new technology and a more diverse workforce are three big challenges that organizations are facing today (Richardson 2017, 425). The new work environment encourages fewer people to work longer hours, with the ambition of keeping up with global competition. However, increased workload does not come without a cost and the outcome has resulted in lost productivity and decreased well-being among workforces (Dewe and Cooper 2017, 1-2).

Digital mobile media have created a work environment with a blurry boundary between working hours and time off. When people are always connected to their work through the smartphone or email, individuals can find it difficult to know when to stop working (Dettmers et al. 2016, 276-77). On the other hand, the boundary-less working conditions give employees new possibilities to organize their work, irrespective of time and space (Mellner 2016, 146-47). As described by Dewe and Cooper (2017, 5): “... we have reached an interconnective world best expressed in terms of it being anytime, anyplace and always ready ... ”.

Restricting the work availability is a responsibility of the individual but the attitude within the workplace is also an important factor. A work culture which embraces high performers who are willing to always be available for work-related matters will create a destructive norm throughout the organization, where employees feel expected or demanded to respond quickly to a work-related email or answering a call from the colleague during the holiday (Day, Paquet, Scott and Hambley 2012, 476; Mellner 2016, 150).

The boundary-less working conditions are of relevance within international communication studies for several reasons. Firstly, it is a global issue. Email has become an important communication tool in today’s corporate world, since it does not require the sender and receiver to be in contact at the same time, which is helpful for multinational companies with employees working from different countries in different time zones (Waller and Ragsdell 2012, 154-55). Employees working for these global corporations will receive emails during all hours of the day and it is necessary to understand the impact of this constant information flow.

Secondly, previous research has shown that information overload and digital mobile media have a negative impact on individuals’ productivity and stress levels, which does not only do harm to the employee but also to the success of the business (Brown, Duck and Jimmieson 2014, 326; Carr, Kelley, Keaton and Albrecht 2011, 32; Waller and Ragsdell 2012, 156). It is therefore important to investigate how to prevent the destructive outcomes of communication through smartphones to improve employees’ overall well-being.
This is a qualitative and exploratory study about the impact of digital mobile media on the boundary between work hours and time off. The focus is on opinions and experiences of employees working for a large multinational corporation, using digital mobile media on a daily basis. Employees will be interviewed and asked questions about their email and smartphone routines after working hours, as well as their own thoughts and experiences about the topic. The study was conducted as part of my final master degree project during two months and it is hoped that the results may contribute to international communication studies by focusing on the influence of digital mobile media on the boundary between work and time off.

Background

A personal interest and experiences relating to the topic are further motivation for conducting this study. A close friend and a former colleague have been home from work because of stress-related sickness. The understanding of how much damage stress can cause has made me concerned about the topic and sparked my interest in stress management at workplaces and how to prevent burnouts. Furthermore, one of my family members often answers work-related messages during spare time. This has made me curious about the impact of digital mobile media, regarding individuals’ stress levels and work recovery.

In Sweden, stress is a topic that is frequently addressed in the media today, in both newspapers and documentaries. One example is a Swedish documentary series that was published in 2017 by SVT, the Swedish public service channel (SVT 2017). The series focused on the stress-related sickness that has become a common phenomenon in Sweden, especially for women. It also explained how individuals today experience burnouts starting at young ages, and that the reasons are work overload and the wish to perform well at work, in school or in one’s private life. Despite knowledge about the risk of burnouts, the number of people affected is not decreasing. According to the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, the physical health of the Swedish population has improved but the mental health is deteriorating (Socialstyrelsen 2017).

It is not only in Sweden that workplace stress is identified as a problem. Countries such as the US and Germany have also reported to have problems with stress-related sickness in workplaces. Some contributing factors are the long working hours, combined with employees’ own experiences of unrealistic job demands and expectations (Richardson 2017, 423).

So where did it all go wrong? One explanation for the increased stress levels in workplaces is the changed circumstances with regard to mediated communication. The fact that we live in an information society is widely known. The usage of computer technology has shaped the way
people work today (Dewe and Cooper 2017, 21-22). Offices started to be familiar with laptops, emails and smartphones after 1990, and the technical tools have been appreciated ever since, mainly for their flexibility and speed (Dewe and Cooper 2017, 23; Thompson 1995, 31).

There are both pros and cons associated with being able to reach one’s colleagues immediately, but the fact remains – the digital mobile media have created working conditions which have resulted in both more freedom and demands on the employee (Mellner 2016, 147). The digital mobile media give their user the ability to reach and collect information faster than ever before, but there is a risk of information overload when the individuals experience too much accessed information in a short period of time (Day et al. 2012, 474).

Due to digital mobile media, the boundary between work and home life has become more stretchable. New statistics from The Internet Foundation in Sweden (IIS 2017, 6) showed that the technology makes the boundary between work and spare time more flexible. It is common for Swedish employees to work from home, as well as using Internet for private purposes when at work. Their findings also showed that the majority of workers are reading their work-related emails during vacation.

The boundary theory has been commonly used when studying the impact of digital mobile media on the work-life balance (Berkowsky 2013, 519; Dettmers et al. 2016, 276; Mellner 2016, 146). This study also has a focus on boundary theory, combined with concepts about globalization and digital mobile media. Psychological theories are also given attention: the social influence model and the social learning theory. Regardless if the availability to work after working hours is an active choice or a demand or expectation from others, there might be different reasons why individuals choose to connect to work during time off. It is of personal interest and research relevance to explore what makes an employee create a blurry boundary between work and home life and what impacts this have on the individual.

Disposition

In the upcoming chapter the aim and purpose will be presented, together with the research questions (p. 5). Here, the reader will become aware of the problematization of digital mobile media in relation to the boundary between workplace and home and the specific focus of this study. This chapter is followed by a section with a literature review of previous research, which includes three different section that cover different angles of the chosen topic: previous research about boundary theory, digital mobile media at workplaces and stress management (p. 6). In the end of this chapter, I position my own study in comparison to previous research.
The next chapter contains the *theoretical framework* and introduce the theories and concepts that will be used when analysing the data and understanding the results of the study (p. 15). The theories and concepts in focus are boundary theory, social influence model, social learning theory, globalization and digital mobile media. After the theoretical part, the *method and participants* will be explained in detail (p. 20). Here, the reader will get an overview of the choice of this qualitative method of semi-structured interviews and arguments for why the method has been chosen. The *result and analysis* will then be presented and analysed together with a comparison with previous research and the theoretical framework (p. 26).

The last chapter focuses on the *discussion and conclusion* of the analysis. The concluding chapter includes a presentation of the main findings of the research and an explanation on how the research questions have been answered (p. 45).
Aim and purpose

The aim of this study is to explore how employees experience the work-life balance when having the possibility of being available to work through digital mobile media after office hours. This study also aims to explore employees’ reasons for being connected to work during time off and what impacts this have on the individual.

This study is investigating the problem of digital mobile media’s impact on the boundary between work and home life. Constant connectivity is a discussion that is of societal and research interest. The ongoing development of digital mobile media in workplaces makes the topic relevant for updated research, in order to understand how to avoid negative outcomes of employee’s technology usage.

This research is qualitative and has been conducted through interviews with employees working for a larger multinational company. The purpose of this study is to add qualitative knowledge to previous research within the field of media and communication. By contributing updated material, this study will also bring useful information for managers that are interested in improving the digital mobile media usage at the workplace.

Research questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do employees experience the impact of digital mobile media regarding the boundary between work and home life?
- What aspects of always being connected to work does the employee like and dislike?

**RQ2:** What reasons do employees mention for connecting to work during time off?
- How does the work culture affect an employee’s usage of digital mobile media after working hours?
- How would the employee like to shape an availability policy after working hours?
Literature review of previous research

In this chapter, previous research will be explored within the fields of boundary theory, digital mobile media usage at workplaces, as well as stress management within organizations. The chapter ends with a summary of previous research and a presentation of the research approach for this study in relation to previous findings.

Choice of previous research

The reviewed articles in this chapter have been collected from the databases Scopus and ProQuest since these websites offer peer-reviewed articles within the fields of media and communication and social science (Scopus n.d; ProQuest n.d.). The following terms were used as keywords: boundary theory, ICT (information communication technology), digital media, mobile media, technology, emails, messages, smartphones, information overload, work-life balance, work, workplace, stress management and workplace stressors.

The main search criteria was to search for smartphone and emails in relation to boundary theory. There was a great amount of research for digital mobile media usage at workplaces in general. As the reader will experience, there are articles about overall smartphone usage, email usage and email and smartphone usage combined included in this review. However, there are no articles focusing on work-related calls alone, instead research about calls at workplaces are included in the articles about overall smartphone usage. Emails have been given more attention, compared to calls, since the employees are working for a multinational company with people working from different time zones, which makes it more likely that they are communicating more through written messages.

The publication year was also considered when searching for the literature. The majority of articles in this chapter have been published during the recent years and the oldest article is from 2003. In each section of this chapter, the main focus has been to find similarities and differences in the articles within the same research field. The articles aim, choice of method and results are especially compared.

Studies focusing on work expectations and work-life boundaries

The boundary theory has been commonly used in research exploring the effects of a blurred work and home life. In 2013, Berkowsky (2013, 519) argued that not much research has been done on what effects ICT has on the work-life boundary. The theoretical framework for the study was boundary and spillover theories, together with the concept of ICT (Berkowsky 2013, 520-522). The result from his study showed that the usage of Facebook and emailing creates a
negative boundary blur between the work-life balance (Berkowsky 2013, 536). The findings indicated that there was not only a negative spillover when focusing on work during after office hours, but a negative boundary-blur did also occur when the employee had contact with family and friends while at work (Berkowsky 2013, 536). It was also mentioned that some people with demographic characteristics are more likely to feel negativity about a blurry work-life boundary, such as being female, having a child living at home, experiencing a heavy work-load, mental illness or unclear job expectations (Berkowsky 2013, 534).

It has now been five years since the study by Berkowsky was published and several new studies have been made with different focuses on boundary theory and ICT. Mellner (2016, 57), investigated the effects on employees which have a work-related smartphone available after the agreed working hours. This research focused mainly on the level of felt expectations among the employees and the psychological effects of always being able to connect to work tasks. Mellner (2016, 147-9) also focused on a theoretical perspective including boundary theory but with additional theories of boundary control, job demands and psychical detachment.

In another study, the focus was on well-being and recovery in relation to availability and working after-hours (Dettmers et al. 2016, 276). The theoretical framework for this study covered demands and resources for extended work availability (Dettmers et al. 2016, 278-81). How extended work availability has an impact on employees work and family conflicts has also been explored (Wang and Chen 2017, 93). In the study by Wang and Chen (2017, 94-95), the theories and concepts focused on family support, digital mobile media and psychological detachment from work.

Despite different research angles, several results were alike. The findings from Mellner (2016, 156) showed that employees who are available to work on their smartphones during spare time were more likely to have difficulties to detach from work. The study also showed that individuals that have a good boundary control between work and home, found it easier to detach from work psychologically. Additionally, the study showed that an availability policy helped employees to mentally detach from the work (Mellner 2016, 157). Similar to Berkowsky (2013, 534), the study found that employees with long working hours and females have more difficulties for a psychological detachment from work (Mellner 2016, 157).

