Adjusting and re-adjusting: Learnings from the experience of coworkers for the future of coworking and shared working spaces

SUCKLEY, Louise <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2577-3731>

emerald PUBLISHING

Journal of Workplace Le

Adjusting and re-adjusting: Learnings from the experience of coworkers for the future of coworking and shared working spaces

Journal:	*Journal of Workplace Learning*
Manuscript ID	JWL-11-2022-0162.R3
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Methodologies:	Qualitative
Keywords:	coworking, home-based working, shared working spaces, boundary management, remote work adjustment

Adjusting and readjusting: Learnings from the experience of coworkers for the future of coworking and shared working spaces

Structured Abstract

Purpose: This paper examines the learning gained from the evolving adjustment experiences of coworkers in moving to home-based working during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the influence of these experiences on readjusting to return to coworking.

Design/ Methodology/ Approach: Results of a longitudinal qualitative study are reported where a group of coworkers were interviewed on three occasions between 2019 - 2022. Experiences are analysed alongside the adjustment to remote work model using a boundary management lens.

Findings: The main adjustment experiences were in work location, temporal structures, professional and social interactions; and a new adjustment area was identified around family role commitment that emerged in the home-based setting. Boundary management practices were temporal, behavioural, spatial and object-related and evolved with the unfolding of adjustment experiences. A return to using coworking spaces was driven by the need for social interaction and spatial boundaries but affected by the requirement for increased privacy.

Originality: Although many workers abruptly transitioned to home-based working during the pandemic, this research considers those who would normally choose to work in a community-centred working environment rather than being home-based. As such, their experience of adjustment is of greater interest, particularly in terms of their expectations for shared working spaces.

Practical implications: This paper will help workplace managers to understand adjustment experiences and develop facilities that will support a positive shared working environment not fulfilled through home-based working.

Keywords: coworking, home-based working, remote work adjustment, boundary management, shared working spaces

Article classification: Research Paper

1.0 Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on all areas of life, but one of the most significant has been how individuals work. Due to governments introducing measures such as 'lockdowns' and isolations (Baldwin and Tomiura, 2020) to reduce the spread of the virus, home-based working (HBW) became the norm. Several studies have considered the adjustment of workers to HBW during the pandemic (e.g., Kerman *et al*, 2022; Van Zoonen *et al*, 2021), but few have considered the experiences of those that could previously have been home-based but instead opted for working with others. The latter is the case for many individuals who use community-centred collaborative workspaces, commonly referred to as coworking environments (Bouncken *et al,* 2018).

The emergence and popularity of coworking spaces (CWS) have disrupted conventional understanding of work environments. CWS primarily cater to freelancers, entrepreneurs, and self-employed professionals (Merkel, 2015;

Spinuzzi, 2012), with a growing clientele from SMEs and larger firms (Orel and Bennis, 2021; Bouncken *et al*, 2021). These spaces champion the idea of 'working alone together', balancing individual autonomy with the perks of a community ambiance, spurring collaborative activities (Spinuzzi, 2012; Orel and Almeida, 2019). However, with the pandemic temporarily halting CWS operations, a new paradigm arose, pushing these mobile professionals into enforced HBW.

In this study, we delve into the transitional journeys of five coworkers: starting from their utilisation of CWS in 2019, transitioning to an exclusively HBW regime in 2021 during the pandemic, and their experiences in 2022 as CWS were reopened. Through the prism of the 'Adjustment to Remote Work' framework (Van Zoonen *et al*, 2021), coupled with the theoretical lens of boundary management (Nippert-Eng, 1996), we aim to understand the adjustment experiences of a cohort known for its inherent flexibility and autonomy. With that, this research furnishes novel perspectives on how pandemic-induced work adjustments have shaped the inclination of coworkers toward reverting to shared workspaces like CWS.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Coworking spaces (CWS) and the Covid-19 pandemic

CWS provide diverse workspaces, from individual stations to meeting rooms and casual spaces like kitchens (Orel, 2015; Schopfel *et al*, 2015). Their global popularity grew pre-pandemic due to increased flexible work preferences, advanced technology, and concerns over drawbacks of HBW or cafes. These concerns include limited social interaction, feelings of isolation, and blurred work-family boundaries (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte and Isaac, 2016; Spinuzzi, 2012).

Orel and Bennis (2021) categorize CWS into spaces emphasizing social interaction, specific needs, team collaborations, and mentorship-focused startup environments. The extent of social interaction in CWS varies, but it remains a fundamental aspect of the concept.

The opportunity for social interaction has led to the label of CWS as the 'social workplace concept' (Cabral and van Winden, 2022, p. 258). This social element can come in various forms such as informal conversations, direct social support through active mediation, or indirect affective social support such as sharing business stress and exchanging knowledge (Gerdenitsch *et al*, 2016). The social interaction offer has been argued to provide those using the space with a sense of belonging as they strive to be part of a community (Garrett *et al*, 2017) which reduces a sense of isolation (Bouncken, *et al*, 2018).

CWS emerged as a response to the isolation and limited collaboration opportunities frequently faced by independent professionals and entrepreneurs who cherish the freedom of location-independent work (Spinuzzi, 2012). Central to the appeal of CWS is the empowerment they offer to the precarious segment of the creative class, assisting them in crafting personal networks (Walden, 2019). Such environments prioritize collaboration, acting as melting pots that encourage interaction, trust-building, and relationship forging among a diverse cohort. Rese *et al* (2021) and Merkel (2015) have presented evidence indicating that both active and passive mediation within CWS can augment creativity and innovative tendencies among its users. By facilitating these connections, CWS become the bedrock for the development of supportive networks. This, in turn, empowers participants to navigate the hurdles of independent work, stimulating collaboration and innovation.

Coworking, while largely beneficial, has its own set of challenges, often referred to as its 'dark side' (Bouncken *et al*, 2018). A notable issue is the diminished emphasis on relationships, a concern raised by Loyd *et al* (2013). Furthermore, Bouncken *et al* (2018) underscore that the inherently collaborative environment can foster competition, occasionally leading to conflicts among users. Privacy is another substantial concern; Bhave *et al* (2019) detail how open workspace designs prevalent in CWS can compromise individual privacy. Such layouts, marked by their minimal barriers, can prove distracting for those needing concentrated solitude. Wallace *et al* (2011) also highlight potential issues arising from the visibility of computer screens in these open settings, which can trigger privacy concerns and disputes over the boundaries of shared resources within a supposed 'collaborative' environment.

CWS, aimed at fostering collaboration, grappled with maintaining community amidst pandemic-related challenges. Health safety became the priority, and open layouts posed transmission risks. Konya (2020) noted a 72% drop in users across 172 countries post-outbreak. CWS open during the pandemic's initial phases implemented safety measures including space reconfiguration and online community-building platforms (Cabral and van Winden, 2022).

