

Blending work and leisure: A future digital worker hybrid lifestyle perspective

Annals of Leisure Research

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Abstract

Work performed by digital means is one of many societal transformations caused by the prevalence and continuous adoption of digital technologies. Free of the constraints of location and time, digital work has the potential to disrupt the mental and physical separation of work from leisure. Using an exploratory qualitative approach based on narrative futuring, work and leisure orientations of future digital workers are imagined in relation to digital technologies. Insights were obtained from twenty-five digital workers who were asked to imagine their digital worker selves in 2030. Borrowing from aspects of the *Serious Leisure Perspective supported by the Mobility and Connectivity paradigms*, future types of digital workers are proposed. Findings indicate a trend towards increased dissolution of the distinction between work and leisure. Implications for the organizations managing this type of worker are discussed, along with reflections on the changing nature and meaning of work and leisure.

Keywords: Digital work, work, leisure, work-leisure relationship, serious leisure perspective, narrative futuring, letters from the future, lifestyle, worker types

Introduction

In the last two decades advances in digital technology have impacted all industries leading to the emergence of a new work paradigm and the fundamental transformation of many traditional job roles (Orlikowski and Scott 2016). In this context, the application of digital technologies in the everyday conduction of work led to a proliferation of nonstandard digital work types (Gandini 2016) characterized by more self-determined, independent, and flexible arrangements (Spreitzer, Cameron, and Garrett 2017) such as gig work (Ens, Stein, and Jensen 2018) and digital nomadism (Schlagwein 2018). Broadly, digital work proposes a reconfiguration of the 9 to 5 work tradition which promotes the principle of efficiency in completing work regardless of time, location, and organizational structures (Mazmanian, Orlikowski, and Yates 2013; Holland and Bardoel 2016; Ens, Stein, and Jensen 2018; Dittes et al. 2019). While the term digital work is used to indicate a wide range of work types a commonly accepted definition and distinction criteria are still lacking (Ens, Stein, and Jensen 2018). Thus, in this research we define digital work as the practice of work in which work activities are fundamentally intertwined with digital technologies and are conducted across variations of space and time.

As digital work is increasingly flexible and self-determined, the divide between work and leisure has become blurred enabling these two life domains to coexist at the same time and thereby contesting their meanings (Sintas, De Francisco, and Álvarez 2015) challenging the time, space, and ways in which both work and leisure activities are undertaken (Brown et al. 2011; Colbert, Yee, and George 2016). Much of the literature emphasizes that digital workers feel increased blurring between different life domains, and are likely to experience a state of liminality, described as a condition of being *betwixt and between* (Vesala and Tuomivaara 2019), *a constant state of limbo* (Johnsen and Sørensen 2015) or living on a *borderland* (Clark 2000). Under these circumstances the

traditional understanding of and distinction between work and leisure might be replaced by a fluid organization of life for those people working in occupations transformed by digital technologies (Sintas, De Francisco, and Álvarez 2015).

As a consequence, scholars have proposed a reconsideration of the traditional paradigm of work/leisure dichotomy (Snape et al. 2017). Beatty and Torbert (2013) postulate that the new world of work has seen an increase in work perceived as a positive, intrinsically determined, and meaningful activity, more similar to leisure, and leisure as an attitude rather than an amount of time off. Stebbins (2020) supports this perspective arguing that even though in contemporary mindsets work and leisure are mostly perceived as separate life domains, through daily life they become interconnected in many aspects and, thus, they are not as divided as it has been previously understood. Subsequently, Stebbins developed the *Serious Leisure Perspective*, a framework oriented towards categorizing all types of leisure which also includes a particular condition, framed as occupational devotion, mostly attributed to knowledge industries, where work and leisure are perceived as one blended life domain (Stebbins 2015, 2020).