A negative effect about the digital mobile media can also be seen in the results from Detmmers et al. (2016, 286), which showed that the employees that were required to have an extended availability had a reduced well-being and found it more difficult to recover from work-stress (Dettmers et al. 2016, 291). The result also showed that having the right resources available
could reduce exhaustion, such as knowing what tasks that are ahead, control over job contacts and access to the right equipment (Dettmers et al. 2016, 291).

Wang and Chen (2017, 99) also showed that employees that have demands of working after agreed working hours have a higher risk for a work-family conflict, for example during evenings or holidays.

Based on these findings, it is difficult to question that the digital mobile media do have an impact on the boundary between work and home life. However, previous research has so far not had much focus on employees’ thoughts and experiences on the subject, since they have used surveys and web-questionnaires as methods (Berkowsky 2013, 523-24; Dettmers et al. 2016, 283; Mellner 2016, 151; Wang and Chen 2017, 96).

A qualitative study was found in the field, which had the purpose to understand how ICTs influence the individuals’ work-life boundaries (Sayah 2013, 180). Similar to the quantitative studies, the result from Sayah (2013, 192) also showed that ICTs influence an employee’s boundary between work and home life. However, differently to the other studies, it explored employees’ tactics to handle work-life balance with the influence of ICT. For example, the findings showed that employees choose to not answer work-related messages when not at work to create a clearer boundary between the different roles (Sayah 2013, 192). Other tactics that the employees used were to selectively answer calls and emails, using different devices for certain tasks and having separated home and work devices (Sayah 2013, 188-9). Moreover, the author explained how employees create temporary boundaries with their tactics of boundary control, which can help them to choose how segmented or integrated they choose the work-life balance to be (Sayah 2013, 192). The theories used for this study were work-life boundaries, and the influence if ICTs of the boundaries (Sayah 2013, 180-181).

Further research can complement previous findings on boundary theory by using a qualitative method. It would be valuable to ask employees for their opinions of their digital mobile media usage at their workplace and what improvements that can be done, such as implementing policies for digital media usage after working hours.

It can also be useful to conduct a study with another theoretical framework than previous research, such as studying the boundary theory combined with workplace norms. Similar ideas could be identified in the studies by Mellner (2016, 149) and Dettmers et al. (2016, 280), which studied boundary theory in relation to expectations and demands. However, these studies did not look into social norms in general. To add value to the current studies, it would be of
research interest to understand how workplace norms influence employees, both positively and negatively.

Research examining digital mobile media usage at workplaces
The issues of being connected to work email after working hours could be identified already in the beginning of the 20th century. According to Dawley and Anthony (2003, 193), their study was the first one to provide empirical data of information overload through emailing at workplaces. The study researched the problem with a theoretical perspective on information richness theory, information overload and email training (Dawley and Anthony 2003, 171-173). The findings showed that employees think of themselves as more email trained compared to their co-workers and that the lack of training can cause information overload. The employees also thought that there are too many work-related emails (Dawley and Anthony 2003, 192-193). However, the findings also showed that employees find the emailing useful and productive since it reduces face-to-face meetings and telephone contacts (Dawley and Anthony 2003, 192).

Evidence of destructive email usage could also be recognized in a study by Waller and Ragsdell (2012, 169). The study focused on email availability and work-life balance and the number of hours employees spend each day to check work-related emails after the agreed working hours. Similar to Dawley and Anthony (2003, 172-173), the concept of information overload was described. Waller and Ragsdell (2012, 157-158), also gave attention to other theories, such as stress and addiction related to emailing (Waller and Ragsdell 2012, 157-158). Another similar study about work-related email usage was made by Kushlev and Dunn (2014, 220), which aimed to understand how checking emails on a frequent basis are affecting individuals’ health and overall well-being. The theoretical framework was about task switching and how individuals manage this, which is part of cognitive psychology (Kushlev and Dunn 2014, 221).

Waller and Ragsdell (2012, 162) showed how employees spend almost four hours a week on checking and answering work-related emails after working hours and that women spend slightly more time compared to men. It was also shown that managers tend to be more available after working hours (Waller and Ragsdell 2012, 168). The findings also specified that checking emailing could be addictive and that the habit of constant availability had a negative effect on the employees’ spare time, resulting in a feeling of overload and stress (Waller and Ragsdell 2012, 169). In correlation to these findings, Kushlev and Dunn (2014, 226), showed that frequent email checking increases the day-to-day stress and that reducing the time for availability through email was linked to better well-being, such as better mindfulness and sleep quality (Kushlev and Dunn 2014, 226).
So far, the studies in this section have been focusing on the effects of the email usage but not why employees decide to answer work-related messages after working hours. A study by Barber and Santuzzi (2015, 172), did focus more on the reasons employees have for answering work-related communication after working hours. The main theoretical framework for this study was telepressures, described as the urge to respond quickly on ICT, such as emails (Barber and Santuzzi 2015 173-174). According to Barber and Santuzzi (2015, 181), employees might feel that they are showing that they are good performers when responding quicker but telepressure can result in less well-being and, in the worst, case burnout. The findings also showed that an individual’s personality has a minor impact on the cause of telepressures and that the issue depends more on the workplace environment and the felt expectations from others (Barber and Santuzzi 2015, 172, 183).

Telepressure could be one of the reasons for why employees answer work-related emails and calls after working hours. However, there are possibly more reasons for why employees choose to be available to work while at home. In other words, the reasons for why employees answer work-related communication after working hours can be further explored.

The findings from Barber and Santuzzi (2015, 183) were similar to those from another study about smartphone usage at workplaces (Lee 2016, 705). The findings from this study showed that the level of smartphone usage depends on the social influence between colleagues. The result also showed that smartphone use can become a stressor causing emotions of anger and information overload (Lee 2016, 713). The aim of this study was to investigate how work-related smartphone usage is affecting employees’ temper and emotions, as well as exploring the influence of social norms on this topic (Lee 2016, 705). The theoretical framework used for this study was the technology acceptance model and the stressor-strain framework (Lee 2016, 706).

A common factor for the studies about email and smartphone usage was that they mainly focused on the negative aspects of digital mobile media. A positive aspect was only mentioned briefly, that employees think positively of emailing since it is flexible and time effective (Dawley and Anthony 2003, 193). Most of the studies in this section showed negative results about the digital mobile media usage. To understand the topic more broadly, it could be of relevance to study the positive aspects of digital mobile media usage at workplaces.

Similar to the studies about the boundary theory, the research about email and smartphone usage has also mostly been of a quantitative kind. The majority of the studies used quantitative surveys (Barber and Santuzzi 2015, 175; Dawley and Anthony 2003, 173-4; Kushlev and Dunn
Waller and Ragsdell (2012, 161) also used a quantitative online questionnaire but did mix it with qualitative diaries. There was also a study that used group interviews as a first step for creating a survey but, apart from this, interviews were not prioritised as a method for exploring employees email and smartphone usage (Dawley and Anthony 2003, 173-74).

Studies covering workplace stressors and digital mobile media support

In the previous section, it was shown that digital mobile media can be a stressor at the workplace when employees do not know how to use it properly. To avoid information overload, it has been shown that technology training could be an important activity in organizations.

Brown et al. (2014, 330), investigated the impact of social norms in relation to email stressors. The study had a psychological framework, focusing on email, norms and stressors in relation to the transactional model of stress (Brown et al. 2014, 327-330). A result from Brown et al. (2014, 340-43), showed that too many emails with a lack of quality, had a negative effect on the employees who experienced emotional exhaustion and that these negative experiences could be reduced if the employees were more aware of how to professionally use emails, such as not sending messages after working hours.

A similar study explored how digital mobile media were handled at workplaces through demands and support (Day et al. 2012, 473). This study covered theories and concepts such as availability, information overload and demands and support of ICT (Day et al. 2012, 474-476). Similar to Brown et al. (2014, 340-43), the result showed that it is important for the employees to know how to use the technology to decrease stress (Day et al. 2012, 484-485). The result also showed that work-related ICT usage can be improved through general organizational support, such as improving the organizations work culture or implementing a ICT media-available policy (Day et al. 2012, 486). Furthermore, it was also shown that organizations that encourage employees to have a strong boundary between work and home life can be helpful for minimizing the negative effects of the ICT demands (Day et al. 2012, 486).

In the study by Burgess, Jackson and Edwards (2005, 71) the effects of implementing specific email training into an organization were explored. As a theoretical framework, the study focused on the functions and features of emails and how it is used (Burgeses, Jackson et al. 2005, 72-74). The findings showed that employees experience that one of ten received emails is irrelevant or not addressed to a specific person (Burgeses et al. 2005, 76). The result also showed that email training improves the emailing within a company and employees become more professional when sending emails to each other. For example, the emails become clearly
written by a structured subject line so the receiver know if the email is urgent or not (Burgess et al. 2005, 80, 82).

The effect of training and stress management did show different results in different studies. There were results that showed that it might not always be as easy as just having a few meetings about how to cope with stress. In the research by Hahn, Binnewies, Sonnentag and Mojza (2011, 210-11), the findings showed that implementing stress management could increase employees sleep-quality, mastery and relaxation, as well as psychological detachment from work. However, the training did not show improvements in reducing emotional exhaustion since it needs a longer ongoing training (Hahn et al. 2011, 211). The concept of recovery was a major focus in this study (Hahn et al. 2011, 203).

Another similar study focused also on the effects of implementing stress management at the workplace (Mino, Babazono, Tsuda and Yasuda 2006, 177). Differently from the study by Hahn et al. (2011, 210-11), the participants did not significantly improve their overall well-being after the stress management courses. One reason for this could be, as described by Mino et al. (2006, 182), that it is more important to focus on the overall work culture to make positive changes that lasts. In other words, there is not only the training itself that is important, but a complete change of norms and work structure at the workplaces that need to be focusing on, and to understand, what needs to be changed. Experiences of stress and digital mobile media training could be further explored by interviewing employees and asking them about their own suggestions for improvements at their workplace.

Another observation of the workplace stressors could be identified in the research by Harvey, Kelloway and Duncan-Leiper (2003, 309, 13), which focused on trust within organizations. The study defined trust in organizations as actions of good intentions between workers. Trust exists when everyone does what is expected from them (Harvey et al. 2003, 307). The findings showed that trust in the management can prevent burnout and improved work-life balance. It was described how employees that have a trusting relationship with their managers can better handle more work. They have a better communication with their management on how to handle potential work overload (Harvey et al. 2003, 313). This study had a theoretical focus on work overload and trust in organizations (Harvey et al. 2003, 306-307).

A result from a similar study showed that employees from smaller organizations rated a higher job satisfaction and more trust between the employees and management than the people who worked for larger organizations (Buys, Matthews and Randall 2010, 28). As described by Buys et al. (2010, 30) is the tasks often less divided in smaller organizations which be a reason for
why the relationships between management and employees are better. Based on this, it would be most useful to interview employees in larger organization which might experience more stress at their workplace.

The majority of the studies mentioned in this section have used quantitative methods in form of different kinds of questionnaires (Brown et al. 2014, 333; Burgess et al. 2005, 74; Buys et al. 2010, 27; Day et al. 2012, 478; Harvey et al. 2003, 308). There were two studies that differed compared to the others in terms of choice of method. Hahn et al. (2011, 205-206) and Mino et al. (2006, 178), both experimented with forms of recovery programs at organizations and followed up the results of it. Qualitative interviews have not been the priority method within the area of stress and support at workplaces.