2.2 Remote Work Adjustment

Adjustment to a new work context is viewed as the ability to respond to new environmental demands and align these with individual needs (Dawis *et al,* 1968). There is an element of trade-off to achieve adjustment and to balance work/ non work demands (Raghuram *et al,* 2001). Remote working, as a work environment, has been an option for some workers for several years, offering flexibility to employees (Saraigh *et al*, 2021) and enhancing work-life balance (Felstead and Henseke, 2017). Various theories have explored remote working,

focusing on aligning individuals with their environment (e.g., Person-environment fit, Edwards, 1996; Theory of Work Adjustment, Dawis *et al*, 1968); their job (e.g., Job Demands-Resources model, Bakker and Demerouti, 2017); and work-life balance (e.g., Boundary theory, Nippert-Eng, 1996; Conservation of resources theory, Hobfoll, 1989). These studies primarily target organisational employees to foster supportive HRM practices (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020); minimise burnout (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017); or delve into pre-planned remote working adoption (Biron *et al*, 2020). None have considered the adjustment for self-directed professionals who found their work flexibility suddenly restricted to a singular location.

It is the abruptness of this curtailment that is of interest in this research, and the experiences of these flexible workers in creating congruence with new demands. For this reason, we draw upon theories of work adjustment and more recent contributions that have incorporated the abruptness of the change due to the pandemic.

Carillo *et al* (2021) used the Theory of Work Adjustment (Dawis *et al*, 1968) to identify prevalent factors influencing employee adjustment to epidemic-induced telework specifically focusing on technology adoption. In their survey they measured individual, job and organisational factors and found of greatest importance for feelings of adjustment were: a favourable working environment, high IT self-efficacy, low stress levels (individual factors); low work interdependence, and minimal professional isolation (job factors). Previous telework experience was an important predictor of adjustment, as was the duration of telework, which they argue demonstrates the evolutionary nature of adjustment particularly when this is crisis-induced. They call for more longitudinal

research to explore how adjustment experiences develop as the crisis unfolds, which we hope our study can help address.

Bringing in wider experiences, Van Zoonen *et al*'s (2021) Adjustment to Remote Work (ARW) model suggests that areas impacting most on crisis-induced work adjustment are structural, relational and contextual. Structural factors are organisational job-related expectations, such as job role clarity and work independence. Relational factors include interpersonal trust experienced with colleagues even when working at a distance, incorporating accepting vulnerability, cooperation, and knowledge sharing. This factor also includes social isolation arising from a lack of professional support/ recognition. Contextual factors are crisis-specific indicators that relate to the change in work location (physical, technological and social work conditions) and disruption in work routine (habits, norms and procedures). The broader considerations of the ARW model make this more appropriate for our study than Carillo *et al*'s (2020) specific focus on technology adoption.

We will be mindful of the factors identified for adjustment by previous studies in our research, but as quantitative studies they fail to convey the lived experiences of adjustment during the pandemic where other factors may emerge. Previous studies have also failed to depict the evolutionary nature of adjustment that they recognise exists. With our qualitative and longitudinal design, we can explore the emerging adjustment experiences and, given the home confinement of the enforced remote working, we have chosen to use a theoretical lens that is prominent in the field of HBW research, which we will now discuss.

2.3 Boundary management

Boundary theory (Nippert-Eng, 1996) refers to the meanings that people give to work and life, and the ease with which they transition between the roles assigned to each domain (Ashforth *et al*, 2000). Boundary management is the practice that separates the different domains of life. The home-confinement of working during the pandemic created an increased blurring of these boundaries, with the demands of life roles ever-present when undertaking work roles. Although studies have been published on workers' pandemic-related HBW experiences (e.g., Kerman *et al*, 2022) few have considered the adjustment experiences of those that would normally use CWS to create boundaries between work and home.

Boundary management practices are identified by Nippert-Eng (1996) and Hearn and Michelson (2006) as including temporal, spatial, objects and behavioural approaches. Temporal boundaries can be established by setting specific days/ hours for work. Spatial boundaries relate to the use of specific spaces as part of the working day such as going to a room/ desk to undertake work. Boundaries established through objects are psychological in nature relating to what they represent, and meanings individuals attach to them (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008; Reissner *et al*, 2021). These include wearing specific clothes and using a phone/ laptop that is used for completing the ‘work’ role rather than the ‘personal’ role.

Duxbury *et al* (2014) suggests that if boundaries between work and non-work are not managed then individuals become ‘struggling segmentors’, and they experience conflict. In terms of work adjustment, it would follow that difficulties with boundary management would imply that individuals have not been able to align their needs/ values with the new demands of the work environment (Dawis *et al,* 1968).

As highly flexible professionals, responsible for managing their own working arrangements, coworkers have chosen to work in a 'social workplace' (Cabral and Winden, 2022) rather than HBW. Having the opportunity to be a home-based worker, even before the pandemic, but choosing not to, will make an exploration of their adjustment experiences even more valuable. The evolution of views about using CWS will also be interesting to explore alongside experiences of adjustment.

We have chosen the ARW model to guide our exploration of coworkers' adjustments from CWS to HBW. Given our study's contrasting longitudinal and qualitative approach, the model is used inductively to explore similarities in adjustment areas considered by the model to be indicators of good adjustment, rather than deductively to focus solely on these factors. We recognise that other adjustment areas could emerge. A boundary management (Nippert-Eng, 1996) lens is used to explore the tools and working practices adopted by participants in their attempt to create feelings of adjustment. See Supplementary Material - Figure 1 for details of the theoretical framework. Evolving views about using CWS are then explored to understand whether adjustment experiences affect views about returning to using a shared work setting such as CWS.

The following research questions guide this research:

- What are the main experiences of adjustment from coworking to home-based working and beyond?
- How are boundary management practices related to experiences of adjustment?

- How do views about using CWS change over time and how is this related to experiences of adjustment?

Supplementary Material Figure 1

3.0 Methodology

A longitudinal study was undertaken with the users of two CWS through three points of data collection between 2019 and 2022. The original focus of the research was to develop a series of case studies looking at physical design and users' experience of CWS. However, following the pandemic, the focus changed to consider how users adjusted to working since CWS were closed.

The two CWS used for the Time 1 (T1) data collection were both UK-based and were selected based on their contrasting approaches given the original focus of the research. Since the focus of the research changed to consider the experiences of individual coworkers, the characteristics of the two CWS will not be reported.

In 2019, T1 research utilised in-person semi-structured interviews with users at the coworking space. This approach facilitated immersion in the environment while allowing exploration of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). Questions covered motivations, daily routines, interactions, and areas for improvement. The interviews, conducted in a meeting room, were audio recorded and transcribed. For T1, regular users of the space were invited by coworking hosts based on their availability and willingness, a form of convenience sampling (Dörnyei, 2007). While this ensured participant accessibility, it also introduced potential biases, as self-selecting participants might not represent the wider CWS

community. However, the study's qualitative nature emphasized the depth of individual experiences over broad generalizability. As Small and Calarco (2022) suggest, quality qualitative data stems from participant exposure rather than sample size. In this study, participants were interviewed three times, with each session lasting about 40 minutes.

