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BALANCING WORK, STUDY AND HOME: A RESEARCH WITH MASTER'S STUDENTS IN A BRAZILIAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Understand the tactics that nontraditional students use to manage the boundaries between work, home and study.

Originality/gap/relevance/implications: The originality of this study relies on transfer of the focus from the conflict to the balance between work, home and study. It also breaks new ground by directing attention to the micro level of individual action, in contrast to a literature that traditionally studied organizational actions. Finally, it performs an innovative reading of the interface between work, home and study domains from the perspective of the boundary theory.

Key methodological aspects: This qualitative study was held from 18 interviews that were recorded, transcribed and content analyzed, which revealed a list of individual tactics employed by respondents to reconcile the demands of work, home and study.

Summary of key results: The analysis allowed us to identify 18 tactics that our respondents employ to negotiate the level of permeability between the boundaries between work, school and home. These tactics were classified as behavioral, communicative, physical and temporal.

Key considerations/conclusions: The study revealed that students develop an active role by interpreting the expectations of the social actors from the home and work domains and from the institution where they study and adopt boundaries with degrees of permeability that enable a state of greater balance between these domains.

KEYWORDS

Boundaries. Nontraditional students. Work-home-study. Conflicts. Balance.

1 INTRODUCTION

Over 30 years ago, when Kanter (1977) had mentioned that work and non-work were worlds that could not be set apart, roles management had already

become important and challenging for individuals and organizations (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). Today, with the growing demands of society and the involvement of individuals in multiple roles, such management is paramount so that the individual and the organization may live together in an environment of less stress, with fewer health problems, greater productivity and employees' commitment (Cappi & Araujo, 2015). Hence, it arises the great importance of studies of conflict and balance between different domains of life.

Over the last decades, there is growing evidence that workers are facing great pressure at work and in personal life (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003), which makes the balance between work and home domains an important issue to the current workforce. Today, many organizations are pressuring their employees, expecting more work out of fewer people, making it difficult to manage the demands of domains. Hence, conflicts arise related to two main domains of the contemporary worker.

In addition to the pressures of work and home, with the increasing modernization and internationalization of companies, becoming more competitive and therefore demanding ever more from the employees, it is indispensable to the worker specialization courses such as masters and MBAs (Mamede, Marques, Rogers, & Miranda, 2015). Thenceforth, in addition to the various roles related to the domains of work and home, there comes into existence another role which the individual must manage: that of being a student (Pinto, Leão, Leite, & Pereira, 2015).

The participation of the individual in multiple roles is important in that it provides a foundation for self-esteem, competence and sources of social support, in addition to enabling the achievement of economic and social status (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). On the other hand, an increase in demands, in the roles and time conflicts are associated with greater stress, anxiety and depression for adult individuals who are studying (Ferreira & Almeida, 2015; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). Due to these negative consequences for individuals and organizations, many authors (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011) are analyzing the causes, consequences and factors linked to the conflicts and balances between the domains.

Recent literature reviews on boundaries have shown that the vast majority of research focuses on the relationship between work and family, having the prospect of the conflict been dominant on these researches over the last decades (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). Regarding the work/study conflict or balance, in addition to there being little research, a great deal of the attention in this domain over the last decades has focused on documenting the conflicts between the demands of work and study, with the work/school conflict being a key term of this tension, which analyzes, for the most part, teenagers or university students (McNall & Michel, 2011), who are studying full-time and seek employment to satisfy some personal need.

Despite the lack of studies focusing on the work/study interface with non-traditional or adult students, according to Fairchild (2003), they comprise one of the fastest growing segments among students of higher education. According to Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002), even though it is an understudied group, for they have more commitments and responsibilities than traditional students, besides receiving less social support, they have more demands to be managed, leading to greater conflicts.

According to Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep (2009), there is limited research that seeks to comprehend how people solve problems related to demands between work and home. In the few cases where the balance between these two domains is studied, authors' focus has been on the actions of organizations, and the strategies of the individual itself were forgotten. We notice that the same setting is present in the literature on the relationship between the work, home and study domains.

In view of the above, the present study attempts to respond the following research problem: "How workers cope with the demands between work, study and home?". In the face of the research problem, the objective is to examine the tactics that individuals use to promote the balance between these three domains. As the investigation subject, we opted to work with non-traditional students, who are adults aged 24 years or older, who lived with their dependents, work full-time and have returned to education in the case of this research, studying a master's degree for a period exceeding ten months.