Summary of previous research and research angle identified

Boundary theory has been a commonly used concept when researching about the blur between work-home life in relation to digital mobile media. All the studies within this field showed similar result – that a blurry boundary between work and home life can cause stress and lack of work recovery (Berkowsky 2013, 536; Dettmers et al. 2016, 291; Mellner 2016, 156-57).

Studies about digital mobile media usage at workplaces have also been widely explored, focusing on smartphone and email usage (Dawley and Anthony 2003, 170; Kushlev and Dunn 2014, 220; Waller and Ragsdell 2012, 154). The overall findings from these studies were that a lack of ICT training could result in information overload and that frequently being available to the job could increase employees stress levels (Barber and Santuzzi 2015, 181, 182; Dawley and Anthony 2003, 192-193; Kushlev and Dunn 2014, 226; Lee 2016, 713; Waller and Ragsdell 2012, 169). It was also shown that the workplace environment and influence from others have big impact on employees’ availability and that the usage behavior is often not a matter of individual personality (Barber and Santuzzi 2015, 172, 183; Lee 2016, 713).

In the section about digital mobile media training and support, the results showed that training could reduce information overload and help employees use ICT in a less stressful way (Brown et al. 2014, 340-43; Burgess et al. 2005, 80, 82; Day et al. 2012, 484-485). However, there were also results showing that a few training sessions are not enough for making lasting positive changes in the organization and that it is of importance to offer ongoing support with the technology (Hahn et al. 2011, 211; Mino et al. 2006, 182). Another thing identified was that trust, such as positive expectations, between management and employees seemed to be an important factor for reducing stress among employees (Harvey et al. 2003, 306; Buys et al. 2010, 25).
Based on the overall literature review, there are elements that could be further explored. Firstly, the articles have mostly been researched with quantitative methods, such as web questionnaires. These kinds of methods do usually not answer questions about how the employees experience the work-life balance and why they choose to be connected to their job after working hours. Consequently, a qualitative method is suggested for further research in the fields of interest. Interviews could bring answers to how the employees would like their workplace to be improved regarding digital mobile media usage and policies. Interviews would provide the research field with valuable data and a qualitative insight into the employees’ opinions about the after-hours availability.

Secondly, previous research about boundary theory has focused on digital mobile media together with concepts of expectations and demands (Dettmers 2016, 280; Mellner 2016, 149). However, their overall impact of social norms regarding the after-hours availability was not a main focus. Based on this, it would be of research relevance to study boundary theory in relation to theories about social norms and digital mobile media.

Furthermore, previous research did mostly focus on the negative aspects of the digital mobile media at workplaces. There might be more negative outcomes resulting from a constant availability but finding out the positive sides of it could provide the research field with a small contribution of data. It would also be of interest for companies to know both the negative and positive sides of the digital mobile media when improving policies for digital mobile media usage.

Lastly, Buys et al. (2010, 28) mentioned that employees within smaller organizations feel that they can manage stress better than those in a bigger organization. It was explained that the work in smaller organizations are less divided which creates better relationships between management and employees, resulting in less stress (Buys et al. 2010, 30). It would therefore be valuable to do the research within a large company and analyse the answers from the employees, in order to find out what thoughts and experiences they have about the impact of the digital mobile media of the boundary between work and home life.
Theoretical framework

In this section, the theoretical framework for the study will be presented and explained. The following concepts and theories have been chosen for this research: boundary theory, social influence model, social learning theory, globalization and digital mobile media. The theoretical framework will be useful when analysing and understand the result of the research.

Globalization and digital mobile media

*Globalization* is commonly described as processes of communication between individuals globally, no matter of time and space, which is possible because of electronic media (Thompson 1995, 149). Information that is communicated through an electronic device is explained as ICT, such as smartphones and computers connected to the Internet (Berkowsky 2013, 520; Day et al. 2012, 473). ICT is referred to as digital mobile media in this study, since this research is focusing on the use of portable devices employees bring home after working hours, especially focusing on emails and calls through smartphones.

An understanding of globalization and digital mobile media in workplaces are necessary for this study, which will focus on work-related email and smartphone usage. The concept of globalization is also important to have knowledge about because the participants are working for a multinational company.

Digital mobile media have had an important impact on workplaces since they offer the possibility of a boundary-less working environment, where it is possible to communicate to anyone, anywhere and at any time (Mellner 2016, 146-47; Thompson 1995, 31). The work environment has been going through several changes during the last 50 years. The technology has had a major influence on how individuals communicate today and new global workforces have been possible to create. Global capital, competition and production have together created a bigger need for efficiency and fast learning employees (Dewe and Cooper 2017, 95-96).

There are both positive and negative aspects of the new technology within organizations. The digital mobile media have made it easier to communicate with co-workers that are not physically available, but the possibility to always being connected to work has generated in new work demands and expectations (Day et al. 2012, 473). Digital mobile media, such as smartphone and laptops, make it possible for workers to be constantly available to the workplace, no matter time or geographical place (Sayah 2013, 176).

The concept of *technostress* refers to the negative effects that can be caused by being introduced to new technology, such as learning to adapt and cope with it (Brod as cited in Dewe
and Cooper 2017, 121). *Telepressure* is another negative expression of media usage, referring to employees that experience pressure to answer work-related message immediately (Barber and Santuzzi 2014, 173). It is of importance to have an understanding of concepts about stress in relation to digital mobile media because there is a possibility that the participants have experienced technostress or telepressure at their workplace.

Statistics from Sweden show that *emailing* is the current superior communication tool online, more used than instant messaging and (online) calls (IIS 2017, 6). Email is important within organizations and has changed internal and external communication. Sending an email is a quick, easy and cheap way to deliver a message. It is also possible to send it to several receivers at ones, independent on time zones. However, there are also negative aspects of using emails. Too many emails and of bad quality make it difficult for the receiver to understand which ones to prioritize. It is also common that the receiver misunderstands the sender’s message since emailing does not include tones of voice or gestures as a face-to-face conversation (Dimbleby and Burton 2007, 139 – 140).

**Boundary theory**

When exploring the effects digital mobile media have on work-life balance, a *boundary theory* is often used (Berowksy 2013, 520-21; Mellner 2016, 147).

As described by Nippert-Eng (1996, 563), boundary work is a process when the individual mentally categorizes life into different spheres, and the effort it takes to maintain and challenge these psychological frameworks. According to the boundary theory, individuals create a boundary between different sections of their life to simplify and organize it. Individuals categorize people, places, events and thoughts into different sections which each has a special meaning for the person, such as home and work life. The different sections are often socially constructed and individuals create similar spheres (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate 2000, 474).

Within the socially constructed spheres, e.g. home and work, there are also different roles created, such as employee, manager and parent. The individual uses the roles for different situations and times during the day, for example has a person different felt expectations when being at home as a parent and when at work as an employee (Nippert-Eng 1996, 571, 580). The definition of work does not necessarily need to have one meaning. There are jobs that can be done from home and ‘work’ is not always tasks that the individual gets paid for, taking care of one’s child or doing voluntary tasks are also forms of work (Mirchandani 1998, 168-169). However, in this research ‘work’ will only be referred to the workplace where the participants are hired to be working from during office hours.
In boundary theory, the relationship between different roles can be explained in *segmentation* and *integration* and individuals have different amount of boundary between work and home life (Hartmann cited in Ashforth et al. 2000, 475; Nippert-Eng 1996, 567). When there is segmentation between the work and home life, the individual is maintaining the roles as separate activities for example, choosing to not check job emails when at home. Integration is the opposite and the boundary is more flexible such as, an individual might choose to work from home (Nippert-Eng 1996, 567-568).

As described by Kreiner (2006, 485-486) different individuals prefer different levels of segmentation or integration between their social roles. However, the technology is making the boundary blurred which can make it more difficult to choose the level of role segmentation and integration. The boundary also depends on what kind of role it is. For example, a manager might have high expectations to answer work-related email on the spare time even though he would prefer to have a high segmentation between work-home life (Ashforth et al. 2000, 475). How the workplace is structured is also a factor on how integrated or segmented the work-home life is. Some workplaces are more integrated than others. Nowadays workplaces are encouraging their employees on some level to be connected after working hours through digital mobile media (Kreiner 2006, 486). Based on this, it is important to take digital mobile media into consideration when studying the boundary between work and home life.

The different domains in consist of different rules and behaviors (Ashforth et al. 2000, 478-79; Clark 2000, 753). The different borders or boundaries between the different sections can be divided into three types: physically, temporally and psychologically. A physical border can be the office where the individual chooses to do his or her work. Temporal borders refer to when the role actions take place, such as working from nine to five. The third border, the psychological one, is self-created and is about when the individual chooses to be mentally concentrating and thinking of special tasks, for example solving work-related problems when in the office. Even though the psychological border is a responsibility of the individual, the physical and temporal borders can influence the physiological behavior of a person (Clark 2000, 756; Kreiner 2006, 485-86). Permeability refers to how the different domains are entering each other. For example, the individual might be physically and temporally at work but he or she gets a phone call from a family member (Clark 2000, 756).

The boundary theory will be valuable when answering RQ1: “How do employees experience the impact of digital mobile media regarding the boundary between work and home life?”. The segmentation and integration of work and home life will be a guideline when analysing the participants’ answers about their usage of work-related digital mobile media after office hours.
Social norms and behaviors

To understand why digital mobile media have such a strong impact on the boundary between work and home, it can be useful to look into norms since it has influential effects on group behaviors (Dimbleby and Burton 2007, 101). Norms can be described as unwritten rules of behavioral expectations for different kinds of social roles (Kinicki and Fugate 2012, 233).

As described by Fulk (as cited in Baym 2010, 41), the social influence model describes that individuals use media, especially email, depending on the norm in the working environment. The model explains how friends or colleagues can have a major influence on an individual’s attitude towards a medium and its usage. Based on this, the boundary between home-work life is not only something that is chosen by the individuals themselves but rather something that is socially constructed in the working place (Berowsky 2013, 521).

To create a workplace culture with a healthy relationship to the digital mobile media usage, training can be valuable. Having training on how to use new technology can avoid stress at the workplace, for example when learning how to communicate by email in a clear way and the support of having a work-life balance (Day et al. 2012, 476). It is also important with support from the managers and not only have one training session but also evaluate its success (Dewe and Cooper 2017, 185; Mellner 2016, 278).

Work culture and the social influence model will be useful for this study since the participants are working for the same company. Focusing on norms will be helpful when exploring the answers for RQ2 “What reasons do employees mention for connecting to work during time off?”. The participants might not experience any peer-pressure from colleagues or managers in a negative way but being positively influenced is also part of how a workplace culture is created.

Another theory within psychology is the social learning theory by Bandura (1977). Bandura (1977, 16-17) explains how individuals are not born with certain behavior but that behaviors are learned through self-experiences or by observing others and the surrounding. The theory indicates that individuals only imitate a behavior if they see a value of doing it and a positive outcome. As described by Bandura (1977, 17): “Learning by reinforcement is commonly portrayed as a mechanistic process in which responses are shaped automatically and unconsciously by their immediate consequences.”. Depending on the outcome of an action, individuals also learn in which situations it is suitable for certain actions (Bandura 1977, 17).
Another factor for adapting a behavior is the individual’s thoughts about an behavior. If an action in a setting shows a positive outcome, the individual might still not want to follow this behavior for future similar situations. One reason for this could be that he or she has heard from other sources that this behavior should not be rewarded (Bandura 1977, 18).