Time 2 (T2) research was undertaken in 2021 and all participants from T1 were invited to participate in a follow-up interview. At this stage, the research focused on understanding their current working practices and how they had adjusted to working during the pandemic. 4 coworkers responded and agreed to participate. A further participant was secured who had used one of the CWS at T1. Time 3 (T3) research was completed in 2022, and 4 participants from T2 participated. The focus of the interview on this occasion was to understand current working practices and views about returning to using CWS. Both T2 and T3 interviews were undertaken over a videoconferencing platform (i.e., Zoom) which were recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

Interview data was analysed using the thematic analysis approach by Braun and Clark (2006) to identify patterns of meanings related to adjustments. Starting with the T2 interviews, codes produced were applied to the T1 interviews to determine the 'starting point' for adjustment. These codes were then applied to the T3 interviews to see if the adjustments persisted, allowing for new codes to emerge based on further adaptations or evolving perspectives on returning to CWS.

For the analysis, the process began with familiarizing of the data, ensuring transcript accuracy and identifying initial patterns. Initial codes were then generated based on the research questions, looking at experiences of adjustment and boundary management practices, for example, comments made

around sharing a working location with your spouse and working in various rooms in the house were coded as ‘location challenges’. These initial codes were grouped to create potential themes which were then validated against academic literature and refined for clarity. For instance, 'professional interaction' and 'social interaction' were grouped under 'Relational factors' like the ARW model.

4.0 Findings

Findings are presented here under the key themes identified in addressing the research questions. Firstly, we consider the main experiences of adjustment between using CWS, HBW and beyond (see Supplementary Material Table I). Practices used by participants to support their adjustment are explored using a boundary management lens to address the second research question (see Supplementary Material Table II), which are then presented in a model of coworker work adjustment (see Supplementary Material Figure 2). Finally, the evolution of views on using CWS are explored in the third research question (see Supplementary Material Table III) and are discussed in relation to the reported adjustment experiences.

4.1 Experiences of adjustment

Supplementary Material Table I

4.1.1 Work location

A prominent area of adjustment was the work location. At T1, participants were presented with a range of choices in using CWS which they selected based upon preference and work task. Practical preferences included access to sockets and ergonomic issues like standing up working spaces. Flexibility of the work location was valued in the choice of desks, mobility around phone calls, and availability of coffee areas when taking a break.

At T2, work location choice was more limited to meet governmental guidelines for home-based/ socially distanced working. Choices for participants included various rooms at home, a garden office, renting a private office and using a clients' empty office. Practical location preferences related primarily to sharing spaces with family members rather than the functionality of the space as identified in T1. Flexibility of space was no longer discussed, but instead challenges emerged including distractions from family members and non-work tasks around the house. This distraction caused some participants to readjust their work location to a client's empty office.

Ergonomic issues continued to be an area of consideration at T2, but these were more about the difficulties experienced in not having a standing bench as provided at T1. Views about the work location had changed from T1 when participants preferred to use the same space, to it no longer being as significant given the seriousness of the pandemic. As one participant comments:

"The actual environment has gone down the pecking order a little bit for me in terms of priorities." (P2)

During T3, work location choice had expanded as participants were visiting clients, using their employers' office, coffee shops, HBW and some had started using CWS again. Practical location preferences related to working spaces when travelling, distractions when HBW, and the need for some ambiance in a working space. This contrasts with the more specific functionalities of the work environment cited at T1. Challenges continued with the work location, around the need for privacy when using CWS and interrupting family members when HBW though ergonomic issues were no longer raised as they were in T1 and T2.

Views about location at T3 related primarily to the need to use a wider range of locations, whether this was a preference to work outside of home or a need to visit clients/ colleagues. This contrasts with the diminished importance of the work location at T2 and the preference to use the same space at T1 in CWS.

4.1.2 Temporal structures

As independent professionals, coworkers are self-directed in the days and times they work. At T1, participants referred to working at CWS between 3–5 days a week and working from around 8.30am until 6pm. Timings were influenced by CWS and arriving to secure the preferred work location. Participants discussed taking breaks for coffee and conversations with other coworkers, and then a break for lunch which they spent outside the space to eat, shop or exercise. Before-work routines and the commute were discussed and involved walking with their spouse, cycling or using public transport.

At T2 these temporal structures continued regarding start and end time and working 5 days a week. Some participants discussed extending their working hours, which they considered a positive experience allowing them to harness their 'flow', but others considered this a negative experience:

"It's just the classic thing because you're working from home it seeps from early in the morning to a bit too late in the evening and then a sneaky return back to the laptop late at night if you're not careful." (P1)

The before-work routine still emerged as important, but it had been adjusted somewhat from the T1 commute. Now it included a form of outdoor exercise that

adhered to pandemic restrictions such as walking/ running, which was discussed as supporting work focus.

Taking breaks was still considered important at T2, but technology was now used to structure this which contrasts with the more natural experience at T1 of taking coffee with others or going out for lunch. Several participants discussed being so absorbed in their work that they would forget to take a break, hence the use technology reminders.

Although family commitments still existed during T1, participants referred to these within the routine outside of work. At T2, the need to cover home schooling or the school run was an important element of temporal structure that involved blocking out work time.

There was little adjustment in the working times and days at T3, with some participants continuing to struggle to segment their time, which was recognised because of HBW:

"We still have the problem… because I can start to fret about work, settle down by 8, let it drift sometimes or return to it in the evenings." (P1).

Experiences of taking breaks at T3 continued to involve using technology to schedule time and set reminders as was the case at T2, or moving to different locations outside of the work location which was more like T1.

4.1.3 Work Tasks

At T1, participants discussed their work tasks as involving individual tasks using laptops, making phones calls, communicating via email/ video calls, or in-person meetings. Headphones were used to support focus or just 'zoning into' the computer when using CWS.

Variation in work tasks had reduced at T2 but there was a greater use of video calls to replace in-person meetings. This was a positive experience for some who felt their productivity levels had increased, however, for others the online communication had led to an intensification of work.

During T3, there was more variation in work tasks when using other locations, with the reintroduction of in-person meetings. Variation reduced the sense of intensity to some extent, though the travel time extended the working day which aligned more with T1.

Two participants at T3 had introduced more structure to their work tasks to help with productivity. They discussed the need to create clear times for deep work and shallow work (Newport, 2016), where deep work was more concentrated tasks, and shallow work involved quicker tasks:

"three times a day, I'll do like shallow work. And then when I go into deep work, I disconnect everything. … I put my phone onto flight mode. I turn off my email notifications on my computer. And I just work like in four-hour slots undistracted." (P5)

This contrasts with the work task experiences at T1, where no such differentiation was discussed or potentially needed, and is perhaps the result of distractions that

were prevalent at T2.

