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Managing work and leisure in the digital age: A practice exploration of digital nomadism

Mattia Rainoldi [1]*

[1] MC Krems University of Applied Sciences, Austria; Bournemouth University, UK. Email: mattia.rainoldi@fh-krems.ac.at

* Corresponding author

Supervisor: Professor Dimitrios Buhalis and Professor Adele Ladkin, Bournemouth University, UK

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

To identify digital nomads' border management practices in the digital work-leisure system by investigating the relationship between work, leisure, and digital technology to uncover a practice-based typology of digital nomads.

Objectives

1. To explore the situational elements that influence how border management practices are performed in the digital work-leisure system.
2. To examine the sociomaterial elements that influence how border management practices are performed in the digital work-leisure system.
3. To identify border management practices in the digital work-leisure system.
4. To develop a practice-based typology of digital nomads in the digital work-leisure system.

Methodology

Grounded in the paradigmatic principles of pragmatism, a qualitative multimethod data collection strategy (Bueger & Gadinger, 2018) based on a praxiographic approach—including a) observant participation and b) praxiographic interviewing methods—was used to collect insights from digital nomads selected through purposive sampling. Observant participation, a self-report method, was employed to capture a detailed account of digital nomads' practices in situ from their own perspective. Towards this end, a digital diary based on the day reconstruction method was designed. Following the completion of the observant participation phase participants were invited to share their knowledge in a semi-structured in-depth online interview conducted in praxiographic style supported by the remote video method. The insights obtained from 224 digital diaries and 32 semi-structured in-depth online interviews were analysed by applying a mixed method analysis strategy consisting of a) template analysis (King & Brooks, 2017) and b) archetypal analysis (Seth & Eugster, 2016). The combination of these methodological choices allowed not only to combine longitudinal and cross-sectional data about border management practices otherwise impossible to detect from an external observer but also to uncover and made interpretable hidden trends and patterns in the data.

Results

The findings offer insights into the multilevel and multidimensional nature of digital nomads' border management practices in the *Digital Work-Leisure System*. The findings first reveal the situational elements that influence border management practices and show the elements of the sociomaterial relationship between digital nomads and digital technology. Moreover, they uncover a five-dimensional structure and its configurations, from which a total of 25 distinct border management practices emerge. Finally, the findings contribute a typology of digital nomads consisting of six diverse archetypes.

Theoretical conclusions

The core contribution of this study lies in its in-depth understanding of the digital nomadism phenomenon and the management of work and leisure borders in practice. This research contributes to the literature by conceptualising and empirically exploring the *Digital Work-Leisure System* in which digital nomads are immersed. It unified three literature streams formed by the conceptual logic of practice theory and border theory and the contextual logic of digital nomadism.

First, this study redefines the digital nomadism phenomenon from a post-pandemic point of view. Second, a contribution to sociomateriality and practice theory is made by conceptually identifying how the digital nomads' practical principles and the digital technologies practical affordances and

constraints are entangled in practices highlighting how they are linked to a number of situational elements. Third, this study contributes to border theory by going beyond work, home and family domains and applying it to work-leisure settings. Five forms of borders are presented, including the temporal, spatial, material, human, and social borders, that shape the 25 distinct practices that compose work and leisure border management extending thus previous conceptualisations. Fourth, this study further contributes to practice theory by empirically demonstrating how practices come together to form practice networks and by bundling practices together in an analysis process that uncovered six archetypes of digital nomads. Overall, the study contributes to the post-pandemic literature on digital nomadism in the era of mainstream remote work by tapping into the wider work-life balance debate opening thus a new avenue of inquiry.

Practical application of the dissertation

The study offers implications for public policy and organisations working with digital nomads, along with critical reflections for the leisure and tourism community. First, the identified practices of border management and the proposed practice-based typology of digital nomads can serve as a basis for revisiting regulations about work times and place along with fair and decent working conditions.

Moreover, the strategic reconfiguration of the relationship between organisations and their workers will have a transformative influence on organisational structures, corporate culture, recruitment, career planning, and performance measurement. This research helps organisations understand the forces that shape when, where, with whom, and in which way work and leisure endeavours currently are and will be conducted evermore. In an increasingly competitive job market, offering optimal conditions that favour a fluid work-leisure lifestyle can attract talented digital nomads into the workforce.

