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Mobile Working in a Higher Education Context

Opportunities and risks for diversity



Institute for Gender and Diversity in Organizations

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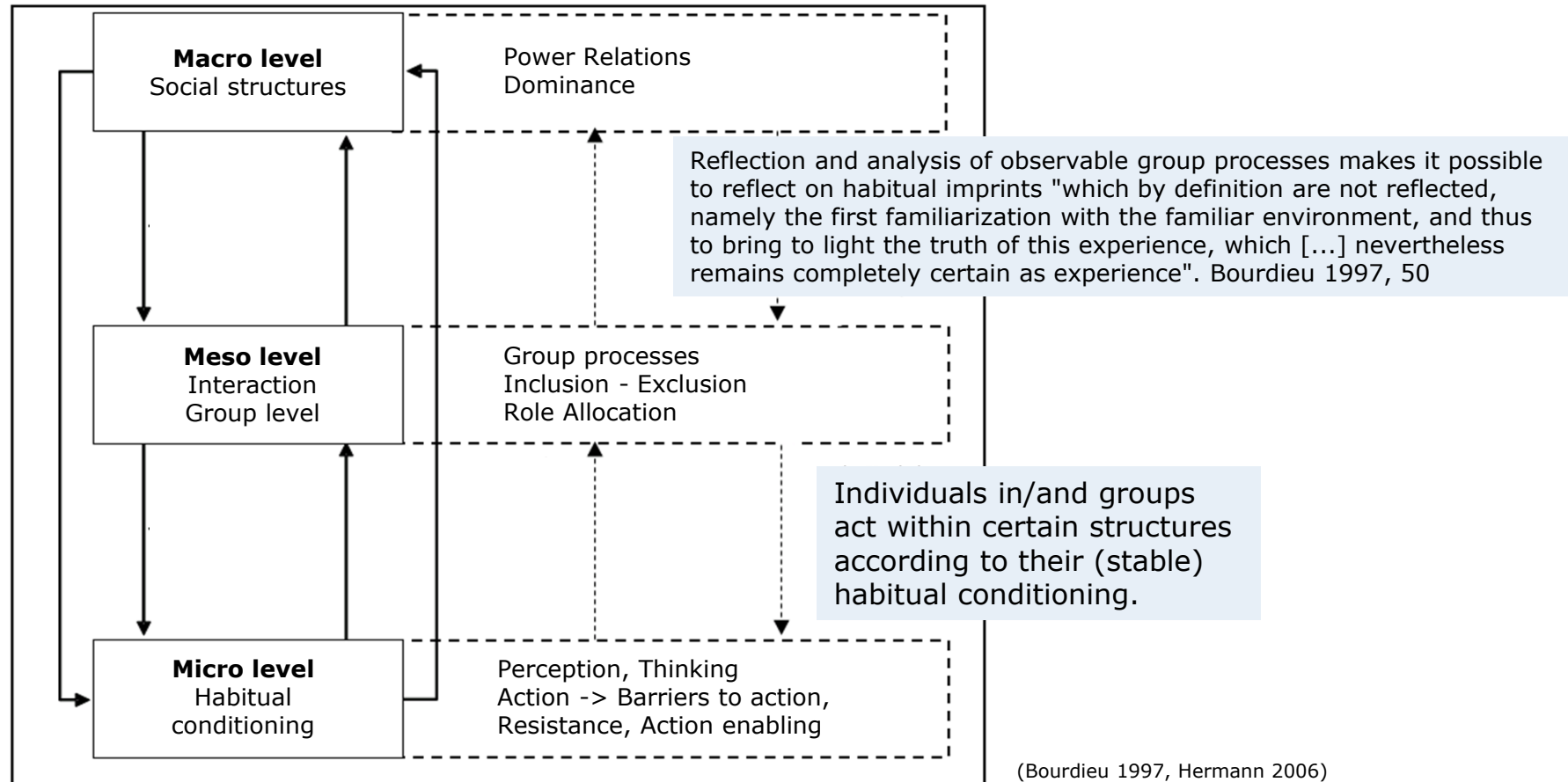