This study contributes to the advancement of literature on the work/home/study interface, by directing the focus from the conflict to the achievement of the balance between these domains. In relation to the boundary work tactics theory, addressed by Nippert-Eng (1996), Kreiner *et al.* (2009) and Araujo, Tureta and Araujo (2015), we expect to obtain a head start when considering how non-traditional students use strategies to cope with the demands of work, home and study domains. In addition, the study also represents a breakthrough by considering a third domain (study) in this relationship, which highlights its originality. In practical terms, we expect for the study to present solutions so that adult students can minimize the conflicts experienced with the high demands from these three spheres of life, thus reducing personal and organizational problems.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Recent work on the work/home interface show a tendency to use a line of research that frames the boundary between work and home domains as socially constructed (Araujo *et al.*, 2015; Eby *et al.*, 2005). Thus, the present

study will follow this approach, which, according to Nippert-Eng (1996), allows individuals to identify the tactics they use to experience, interpret and shape the world, enabling the best balance between the domains. From the social construction perspective, the Boundary Theory emerges, a theoretical lens adopted in this study.

2.1 BOUNDARY THEORY

The term “boundary” has been used in several contexts, such as art, psychology, architecture and organizations theory (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009), referring to the temporal, emotional, cognitive and physical limits or perimeters that set an entity apart from another (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000).

The boundary theory, widely used by researchers in order to answer several questions, such as those dealing with roles transitions (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000) and the work/home interface (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006), is dedicated to studying the way people create and sustain their boundaries in order to simplify and organize the environment which they are inserted in (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000). “Mental fences” (Zerubavel, 1991, p. 2) established regarding “geographical areas, historical events, people and ideas” in order to set the existing boundaries between such domains (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000, p. 474).

When it comes roles, Rau and Hyland (2002) argue that the boundary theory attempts to explain how individuals transit between their roles, which are separated by spatial boundaries, “where the work is performed”, and temporal “when the work is performed” (Rau & Hyland, 2002, p. 112). According to them, people try to minimize the difficulty in the transition of roles and the unwanted interruption by these, due to the fact they wish to increase the efficiency of all roles they may undertake.

According to the study by Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000), the boundaries between any domains can take two different forms: thin and thick. Thin boundaries are permeable and allow for greater integration between the domains set apart by them. This means that, when dealing with two domains separated by a thin boundary, we noticed little differentiation between the roles, with a high incidence of domain-related events occurring at moments and physical spaces that are typical of another domain. As for thick boundaries, they create segmentation between the domains and their respective roles, that is, it creates a clear distinction between the domains, causing the event of a role to be performed in moments and places representative of their respective domain (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Notwithstanding their existence, totally segmented or integrated roles are rare, and since they have different costs and benefits, people’s preferences

towards them differ (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000), usually falling somewhere along the continuum between these two paradigms (Nippert-Eng, 1996).

Once individuals create socially the boundaries between different domains, it becomes relevant to understand how those involved stand in relation to such boundaries (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009). For these authors, as people often have different preferences of boundaries (segmentation or integration) between domains, they seek to soften the conflict between different roles through a negotiation of such boundaries, managing, thus, the permeability between different domains.

2.2 BOUNDARY WORK TACTICS

On the theoretical basis of the Boundary Theory, Nippert-Eng (1996) created the term “boundary work”, referring to the actions taken up by people to create, maintain, reduce or change boundaries between two domains or roles. According to Nippert-Eng (1996), these tactics help us determine how we segment/integrate the home and work domains.

From their definition, Kreiner *et al.* (2009) investigated how the individuals negotiate the boundaries between work and home. Through the study of episcopal priests, the authors developed a model that demonstrates how people negotiate the boundaries between the domains listed through day-to-day activities, which they entitled “boundary work tactics”.

According to the authors, people have different preferences in terms of how to deal with the interface between work and home, which they called “boundary preferences”. Some prefer to differentiate these domains as distinct spheres of life, avoiding overlaps between work and home, thus, segmenting the domains. The integration of domains, in turn, takes place when individuals have preferences for not distinguishing aspects of each domain.

In this process of negotiation of daily boundaries, one must also take into consideration the desires for the integration or segmentation that the individuals involved in this process, such as relatives, co-workers and superiors have (Nippert-Eng, 1996). When individual and environmental preferences are divergent, the “(in)congruence between work/home boundaries” emerges, which have two negative consequences: the violation of the boundaries and the work/home conflict (Araujo *et al.*, 2015).

In response to such problems originating from these domains, Kreiner *et al.* (2009) identified the “boundary work tactics” that individuals use to soften the incongruities, violations and conflicts. According to these authors, once the individual uses a combination of these tactics, violations of the boundaries between work and home tend to be minimized and, consequently, the balance between work and home tends to be better achieved.