Bandura (1977, 22-24) also described how individuals only learn if they want to learn, and that they choose different models to learn from. In a social group, there are some individuals that are more likely to be models for others learning, for example people with certain characteristics and if the functional value of their behavior is worth following.

Social learning theory can be valuable to study in relation to boundary theory since the boundary between work and home can be a behavioral choice. A manager that encourages and rewards his or her team to work over-time, creates a risk that the employees continue this behavior if they do not question it.

A workplace that creates a norm of negative behaviors can be damaging for the both the organization and the employees. As described by Carr et al. (2011, 32-33, 37), it is almost impossible to create a workplace completely stress-free but it is important that the management notice employees’ well-being to upkeep a successful business. There are three areas that can affect an individual to come to a state of chronic stress: Job demands, individual differences, social demands. Job demands have to do with the formation of the work task, such as how difficult it is and how much uncertainty it brings to the employee. The individual differences refer to that all individuals react differently to the same kind of work tasks, what makes one individual stressed might not be stressful for someone else. The last perception, social demands, is about support from the surrounding. It is important to get social support from family, friends and colleagues to upkeep a psychological state of well-being and the individual have a better chance to tackle stressors and difficult situations (Carr et al. 2011, 33).
Method and participants

This chapter focuses on the chosen method and material for the study. Arguments for the choice of method and material will be covered, as well as explanations of how the method process has been proceeding throughout the research.

Interview style and setting

The purpose of this study is to contribute with qualitative knowledge about the boundary-less working conditions and how employees handle a work-life balance when always connected to work through digital mobile media. When aiming to understand individuals experience on a certain topic, a qualitative method of interviews will be useful. Interviews make it possible to gain knowledge about the interviewees’ insights and perspectives about certain issues or situations (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 33).

As described in the previous research chapter, several quantitative studies showed a negative result about the digital mobile media availability after working hours (Berkowsky 2013, 536; Dettmers et al. 2016, 291; Mellner 2016, 157; Wang and Chen 2017, 99). Based on this, there is a possibility that this study will show similar results but with a qualitative method of interviews the answers will be richer and it will be possible to explain how and why the employees use work-related digital mobile media in the way they do (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 33).

The interview type for this study is a phone based semi-structured interview. All of the interviewees have been interviewed through digital telephone. The interviews were phone based since the employee’s workplaces were located in different places around Sweden. Furthermore, the time limit and budget of the research were other factors for choosing interviews through phone (Robson 2011, 290). These factors made it difficult to have face-to-face meetings or focus groups. As described by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, 174-175), a problem with computer-assisted interviews is the difficulty to understand the body language and spoken language, some details of the conversation will be missed out. On the other hand, it is shown that computer-assisted interviews make the participant keener to openly talk about intimate topics (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 175). As described by Robson (2011, 290) phone interviews are shorter than face-to-face interviews and usually, they take less than 30 minutes.

Interviews can have different focuses which give the researcher different information about the interviewees. As described by Robson (2011, 280): “A distinction is commonly made between seeking to find out what people know, what they do, and what they think or feel”. In this study, the questions have mostly been focusing on ‘how the participants do things’, in this case how they use work-related digital mobile media after working hours. The interview
questionnaire also holds a few questions about what the participants ‘think or feel’ about something for example, questions about the positive and negative side of a constant availability through digital mobile media.

The interview questionnaire has been created based on recommendations from the literature by Robson (2011, 284). The questions have been divided into four different sequences and the complete interview guide can be seen in the appendix 2 (p. 56).

Before the actual interviews, a pilot study was set up. A pilot study is helpful to understand if research questions are understood by the participant and how the questions are useful for answering the research questions (Robson 2011, 141). The test person was a family member since he works as a manager for a company in Sweden and has experience from email and smartphone usage after working hours. The pilot study was effective and a section of the interview questionnaire was revised before the final interviews. Throughout the real interviews some of the questions were further improved, to make them even easier to understand for the interviewees.

Choice of participants
The participants for this research were working for a larger multinational company with about 45 000 employees operating worldwide. The company has also several offices located on different places around Sweden. Employees from this company have been chosen for two reasons. Firstly, according to previous research, employees in bigger organizations often experience more stress (Buys at al. 2010, 28). Secondly, a company operating worldwide has employees that receive work-related messages during all hours within a day, which makes the boundary-less working conditions especially noticeable (Waller and Ragsdell 2012, 154-55). Furthermore, the results could also be useful for global organizations that need inspiration on how to improve their digital mobile media-policies.

In total seven participants took part in interviews and the majority were women. The gender difference was nothing that was done on purpose, it turned out that the women were more interested in participating in the research. The participants were all living and working in Swedish but worked in different offices in Sweden. All of the interviews were managed in English to save time during the research process. The participants were using English on a regular basis and they did not have problems speaking the language.

The sample for this study is fairly small but since it is a qualitative study, the data is valuable for research in ways that do not have to do with quantity. Mayer (2011, 186) did a research
where she interviewed four participants and she explained that it is not possible for any
generalizations with this number of participants but a small qualitative study can bring value
because it gives insights to individuals experiences and knowledge about a topic. The
generalization problem was also mentioned in the article by Small (2009, 14-15). Similar to
Mayer (2011, 186), Small (2009, 15) explained that it is difficult for a small qualitative study to
be representative but interviewing a few participants can still provide meaningful information
for research.

Table list of interviewees
The following table is a presentation of the alias for the different participants, which date they
were interviewed, the duration of the recorded interview, their position within the company
and their gender. Each participant has been given a color. The color structure was helpful when
analyzing the answers from the participants and I have chosen to keep the colors in this final
version of the paper since it might be helpful for the reader as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Work field and position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>11/4/2018</td>
<td>18' 09&quot;</td>
<td>Commercial Excellence, Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>11/4/2018</td>
<td>16' 29&quot;</td>
<td>Process Development, Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>12/4/2018</td>
<td>17' 12&quot;</td>
<td>Commercial Excellence, Analyst</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>13/4/2018</td>
<td>14' 05&quot;</td>
<td>Human Resources, Business Partner</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>13/4/2018</td>
<td>15' 34&quot;</td>
<td>Sales and marketing, Global Demand Planner</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>18/4/2018</td>
<td>16' 12&quot;</td>
<td>Human Resources, Business Partner</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>19/4/2018</td>
<td>21' 45&quot;</td>
<td>Human Resources, Talent Resourcing Partner</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Informed consent

To follow ethical guidelines, the participant was asked to fill out a consent form to make them fully aware of the aim of the research project (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 93; Robson 2011, 203; appendix 1, p. 55). The consent form included information about the research project and the participants’ rights during the research process. The participant was informed that their participation is voluntary and that they have the right to leave the research at any time during the research process. They were also informed that the interview will be recorded, transcribed and saved in a secure way. The participants sent their signed consent forms by email before their interviews.

Qualitative analysis

All of the recorded interviews were transcribed to get an overview of the participants’ answers and to make it easier to analyze and interpret the data. As a help for understanding the data, a thematic coding approach was applied. As described by Robson (2011, 467), the thematic coding is “A generic approach not necessarily linked to a particular (or any) theoretical perspective”. The idea of thematic coding is that the researcher is developing different themes, where data that are representing something similar are put together.

The process of thematic coding has been followed by the recommendations in the literature by Robson (2011, 476). The first phase of the analysis included an overview of the interview answers. The transcribed data was re-read to get ideas of what could be valuable for analyzing. The second step was to identify interview answers that were alike, and to give these the same label. To get a better overview of the data set, all the interview questions were printed and was manually organized.

The next step in the thematic coding was to put similar labels together to create relevant themes. The interview questionnaire had four different themes and most of the interview questions within the same theme where labelled similar. The following themes were in the interview guide: ‘Managing work-related email and calls’, ‘Availability after working hours’, ‘Reasons for job contact after working hours’ and ‘Communication improvements at the workplace’. During the thematising, new sub-themes were created within the main themes.

When the thematic coding was done, the analysis of the data started. The data divided into themes and subthemes were analyzed in relation to previous research about digital mobile media, boundary-theory and workplace stress. The data were also analyzed together with the chosen theoretical framework of digital mobile media, boundary-theory and social norms.
Reliability and validity

The concept of reliability can be described as the trustworthiness of the findings of a study and on what level the results could be repeatable (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 281). When choosing interview as a method, the research will not have complete reliability. There is a questionnaire provided in this study and another researcher could interview Swedish employees from a multinational company with this interview guide. However, the answer would most likely differ in some way. Individuals have different experiences and will express their thoughts in different ways, the level of openness of a person is also a factor that could change the interview answers. The performed interviews in this study were also partly improvised with follow up questions, which are not included in the questionnaire. Even if an interviewer would interview the exact same employees that participated in this study, there could still be issues with the reliability since the participants might not answer the same, they could for example have come up with new ideas about the topic or perhaps there have been some changes in the organization since this study was made.

The validity of the study would be argued as stronger than the reliability. As described by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, 282), validity stands for the correctness and strength of the results – if the study did investigate what it was supposed to do. The interview guide was created with the research questions in mind and included different questions about each topic to gather as much useful data as possible. Furthermore, has all the interview data been saved, both as digital records and as written transcripts. The result part is divided into different themes that represent each research question, to give the reader a clear understanding of how the answers to the research questions in the conclusion have been made. A quantitative researcher may argue that a limit to the validity of the study would be that there were few interviewees. However, there were enough data to analyse since the participants expressed relevant details about their experience and opinions on the topic.

Evaluation of the interviewing process

Overall, the interviewing process went without problems. All of the participants signed their consent form on time and there were no technical issues with the recording. The full recorded interviews and written transcriptions have resulted in almost exact quotations from the participants. The only thing that has been adjusted are parts that were difficult to understand and vocal pauses have been removed, such as “like” and “hmm”.

The choice of a qualitative method has involved several problems to the research process. There were issues of finding voluntary participants working for the same company and there were participants that first agreed on being part of the project which decided to not complete
Another problem during the interview process was that five of the seven participants were female. The aim of the study is not to compare the answers between women and men but there might have been a different result if more men would have participated.

Another issue with the interviewing process was the duration of the interviews. As seen from the table of participants, the duration of the interviews was between 14 and 21 minutes. It was described earlier in this chapter that phone interviews often take less than 30 minutes. The results would perhaps have included more in-depth answers if the phone interviews had been slightly longer or if they were achieved through face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions. There were mainly two reasons why the interviews went faster than expected. Firstly, some of the participants were busy or in situations which made it difficult to manage longer interviews for example, participant B answered the questions through her speakerphone while driving a car and participant D was in a room with a smaller child. Another reason for the shorter interviews was that some of the participants had short answers for some of the interview questions or did not answer certain questions.

