Using Communication Channels for Boundary Management

Cooperative Media Lab
HCI Group I University of Bamberg

Introduction

Boundary Management is dedicated to the investigation of strategies that individuals pursue regarding the transition between **life domains** (e.g. work and non-work). There are six clusters of different boundary management styles: Work Warriors, Overwhelmed Reactors, Family Guardians, Fusion Lovers, Dividers, and Nonwork-Eclectics (Kossek & Lautsch 2008; Kossek et al. 2012).

One way to implement the individual boundary management style can be done using **technical devices** (such as different smartphones or laptops for different life domains). Although the bandwidth and availability of such devices are more diverse than ever before, we argue that people nowadays rather vary the communication channel instead of using many different communication devices. The aim of this work is to investigate if and how people use **communication channels** to support their individual boundary management style.

Method

We used a confirmatory **cluster analysis** (K-means) with a six-cluster solution in accordance to Kossek et al. (2012). Besides the analysis of the boundary management styles (using the Work-Life Indicator of Kossek et al. (2012)) we calculated a **communication channel separation score (CCSS)** including weights for the used communication channel with respect to the surrounding life domain. The 16 study participants (8 females) were between 26 and 65 (M = 37.88; SD = 12.77) years old. 68.8% of the participants are full-time (>38 hours weekly working time) and 31.2% are part-time (12-37 hours weekly working time) employed.

Results

The results show that participants use 1 to 4 communication devices (M = 2.5, SD = 0.81) and 2 to 6 communication channels (M = 3.44, SD = 1.21). This confirms that people use **more different communication channels** than devices.

Fusion Lovers, Overwhelmed Reactors and Family Guardians have high numbers of used devices and channels and also have the highest difference between used devices and channels, which indicates that they do **not limit their communication** to one application on one device, although this communication behaviour is not reflected in their CCSS.

The cluster with the highest separation of life domains (Dividers) does not have an explicitly high separation of communication channels. The clusters with a higher integration of interruptions across domains (Fusion Lovers, Nonwork-Eclectics) and the cluster that has a low boundary control but a high level of cross-domain interruptions (Overwhelmed Reactors) rather **separate their communication channels**. This suggests that the study participants have a rather **strict separation of communication channels for different life domains** regardless of their associated boundary profile and therefore also the level of integration or separation of different life domains.

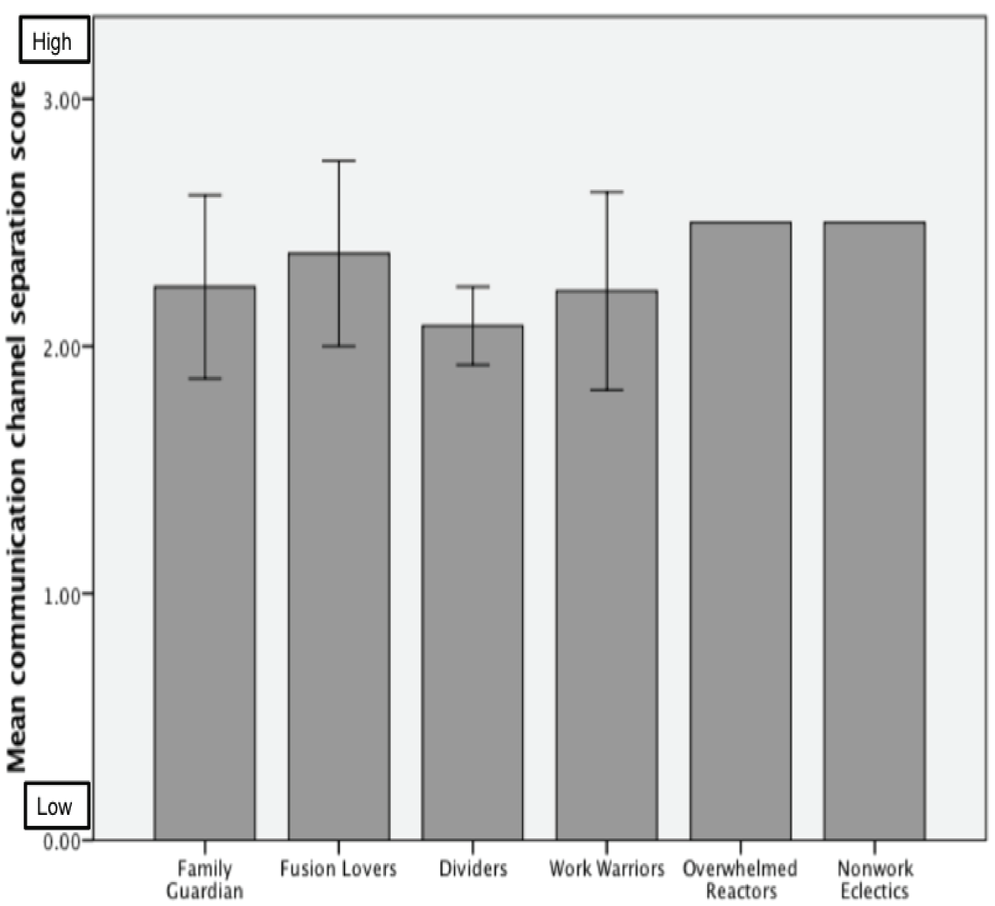

Figure 1. Mean values of communication channel separation score and boundary management profiles

Discussion

Our contribution takes Fleck et al's. idea of using communication devices to support individual boundary profiles but focus on the use of different communication channels for this purpose. In contrast to the choice of communication devices, the **choice of communication channels** always seems to be **highly differentiated** between different life domains. Our results only differentiate between work and non-work. An extension to examine a more granular specification of non-work life domains will be considered in future work.

We conclude from our results that the choice of communication channel depends less on the individual boundary management style, but possibly more on other factors such as the purpose and addressee of the communication. Future work can therefore also benefit not only from a larger sample but also from the consideration of other context factors such as the current activities of users

Pia Marquart
Tom Gross