2.3 STUDIES ON THE HOME/WORK/STUDY INTERFACES

Over recent decades, significant changes have taken place over the professional and personal life of the individual. Changes in the family structure, increased participation of women in the workforce and technological change (Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2005) have made the balance between work and home domains a key question for the contemporary worker.

However, not only work and home are important dimensions to the dynamics of this individual. From the moment in which the companies are internationalizing, seeking competent and ever more skilled workers, the professionalization of these workers becomes necessary, through specialization courses such as masters and MBAs, making “study” an important domain to be investigated. For this reason, in this research, we decided to perform an analysis as to how people negotiate the boundaries between work, home and study.

With regards to work, home and study domains, we identified some studies that analyze the simultaneous relationship between these domains, as well as the antecedents and consequents of the relationship between these roles. In general, these studies are focused on adult students, also referred to as non-traditional. This group of students is characterized mostly by age; however, other authors add additional criteria to characterize them, like the fact they are re-entering educational activities and being into full-time work (Kasworm, 2010).

As observed, the literature on the work/home/study conflict/balance have focused primarily on understanding how educational institutions, companies and family members (especially spouses) can support individuals to better manage overlaying roles evidenced within conflicts between such domains. However, the possibilities of action that individuals can take actively in order to better manage the conflicting demands of that domain remain poorly explored, a gap in the literature which this study aims to fulfill.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study has adopted a qualitative research approach, since we intended to investigate the mechanisms by which workers manage the demands between these three domains. In relation to data collection, personal interviews were held, based on a semi-structured script, adapted by Kreiner *et al.* (2009).

The subjects of the research are non-traditional students, adults over the age of 24 years, who live with dependents, who work full-time and had undertaken a master’s degree for a period over ten months. The choice for these subjects is justified by the fact that non-traditional students experience intense conflicts between

the work, study and home domains (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). We decided to work with master's students, as it covers a greater workload than other postgraduate courses, as well as requires a dissertation at the end of the course, demanding greater dedication from students. The criterion of a minimum time on the course was chosen because it is considered sufficient for the individual to adapt to this new student role and to experience situations that allow us to perform theoretical observations.

A total of 18 interviews were carried out, between June and July 2013, with students undertaking a master's degree from a higher education institution in Vitória, State of Espírito Santo, Brazil. The number of interviewees was set based on the principle of theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which claims that the interviews should be held till the moment no new data discovery can be verified (Araujo *et al.*, 2015). The choice of the institution occurred for reasons of convenience.

The interviews, with an average duration of 30 minutes, were transcribed and analyzed through content analysis (Bardin, 2004). In this analysis, sentences or passages from the interviews are codified, making it possible to find the tactics that individuals use to manage work, study and home. After this encoding, the tactics found were permitted to be classified in four types: behavioral, communicative, physical and temporal, all of which are described below.

4 RESULTS

As explained in the theoretical framework, the work/home/study conflicts and boundary violations, derived from the incongruity between the personal and environmental preferences, causing negative consequences both for individuals as for organizations which they are inserted in. As regards to these generated issues for the work, study and home domains to be reduced, we observed that individuals use boundary negotiation tactics, which were classified in four dimensions: behavioral, communicative, physical, and temporal.

Although we have been open to other dimensions, all tactics presented can be inserted in the classification by Kreiner *et al.* (2009), which emphasizes the saturation found in that study and the transferability of the categories found for other substantive areas. However, some specific tactics to the empirical context of this research have been identified and are presented below.

4.1 BEHAVIORAL TACTICS

Behavioral tactics are social practices that individuals use to reduce the conflict between different dimensions of life (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009). Eight types of behavioral tactics were found in this study, which will be described below.

4.1.1 Using people

According to the research data, one of the tactics mostly mentioned by interviewees was “Using people”, which refers to the fact of an individual making use of collaboration and encouragement from a person linked to one of the domains in question, such as a spouse, child, secretary, supervisor and master’s colleague, for easier management of boundaries between work/study/home.

As I am in the process of finishing my masters, what we are using: we’re using a lot of support from family [...] at times it’s my mother-in-law who comes over... my mother-in-law lives in Guaraná, approximately 35 km from Aracruz [...] so, my mother-in-law and my mother who lives in Aracruz take turns (E6)

When this tactic is used, non-traditional students rely on the help and availability of those involved in the home domain – as in the passage above, the mother-in-law and the mother – in the performance of activities in that domain, which reduces the amount of tasks to be performed by the individual and allows them to focus in priority or urgent demands. This makes managing their roles easier.