4.1.4 Professional Interaction

The first 'Relational' theme that emerged from the adjustment experiences was around professional interaction. During T1 using CWS, participants discussed the opportunities to bounce ideas around, discuss similar clients and build mentoring relationships; as well as sharing business experiences such as bidding for work, sector knowledge and business growth.

At this time, professional interactions related to other coworkers, whereas at T2 the focus moved to interactions with clients, colleagues (for the employees) and former coworkers. Experiences of professional support was through online discussions, or client meetings, though some also continued a mentoring relationship with former coworkers. Several challenges had emerged including the stifled nature of discussions, and a lack of instrumental support affecting professional confidence. For example:

"You could … unload some of your work-related gripes on them [other coworkers] *rather than on the family….. if it's just someone who's in an office with you….they can be sympathetic and interested.. they're not directly impacted by the rest of life."* (P1)

At T3, references were made to professional support, but more around their format given that they were now more varied (travelling to see clients, in-person meetings, and online meetings). Several participants, especially those that were employees, discussed the need to establish a sense of professional belonging with their colleagues at this time, which would involve interactions at their organisations' offices to (re)build their professional presence.

4.1.5 Social interaction

At T1, social interaction was one of the prime motivations for using CWS particularly seeing a variety of people during the working day, having social conversations during breaks, and going out for meals. Social interaction with the same people created friendships that supported a sense of belonging and feeling part of a community.

At T2, participants discussed the lack of variation in people they were now able to socially interact with due to government restrictions. For example:

"I miss that social interaction…whether there's just like a coffee break speaking to someone, you used to get that a lot at [CWS] *So right now, it's just very…solitary."* (P5)

This 'solitary' way of working was causing a sense of isolation for several participants, leading to over-working and negatively impacting well-being.

Adjustment experiences around social interaction at T2 also related to the demands of the family role either as a parent and/ or spouse. The proximity of family in the work location caused distractions since they were emotionally invested in spending breaks together and not distracting other household members. The 'expected' social interaction was leading to feelings of guilt, reduced productivity and longer working hours.

At T3, social interaction had been reinstated with a greater variety of people as more work locations were used. Family role demands were also lower as others

returned to work/ school. Experiences of guilt and distractions did not emerge at T3, but nor did the need for a sense of belonging that was shared at T1.

4.2 Boundary management practices

Adopting the boundary management lens to explore the experiences of adjustment, has highlighted several tools and practices used to separate the domains of work and home, and their evolution over time.

Supplementary Material Table II

4.2.1 Temporal-related

When confined to HBW at T2, participants discussed the importance of temporal structures in their working day creating a specific time to start work, have breaks and end their working day. To facilitate this practice, participants used technology for reminders to take breaks or block out their online calendar to do the 'school run' or have lunch. At T3, the use of temporal-related boundaries had extended further to schedule types of work tasks, to create boundaries within work rather than between work and home.

4.2.2 Behaviour-related

Behaviour-related practices primarily related to health and well-being. All participants discussed the inclusion of some form of exercise in their before-work routine to gain focus and have social interaction. Other exercises were also scheduled at the end of the working day, such as online exercise classes or using gym equipment at home, which facilitated winding-down. These forms of non-work activities were used as boundary practices to differentiate between the working day and home life. Activities continued during T3, though further

locations were used such as the local gym, and spending time in the garden to play with the family pet.

4.2.3 Spatial-related

Work location is discussed as one of the main adjustment experiences. Where the work location at T2 caused distractions in terms of family-role, there was a need for better boundary management to demarcate home and work. One participant made this adjustment by working in a clients' office, others were able to rent a private office. Where this was not possible, the distractions of the family role remained. At T3, there continued to be spatial-related boundary management practices, but this was to support taking breaks and a move away from the desk. The change in spatial location created a boundary between work and non-work, though this was not necessarily home-based.

4.2.4 Object-related

Mobile phones or laptops used for work were physically located out of sight when at home to create a boundary. This emerged at T3 for two participants, but they explained that they had learned this practice from previous work experience. As one participant explains:

"I know just not to bring my work home… I either leave it in the office, leave it in the shop or leave it in my bag. … I have 2 separate laptops – a laptop at home… but then I've got a work laptop which doesn't leave my bag." (P4)

Even though the object signifies 'work' it requires a level of strength and determination to still manage the boundary between work and home. Not all participants had this conviction, and with the laptop being in the home, it allowed a *"sneaky return back to the laptop"* (P1).

4.2.5 Work adjustment and boundary management practices

The relationship between coworkers' adjustment experiences reported at the different stages are summarised in Supplementary Material Figure 2. This shows the most prominent boundary management practices used to support each type of work adjustment. Temporal- and spatial-related boundary management tools were most prominent in the form of scheduling working times and using different locations. At T3, when there were more opportunities for professional and social interaction, a wider range of boundary management practices were used including using separate work-related objects (e.g., laptops) and different locations (e.g., the gym).

4.3 The evolution of views about using CWS

Supplementary Material Table III

4.3.1 Time 1

At T1, participants discussed motivations for using CWS to include: social conversations, meeting a variety of people and belonging to a community; professional support such as networking, sharing business experience; and also, spatial-related to create a work/ home boundary, choice of workspaces, professional décor and ambience. As one participant outlines:

"I use it to work in a… working environment because I work for myself so I don't like to work at home. I can't concentrate. I like to work in open space where I feel like I'm actually going to a different place opposed to… where I live." (P3)

At T1, the only reason for not using CWS was if work tasks required privacy such as working with financial information.

4.3.2 Time 2

At T2, participants were keen to return to using CWS with the main motivation being for social interaction. They were yearning social conversations with a variety of people. This aligns with the adjustment experiences of feelings of isolation and monotony/ tension of family interaction. There was no mention at this time of professional interactions from CWS, perhaps suggesting that this was being addressed via online communication.

Spatial-related reasons for returning primarily focussed on creating a delineation between work and home and aligns with the challenges experienced.

Reasons for not using CWS continued to include the need for privacy, but instead of this just relating to the work task it had expanded to more general privacy. Safety was also highlighted as an issue, linking with comments around cleanliness and over-crowding and the use of public transport which relates more with fears arising from a health pandemic *per se*. Other spatial-related hesitations were around relinquishing the comfort and convenience of HBW, and concerns about distracting others when having online meetings.

4.3.3 Time 3

At T3, some participants had returned to using CWS primarily for social interaction. This related with their experiences of adjustment, especially for the youngest participant who lived on their own.