Mobile Working in HE administration ... a field of research that receives little interest

Research Background

- Higher Education Research (... but not scientific fields/subjects)
- Scientific academic study on the implementation of mobile working among administrative staff in a University
- Theoretical Framework: Pierre Bourdieu's Social Theory
 - Specific field (Administration in the Academic field)
 - Different kinds of Social Capital (Accumulation of social, economic and symbolic capital)
- Methodological framework:
 - Narrative Interviews
 - Global analysis (main words, phrases and context, new questions) (Legewie 1994)
 - Grounded theory method (theoretical sampling) to elaborate and develop categories generated in the data (Charmaz 2014, Mey/Mruck 2011)
 - Detailed analysis (Froschauer/Lueger 1992)
 - Document analysis (Mayring 2009)
 - Literature research

Theoretical Framework



Data collection

- The organization currently researched has more than 2400 employees including around 800 in management and administration.
- Organization main objective: dealing with multiple challenges, diversity and inclusion via digitalization
- Sample = pilot group: selected employees and middle managers with home office experience before "Corona times" (from 2002 to 2020)
 - Interviews from October 2020 to December 2020
 - 43 individual interviews: General administration, all areas (accounting, IT, HR etc.)
 - 9 men, 34 women, almost all in permanent employment contracts and from different hierarchical categories: 16 full-time employees, 27 part-time employees // 29 employees, 14 managers
 - Topics: Experience, Challenges, Individual needs (before Corona t.), shifts during Corona time and wishes for the future

Research question

How do flexible forms of work impact different organizational processes of differentiation?

- How does flexible working and inclusion in a team succeed on site?
- How is control exercised?
- Under what conditions does trust work?
- How (and why) does the Organization shape a gender-identity?
- How can work be made visible and thus build trust?

... to answer this question

1. 3 Cases (Sample) from different Diversity Dimensions

- Women with childcare responsibilities in lower positions
- Female and male Leaders with children and a long experiences in the Organization (University as bureaucratic organization)

Weber 1930

- Non-typical female and male Leaders
 - Women leaders in IT
 - “Non-Austrian” leaders with childcare responsibilities

2. Findings in the way of changes



*Gardenswartz & Rowe, Diverse Teams at Work (2nd Edition, SHRM, 2003)

*Internal Dimensions and External Dimensions are adapted from Marilyn Loden and Judy Rosener,

Case 1: Women with childcare responsibilities

Women with young children (after the maternity leave)

- Lower positions (not Management)
- Work location is the organization: home office as an exception for this specific group after returning from maternity leave
- Leader must agree
- Professional experience and knowledge of organizational processes must be available
- Work must be able to be done from home (one day per week)

Aims

Individual: Work-family life balance and increase Income

Organization: Availability of qualified employees

Interview Sequences

"As I said, I might be particularly fortunate [...] if I say, okay, I have to go to kindergarten. I can work before, work after, and for the time when I have to pick up the children, I'm not at the computer for a short time." (I 1, 24)

"And there I have this pressure, for example, that I very often catch myself that I count, for example, how many e-mails I have written today and that I look whether I have written e-mails in the, at the beginning of my working hours and at the end, so that you can see that I have worked from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.. Or if I on Fridays, for example, if then little is going on and I'm in the home office and there is actually nothing to do, then I can of course, I'm working then already, because I might be planning something or developing something, but no one sees it. I.e. I then try on Friday to send out an e-mail, so that everyone can see how, one is there. (I 43, 28)"