Despite some errors with the interviewing process, the transcribed answers from the interviews have been enough for analysing my research problem qualitatively, since the participants that took part of the study were all interested in the topic and gave relevant answers to the interview questions.
Result and analysis

This chapter covers the interview answers from the participants, together with an analysis based on previous research and theoretical framework. The interview answers are divided into two main categories: “Experiences of the boundary between work and home life” and “Motives for after work availability”. Within these categories, there are themes focusing on different aspects of the employees’ experiences and opinions about the boundary-less working environment. The headlines for the categories and themes are based on the research questions.

The first part of this chapter will focus on interview answers that belong to research question one (How do employees experience the impact of digital mobile media regarding the boundary between work and home life?). The last category will cover themes answering research question two (What reasons do employees mention for connecting to work during time off?). The answers to the research questions will be explained in the concluding chapter of this study.

Experiences of the boundary between work and home life

The first interview questions were of easier kind and gave an answer to what kind of job role the different participant had and what kind of communication channels they use more often when contacting their colleagues. The participant worked in different fields and in different offices in Sweden. As seen from the table of participants, there were three participants that worked within the Human Resource field (D, F and G). Participant E worked in the sales and marketing field and participant A and C worked with commercial excellence, towards sales and marketing. One of the participants, B, worked in the area of process development.

On the question about which communication channels the participant mostly use within the company, they gave answers such as face-to-face meetings, phone calls and emails. Several of the participants also described how they have a function similar to Skype and an internal version of Facebook. All of the participants described email as the communication tool they use most frequently. The participants explained that they receive emails 24/7 but they are seldom receiving phone calls after working hours. As described in the theoretical part, emails are often a preferred communication tool since it is a cheap, fast and it is possible to send someone a message with no limits of time and space (Dimbleby and Burton 2007, 139-40). Email is also the most used communication tool in Sweden (IIS 2017, 6).

The participant had different reasons why they mostly use emails. Participant A and F described that they use emails frequently since it is the most common way of communicating with colleagues within the company. As described by participant F:
F – “I mostly use emails because of the frequency, it’s also the most accepted way of communicating here.”

Participant A also explained that they are a company which is based all over the world and that text messages are flexible and easy. The global contacts were also mentioned by participant B which explained that she is part of a small group based in Sweden but that she often needs to have contact with people from other countries through different channels, she said it was probably mostly through emails. Another reason for using emails was described by participant D and E, which mentioned that they mostly use emails since it is a good way to store information compared to other communication channels:

D – “I use emails if it’s something that I want confirmed and saved or to have something written to prove, an agreement or confirmation or something. And if there is something that I want to discuss or want opinions about ... If I really want to make sure that the people understand me or I understand them, I give them a call.”

E – “... Emails is primarily used to have things documented to see what you’ve been discussed.”

That email is a useful communication channel for workplaces is in line with findings from previous research, which stated that email is often prioritised as a medium between employees because of its speed and that it reduces the number of face-to-face meetings and phone calls (Dawley and Anthony 2003, 192-193).

Availability after working hours
The participant spent a different number of hours each week on work-related communication during their spare time. Participant B and F said that they work a minimum number of hours during time off. The same answer was given by participant G which said that he could be working up to 20 hours a week when he was new in his role but now when he has learned to prioritise he is almost never working from home. Participant D also explained that she is not working more than one hour a week since she tries to do the work at her office:

D – “Not more than maybe an hour. That goes in periods but normally I try to do my time at work and when I’m home I’m offline.”

Participant A and E said that they do not work more than two hours after working hours. The participant that mentioned the highest number of hours after work was participant C, which said that she maybe works about three hours at home every week. Different to previous research, the participants said that they work fewer hours compared to the result by Waller
and Ragsdell (2012, 162). In their research, it was shown that the participants often worked almost four hours a week after office hours.

The participants were asked how many smartphones they own, both work-related and private ones. Participant A and G had only one smartphone for both work and private life. Both participants explained that they do not feel the need of having more than one phone and that it is more practical. The rest of the participants explained that they have two smartphones each – one for private use and one for work. Participant B explained that she prefers to have two smartphones so she can have her personal apps and programs on her private one:

B – “... I’ve realized that the company has restrictions on what you should put on your job phone and I want to have a personal phone where I can put on what I like, without having people wondering.”

Both participant C and E said that they would not have a problem to only have one smartphone but they explained that they are in situations where they have to have two smartphones. Participant C explained that she does not have Wi-Fi at home and that she has free Wi-Fi from her personal smartphone that she shares to the Apple TV and computer. Participant E said that he has a contract for his private smartphone but that he is thinking of only having one phone for both work and private use in the future.

At the question if the participant switches off their work-related phone, the majority of the participants explained that they do not completely switch off their phones but that they have a limited availability to work during time off. Participant E described that he is always available to work in case a problem would occur and that someone needs his help:

E – “I do have my work phone with me all time, so I bring it with me on my way home when I’ve left the office. As I interact with local people from the U.S, they are of course working when we’ve evening, and if there are things that I can support with during their office hours, I have no issues to quickly answer some emails or questions during my evening here in Sweden.”

In difference to the majority of the group, participant F said that she often chooses to leave her work phone at her office since she thinks it is important to have a clear boundary between work and home life:

F – “I actually leave it at work most of the time so that would be the same as switching it off I guess. I think it’s important for me to have a clear distinction between work and spare time. I know I get easily stressed if I’m constantly available ... It depends of course, if there’s an issue
in the organization and I know someone needs my help, I’ll keep it on just to be sure. But unless there’s anything, burning issues in the organization, or if someone needs me I believe everything can be dealt with the next day.”

When looking into the literature about boundary theory, there are two different reasons for why the answers from participant F differed from the other participants. The first explanation is that different individuals have different preferences about how integrated and segmented they like their work and home life to be (Nippert-Eng 1996, 567-68, 578). Participant F expressed that she often leaves her work phone at the office, which means that she prefers to have her work and home spheres more segmented.

What kind of work tasks the participant has is also something that influences the boundary between home and work life and another reason that participant F had a clear boundary between her roles could be that her job role did not require her to work overtime. Other employees might have it more difficult to completely switch their phones off because their roles require them to be available even after working hours (Ashford 2000, 474; Kreiner 2006, 486). One example of this could be identified in the research by Waller and Ragsdell (2012, 168). In that research, the result showed that the majority of the managers in their study worked longer hours than what was stated in their work contract.

That managers tend to work longer working hours could also be identified from interview answers from this study. Participant B explained that she is a group manager and feel a responsibly towards her group to be contactable outside working hours:

B – “If I recognize the phone number ... Since I am a group manager I feel that I should be contactable for my group members in case some emergency has happened or something like that. I have very few other calls.”

The number of international work contacts did also impact the after-work availability. As described earlier did participant F have an almost completely separated boundary between work and home. She explained that her current role does not demand her to work overtime because she does not have much work contact with people outside Sweden. In other words, she is working with colleagues that have similar office hours as she has:

F – “I don’t have to. I’ve never been in trouble or put someone else in trouble because I didn’t answer an email outside working hours. If my role requires me to do so, if I worked with managers overseas that are behind our time so they are at work when I’m at home having dinner,
that might push me to work more often during spare time but since I support local managers in Sweden, at least the majority, I don’t see the need to work after working hours.”

There were other participants which also worked within HR but they did not choose to have as strict segmentation between work and home life as participant F. Participant D explained that she can be available outside work but that she herself choose when she looks at the updates. Participant G, also working within HR, explained that he has the possibility to connect to work but that he normally does not need to do any work tasks outside his working hours since he is mostly working with people from Sweden.

No one of the participants explained that they have a complete integration of work and home life, e.g. that they are always available to work. The participants described that they are flexible to take work-related calls and emails during their spare time but that they had some techniques on how to deal with digital mobile media after working hours. Participant A explained that she is mostly answering emails that she can reply quickly to:

A – “Typically I accept meeting invitations because it’s just one click saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ so that’s very easy ... If it’s less than one minute reply, then I might do it but only if it’s really important or so ... If my manager really wants me to reply on something, which is very rare so I don’t say it’s a habit, but [I answer] if it would be something for him or a really high manager.”

Another method that the participant used to limit the availability to work was to mute or put their work-related smartphones away. Participant D explained how she often put her work smartphone on silence and that she later that evening might check it to see who has been contacting her. She also explained that the people she works closely with have her private number, in case they would need her help immediately. A similar behavior could also be identified in previous research findings. In the result by Sayah (2013, 187), it was explained how muting the phone was a form of disconnecting oneself from work. It was also mentioned how some participants decided to completely remove some functions from their electronic devices to not be able to see the updates (Sayah 2013, 188). Similar to previous research, did participant G explain that he has deleted the app with work email from his smartphone since he does not want to be able to look at these emails after working hours. He said that he does not see a reason for checking the emails after working hours since, in his role, there is almost nothing that cannot wait until the next morning:

G – “I have actually deleted my work email from my phone because I don’t want to be able to look at my emails after working hours... Usually, I’ve my work laptop with me home so if someone sends a text message saying ‘please look at this’, then I have to take a look at my work
laptop instead, I don’t know if it’s a good solution because it’s pretty heavy compared to an iPhone. But it’s really rare that I read my email after working hours... There are very few errands that I can’t do the day after.”

One of the interview questions focused on the participant availability during vacation. All of the participants explained that they think it is important to not be connected to work during vacation but some said that they feel that they want to or have to check the work updates.

Participant C explained that she experiences that she needs to be available since she is the only one that can do certain things in the project and work team that she is part of. Different to this answer, participant A and F explained that they only respond to work related communication during their vacation if it is very urgent. Several of the participants explained that they try not to use their work smartphones during holidays but that there are moments when they look for updates. Both participant B and E mentioned that they check their work-smartphone during vacation:

B – “Sometimes I check so nothing urgent has popped up. If it’s something I know will pop up because I don’t answer, I might not. I try to have free time where I don’t check the phone.”

E – “If I’m on vacation ... I can just take an example from last summer: I maybe looked at my emails two times a day to see if there were something that I needed to answer ... Or if it was something that could wait until I’m back, then I just looked at it and then put it back in my pocket.”

Participant G said also experienced a problem to completely shut off work at vacation. He said that he is often answering phone calls during vacation even though he knows it is not the right thing to do. He mentioned that one of the reasons why he is answering his phone is because he only has one phone for both work and private life and that makes it difficult to avoid the work-related calls.

Availability experience
Overall, the participants experienced that they are not affected too much of being available to work-related communication during time off. Participant E said that it does not bother him to sometimes be available to work during his spare time and participant F explained that she has no problems with it since she chooses to not open her emails when at home. However, she said that she might would feel differently if she was not logged off during her spare time.
Several of the participants mentioned that they are not forced to work from home but they sometimes do it because of their own choice. Participant A said that she sometimes chooses to leave work earlier and that she in these cases do some work from home since she herself made the decision to leave work earlier. She said that the technology makes it possible for her to work from anywhere and that she is not bound to a geographical place to do her work:

A – “I think it’s really good because I could do some of the job when I’m taking my kids to their different activities. So while they are doing sports activities I can do some of my work, I’m not bound to a geographical place ... So I can do my job even though I’m not in my office. I think my kids are feeling well about it because I’m taking them to the activities.”