Evidently this has significant advantages. Research has highlighted numerous benefits such as an increased flexibility and autonomy in arranging and scheduling work and individual task, higher productivity and greater balance between work and life (e.g. Dittes et al. 2019). However, other studies suggest that the hybridization of work and leisure spaces might have major critical implications not only on the time people dedicate to work, family and leisure but also on their health, career, personal growth and relationships (e.g. Kossek 2016). Whilst the notion of work becoming more positive and meaningful is contestable and clearly not the case for all, flexible concepts of work are expected to gain

further momentum (Daheim, Wintermann, and Glenn 2019) and industry leaders are considering new strategies to leverage more flexible work arrangements (Schwab 2017).

Set in this context, we undertake a timely reflection on how digital workers perceive and experience work and leisure. Previous studies on digital work have mostly addressed digital workers through the lens of employment type, mobility, and use of digital technologies (Ens, Stein, and Jensen 2018; Valenduc 2019) whilst others have explored how some types of digital workers manage the boundaries between work and life (Cousins and Robey 2015). However, research exploring types of digital workers based on their relationship to work and leisure remains undeveloped. Such an approach can be valuable to understand how digital workers relate to the professional and leisure dimensions, because if as proposed, work becomes intrinsically more meaningful and intertwined with other life domains, facilitating prosperous and valuable relations with digital workers may be increasingly valuable for organizational policy and business models. How we might foster a sense of occupational devotion is considered in our conclusion.

To explore how digital workers perceive work and leisure, we define a future oriented type of digital workers in 2030 based on both work and leisure orientation. A 10 years into the future perspective is adopted. This timeframe represents a large enough time horizon for noticeable change to occur and for individuals to move away from their current state of living (Millett 2006). For example, tourism scholars recently adopted this approach to imagining the future of travel (Tussyadiah and Miller 2019). In taking this approach, our paper aligns to the body of research on digital work using novel future-oriented methods by applying the *Letters from the Future* technique. In line with Lyotard

(1991 [1984]) this offers a *grand narrative* of the digital work phenomenon and its implications for how the work-leisure relationship might further evolve.

Contextual Background

Digital Work, Mobility and Connectivity

Despite considerable academic attention, the literature on digital work does not provide a commonly accepted definition (Ens, Stein, and Jensen 2018) beyond the general one by Dittes et al. (2019) given in our introduction. For the most part, scholars have described different types of digital workers based on the type of employment and their degree of autonomy and freedom.

Insert here Table 1.

Table 1 evidences the lack of a systematic classification of the typologies of digital workers. For example, Ens et al. (2018) categorize digital workers based on mobility and precarity considerations. Differently, Valenduc (2019) categorizes the diverse forms of digital work primarily focusing on the components of an employment relationship such as working schedules, locations and contractual agreements. Consensus however is found in that the motivation to engage in digital work is widely associated with a quest for autonomy, control, purpose and personal satisfaction (e.g. Ens, Stein, and Jensen 2018; Reichenberger 2018). In this context, the use of digital technologies, connectivity and different levels of mobility have commonly been portrayed as key factors related to achieving the freedom sought in digital work.

Mobility is an inherent aspect of digital work enabled by digital technologies (Ens, Stein, and Jensen 2018; Nelson, Jarrahi, and Thomson 2017), regarded as both spatial-temporal mobility, as well as mobility across boundaries. This means that mobility affords digital workers the possibilities to perform their work across multiple places, times, and domains (Nelson, Jarrahi, and Thomson 2017). Moreover, mobility should not be understood as solely physical motion, but as virtual movement also. This suggests that besides moving

between locations, digital workers are also moving in the net, across different virtual environments (Vartiainen 2006).

Digital workers can experience different levels of mobility. For instance, digital nomads and mobile knowledge workers are examples of those who are highly mobile. They leverage spatial-temporal mobility, digital technologies, and network connection to be able to perform their tasks anywhere, at anytime. However, digital nomads' practices include higher degrees of mobility compared to those of mobile knowledge workers (Jarrahi and Thompson 2017) because they engage in perpetual travel (Schlagwein 2018). On the other hand, digital workers such as teleworkers or other types of freelancers, while still distant from the traditional office, are more stationary in a day as they prefer to, or may need to, create a more stable base to work from, such as their home, co-working spaces, or cafes (Erickson et al. 2014). Certainly, the importance of mobility in explaining different types of digital workers is evident, signaled by the previous attempts to define different types of digital work. Accordingly, spatial-temporal and virtual mobility represent supporting concepts for the conceptual type logic of our study.