Findings

Women with childcare responsibilities

Inclusion is associated with contradictions

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Flexible work (home office) enables adaptation to family or personal pace, gives chance to increase weekly working hours and thus earning more and providing for old age at the same time - Accumulation of economic capital (Bourdieu 1983)▪ Empowerment (self-determination) over the organization of work and reflection of own work -> Habitus change▪ Intrinsic motivation -> Commitment is increased	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Work-family life balance = women's issue, Reinforcement of traditional gender roles (brought back to the surface)▪ Limited scope of action: work, family, household -> High workload, no time for career, social networks (social capital)▪ Flexible working arrangements are oriented towards binary gender (Heteronormative) assumption▪ The danger of creating gaps between 'the privileged few' who can work from home due to their childcare issues and the other 'normal' staff (unfair HR treatment) - Envy debates in the team

Case 2: Leaders with long experience in the Organization

Middle management male and female leaders (Austrians in our study) who were socialized in the organization (presence culture)

Men and Women with childcare responsibilities

Women	Men
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Socialization within organizational structures and organizational culture through certain frameworks: bureaucratic system, strong hierarchy, presence, visibility▪ Cultural conditioning decisive: Women stay at home, little childcare facilities for young children▪ Reduction in working hours due to family circumstances (20 hours) -> These are done on site▪ Home office for additional unpaid work▪ One's own work is seen as important -> employees must be controlled	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Full-time Position▪ Work on content in "peace" (Fridays)▪ More time for work▪ In F2F only for meetings▪ Importance of visibility and own work is emphasized▪ Transfer of work demands to employees - control of work as a central issue

Interview Sequences

"What is your home office experience?" (Q) "Well, I've always worked at home because I'm officially employed for a certain number of hours. So I was not on "Karenz" at all with my son at that time, I went back directly after maternity leave, when he was a few weeks old and at that time with 20 hours officially and that were just, it was always so that this part-time that I have had, was the one that I was in the office and beyond that I have just worked very much more, because that is in my function simply not possible otherwise and insofar I have always actually, since the children are there, I have actually always worked at home." (I 14)

"And from the time when I was able to work on a mobile basis, that was also a legitimization of working hours for me, so to speak. And with it, the flexibilization of how I arrange things for myself. [...] I looked at and analyzed the issues. That's when I started looking at various continuing education topics, yes. That was my quiet day." (I 23)

Interview Sequences

"So I feel sorry for my wife in part. Yes, because at the end of the day, unfortunately, I can support her as much as I want, it just sticks with her more. So I agree, in the lockdown, when there are really ... children are at home and I still have kindergarten obligation for the child. [...] And my wife works at the [...]. Then the issue is, we are both in the home office, but yes, she then makes sure that the children get something to eat for lunch. Why? Because I was not used to that from my routine work. Yes, because I, yes, I just need something to eat at some point and I eat that while I'm working. I've never been considerate of anyone else, I must confess." (I 23)

Findings

- Same mechanisms for women in management positions as for all other female employees
 - Work-family life balance is women's issue also as leader (regardless of organizational position), binary gender system (Heteronormative)
 - High workload: family, household and career
 - Economical capital is not significant, visibility in the organization decisive
- Results are consistent with known studies (Schmidt et al. 2020, Grimshaw/Rubery 2015, Self 2005, Wilson/Greenhill 2004)
 - Women use flexible working models for family and household (Chung 2020, Sardadvar/Mairhuber 2018)
 - Men for career and leisure
 - The result is unequal pay (Strunk/Hermann 2009)

Case 3: Women and Men – non typical Leaders

Leaders who have not been socialized in this organization - other professions, other countries

Women leaders without Children in IT-Profession	Male leaders with childcare responsibilities from other countries (Non-Austrian leader) (Focus of the interviewed employee)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ According to the profession, a high flexibility in the place of work and working hours is "normal" (IT)▪ Flexibility is granted to all employees (regardless of categories)▪ Control over the work performance▪ Flexible small teams, which co-ordinate their work themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Other cultural background (most in the scientific context/scientific leaders)▪ Compatibility of often different living places and family has to be managed▪ Presence of employees for joint Team-meetings is desired▪ Control over the performance of work tasks