4.1.2 Differentiated permeability

The employment of this tactic allows individuals to decide which people or matters relating to the domains of work, home and study, integration or segmentation behaviors will be applied to. For example, in most incidents relating to this tactic, individuals have shown a tendency to adopt an inclusive posture at home and in studies when receiving demands from their immediate superiors. Unlike the superior, people whose requirements did not need to be met urgently, such as work colleagues and clients without urgent demands, were able to violate work boundaries, which enabled the individual to concentrate on primary activities.

I always answer my boss’ calls. If it is a client and I already know the issue, I don’t answer. Restricted phone numbers, belonging to the company, I won’t answer depending on the time. (E1)

In addition to the boss, the family was also singled out by many as demanding of a differentiated integration. This can occur because the relationship with the family is paradoxical: despite it being regarded as the central priority of interviewees, the home domain is often pointed out as what concedes time and space

to activities of other domains. However, the statement that this concession is made for the family's future well-being is recurrent.

4.1.3 Using technology

Technological advances have allowed individuals to use new forms of communication that can be useful in the task of managing their roles. If, on one hand, resources such as e-mails, whatsapp and stores' websites, facilitate boundary violation (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007), since the individual remains available for 24 hours, on the other hand, these tools allow an individual with integrative preferences to keep the desired level of permeability between the domains of work, home and study (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009). Such consequences are described in the following passages:

Consulting, your client is in trouble, then you make use of technological resources for remote access, the professor is teaching, you have your computer switched on, you stop from time to time, you do an eventual access, solve a client's problem [...] it's kind of normal. (E6)

Respondents were found prone to use mostly the internet in the study and work environment to resolve matters of other domains. This technology helps the individual in a way that makes it possible to solve problems or demands of the work, home and study domains without there being any physical displacement, thus reducing the time spent on each task, enabling the performance of more activities.

4.1.4 Denying demands

In this tactic, as the name implies, the person refuses activities from the work, home and study domains in order to maintain their preferences in relation to the boundaries or to prioritize the domains of their interest, as shown in the following passage:

Today, I've learned that, after a certain time within a company, I've learned to say "no" [...] "not right now, even though it's during working hours, I'm solving matters related to my studies" or when I'm here [at college] 'girls, you may continue with things, but I have to solve a professional matter' (E8)

We observe that the great demand from the various roles that non-traditional students have, makes the use of the word “no” necessary at certain activities of the domain in question, such as in unscheduled demands, in the role as an employee, or in a family meeting, in the role as a spouse, child or parent. Through this term, the person communicates with the individual demanding a particular activity that they cannot perform due to the various roles that must be performed, these being priorities or urgent.

4.1.5 Adopting gradual attention

In order to know whether a demand is a priority or not, the strategy of not meeting it is adopted, so to verify that it really is important or urgent, and only pay greater attention to it if the reduced level of dedication previously employed turns out to be insufficient or problems are generated. For example, we can mention the act of not answering the phone during the first calls, not responding to e-mails immediately and, at certain moments, only take calls after receiving a text message, as the following quote.

If you e-mail me I understand that I don't need to respond immediately. [...] because if it is urgent you will call me [...] if they call me once, I'll let the connection drop, if they call me again, I'll let it go again, when they call me a third time then I answer it because I know it is important. (E4)

In order to minimize the negative effects of employing this tactic, some participants reported that they arrange with people involved in the domains the mechanisms to be followed to communicate that the demand is urgent, such as sending a text message or calling three times, which allows an activity to be carried through diminishing the number of unwanted interruptions. This technique reduces the time spent with secondary problems, helping to increase the efficiency of roles that one can take on.

4.1.6 Negotiating flexibility in exchange for results

In this tactic, complying with obligations relating to a domain enables flexibility gains at other times to satisfy the needs of another domain. That is, from the moment the person satisfies the work demand, they may, for example, take time off from the company to perform activities of another domain or to carry out tasks of other roles in the work environment and during working hours, as seen below:

[...] she released me then [the company let me off on Mondays to do my masters], 'as long as you can send the spreadsheets before, and that you can be flexible after 3pm to answer the phone'. (E18)

As noted, as the individual gets more flexibility in the domains, in these cases, at work, a greater possibility to better manage their roles comes up, allowing the most important and urgent demands to be prioritized, being both in the environment of the domain in question or in the environment and time of another domain.

4.1.7 Searching for intensity in each domain

As the demands are various and the time is scarce, people seek to maximize the use of each domain, for example, paying maximum attention in class, performing all of the work's demands at the actual working environment and satisfying the home's demands when at home, so that the temporal and spatial boundaries of each domain can be kept, avoiding conflicts between them.