In the digital work context, digital connectivity frees work from the physical limits of the office and set working hours (Jensen 2018), thereby enabling digital workers to feel effective, flexible and a sense of control in collaborating and communicating with others. Digital technologies and constant connectivity can however also facilitate a 24/7 commitment to the work environment (Haeger and Lingham 2014) and lead to difficulty in disconnecting from work (Ens, Stein, and Jensen 2018). Such phenomenon has been described as *always available* work culture (Erickson et al. 2014). Mazmanian, Orlikowski, and Yates (2013) notice that while mobile devices might give users an initial

sense of control over activities and interactions, the demand for availability might become pressuring, an observation the authors called *the autonomy paradox*.

Clearly, whilst digital workers may have the privileges of freedom to work in preferred times and from their favorite location, it does however have a darker side. Digital connectivity allows work to encroach on times and spaces which were previously exclusively dedicated to private life (Jensen 2018). To enjoy autonomy and flexibility, digital workers also require strategies to provide balance and structure to the increasingly blurred boundaries between private and work life (Dittes et al. 2019). Given that an individual's (in)ability to (dis)connect combined with the requirement for connectivity in digital work, the extent of digital connection and its availability are also considered as supporting concepts for the conceptual logic of the worker types in our study.

Work, Leisure and Serious Leisure Perspectives

In leisure studies, scholars have for many years debated the meaning of work and leisure (Filho 2010). Up to now, vocabulary such as 'the week-end, the holiday, spare time and free time' still perpetuate the work/leisure dichotomy (Snape et al. 2017, 187). However, when looking beyond the work/leisure dichotomy paradigm, a common understanding is that the main characteristic which defines a leisure experience is the perceived presence or absence of freedom. Along those lines, Ravenscroft and Gilchrist (2009) found that the difference between leisure-related intrinsic motivation and work-related extrinsic motivation becomes blurred when the possibility of choosing the activity and how it is done is admitted by paid work, or when a leisure activity can generate income. Similarly, when professional freedom is experienced, a transfer of leisurely aspects to work, such as supporting enjoyment, recuperation and the development of self and identity, can happen.

As a result, the separation between work and leisure can be blurred when the negative aspects of employment are eliminated, and leisurely components are transferred to the domain of work instead (Reichenberger 2018). It is this relationship between work and leisure afforded by digital technology and connectivity that allows for not only work and leisure being equally valued, but dominated by the leisure perspective.

Contributing to an understanding of work and leisure, Stebbins (2015) advanced the *Serious Leisure Perspective* (SLP) through which he conveyed three different main forms of leisure: the serious pursuits, including serious leisure and devotee work; casual leisure; and project-based leisure. Overall, all leisure can be classified in one of the aforementioned categories (Stebbins 2014). Serious leisure represents

a systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficient substantial, interesting, and fulfilling for the participant to find a (leisure) career there acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience. (Stebbins 2015, 14)

What the author defines as a leisure career refers to the continuity of serious leisure activity which leads to the participant experiencing both leisure and work roles while pursuing the activity (Stebbins 2015). Some of the defining characteristics of serious leisure are high identification of the participants with the activity, a need to persevere, personal effort based on gathering knowledge, skill, experience, and durable benefits, such as personal development and fulfillment (Stebbins 2014).

The devotee work refers to occupational devotees who feel a strong and positive attachment to their work, which has a self-enhancing character for the individual. The devotee work is defined by high levels of self-achievement and an attractive core activity which makes the devotee perceive work and leisure as one blended life domain (Stebbins

2015). The main difference between devotee work and serious leisure is that the former is not performed during free time. The devotee work is thus a remunerated type of serious leisure which can provide a livelihood or a notable part of it (Stebbins 2020). To achieve occupational devotion, the individual should feel in charge of the workload and the time put into it so that it does not become a burden. The devotees are mostly found in slightly bureaucratized work, such as small businesses, skilled trades, consulting/counseling, public-centered professions (e.g. arts, scientific fields) and client-centered professions (e.g. teaching, accounting) (Stebbins, 2015). Accordingly, Snape and colleagues (2017) observed that for people whose work incorporates creativity, goal achievement or satisfaction, it is more difficult to discern work from leisure.