"it was very cabin-fever inducing, just basically stuck in one room all day…. it made me realise how important it is to even have minimal social interactions." (P5)

This quote illustrates another reason around the need to separate home from work. This continued from T2 and had been the impetus for several participants seeking alternative work locations. The design of CWS in providing a choice of spaces, professional décor and ambience, was also important and relates to the original motivations discussed at T1.

Privacy continued to be a reason not to use CWS, along with increased productivity whilst HBW due to time saved from commuting.

Although several participants had returned to using CWS at T3, there had been mixed reviews since it failed to provide social interaction because of social distancing measures and little ambience due to low occupancy levels.

Others had chosen not to return because they required alternative locations e.g., clients/ employers' offices which they balanced with HBW. The challenges of HBW had diminished given that it was no longer the sole work location.

5.0 Discussion

With the following discussion, we consider our participant's adjustment experiences over the 3-year period and reflect upon the relevance of the ARW model and boundary management lens adopted. We align this discussion with the research questions, previous research and consider what will lead to a return to using CWS and other shared work locations.

Unfolding adjustment experiences

Carillo *et al* (2021) emphasize the evolving nature of remote work adjustment which is supported in our study illustrated through the fluctuating significance of

various factors. Initially, flexibility and choice of location in CWS were crucial, echoing earlier findings (Weijs-Perrée *et al*, 2019) however, with the shift to HBW, options diminished, leading to challenges like space-sharing and distractions (Ipsen *et al*, 2021). Notably, some coworkers, perhaps influenced by their experience with CWS, actively sought alternative spaces, reinforcing the need for spatial boundaries (Nippert-Eng, 1996). By T3, with more spaces available, work location choice was driven by job requirements. Yet, the adaptability displayed in using diverse work locations contrasts with those confined to one location (Fonner and Roloff, 2010), supporting Carillo *et al*'s (2021) assertion that prior HBW experience aids remote work adjustment.

CWS, as social workspaces, offer both professional and social interactions (Spinuzzi, 2012). Initially, our participants relied on CWS for professional support. This reliance shifted during HBW to family and online communication, occasionally causing diminished self-confidence, which aligns with the ARW model. By T3, professional support rebounded through in-person interactions, emphasizing the role of CWS role in professional networking (Rese *et al*, 2021).

Social interaction was a separate factor that emerged in adjustment experiences. At CWS, social relationships formed with other coworkers through coffee breaks and informal events, leading to a sense of belonging (Garrett *et al*, 2017). The lack of social interaction at T2 was a difficult adjustment for our participants given the huge reduction in variety, and the more emotional labour that comes with family interactions (Munkejord, 2017). By T3, diverse work locations were reintroduced, though they didn't foster a sense of belonging. This might reflect a reduced focus on relationships in CWS as highlighted by Loyd *et al* (2013).

New indicators of adjustment

Using the ARW model to guide the analysis, we can explore its relevance to more independent professionals with prior experience of HBW, and the evolving nature of adjustment given the longitudinal design. We have found support for contextual factors that link with a change in work location, though these were more physical and social work conditions rather than the technological conditions previously identified, perhaps because these are well-embedded in our participants' working practices. Temporal structure was more relevant rather than the general 'work routine' factor in the ARW model relating to habits, norms and procedures. Within temporal structures, the timing of breaks was important building upon previous experience of independent working and using technology more reflexively (Villadsen, 2017).

Family commitments were a new element identified and is arguably an oversight in the ARW model. Although family commitments are not part of a formal work arrangement, which the previous research addressed, it is naive to think that they have no impact on completing work at home.

The distinction in relational factors between professional and social interactions was also a new indicator. In the ARW model, this element covered professional relationships only around trust, vulnerability and knowledge sharing; and feelings of social isolation from a lack of informal interactions. Our participants discussed similar adjustments in professional relationships experienced in CWS, but also discussed the social interactions gained from informal interactions and social events. This supported CWS as the 'social workplace concept' (Cabral and van Winden, 2022).

Extending the use of boundary management practices

The boundary management lens (Nippert-Eng, 1996) has shown the range of practices used by these flexible self-directed professionals to support their work adjustment, which can support adjustment in those experiencing work location changes. Although boundary management practices are prevalent in research on HBW (Kerman *et al*, 2022) with its focus on work-life balance, this research has also shown how they are used within the work role to create boundaries between different types of work, working relationships and work locations.

What leads to a return to CWS?

Through the research we were able to track the evolution of views about using CWS and found that social interaction was a consistent and key motivation. Participants used CWS to support more informal interactions throughout the working day with a variety of people. The experience of working in CWS post-pandemic was not yet providing these opportunities, which suggests more is needed to facilitate social interactions, raising the importance of the mediating role of community managers (Rese *et al,* 2021).

There were also spatial reasons for returning to create a physical boundary between work and home (Ashforth *et al*, 2000) and was important to reduce over-working and becoming a 'struggling segmentor' (Duxbury *et al*, 2014). A further spatial reason was the professional ambience and design that is offered for meetings with clients/ colleagues and supports the findings of Yang *et al* (2019) in using CWS as part of a Corporate Real Estate strategy.

Privacy was an issue raised throughout the study and should be addressed to encourage a return. Initially this related to the type of work task, supporting the work of Wallace *et al* (2011) on the visibility of computer screens; but this had

developed further towards a fear of disturbing others, previously found by Bhave *et al* (2019).

6.0 Conclusion

This study examines coworkers' adjustments transitioning from CWS to HBW and their sentiments on returning to CWS. Through a boundary management perspective, we've delved into their evolving adjustment practices. Despite its depth, this research has limitations. A smaller sample size is a constraint, as not all participants joined follow-up sessions, yet the longitudinal approach offers valuable insights into personal adjustments during this unique work era.

These findings hold practical relevance, benefiting not just managers of CWS but also employees and researchers. Grasping adjustment experiences can guide employees and offer researchers a deeper understanding of work dynamics, potentially influencing future studies on employee well-being and productivity. Moreover, traditional workplaces can apply these findings during their 'return to work' phase, helping organisations tailor supportive and flexible work policies around boundary management and work environments, like introducing varied workspaces and promoting community building.

From a design perspective, the findings suggest shifting from predominantly open-planned spaces to more private spaces that bridge the home and work environment. This could be achieved through providing inspiring and homely-interior designs but complemented with ergonomic seating. Also, more use of glass-walled or partially closed workspaces will allow users to undertake work either socially or privately but still build a sense of co-presence.

We emphasise the importance of further inquiry and specify several avenues for future research. Firstly, research into coworkers' post-pandemic experiences in returning to CWS is crucial. For instance, studies could examine if prolonged HBW has led to preference-shifts for specific amenities or spatial configurations. Finally, given the significance of reduced social interaction during the pandemic, it becomes vital to investigate hybrid approaches that balance remote and physical interactions, and how they cater to individual productivity and community-building needs.

7.0 References

Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: Boundaries and micro role transitions. *The Academy of Management Review,* Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 472–491.