[...] at work I try dedicating myself to work [...] So when I'm home, I try being kind of homebound, while at work I dedicate myself to work and while studying I dedicate to my studies. (E10)

These data reveal that the individual, when seeking intensity and productivity in each domain, manages to maintain a certain distance between the domains. This way, the aim is to improve the quality of time dedicated to each domain, in order to decrease the demands of time and space in that domain in subsequent times.

4.1.8 Rewarding the members of the domain

The eighth behavioral tactic identified is "Rewarding the members of the domain". According to some respondents, rewarding the members of a domain, particularly those from the home domain, as children and spouses, can benefit the individual in managing boundaries, as it reduces boundaries violations.

In the morning, when they are at home (they study in the afternoon), I try giving them more attention, do their homework with them for a bit, and like, around 3pm approximately I tell them 'mum has to work. Mum has to close the door and mum has to work'. 'Why, mum?' 'Because mummy needs to work. Don't you want to have your games?' (E9)

From these rewards promised to people who need to give up attention for the benefit of the objectives of another domain, as the other person is convinced that it is important to perform that task at that moment, enabling the person to perform demands from the work and study domains at home without there being undesirable interference from relatives.

4.2 COMMUNICATIVE TACTICS

Once individuals interact continuously with other people, they communicate their preferences with respect to the types of desired boundaries between domains, whether it is integrated or segmented (Araujo *et al.*, 2015). In this context, we found two tactics in the speech of the research participants.

4.2.1 Developing dialogue

A tactic mentioned by respondents to reduce potential problems arising from this growth in the level of demand in one or more roles was “developing dialogue”. With this tactic, non-traditional students communicate, especially, with their dependents, the challenges they will face with this new domain and question whether these will support them throughout the process, avoiding future conflicts, as shown in the following quote:

I think the first to be done is to make the game rules very clear. When I started my masters, the first person I spoke with was my husband, ‘look, I want to start a masters. It’s going to be hard work. Perhaps I won’t be able to give you attention, the attention you deserve, and need’ and he replied, ‘Cool. If you want to start a masters, let’s do it then’. (E4)

In addition to the family, many have reported the need to communicate to individuals involved in the work environment by making use of this tactic, the non-traditional student anticipates to individuals involved in the domains the problems that they may experience when increasing the amount of demand.

4.2.2 Managing the image in order to maintain flexibility

Individuals, for fear of losing an opportunity in the working environment, try to masquerade as “strong” and balanced people. They believe that, if they expose

their emotional side, which does not withstand a lot of pressure, opportunities as a promotion would be at stake, besides their job being jeopardized, which affects the other domains, causing conflicts and tensions. From there, they create a shell around themselves to show that they can withstand adversities.

I try to show in the company that I'm doing very well. That is because if you're too dramatic and sentimental, you'll end up being labeled, even as a wimpy professional, who can't take the pressure. (E1)

According to the data, by managing one's image in order to keep it associated to the idea of a strong individual, the non-traditional student communicates the impression of being more able to achieve greater opportunities at work, which tends to result in positive consequences in the home and study domains, as it increases self-esteem, competence and the economic and social status of the individual (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992).

4.3 PHYSICAL TACTICS

We classify as physical tactics those that referred to the symbolic use of objects and spaces in order to create or remove barriers between home, work and study. Within this vision, we found four physical tactics, described below.

4.3.1 (De)constructing physical boundaries

As noted, the large portion of respondents in the survey reported to keeping integration between the domains due to high demands. Thus, keeping physical boundaries at home in order to separate work and study activities from that of home, as for example, requesting privacy in a room to study or work, was mentioned by some non-traditional students, as illustrated below:

I have an office to which I close the door, well I try [...] when he tries to interfere I say 'no, no, no, I can't right now', but I do have an office at home. (E13)

These walls and doors that separate the entities in the home domain are seen as physical boundaries by members of that domain. Once the individual remains in the office, people such as spouses and children already have in mind

that they should not violate such boundaries. This symbol created allows the non-traditional student to keep a desired level of integration between the domains, favoring their roles management.