The individual responsibility was also described by participant D which explained that she is good at putting her work-related phone away when at home and that she thinks that that other people might find this more challenging. She said that the company itself is not forcing people to do work from home but that it is an active choice by the employees:

D – “I think it’s more about the individual rather than an actual policy, I think it’s more that I made an active decision to not answer calls during the evening and it’s more that you actually make the decision yourself and feel it’s a good decision for you. For me, I have a two years old and I want to be part of his life so that’s mean that I have to ... I won’t bring him to work and play with him when I’m in the office so I need time to focus on both parts of my life.”

As seen from the comment above, participant D explained that she does not bring her child to work and that it is important that work tasks are not distracting her when she is at home. Different role expectations were mentioned by Nippert-Eng (1996, 564, 569), which explained that there are certain rules for what is expected of us in different situations and that this can for example be constructed for example, psychologically or socially. The comment by participant D is interesting since it challenges the picture of the value for the different social roles such as, why it should be more acceptable to do work at home but not to bring the parenting role to the workplace taking the child to the office.

The comment by participant D is also different compared to findings from previous research, which showed that a workplace culture has a stronger impact on employees’ behaviors than individual personalities (Barber and Santuzzi 2015, 172, 183; Lee 2016, 713). Participant D explained that she experiences that it is an individual choice to be available after working hours. One reason for the different results could be that the participants’ company has a work culture that values employees’ spare time. Being available after working hours would then be an active choice of the employee, rather than an expectation or demand from the workplace.
Telepressure, the feeling of having an urge to respond quickly to an email, did not seem to affect any of the participants. One reason for this could be that the workplace is not pushing the employees to answer work-related communication after working hours. According to the result from previous research, does telepressure often not depend on a certain personality type but rather how the workplace culture deal with demands and expectations from colleagues and managers (Barber and Satuzzi 2015, 183).

The majority of participants said that the work-related emails they receive during time off can wait until the next working day. Both participants A and F explained that they are not working as doctors or emergency healthcare and that all work can wait until the next working day:

A – “... I’m not a doctor so everything could wait until to next day.”

F – “... There’s nothing that is so important, at least not in HR, that is so important that it can’t wait until the next morning. I’m not working with emergency healthcare ... I understand the issue but it’s not an issue for me since I work mainly with people from Sweden.”

However, participant D explained that emails can wait until the morning after she feels that she needs to answer some work-related phone calls when at home. She explained that people that she works closely with has her private number and if they call her, it is most likely something very urgent:

D – “The most important people have my personal number and then they also have to make a judgement since they know if it’s my private zone, if it’s so urgent so they have to call me privately.”

However, several participants explained that they, even though they are not forced to check their emails, feel a need to be available to work. Participant E explained that he often feels curious to check his emails after working hours since he wants to be updated on projects that is happening in another region, operating outside his office hours. Checking the smartphone because of curiosity was also mentioned by participant C:

C – “It’s not an expectation, it’s not that someone ... My manager would say “no answer tomorrow” and “if you’re sick “don’t look at your emails” but it’s something that I’m curious about, what’s in my email.”
Positive aspect of being available to work during time off

As described by Thompson (1995, 31, 149), the digital mobile media have made it possible to work anywhere at any time. The flexibility with the technology was seen as a positive thing among the participants. Participant B explained that she likes that she does not need to sit and wait at the office for an email to arrive in the afternoon and that she instead can go home and answer it later in the afternoon or evening. She explained that the technology makes it possible to have a more flexible work-life balance and that this is good for parents with children:

B – “I think we have a good culture, it’s flexible for those who want, for example parents that have children. [There are] more benefits than negative sides.”

Several parents were interviewed for this study and all of them agreed that the flexibility is something positive. Participant D said that it makes the family life easier since it is possible to change plans with short notice. She gave an example of how her husband during the morning was supposed to be home with their child but because of changed plans, he had to leave earlier. She explained that she had to stay at home but it was still possible for her to work since she could easily connect to work and do job tasks from home. Participant A also described how the flexibility makes it easier to work from home and be with her children:

A – “… I left the office earlier to be with my kids so I think it’s a win-win situation. I think the company is good that control my time at the office myself and for me it’s fair that I do the emailing then in different geographical places.”

Some of the participants mentioned that they like the possibility to connect to work when they are at home since they experience that they can do a better job because of this. Participant C said that she feels that she can do a better job when she is available for her employees during the spare time and participant D mentioned how the technology makes it easier to prepare when she is not at the office. She said that she thinks it is good to be updated on what will happen during the next working day since she has the possibility to prepare and/or reschedule something. Participant E mentioned that it is positive to partly be available outside working hours since they are working in a global company and it is easier to do the work when people are supportive towards each other also after working hours:

E – “… We are working in a global company with functions related to all the regions, also located across the globe. I would say that regardless the person or the function that you need to get hold on located in another region, there is always [or] usually some people in that particular region and department that you can get hold on and you know that this person is supportive. This person will answer quickly outside office hours and I myself would very much appreciate that...
For example, if someone in Asia, when it’s their evening, answer a quick question to support my work … So, I try to be as supportive myself.”

Negative aspects of being available to work during time off

When the participants commented on the negative aspects of a constant work availability, the word ‘stress’ was mentioned several times. Participant G explained that he normally does not open emails during his spare time but when he does, he can feel stressed even though he gets information about a problem that he cannot solve before the next working day. He gave an example that he sometimes does not have the right equipment at home to solve a job-related problem, which he experiences as stressful.

There was an article from the previous research that mentioned work equipment at home. In the study by Dettmers et al. (2016, 291) the result showed that employees that are demanded or required to work after office hours experience lower recovery and well-being. However, it was also explained that an employee that have the feeling of control and the right tools to handle a situation after working hours experience less stress.

As described by both participant C and F, they are not currently feeling stressed about job tasks after working hours but that their situation could be more stressful if they would start to do more job-related errands from home. They highlighted the importance of having spare time and relaxation:

C – “I don’t feel that it’s negative right now but I know it could be negative to not be able to relax 100%. I think it’s always good to be on the holiday when you’re on holiday, you should relax and don’t think about work. I think it’s up to each person to feel how stressed you are. It’s difficult. I think the right answer is to not bring work home …”

F – “I think it’s the stress. You get wind up in it and think it’s hard to stop when you first start. You might get the sense that you need to be logged on all the time because you might miss something but I don’t want to go there. I want to keep my spare time and then work when I get paid for it.”

The comments by participant C and F are examples of how individuals actively working on the creation of a boundary between different spheres, in this case the work and home life. As explained by Nippert-Eng (1996, 564), it is a constant boundary work to maintain two spheres apart from each other. The quotes from participant C and F show how they actively make choices which make them not think of work when having spare time, since this would decrease their overall well-being.
Stress in relation to sleep quality was mentioned by both participant A and B. They described how opening emails late in the evening can start a thinking process and have a negative impact on their sleep:

A – “Let’s say I’m reading emails during the evening before I’m going to bed, then it might start a thinking process and that means that I might not sleep because then I start think and start to plan stuff or solve [work-related] problems ... So I might sleep less hours.”

B – “I actually had a small training session, a stress-related training session, where they said that it’s not good to look at emails before you go to bed... Even though you think it doesn’t stress you, it still does. If I feel more stressed about knowing that something has popped up that I knew would pop up, then I take it and take action, so I can relax after that.”

Based on the quote by participant B, the training has helped her to be more aware of when to be available to work during time off. Previous research has also shown that training sessions can be useful to improve the work recovery and sleep quality (Hahn et al. 2011, 201). However, as described by Mino et al. (2006, 182), it could be more important to focus on improving the overall work culture about availability outside working hours since this will be a more long-term solution compared to single stress-management trainings. Another study that mentioned stress in relation to sleep was Kushlev and Dunn (2015, 226), which findings showed that frequently checking emails is linked to increased stress levels and bad sleep quality.

As described earlier in this chapter, the participants mentioned several positive aspects of how the family life has improved with the possibility of flexible working hours. However, the participants also explained that there are times when the working flexibility can be damaging to the family life. One example of the negative aspects of working from home was explained by participant G, which said that his girlfriend is not fond of him working from home and that he finds it difficult to focus on his spare time interests if he starts thinking of work.

That it can be difficult to mentally detach from work at home was also one of the findings from previous research. In the study by Wang and Chen (2017, 99), the result showed that employees that brings work home have a higher level of work-family conflict and that individuals that are working from home can have more difficulties to psychologically detach from work.

Participant B explained that she finds working from home both positive and negative. She said that she and her husband sometimes both work from home and that she can feel that they can be disconnected from the family life. However, she also said that it is good that she can connect to work from home. For example, working from home when her child is sick.
Result from previous research described how it is common for employees look at their job-related messages after office hours even though they know it might be more a stressful than productive habit (Waller and Ragsdell, 2012, 169). Participant E explained something similar, he said that it can become a negative habit to check work-related updates through the smartphone:

E – “You get the habit of looking at what the updates, I mean if you hang out with someone you should not look at your phone, you should focus on spending time with that person instead. Like, you’re off and you’re not working now but maybe you get the habit of looking too much.”

Motives for after work availability
The participants all agreed on that it is important to be able to have spare time after working hours. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants were somewhat available to work during time off, for different reasons. The answer among the participants was that they are working for a global company and that this makes it difficult to do everything during the Swedish office hours. Participant A and D explained that the company is based all over the world and that there are always some people working somewhere. The different working hours were also described by participant C:

C – “... The company is global so there’s always someone working, 24/7. It’s like, if it’s not in the U.S, Brazil or South America, it’s either Europe or Asia ... The sun is always shining somewhere.”

Participant C also explained that she has to arrange certain meetings outside office hours since some people she’s having meetings with are working from other countries:

C – “They can see in my calendar that I finish work at five but sometimes I choose to have a later call because I have colleagues in for example the U.S ... that’s why I choose to have meetings a bit later so it can match both our schedules.”

As described in the theoretical chapter, the boundary between the work and home sphere depends on an individual choice but it also depends on the type of role the individual has (Ashford 2000, 474; Kreiner 2006, 485). There was a difference between the participants that had more international contacts within the company, compared to those who worked more nationally. The participants that had more work-related international contacts experienced that they wanted to be more available after working hours. However, they did not comment negatively about it since they said it is a choice they make themselves (A, B, C, E).
Because of the company’s global focus, several of the participants explained that there are difficulties to reduce the emailing in the company. Participant B said that her colleagues from other countries are emailing her during their working hours, which is difficult to change. Participant E also mentioned that he cannot expect to receive fewer emails during his spare time from people outside Europe:

E – “It can be [reduced] from my side but when it comes to my colleagues I would say no since we’re so spread out, people in Asia, people in the U.S, South America you name it. They have of course other business hours than I have so I cannot expect that I should get fewer emails received outside working hours. But let's say European colleagues ... I would say it can be reduced but I do not receive that many emails from European colleagues because the things that needs to be fixed or solved within the region of Europe, that’s usually gets solved during business hours.”

Participant E also described how he thinks the main reason that he is available after working hours is to be available towards others since he is expecting his other colleagues to do the same for him. Another person that described the importance of being available for others was participant B, which said that she is a group manager and she feels that she should be contactable for her group members in case something urgent happens.

Several of the participants described that if they respond to a work-related call or email after working hours it is because it is easy to answer or if something is very urgent. Both participant B and E explained that they are checking their smartphones after working hours and if there is something that needs an urgent response they would reply to it. Participant A also explained that she is selective about what kind of job-related messages that she answers to and that she mostly accepts messages that go quickly to reply to. Selectively answering work-related message was also mentioned in the study by Sayah (2013, 190, 192) which showed that employees control the boundary between work and home life by choosing when to be available.