Bakker, A., and Demerouti, E. (2017), Job demands–resources theory: taking stock and looking forward, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 22, pp. 273–285.

Baldwin, R. and Tomiura, E. (2020), Thinking ahead about the trade impact of COVID-19*, Economics in the Time of COVID-19,* Vol. 59, pp. 59-71.

Bhave, D. P., Teo, L. H., and Dalal, R. S. (2020), Privacy at work: A review and a research agenda for a contested terrain, *Journal of Management,* Vol. 46, No. 1, pp.127-164.

Biron, M., Peretz, H., and Turgeman-Lupo, K. (2020), Trait optimism and work from home adjustment in the COVID-19 pandemic: Considering the mediating role of situational optimism and the moderating role of cultural optimism, *Sustainability*, Vol. 12, No. 9773,- pp. 1–21.

Bouncken, R.B. and Aslam, M.M., (2021), Bringing the design perspective to coworking-spaces: Constitutive entanglement of actors and artifacts, *European Management Journal,* Vol. 41, No. 1, pp.101–113.

Bouncken, R. B., Aslam, M. M., and Reuschl, A. J. (2018). The dark side of entrepreneurship in coworking-spaces. In Porcar, A.T. and Soriano, D.R. (Eds) *Inside the mind of the entrepreneur*, Springer International Publishing, pp. 135-147.

Bouncken, R.B., Aslam, M.M. and Qiu, Y., (2021), Coworking spaces: Understanding, using, and managing sociomateriality. *Business Horizons,* Vol. 64, No. 1, pp.119-130.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), Using thematic analysis in psychology*, Qualitative research in psychology,* Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 77-101.

Cabral, V. and van Winden, W. (2022), The reaction of coworking spaces to the COVID-19 pandemic. A dynamic capabilities perspective*, Service Business,* Vol. 16, pp. 257-281.

Carillo, K.; Cachat-Rosset, G.; Marsan, J.; Saba, T.; Klarsfeld, A. (2021),Adjusting to epidemic-induced telework: Empirical insights from teleworkers in France. *European Journal of Information Systems,* Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 69-88.

Carnevale, J. B., and Hatak, I. (2020), Employee adjustment and well-being in the era of COVID-19: Implications for human resource management, *Journal of Business Research,* Vol. 116, pp. 183-187.

Creswell, J.W. (2013), *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches.* 3rd ed. Los Angeles, California: SAGE.

Dawis, R.V.; Lofquist, L.H.; Weiss, D.J. (1968), A theory of work adjustment: A revision. University of Minnesota Studies in Vocational Rehabilitation XXIII, Bulletin 47.

Dörnyei, Z. (2007), *Research methods in applied linguistics: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*, Oxford University Press.

Duxbury, L., Higgins, C., Smart, R. and Stevenson, M., (2014), Mobile technology and boundary permeability. *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp.570-588.

Edwards, J. R. (1996), An examination of competing versions of the person-environment fit approach to stress. *Academy of Management Journal,* Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 292-339.

Felstead, A., and Henseke, G. (2017), Assessing the growth of remote working and its consequences for effort, well-being and work-life balance, *New Technology, Work and Employment,* Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 195-212.

Fonner, K.L. and Roloff, M.E. (2010) Why Teleworkers are More Satisfied with Their Jobs than are Office-Based Workers: When Less Contact is Beneficial, *Journal of Applied Communication Research,* Vol. 38, No. 4, pp. 336-361.

Garrett, L.E., Spreitzer, G.M. and Bacevice, P.A. (2017), Co-constructing a Sense of Community at Work: The Emergence of Community in Coworking Spaces*, Organization Studies,* Vol. 38, No. 6, pp. 821-842.

Gerdenitsch, C., Scheel, T.E., Andorfer, J. and Korunka, C. (2016), Coworking Spaces: A Source of Social Support for Independent Professionals*, Frontiers in psychology,* Vol. 7, pp. 581.

Hobfoll, S. E. (1989), Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist,* Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 513-524

Hearn, M. and Michelson, G. (2006), *Rethinking work: Time, space and discourse*, Cambridge University Press.

Ipsen, C.; van Veldhoven, M.; Kirchner, K.; Hansen, J.P. (2021), Six Key Advantages and Disadvantages of Working from Home in Europe during

COVID-19, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, Vol. 18, p. 1826.

Kerman, K., Korunka, C. and Tement, S. (2022), Work and home boundary violations during the COVID-19 pandemic: The role of segmentation preferences and unfinished tasks*, Applied Psychology,* Vol. 71, No. 3, pp. 784-806.

Konya K (2020), Can Coworking Aid Businesses in Combating Coronavirus? https://www.coworker.com/mag/how-coworking-can-aid-businesses-in-combating-coronavirus.

Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, A. and Isaac, H. (2016), The new office: how coworking changes the work concept*, Journal of Business Strategy,* Vol. 37, No. 6, pp. 3-9.

Loyd, D. L., Wang, C. S., Phillips, K. W., & Lount Jr, R. B. (2013), Social category diversity promotes premeeting elaboration: The role of relationship focus. *Organization Science*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 757-772.

Merkel, J., (2015), Coworking in the city. *Ephemera*, Vol. 15, No.1, p.121.

Munkejord, M.C. (2017), His or her work–life balance? Experiences of self-employed immigrant parents*, Work, employment and society,* Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 624-639.

Newport, C. (2016), *Deep work: Rules for focused success in a distracted world,* Hachette UK.

Nippert-Eng, C.E., (1996), *Home and work: Negotiating boundaries through everyday life*. University of Chicago Press.

Orel, M. (2015), Working in coworking spaces: The social and economic engagement of European youth*, Perspectives on Youth,* Vol. 2, pp. 133-139.

Orel, M. and Almeida, M.D.M., (2019), The ambience of collaboration in coworking environments. *Journal of Corporate Real Estate*, Vol. 21, No.4, pp.273-289.

Orel M, and Bennis W.M. (2021), Classifying changes. A taxonomy of contemporary coworking spaces. *Journal of Corporate Real Estate,* Vol. 23, No. 4, pp.278–296.

Orlikowski, W.J. and Scott, S.V., (2008), 10 sociomateriality: challenging the separation of technology, work and organization. *Academy of Management annals*, Vol. 2, No. 11, pp.433-474.

Raghuram, S.; Garud, R.; Wiesenfeld, B.; Gupta, V. (2001), Factors contributing to virtual work adjustment, *Journal of Management*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp.383–405.

Reissner, S.C., Izak, M. and Hislop, D. (2021), Configurations of Boundary Management Practices among Knowledge Workers*, Work, employment and society,* Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 296-315.

Rese, A., Görmar, L. and Herbig, A., (2021), Social networks in coworking spaces and individual coworker's creativity, *Review of Managerial Science*, Vol. 16, pp.391-428.