4.3.2 Reducing physical distances

Managing the physical distance between work, home and study is a way for individuals to keep such domains either segmented or integrated. From the data, we saw that individuals tend to keep the home, work and study environments closer, or even minimize the distance between environments of the same domain, as seen in the following passage:

I still give a lot of attention to my family and I think my family has developed a tactic to facilitate that, everyone lives in the same block. As a matter of fact, it has been a year and a half since I moved to my new apartment, and my apartment is 2 minutes away from my grandmother's, 3 minutes from uncle's and 10 minutes away from my dad's. So that, perhaps, is a way to manage, this proximity. (E4)

As the home was seen as the domain which gives more space and time to other domains, according to the excerpt quoted, the individual and the family sought a way to facilitate the contact, through the proximity of their homes. This tactic allows the individual to continue performing their activities, without there being interferences from their families, since quick encounters on the streets are sufficient to meet the needs of the family. This ensures a better management of their roles, because they don't have to worry about certain activities, such as phone calls and visit requests, which ensures more time to satisfy prominent demands.

4.3.3 Manipulating symbolic objects

Another physical tactics mentioned by respondents was classified as "Manipulating symbolic objects". In this tactic, the individual socially handles an object in order to perform a symbolic communication with those involved, in order to convey a preference for integration or segmentation between the domains. This allows achieving a better balance between their roles, as mentioned in the following example:

[...] in academic work or in professional life, if I have to concentrate on something, I take off my wrist watch [...] then I was trying to interpret this thing of 'taking off my watch': when I'm home reading an article and you think like: you read one page of the article and you take a look at your watch, 'goodness, 30 minutes', then you read the second page '45 minutes' [...] 'holy Christ, I will never finish this article!'. So I take off my watch, put it face down and I don't look at it. (E4)

From this quote, we observe that the respondents use the absence of objects to symbolically create the interface between work/home/study. In the excerpt, the non-traditional student keeps the watch away when performing the activities of the domains, because it allows her to concentrate and to better perform her demands, especially the priorities ones. Thus, the absence of the clock becomes a symbolic act that aims to create an insulating barrier that allows the student to focus on certain activities.

4.3.4 Using neutral spaces as wild cards

The last physical tactic found was "Using neutral spaces as wild cards". "Neutral spaces" was the name we used to represent spaces that do not feature any of the domains *a priori*. Generally, these places are temporary spaces, in which individuals can carry out activities relating to any of the domains, as a hotel, airport or transportation vehicles. Because they are not representative of any particular domain, they are used as a "wild cards" to meet demands, according to situational needs.

During the commute [to work by van] I grade exams, I read articles... I take my notebook with me so I can do all of that. (E11)

In these neutral spaces, the individual enjoys a freedom in order to be able to carry out activities that could not be performed in their respective domains. Thus, through these neutral spaces, the individual can satisfy a greater range of demands, especially priority or urgent ones.

4.4 TEMPORAL TACTICS

Time is a fixed resource and in the midst of so many demands of modern society, to manage it is crucial to mitigate conflicts between work, home and

study and, thus, achieving a better balance between such spheres of life. In this study, we found four temporary tactics – “Using neutral moments as wild cards”; “Taking advantage of loopholes”; “Synchronizing tasks” and “Putting time aside for oneself” – that are presented below.

4.4.1 Using neutral moments as wild cards

In addition to using neutral spaces to balance the demands of home, work and study, the participants in the study also revealed the existence of moments that are characterized as not associated with any specific domain. In these moments, as in the lunch hour at work and university, students satisfy demands that they consider relevant.

Generally I do that [resolving college matters at work] close to lunch break, right?! As lunch time is 1 hour and I have lunch in 25 minutes [...] I have time. (E5)

In this neutral moment, or “wild card”, the individual is able to perform activities of other domains, as seen in the above excerpt, resolving home and study issues at work, even when one is not physically in the domain to which the activities relates to.

4.4.2 Taking advantage of loopholes

In this tactic, non-traditional students take advantage of relatively short periods off in a domain, as when children are asleep, so that other activities may be performed without violating the boundaries preferences of the individuals involved in the domain which granted the “time off”. The incidences of this tactic occurred especially in relation to the loopholes found at home.

I usually try organizing my life. There are days my daughter sleeps at 7pm. So, when she’s asleep, I use that time to study. It’s a matter of organizing my time. (E1)

Waiting for the child to go to sleep in order to perform work and study activities was a tactic mentioned by the vast majority of respondents who used this strategy. In addition to having children, respondents who have, for example, spouses who work on duty or on non-fixed shifts also reported as to how they take advantage of the home domains to satisfy a demand, without there being conflicts at home.

4.4.3 Synchronizing tasks

As time is scarce for the amount of demands that a non-traditional student should perform, a tactic used by them was “Synchronizing tasks”. In this tactic, the individual performs simultaneously two or more activities from different entities, being generally one from study or work and one from home, as noted in the quote below:

Usually we can only meet towards the end of the evening. We talk, have a nice chat, if she has something to do be done, she goes to her computer and I also do the same, and as the table is large we sit next to each other and we talk and carry on working or studying. (E15)

By using this tactic, the non-traditional student is able to meet the requirements of their roles, as giving attention to the husband and satisfying the demands of work and study, saving time, because two activities are being performed at once, making it easier to manage the demands of work, home and study. In addition, as these are routine activities, which require less concentration, the individual performs them without the need to disconnect from the home environment, which could lead to conflicts with members of that domain.