Other reasons for being available after working hours were to prepare for the next working day and to do work that was not done during the working day. Participant A described that she sometimes does not have time to read emails during office hours and participant C said that answering emails during her spare time gives her fewer emails to respond to in the morning:

A – “... at work I don’t always read my emails because I’m doing, you know, having meetings, writing documents, interviewing people and so ... Most of the time I have time to read my emails but if I for some reason one day didn’t had the time then I might read it at home. But I don’t always reply to the emails. I can read it but I don’t necessarily reply to it.”
“Mostly because of two options. The first one is that I feel that something is coming and I’m maybe, if it’s a discussing I see in the email, I can get a little bit annoyed that they don’t even have the information and then I just want to answer to give them the information so they stop emailing back and forth, not knowing. The second could be that I’m stressed and I feel that is nice to just finish some emails, so it’s a bit less in the morning.”

Based on these answers, the participants explain how they can feel stressed if they do not answer certain emails during their spare time. This behavior might be useful for the individual self but the behavior can make other people working in the same time zone experience that they need to do the same. As described by Brown et al. (2014, 343), how and when an email is communicated can create norms within the company, such as answering during the spare time.

Participant G said that he feels negatively affected by receiving emails after working hours. He explained that his manager is often connected after working hours and that she tends to send him and her team emails during their spare time. He also described that he experience some expectations to be available himself:

G – “Not in the way that she managed her team but in the way that she works, she brings up the expectation for us to do the same ... I think the expectations from my managers part is to be connected ...”

As seen from the quote above, he explained that he experiences that his manager would appreciate if he was more available after working hours. As described by Bandura (1977, 16-17, 24), individuals observe others and the surroundings to learn certain behaviors but the individual only learn a behavior if he or she wants to learn it. This could be identified in another answer from participant G, where he describes how he chooses to have a restricted availability after working hours since he believes a constant availability is causing stress:

G – “ ... For my personal part, work is work and private life is private life and I don’t like to have them connected but a lot of people value job as a private interest ... That’s good but not too much. It’s simply because they want to have the control of it and I don’t think it’s good ... It’s good when you’re at work but not outside work because then you only get stressed. I have a lot of colleagues that feel that they have to answer outside [working hours] and I don’t think that’s good.”

Based on the comment by participant G, does he make an active choice to be occasionally connected to work after working hours even though he feels that his manager would prefer him to be more available.
Peer pressure and workplace culture

The workplace norm has an important impact on the digital mobile media usage are used within an organization (Fulk as cited in Baym 2010, 41). According to the majority of the participants, their workplace does not encourage anyone to work after office hours. As described by participant C, her manager would never demand her to respond to a work-related message if she has gone home from the office or is she is home and sick. Participant C also described that she thinks the workplace culture is very positive:

C – “I think they have a really good and positive affect ... They don’t want me to take calls or emails after work. Most of my colleagues and other, not first colleagues in my team but other colleagues in the company who are also my colleagues, they never expect me ... Or I never feel that they expect me to answer emails or calls after office hours.”

Participant E also explained that he experiences a little negative peer pressure at his workplace. He said that he is not expected or supposed to answer calls outside working hours but that it is up to himself if he does it. Participant F also agreed that there is no destructive peer pressure at her office and that she is happy that her work and home life is not too integrated:

F – “I think it's affects me but not in a negative way. Because I think we're good at respecting each other’s private's life at this company. It would be harder for me to keep this clear line if I worked for a company that didn’t respect spare time.”

Participant C and D explained that they think their managers are supportive and are good at telling their teams to not work unnecessarily from home:

C – “It’s not an expectation, it's not that someone ... My manager would say ‘no answer tomorrow’ and ‘if you’re sick don’t look at your emails’ but it’s something that I’m curious about, what’s in my email.”

D – “As long as there is respect and I do my part. My manager and colleagues say that as long as I do what I’m supposed to do, I can do it whenever I want to. Of course, we have a communication and I say where I am at different times.”

Overall, the majority of the participant experienced a good work-life balance and that they have enough support from the management, which is an important factor for well-being among employees (Carr et al. 2011, 35; Harvey et al. 2003, 313).
Lastly, the participants had all very different habits of how they used their work-related messages and calls after working hours but all were happy about their own behavior regarding the availability. They also explained that their current work-life balance is working well. This result differed compared to previous findings showed that smaller organizations rated their workplace environment higher than medium and large companies in relation to workplace stress and job satisfaction (Buys et al. 2010, 28). As described in the method chapter, the participants for this study were working for a larger multinational company. One reason for the different results could be that Buys et al. (2010, 27), had a survey which was answered by 600 employees from different companies and countries, while this study has been qualitative and focusing on participants from one company.

Digital mobile media policy and improvements of work availability

In the study by Day et al. (2012, 486), it was described how a workplace culture can be improved by implementing an availability policy for digital mobile media. When asking the participants about their digital mobile media policy, the majority of the participant said that they have a policy but none were fully aware of what it is about. The participants did not think there was any policy about the availability after working hours. Participant G explained that the policy is more about how they can use the work-related phone:

G – “We have an agreement for what we use it for. We can’t use it for mail for private things, it has to be work-related ... We have a policy and we cannot use the smartphone for private more than just changing out some information or use Google ... It doesn’t state when I’m allowed to use the phone for example.

The participants expressed several general improvements to the email and smartphone usage after working hours. Participant B explained that she thinks there should be a general policy about how to use the emails after working hours but it could be decided between the person and its manager. Another improvement was described by participant A, which described that she thinks there should be a rule which says that it is not be allowed to read emails in bed:

A – “The only rule I would have is to not read emails in bed ... That’s something I would change. It makes sense but it’s difficult to follow.”

Participant A also explained that she thinks the email usage could be improved by flagging or marking the emails differently. She described that it would be easier to prioritise for the receiver if the emails were flagged or marked:
A – “In a previous role ... To be able to manage the big flow of emails that we had was actually to put in the title, or in the subject, that you wrote ‘info’ or ‘action’. Because then you could prioritise. If I got an email with a subject saying ‘action’ ... Then I would know that know that I need to do something, then I could prioritise that, in front of the emails with ‘info’ as a subject and that could be something. Because sometimes you get emails which is just about information and it could be more visualised ... Then you could do your prioritising if you have a lot of emails.”

The method of categorizing emails was also described in previous research. The result by Burgess et al. (2005, 80-1) showed that the subject line is important for labelling and marking emails differently, which makes it easier for the receiver to value how urgent the email is. It was also described how email training can improve the employees’ email communication which reduces the feeling of overwhelming when receiving a large number of emails.

Another general improvement for digital mobile media after working hours, were described by participant C, which mentioned that people within the same time zone should stop reply to each other after office hours. She explained that people that are emailing during their spare time can cause a bad workplace culture since it makes other employees feeling a need to do the same:

C – “I don’t know if this could be a solution but if I would want a change it could be that, if I’m a Swedish person working in our time zone I don’t reply to Swedish people after office hours because that could be stressful for someone else ... For example if colleagues open their phones and see that I’m emailing at 10 o’clock, maybe they feel stressed that I’m working in the evening and they might feel that they should too ... But I think it’s a little difficult to control because sometimes ... People go early from work to pick up their kids and then they work a bit in the evening instead. Most of us have very flexible hours and we can work from home, then we can take a couple of days during the day doing something else and then work in the evening. I don’t think it’s something that we should do but that is something that could be done ... ”

Another improvement suggestion from participant F was to do what she is doing – to not bring work to home. A similar answer was also given by participant A, which explained that they rather do all work when at work and then have time off completely:

D – “... I’ve not had that long of a career but basically from the beginning I made a statement that I’ll work long days, for me it’s not that important to have one hour lunches and I can have lunch meetings... But when I’m home, I really want to be home and I was thinking like this even when I did not have a child in the beginning. I don’t think most people do that in the beginning, even when they don’t have a boyfriend, girlfriend or a child. It’s more something that will come when realize that you don’t have time for everything.”
Participant G explained that he sees an improvement in how some people handle emails after working hours. He described that they often have a lot of workload and that there is sometimes not enough time to do everything during the working hours and that his colleagues choose to answer email when they come home. Participant G said that he thinks an improvement on this could be to always answer the emails the first thing they do in the morning:

G – “Everyone has a lot of work load and then they do all the things they have to do during the work day and then go to the email when they're home. My solution to this is to go to the emails in the morning. I think a lot of other people should do that as well but they don’t because they have their own way of handling it.”

Other general improvements for the after-work availability was comments about the importance of spare time and relaxation. As described by participant C, individuals have a lot of pressure in today's society, not only from work, and it is important to take time for all parts of life:

C – “I mean there are two main things, basically, it’s never a super positive thing to work when you’re not supposed to work I think. It’s a very stressful world and people are pressured by not only work but relationships and you’re supposed to work out and eat healthy and make your own food and take care of your kids and whatever. I think it’s very important to work and then take care of the rest of your life when you’re not working. Secondly, in this company, the culture is very good in regard to that you shouldn’t bring your work home. At least in my position. Maybe people that are on a higher position have a different feeling.”

When comparing this result to previous findings, a similar result was found in the study by Mellner (2016, 156-157), which showed that individuals that are using their smartphones after working hours have more difficulties to detach from work and that those ones that have a better boundary control between work and home life find it easier to detach from the job when having spare time.

The participants for this study have all expressed a feeling of control over their current situation but they have also explained that they probably would feel more stressed if they started to do more work-related tasks after working hours. Participant D explained that she sees an overall problem in workplaces about the stress and that the availability can be a risk for those who do not know their limits:

D – “For me, since I put my phone away, I don’t see that much negative aspects. It’s more a comment here and there ... I think I’m really good at putting my phone away but for those who's not, there could be challenges.”
Lastly, there were two comments that were slightly different from the other ones regarding improvements for the work availability during time off. Participant G explained that it would be easier for him to do work-related tasks from home if he was allowed to use his own personal devices. Another suggestion for improvement was about answering the smartphone while driving. Participant A explained that they have a rule in her team to not taking phone calls while driving, she described that these situations mostly happens after office hours. She believed that it would be useful if this was banned throughout the whole company since it is about safety.
Discussion and conclusion

Globalization and the digital mobile media affect the way people live and work today and the technology is a major factor for the blurred boundary between work and home life (Dettmers et al. 2016, 276-77; Thompson 1995, 149). The aim of this study has been to explore how employees experience today’s boundary-less work environment through digital mobile media and reasons for being available to work during time off.

This study has had the purpose to continue exploring previous findings of the boundary between work and home life, in relation to digital mobile media. In terms of method and theories, the study has differed compared to previous research on the topic. Previous research has been focusing on quantitative methods of surveys and web-questionnaires, while this study has been organized through a qualitative method of semi-structured interviews through phone. Based on the literature review it was also revealed that boundary theory in relation to social norms could be further explored. The theoretical framework of this study has focused on boundary theory combined with social influence model, social learning theory, the concept of digital mobile media and globalization.