Saragih, S., Margaretha, M., & Anantyanda, L. (2021), Job Autonomy, Job Crafting And Employees' Well-Being During Working From Home. *Journal Manajemen Dan Kewirausahaan*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 177–185.

Schopfel, J., Roche, J. and Hubert, G. (2015), Co-working and innovation: new concepts for academic libraries and learning centres*, New Library World,* Vol. 116, No. 1, pp. 67-78.

Small, M.L. and Calarco, J.M., (2022), *Qualitative literacy: A guide to evaluating ethnographic and interview research*. University of California Press.

Spinuzzi, C. (2012), Working alone together: Coworking as emergent collaborative activity*, Journal of Business and Technical Communication,* Vol. 26, No. 4, pp. 399-441.

Van Zoonen, W., Sivunen, A., Blomqvist, K., Olsson, T., Ropponen, A., Henttonen, K. and Vartiainen, M., (2021), Factors influencing adjustment to remote work: Employees' initial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,* Vol. 18, No. 13, p.6966.

Villadsen, K. (2017), Constantly online and the fantasy of 'work–life balance': Reinterpreting work-connectivity as cynical practice and fetishism*, Culture and Organization,* Vol. 23, No. 5, pp. 363-378.

Walden, J., (2019), Communicating role expectations in a coworking office, *Journal of Communication Management*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp.316-330.

Wallace, J. R., Scott, S. D., Lai, E., & Jajalla, D. (2011), Investigating the role of a large, shared display in multi-display environments. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)*, Vol. 20, pp. 529-561.

Weijs-Perrée, M., van de Koevering, J., Appel-Meulenbroek, R. and Arentze, T. (2019), Analysing user preferences for co-working space characteristics*, Building Research & Information,* Vol. 47, No. 5, pp. 534-548.

Yang, E., Bisson, C. and Sanborn, B.E. (2019), Coworking space as a third-fourth place: changing models of a hybrid space in corporate real estate, *Journal of Corporate Real Estate*, Vol. 21 No. 4, pp. 324-345.

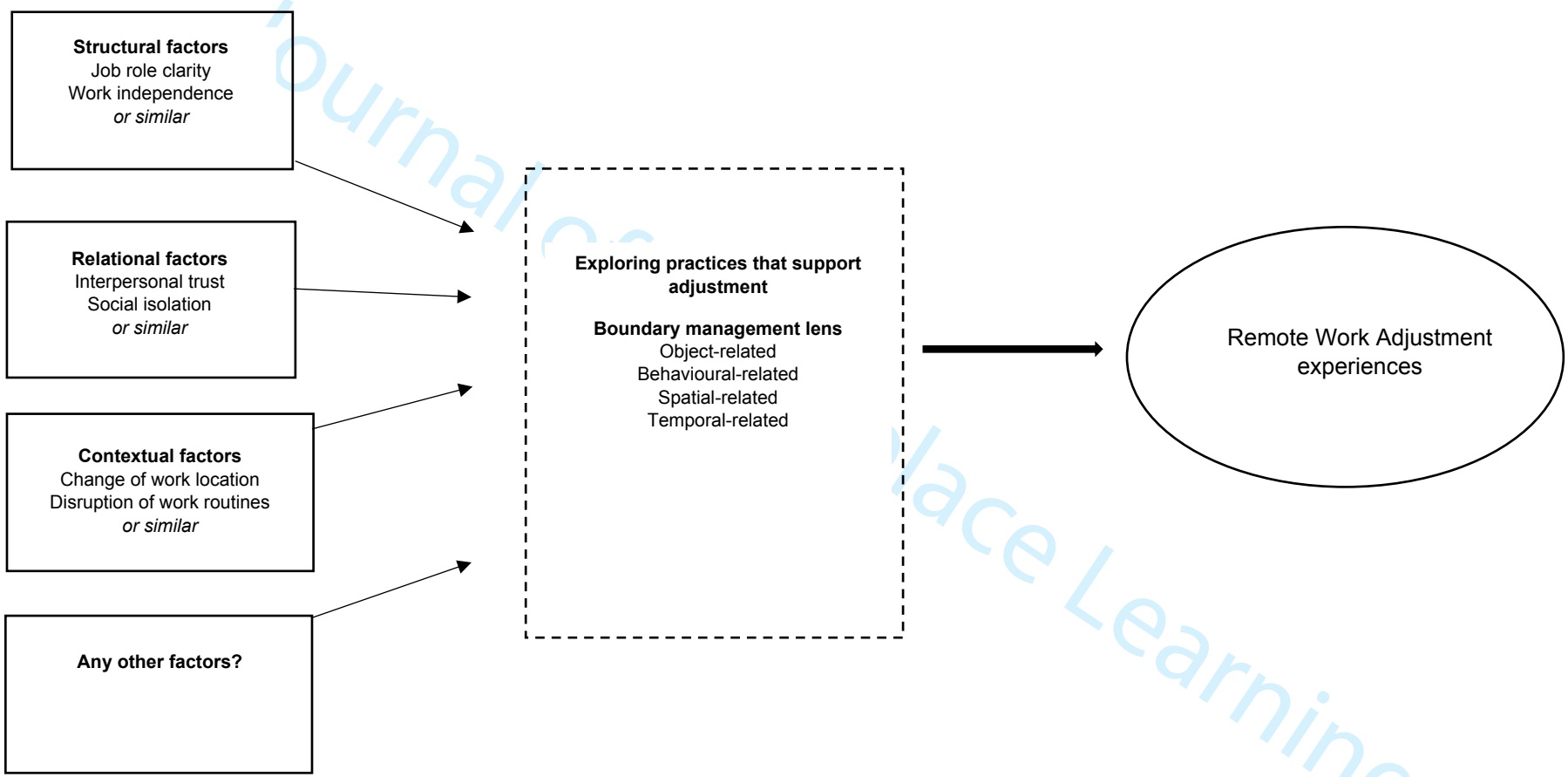

Figure 1: Theoretical model based on the inductive use of the Adjustment to Remote Work model (Van Zoonen *et al,* 2021) and Boundary management (Nippert-Eng, 1996)

Table I – Areas of adjustment coding summary

Coding			Themes	Aggregate themes
Time 1	**Time 2**	**Time 3**		
Choice of location	Choice of location	Choice of location	Work location	Contextual factors
Practical location preferences	Practical location preferences	Practical location preferences		
Flexibility of location	Challenges with location	Challenges with location		
Views about location	Views about location	Views about location		
Ergonomic Issues	Ergonomic Issues			
Working days & times	Working days & times	Working days & times	Temporal structures	
Taking breaks	Extending working time	Extending working time		
Before-work routine	Taking breaks	Taking breaks		
	Before-work routine			
	Family commitments			
Communicating with others online	Communicating with others online	Communicating with others online	Work tasks	Structural factors
Concentration on work	Productivity levels	Structuring tasks		
Individual work	Intensity of work	Intensity of work		
Professional support	Professional support	Format of professional interactions	Professional interaction	Relational factors
Shared business experience	Need for professional belonging	Need for professional belonging		
	Challenges with professional interaction			
Sense of belonging	Sense of isolation	Family role interaction	Social interaction	
Variety of people	Lack of variety of people	Variety of people		
Conversations	Family role interaction/ distraction			