4.4.4 Putting time aside for oneself

Several of the tactics presented in this study refer to personal concessions that non-traditional students make to satisfy demands of home, work and study. The tactic “Putting time aside for oneself” refers to the dedication of a predetermined time to perform regular personal-oriented activities, such as going to a church and exercising, or occasionally, such as using the holiday period to renew one’s personal energy. These activities have the purpose of relieving the stress obtained by daily pressures deriving from the conflicts of family, professional, and academic requests, facilitating so that one will be prepared to face the demands of the work, home and study domains, as illustrated below:

I think that, the way I see it, in addition to you having a professional side, an academic side and having a personal side, on the personal side you must relate both physical activities and food. (E15)

From this tactic, that is, performing frequent activities outside the domains, such as taking a walk, going to mass and eating healthy foods, the non-traditional student can achieve a better balance between their roles, as the problems related to the entities are put aside for a moment. This makes it easier to reduce the level of stress caused by the demands, a stress that could generate conflict in the domains.

5 DISCUSSION AND FINAL REMARKS

As in the work/home interface, investigations on work/home/study demands focus on, especially, from the perspective of conflict between such domains, and there is limited research on how individuals balance roles. This gap is also present in the literature on non-traditional students, who despite being the most studied subjects in the work/home/study relationship, remain being insufficiently analyzed because they are those who suffer most from the demands of the three domains (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). This study aimed to fill that gap, seeking to identify tactics that non-traditional students use to promote the balance between work, study, and home.

Although we have been open to the emergence of other dimensions, all the tactics found in this study may be inserted into the four dimensions (behavioral, physical, communicative and temporal) presented by Kreiner *et al.* (2009), highlighting the saturation found in that study and the transferability of the categories found for other substantive areas. Although some tactics of this study are similar to those identified by previous studies, most of which is specific to the empirical context of this research, and can be seen as a relevant to the boundary work literature, especially when it comes to the work/home/study interface. As an example of these tactics, one can cite: “Denying demands”; “Adopting gradual attention”; “Using neutral spaces as wild cards” and “Taking advantage of loopholes”. We observe that these tactics are specific to this study, because with the addition of a new domain in the life of the individual, the study, in conjunction with the high existing demands of work and home, the management of roles becomes more complicated, what makes them use additional strategies, allowing them to focus on priority demands and make better use of their time in the performance of those activities.

Despite the fact that various tactics mentioned in this study help non-traditional students in the negotiation of the demands of work, home and study domains, the tactics that use neutral spaces and moments, in fact, are using the space that would be considered as the individual’s personal space. Thus, the concern with the subject itself emerges, which makes use of minimal moments of

time intended for rest or personal recreation, in order to accomplish their tasks without impacting their relationship with members of the domain.

This study also contributes to the literature of non-traditional students, by describing a preference by non-traditional students in integrating the domains. This is due to the challenges associated with several demands of the domains in question that these individuals face (Fairchild, 2003). From this discovery, universities, companies and the family can create support mechanisms to facilitate the integration of domains, making the achievement of balance between work/home/study easier to be achieved.

Finally, this paper reports non-traditional students as individuals who use personal strategies to achieve balance between work, home and study. Tactics were found that fit into the four dimensions of Kreiner *et al.* (2009) and that facilitate the management of boundaries. Finally, an understanding of these tactics can be critical so that individuals, families, organizations and universities can reach closer to having balance between work, home and study.

5.1 LIMITATIONS

One of the limitations of this study is due to the cultural context in which it was performed. As the students interviewed are Brazilians, the findings cannot be generalized; non-traditional students from other countries may mention other tactics of boundaries management. In addition, as the interviews were held with master's students of a specific institution, of private capital, the tactics found may not report the strategies used by all non-traditional students to manage their demands.

5.2 FUTURE RESEARCH

As ideas for future research, studies could examine how individuals, in general, manage their personal demands within the work/home/study conflict, because the tactics mentioned report the concern of non-traditional students only with others. Second, investigations could be carried out in order to explore how the boundaries work tactics can be used in different types of work arrangements, as telecommuting and flexible time (Rau & Hyland, 2002) and in different educational arrangements, as distance education (Murtaza, Shah, & Ud Din, 2011) and courses as MBAs. Also, researchers could examine the cross-cultural differences in tactics used by non-traditional students, in countries where labor laws are very different from the Brazilian one.