The result from this thesis is based on experiences and opinions from a few participants working in Sweden and is clearly not representing how employees in other international companies and organizations are experiencing their work-life balance. As described in the method part, a qualitative study never has the aim to cover a large amount of participant but rather to gather personal insight in a topic that a person has experience in. The findings from this study is a small qualitative contribution to the research field of international communication studies.

Seven Swedish participants took part of the individual semi-structured interviews. This study did not focus on a specific gender but out of seven participants five were women. The company did not have more women than men working in the company, it was rather the opposite. One explanation of why the majority of the participants were females could be that women are more interested in the topic and have more negative experiences with a blurred boundary between work and home life. Previous research has shown that women often have more difficulties to psychological detach from work and often score higher on the spill over scale (Berkowsky 2013, 534; Mellner 2016, 157). However, this study did not have the aim to explore the difference between men and women and it would be misleading to make any statements about the gender question.
Emails were the most common communication tool within the company. This did not come as a surprise since it is mentioned in previous research and theory how email is popular for communication within workplaces (Dawley and Anthony 2003, 192; Dimbleby and Burton 2007, 139-40). The participants explained that they use mainly emails when contacting each other since the company is operating worldwide and the participants described emails as ‘flexible’ and ‘a good way to store information’. The majority of the participants used two smartphones, both a job-related phone and private one. It was explained that this make it easier to separate the work and time off (p. 28).

Answering research question one
When looking into the first research question (How do employees experience the impact of digital mobile media regarding the boundary between work and home life?), the answers showed different results depending on the participants’ role within the company. Overall, none of the participants worked more than three hours a week after office hours and there were participants that expressed how they almost fully disconnect from work during spare time (p. 27). These participants explained that they believe that a segmented relationship between work and home life is best for them. However, the common factor for these participants, was that they worked in roles which mostly has work-related contacts with people from Sweden (p. 30).

The other participants that worked more with international contacts, also described that their spare time is important and that they have a restricted availability to work. Nevertheless, they also explained that they think it is difficult to completely disconnect after work since their colleagues are working from different countries and have different working hours. As described in the boundary theory (Ashforth et al. 2000, 475; Kreiner 2006, 485-486), the findings showed that the level of segmentation and integration of the work-life boundary depends both on the individuals’ choice but the role within the organization is also impacting the boundary.

As seen from the result, the participants experienced that they need to be flexible when working with people from other countries since they are operating from different time zones. The participants explained how meetings sometimes are in another time zones than Sweden and that they have to attend these meetings, they need to be available during the spare time (p. 37). However, the participants expressed that they are almost disconnected to work during vacations and that they only answer emails and phone calls that are very urgent (p. 31).

The participants experienced the work-life boundary quite similar to each other. The majority of the participants said that they are not feeling demanded or expected to work after office hours but they sometimes do it because of their own choice (p. 32). The participants expressed
that the digital mobile media make it possible for them to work from different geographical places and that it can be both positive and negative. None of the participants expressed that they answer work-related messages as soon as possible after working hours. The majority of the participants said that they often check their work-related messages when at home but not always answering them, or that they answer the emails later during that evening (p. 30).

The sub-question (What aspects of always being connected to work does the employee like and dislike?) was inspired by previous research, which mostly showed negative results regarding availability after working hours (Berowsky 2013, 536; Mellner 2016, 156-157). The participants were therefore asked for both their positive and negative opinions regarding the availability after working hours.

Several positive and negative sides of the work availability were mentioned during the interviews. The participants described the flexibility as something they liked the most with the with the digital mobile media – to be able to work from anywhere. The participants described how it makes the family life easier since they now have the possibility to leave earlier from work to be with their family or stay home with a sick child (p. 34, 36). It was also described how the digital mobile media make it easier to do their jobs well since it is possible to prepare for the upcoming working day from home (p. 38).

The most disliked aspect about the possibility of being available after working hours, was the stress that could occur. As described by some of the participants, there is a problem with always being connected since it starts a thinking process that could cause bad sleep quality and difficulties to detach from work. The participants said that they think it helps with digital mobile media training for reducing stress (p. 36).

The majority of the participants described that they experience a good control over their work-life balance, which might be a reason for why they do not only see the availability as something that is only negative. The participants did not feel any expectation or demand from the colleagues to answer work-related messages outside working hours but they explained that they did it mostly because they themselves wanted it (p. 32, 40).

**Answering research question two**

The second research question (What reasons do employees mention for connecting to work during time off?), covers a topic that has not been much focused on in previous research. There have mostly been studies of quantitative kind, which often does not answer questions such as how and why.
Differently from previous research, the result from this study explored the reasons employees have for answering work-related calls and emails after working hours. The most common answer for being available was that the participants experience a need to help others that are working in other parts of the world (p. 28). Another reason for their availability was that they have too little time at work to answer their emails and choose to answer them during the spare time. There were also participants that said that they are available to work since it helps them become better at their job, for example being more organized (p. 34). Curiosity was another answer to why the participants answer work-related emails and calls after working hours (p. 33). None of the participants described that they are available after working hours because of peer-pressure from managers or colleagues (p. 40).

One of the sub-questions for research question two was about work culture (How does the work culture affect an employee’s usage of digital mobile media after working hours?). According to the social influence model a workplace culture has an important influence on how employees use digital mobile media (Fulk as cited in Baym 2010, 41). The participants explained that they do think that they influence each other – but not in a negative way. There were comments saying that they have a positive workplace culture and that they are respecting each other’s private lives. Furthermore, the majority of the participants did think that their managers were good at not pushing them to work outside office hours (p. 40). Having a good management team was described by previous research as an important factor for a good workplace culture (Carr et al. 2011, 35; Harvey et al. 2003, 313).

The last sub-question (How would the employee like to shape an availability policy after working hours?), also had to do with workplace culture but focused more on the employees own opinions about how they would like their workplace to become even better.

There were different answers given to this sub-question. The participants did not think that the emailing itself could be reduced since they are working in a multinational company, however there were some comments about how the emailing could be improved. Being more structured when sending the emails was one of the improvements that the participants would like to see, such as labelling and flagging emails in order for the receiver to easily prioritize. The participants also explained that it could be useful if the people working in the same time zone had as a rule to not respond to each other after working hours (p. 42). Lastly, there was a comment saying that emails should not be read late in the evening or in bed since it will damage the sleep quality (p. 41).
Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

There are several limits of the study, which could be taken as inspiration for future research. All of the participants were working in a multinational company but they were all Swedes working in Sweden. This is a limit since the result only gives a Swedish point of view to the availability after working hours. Employees working for the same company but from different countries might have other opinions and experiences on the work-life balance. For future research, it would be of research interest to interview people from two different countries within the same company. Even though the employees are working for the same company, there might be some differences between the country offices.

As described earlier, the study did not focus on the difference between the genders. For future research, it would be interesting to make a qualitative study on the after-work availability, focusing on the different experiences between men and women. Different age groups would also be of value to interview since this study has not taken this into consideration.

Another limit of the study is the selection of participants within the company. The participants have been randomly chosen from several Swedish offices, with different positions and within different fields. The positive side of this, was that the answers were quite varied, especially between those who worked with people from Sweden compared to those who had more international job contacts. As seen from the result, the ones working with people from Sweden were more offline to the job after working hours, compared to the ones working with people from different time zones. However, it could be interesting to understand how different people working in the same field experience the boundary between work and home life. Furthermore, it would be of societal interest with a research that compares the answers between managers and employees. As seen from this study, a participant with a management position experienced a responsibility to answer work-related emails and calls after working hours (p. 29).

Due to a short time limit and limited travel budget, the method of interviews through phone was relevant for this study. However, for future research it would be recommended with face-to-face interviews or focus groups since these qualitative methods could be further explored, focusing on the boundary between work and time off and the impact of digital mobile media.

This study only focused on the work spill over during employees’ spare-time and not on how the personal life affects the work through digital mobile media. In other words, there was no focus on communication for private purposes at the workplace, for example through instant messages. I found previous research that looked into this topic but it could be further explored (Berkowsky 2013, 523).
Concluding words

The aim of the study has been fulfilled by providing the international communication field with a small qualitative contribution about employees’ experience of the boundary-less working environment with digital mobile media. In a world that is characterized by globalization and the possibility to constantly be connected, it is important to continue updating the knowledge about the boundary between work and time off.
List of references


Personal interviews by phone
A - 2018, April 11
B - 2018, April 11
C - 2018, April 12
D - 2018, April 13
E - 2018, April 13
F - 2018, April 18
G - 2018, April 19
Appendix 1 – Information sheet and consent form

INFORMATION SHEET

Dear...

Thank you for agreeing to take part in an interview for my research study, conducted as part of a master’s course taught at Jönköping University. Please read this information carefully.

My name is Hanna Holmgren. I am a Swedish student, in the field of international communication, and this interview is part of a course assignment. I am studying how workers handle the work-life balance in the context of constant online connectivity. I am interested in the opinions and perspectives of people working for multinational companies.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may skip any questions that you don’t want to answer, and you may choose to end the interview at any time.

I will record, transcribe and save the interview in a secure way. In the future, I may use parts of the transcription in a course assignment. If I do, your name will not be linked to quotes from your interview.

Please keep one copy of this INFORMATION SHEET. I will ask you to sign another copy for Jönköping University’s records. You can find my contact information below, as well as a contact email for my university supervisor for this assignment. Thank you again for your collaboration and your time.

Hanna Holmgren

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CONSENT FORM

By signing below, I agree to participate in the interview, and for the interview’s recording and transcript to be used according to the conditions described in the INFORMATION SHEET above.

Name:

Contact information (phone number and e-mail address):

Date:

Place:

Signature:
Appendix 2 – Interview questionnaire

Opening questions

1. What are you working with?
2. Which communication channels do you use more often when contacting your colleagues?
   a. Why?

Questions regarding integration of work and leisure

Theme 1: Managing work-related email and calls

1. How many smartphones do you have?
   a. If only one: Why?
   b. If more than one: Do you switch off your work phone during your spare time?
2. Do you get work-related phone calls after working hours?
   a. Yes: Do you answer them?
      i. Why?
3. Do you get work-related emails after working hours?
   a. Yes: Do you read them?
      i. Why?
   b. Yes: Do you answer them?
      i. Why?
4. If you are on vacation and check your work-related smartphone, what are the reasons for doing this?

Theme 2: Availability after working hours

1. How much time per week are you available to work after working hours?
2. What are the positive aspects of being connected to the job outside working hours?
   a. What are the negative aspects?
3. In what way does your connectivity to the job outside working hours affect your everyday life?

Focus on why the participant responds to job-related messages during leisure

Theme 3: Reasons for job contact after working hours

1. Are there any emails and calls that could wait until the next working day but that you still answer?
   a. Yes: Why?
2. Do you feel that you should answer a phone call after working hours?
   a. Yes: Why?
3. How do you think peer-pressure from colleagues and managers affects how you handle email and calls after working hours?
Theme 4: Communication improvements at the workplace

1. How would you like to change your behavior regarding job availability outside work?
   a. Why?

2. Do you experience that the emailing can be reduced after working hours?
   a. Yes: In what way?

3. Is there any email or smartphone policy at your workplace?
   a. Yes: How does it look like?
   b. No: If there was a policy about after-work availability, how would you like it to be?

4. How would you like to improve your workplace’s culture regarding constant availability outside working hours?

‘Cool-off’ question

1. Is there anything else about this topic that you would like to comment on?