Findings

- Different valuation and recognition of telework
 - High flexibility is characteristic for careers in IT, telecommuting is normal
 - Categorization of personnel is not necessary in IT/certain work areas

- Heterogeneity and life situation as well as socialization (shaped by certain professions and national cultures) of the leaders is essential for flexible work arrangements
 - Trust in employees is "essential for survival", necessary for one's own well-being
 - Change in organizational culture

Findings in the way of changes - Trust and Control -

Work flexibility and working conditions control are contrasted

Before Covid-19	During Covid-19
<p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regulation very flexible for selected employees in coordination with the manager (informal) ▪ Employees: "healthier, happier, more satisfied, more motivated" ▪ No digital control, free time organization <p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conflicts in the team ▪ Envy debates (Privileges) ▪ Great pressure: proving that work is done at home 	<p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complete elimination of boundaries, different ways of dealing with them ▪ No problem for employees with home working experience ▪ Many employees (colleagues in the team) would also like to use Telework in the future ▪ Team cohesion is strengthened (equal treatment of all) <p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organization and many of the leaders have a sense of loss of control

Organization takes action based on the demands of all employees for more flexibility (future of work).

Findings in the way of changes - Trust and Control -

Situation now: Control of work over time frame (University Policy)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Formal Agreement for all people in administration with reasons▪ Open information and communication▪ Labour law changes, Policy/Company agreement (2 models)▪ Fix: 2 days/week for full-time▪ Flexible: max. 8 days/month▪ Elimination of travel time (no more commuting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Categorization: agreement for all persons/families with children under 14 years of age, care of family members, return to work after a longer period of illness, managers and specialists, other (disability, etc.), not for trainees and scientific staff▪ Less flexibility (very strict insurance issues to consider), strong control (enrollment, precise specifications, digital control over new media)▪ Hours have to be reduced again in some cases (Women with childcare responsibilities)

Interview Sequences

"In truth, everyone here has a workplace [...] and home office is an option that you can take advantage of, but you don't have to. And I think there will be a lot of need for regulation, and I think Corona has made that clearer. Otherwise, in terms of labor law, yes, what is an issue for me right now, where I am still very unclear how I can determine that, is the workload. So when I'm on site now, then you get the workload as a manager in a certain way, because I see how much someone is talking, so you get to see what's happening around you. And if two people talk to each other a lot, then they obviously don't have the high work pressure or, well, you get a little bit of a feeling for how busy someone is, because you can see how people are doing. In a certain way, you can see how people are doing. You can look at the workload much better, and that's difficult in the home office." (I 14)

"And that can't be like saying I have a 6-hour work schedule now and I can do it between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. whenever I want. Then it doesn't work. That's not fair play." (I 23)

"So that's almost my biggest issue right now, this/this in lockdown, this freedom, yeah, which I think everybody enjoyed a lot - to limit yourself there again." (I 29, 95)

"And in SAP, I then of course looked, is the system available, who's in the system right now, who's working right now." (I 23)

Discussion

Control and visibility are key issues in future digital (hybrid) working

Administration in the Academic field

- Scientific organizations (in the German-speaking context) have a strong hierarchy and a presence culture: No change in organizational culture (current)
- Control takes place via visibility and presence
- Control of work mechanisms are changing, dynamic adaptation is occurring
- Digitalization enables stronger control via new media in homogeneous organizations
- Pressure on employees grows: constant availability is expected

There is a certain image of “the ideal teleworker”.

- “The ideal teleworker” is available “around the clock” and has no obligations
- This causes -> Stereotyping and compression of work for women with children

Discussion

- Inclusion requires flexibility and trust (control over content, not presence)
- Inclusion is only possible through the respect of diversity of all the employees (Categorization means exclusion)
- Flexibility work and sustainable working models including Diversity management in higher education/administration needs a culture change = Basis for current competitive challenges (Attractive organization for highly qualified employees)

Thank you for your attention!

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