5.3 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

As expected, this study presents practical implications for non-traditional students, organizations, universities and families. In individual terms, non-traditional students may use the tactics found so that the experienced conflicts with the high work/home/study demands can be minimized. At an organizational level, managers can develop integrative practices that enable these individuals to better manage their roles, reducing potential problems originating from this conflict, such as absenteeism, turnover rates and poor performance, and thus increase the organizational well-being. In relation to universities, courses coordinators can also create mechanisms to facilitate the negotiation of the demands by students, such as offering a mix of on-site and virtual classes if the student's profile of a certain course is for individuals with high work and family demands. Finally, from the findings, the family is able to better understand the challenges faced by the non-traditional student, being able to help them overcome problems deriving from the high demands and expectations of the roles, through a more tolerant behavior during this transitional period.

EQUILIBRANDO TRABALHO, ESTUDO E LAR: UM ESTUDO COM MESTRANDOS EM UMA UNIVERSIDADE BRASILEIRA

RESUMO

Objetivo: Compreender as táticas que estudantes não tradicionais utilizam para gerenciar as fronteiras entre trabalho, lar e estudo.

Originalidade/lacuna/relevância/implicações: O estudo se mostra original ao transferir o foco do conflito para o equilíbrio entre trabalho, lar e estudos. Além disso, também inova ao direcionar a atenção para o nível micro da ação individual, contrastando com uma literatura que tradicionalmente estuda ações organizacionais. Por fim, realiza uma leitura inovadora do fenômeno da interface entre trabalho, lar e estudos sob a ótica da teoria das fronteiras.

Principais aspectos metodológicos: O estudo, de natureza qualitativa, foi realizado a partir de 18 entrevistas que foram gravadas, transcritas e passaram por uma análise de conteúdo, que revelou uma lista de táticas individuais empregadas pelos entrevistados para conciliar demandas do trabalho, lar e estudos.

Síntese dos principais resultados: A análise permitiu identificar 18 táticas que os entrevistados empregam para negociar o grau de permeabilidade entre as fron-

teiras entre trabalho, estudo e lar. Essas táticas foram classificadas como comportamentais, comunicativas, físicas e temporais.

Principais considerações/conclusões: O estudo permitiu identificar que os estudantes desenvolvem um papel ativo ao interpretarem as expectativas dos atores sociais dos domínios do lar, trabalho e da instituição em que cursam o mestrado e adotarem fronteiras com graus de permeabilidade que possibilitam um estado de maior equilíbrio entre esses domínios.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Fronteiras. Estudantes não tradicionais. Trabalho-lar-estudo. Conflito. Equilíbrio.

EQUILIBRANDO TRABAJO, HOGAR Y ESTUDIOS: UNA INVESTIGACIÓN CON ALUMNOS DE MÁSTER EN UNA UNIVERSIDAD BRASILEÑA

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Comprender las tácticas que estudiantes no tradicionales utilizan para gestionar las fronteras entre trabajo, hogar y estudios.

Originalidad/laguna/relevancia/implicaciones: El estudio cambia el foco del conflicto para el equilibrio entre el trabajo, el hogar y estudio. También abre nuevos caminos al dirigir la atención al nivel micro de la acción individual, en contraste con una literatura que estudia tradicionalmente acciones organizacionales. Por último, realiza una lectura innovadora de la interfaz entre trabajo, hogar y estudios desde la perspectiva de la teoría de las fronteras.

Principales aspectos metodológicos: El estudio, de naturaleza cualitativa, se realizó a partir de 18 entrevistas grabadas, transcritas y que se sometieron a un análisis de contenido, que reveló una lista de tácticas individuales empleadas por los participantes para conciliar las exigencias del trabajo, hogar y estudios.

Síntesis de los principales resultados: El análisis identificó 18 tácticas que los encuestados emplean para negociar el nivel de permeabilidad entre las fronteras entre trabajo, escuela y hogar. Estas tácticas fueron clasificados como comportamentales, de comunicación, físicas y temporales.

Principales consideraciones/conclusiones: El estudio reveló que los estudiantes desarrollan un papel activo al interpretar las expectativas de los grupos de interés de los dominios de la casa, el trabajo y la institución en que estudian y adoptar

las fronteras con grados de permeabilidad que permiten a un estado de mayor equilibrio entre estos dominios.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Fronteras. Estudiantes no tradicionales. Trabajo-casa-estudios. Conflictos. Equilibrio.

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