Table II – Practices for supporting adjustment

Time 2		Time 3	
Coding	**Boundary Management Themes**	**Coding**	**Boundary Management Themes**
Scheduling time for family commitments	Temporal-related	Scheduling work tasks	Temporal-related
Health and well-being activities	Behaviour-related	Scheduling time for breaks	
Socialising online		Health and well-being activities	Behaviour-related
New work location	Spatial-related	Time away from desk	Spatial-related
		Reducing distractions using technology	Object-related

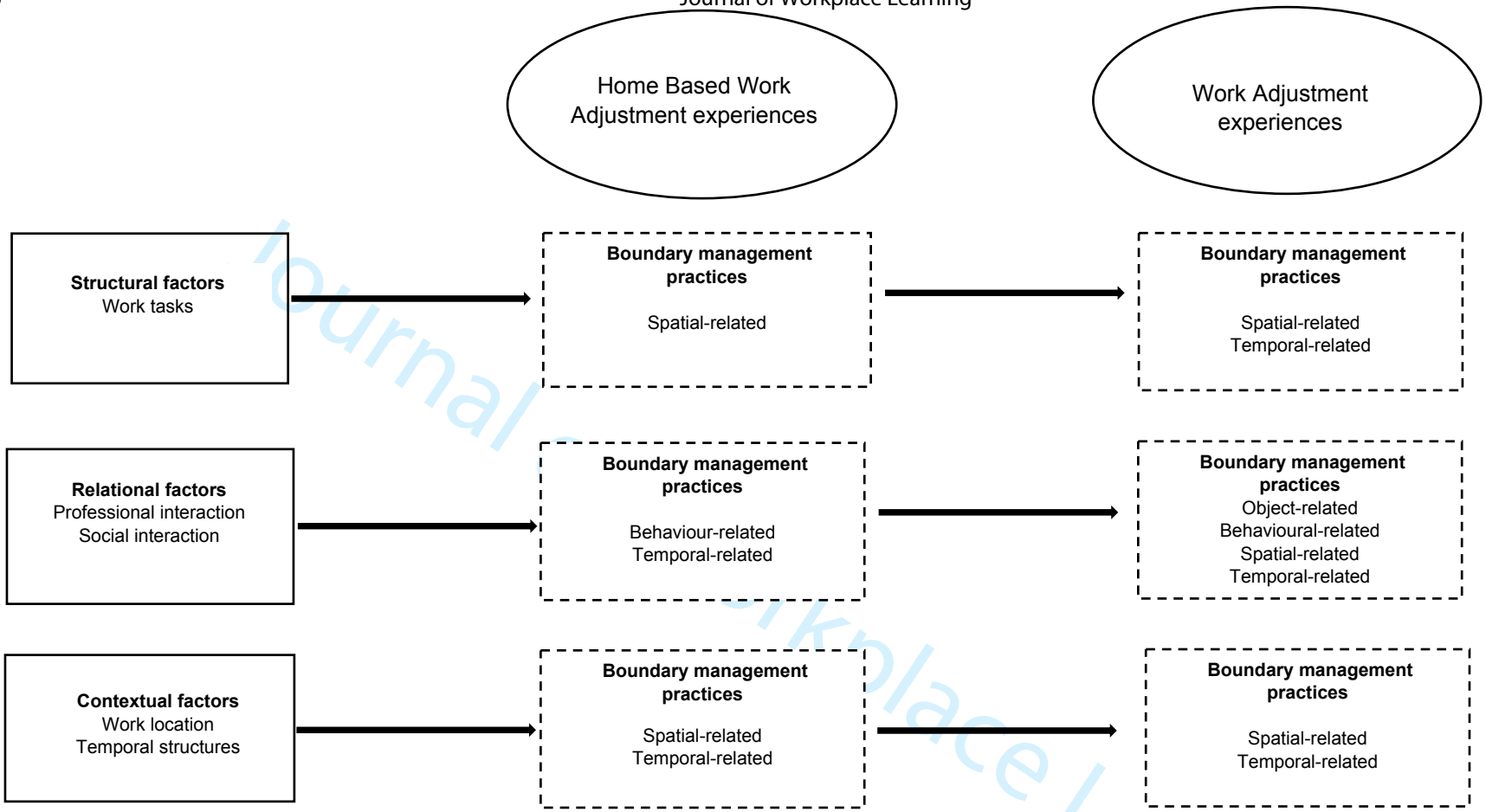

Figure 2: Coworker work adjustment using boundary management practices

Table III – Views about using CWS over time

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">Reasons for using/ returning to using CWS</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Time 1</td><td colspan="2">Time 2</td><td colspan="2">Time 3</td></tr>
<tr><td>Coding</td><td>Theme</td><td>Coding</td><td>Theme</td><td>Coding</td><td>Theme</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sense of belonging</td><td rowspan="3">Social interaction</td><td>Sense of belonging</td><td rowspan="3">Social interaction</td><td>Conversations</td><td>Social interaction</td></tr>
<tr><td>Conversations</td><td>Conversations</td><td>Separate from home</td><td rowspan="2">Spatial-related</td></tr>
<tr><td>Variety of people</td><td>Variety of people</td><td>Design of the space</td></tr>
<tr><td>Professional support</td><td rowspan="3">Professional interaction</td><td>Separate from home</td><td>Spatial-related</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="4"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Shared business experience</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Increases productivity</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reduce distractions at home</td><td rowspan="3">Spatial related</td></tr>
<tr><td>Separate from home</td><td colspan="4" rowspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Design of the space</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Reasons for NOT using/ returning to using CWS</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Time 1</td><td colspan="2">Time 2</td><td colspan="2">Time 3</td></tr>
<tr><td>Coding</td><td>Theme</td><td>Coding</td><td>Theme</td><td>Coding</td><td>Theme</td></tr>
<tr><td>Need for privacy</td><td rowspan="2">Work tasks</td><td>Need for privacy</td><td rowspan="2">Work tasks</td><td>Need for privacy</td><td rowspan="2">Work tasks</td></tr>
<tr><td>Need to concentrate</td><td>Need to concentrate</td><td>Reduces productivity</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="4"></td><td rowspan="3">Fear of distracting others</td><td rowspan="3">Professional interaction</td><td>Social interaction limited</td><td>Social interaction</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Other locations now required</td><td rowspan="3">Spatial-related</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Suitable home location</td></tr>
<tr><td>Hygiene/ safety</td><td rowspan="2">Spatial-related</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>Home comforts</td></tr>
</table>