For the leisure and tourism industry, the findings offer critical suggestions for developing infrastructures, resources, and services for the different types of digital nomads. The identified border management practices offer valuable suggestions on how hybrid work-leisure settings should be designed in the future to support novel forms of digital workers in traditional leisure spaces. The tourism sector will need to consider new strategies to accommodate flexible life arrangements and innovate services and experiences that enable conditions for relaxation, entertainment, learning, and productivity.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of Chapter 1

Technological developments are driving a new revolution, transforming the doings of work, the organisation of the labour market, and the structure of the leisure industry. The ability to work digitally, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has enabled the emergence of new typologies of knowledge workers (Rainoldi et al., 2022), and a reconfiguration of where, when, and with whom they work. Digital nomadism represents a lifestyle in which the flexibility and constant connectivity provided by digital technology favours the integration and fluid arrangement of professional and leisure activities. As work can be conducted in leisure-oriented environments, the borders between work and leisure have become increasingly blurred (Cook, 2023). This research recognises the importance of examining the mechanisms at the base of the border management practices that digital nomads adopt to manage the organisation work and leisure.

Abstract of Chapter 2

The literature review analyses the digital nomadism phenomenon and its conjunction with a) the sociomaterial stance within practice theory (Leonardi, 2012; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) and b) border

theory (Clark, 2000). Digital technology serves as a catalyst of change for work and workers in supporting new practices in which work is distributed across multiple life contexts. Digital nomads are knowledge workers who use digital technologies to conduct digital work from various locations, both inside and outside organisational settings, and increasingly in leisure settings (Aroles et al., 2020; Chevtaeva et al., 2023). The sociomaterial and border lenses serve to understand how digital nomads leverage digital technology for the organisation of work and leisure. The main contribution of the literature review is an original framework entitled the *Digital Work-Leisure System* that guides the exploration of digital nomads' border management practices and their elements as well as the identification of a novel practice-based typology of digital nomads.

Abstract of Chapter 3

To address the goal and the four objectives of this thesis, a multimethod data collection strategy was used involving a) observant participation and b) praxiographic interview methods. These two complementary data collection points allowed exploring digital nomads' border management practices in the *Digital Work-Leisure System*. Participants were recruited via social media through means of purposive sampling. Data was obtained from 32 digital nomads during the seven-day-long self-observation (224 self-report diaries), followed by in-depth online one-to-one interviews. A mixed methods data analysis strategy was adopted including a) a qualitative template analysis and b) a quantitative archetypal analysis. This combination of analysis methods allowed to identify digital nomads' border management practices and their constituting elements and also to uncover a practice-based typology of digital nomads by bringing to the surface the nexus of different practices that digital nomads enact in managing their work and leisure borders.

Abstract of Chapter 4

The findings advance knowledge on the digital nomadism phenomenon through the theoretical foundations of sociomateriality and border theory. An original, theoretical model, entitled *Digital Nomads' Bordering Practices in the Digital Work- Leisure System* is offered. The model suggests that border management practices rely on an infrastructure of interlinked levels. It does so by demonstrating that the situational elements in which bordering practices are lived influence the sociomaterial system composed of the practitioners' set of practical principles and the practical affordances and constraints provided by digital technology. Digital nomads and digital technology are seen as constituting actors of a nexus of relations that materialise in a five-dimensional structure comprising temporal, spatial, social, material, and human elements in which border management practices manifests. A total of 25 distinct practices distributed across the five structures were identified. The model functions as a *switchboard*, which digital nomads use to regulate the relationship between work and leisure in their daily lives. The further analysis of the identified border management practices also allowed to identify the underlying patterns that tie digital nomads into coherent groups and resulted in the proposition of a novel typology of digital nomads including six different archetypes.

Abstract of Chapter 5

This thesis addressed an important gap in management and organisation studies by proposing a holistic and practice-based view of digital nomads' border management in the *Digital Work-Leisure System*. This study *zoomed in* on border management practices and the process through which they are developed and enacted and *zoomed out* to develop an understanding of the relationships between practices leading to a novel typology of digital nomads. The provided insights are not only beneficial for digital nomads and work and leisure organisations but also significant for further development of scholarly research in the field. This is because the emerged theoretical contributions enable a better understanding and guidance of the ongoing change in both the world of work and leisure for

policymakers, work organisation, tourism destination, services providers and the leisure community. With its theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions, this study provides a novel knowledge base on the complex reality that constitutes the practices of digital nomads in the *Digital Work-Leisure System* and hopes to serve as inspiration and guidance for future research in management and organisational studies, tourism and leisure studies, and the wider social sciences field.

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