Casual leisure is the type which implies more hedonic and relaxing activities which are instantly rewarding. Such activities offer pure enjoyment and pleasure without requiring any special skill. Furthermore, project-based leisure refers to one time or occasional activities which require knowledge and planning but are not further pursued as serious leisure. An individual can achieve an optimal leisure lifestyle by combining serious leisure forms with a wise amount of casual leisure or project-based leisure to achieve human potential realization, more wellbeing, and a better life quality (Stebbins 2015). Nonetheless, Stebbins (2020) mentions that an individual can achieve a satisfying lifestyle by making discretionary time commitments, namely dedicating more time to one's favorite activities, whilst minimizing the time spent on the less likable ones.

Supported by the mobility and connectivity paradigms the SLP is thus proposed as a useful theoretical lens that contributes to exploring the changing nature of work and

leisure in relationship with digital technologies and theorizing future types of digital workers.

Methodology

Research Design

Our study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach based on narrative futuring to explore work and leisure orientation of future digital workers. Narrative futuring consists of ‘imagining the future through storytelling’ (Sools and Mooren 2012, 149). Imagining the future through narratives resulting from fantasy rather than from the recollection of past events serves to sense and capture perceptions about changes that lies ahead (Gabriel 2018). By providing access into otherwise unavailable knowledge engrained into practitioners’ experiences (Gabriel 2018), futuring narratives enable insights into the intentions, hopes and wishes that imagined action carry (Sools, Tromp, and Mooren 2015). It is through imagination that the knowable, which have so far escaped words find expression (Pösö, 2018). In other words, adopting a narrative futuring approach helps to answer Gergen’s (2015) call for prospective methodologies that aim not to ‘illuminate what is, but to create what is to become’. Despite the impossibility of precisely predicting the future, the aim of futuring approaches is to recognize how imaging the future directs present ways of doings and thinking, which in turn leads to changes at personal and societal level (Sools 2020). As such, Gabriel (2018) suggests to treat narratives as raw materials for the development of scientific theoretical propositions. This study embraces the narrative futuring approach to propose future-oriented theoretical developments about digital work perspectives in leisure and tourism research.

Towards this end, the *Letters from the Future* (LF) technique (Sools 2020) was used as an instrument for data collection. LF encourages participants to elicit future experiences

in narrative form. Fundamentally LF requires participants 'to imagine travelling to the future in a time machine, and consequently, write a letter to an audience in the present about the depicted future' (Sools 2020, 453). LF stimulates the capacity of the participants' mind to imagine their future self in their future world while exposing the meaning attached to the imagined future experiences (Sools and Mooren 2012; Sools, Tromp, and Mooren 2015; Sools 2020). In other words, the narrative nature of LF enables the collection of rich information about a phenomenon by stimulating a retrospective outlook from the imagined future as if already realized. Sools (2020, 6) argues that such an approach has the power to result in 'an embodied sense of self in a future that has not yet occurred'. Compared to other qualitative narrative-based methods as interviews, LF enables participants freedom for expression without the influence of the interviewer and the autonomy to decide the when and where of their participation (Sools and Mooren 2012; Sools 2020).

By embracing LF as a data collections method we stimulated digital workers imagination as a tool for uncovering the complex relationship between work and leisure and the future implications for the leisure and tourism industry. Thus, LF was used to encourage participants to develop a vision of their expectations and desires about the future development of work and leisure with the affordances and constrains that future digital technologies may bring. In doing so LF enabled us to collect a range of diverse perceptions of how the future of digital work will come in to being, answering Gergen's (2015) call for methodologies that aspire to describe what is to become.

Narratives of 'imagining the future' are of great importance for addressing future issues across a range of disciplines and contexts. For instance, researchers have asked family

firm founders approaching retirement to describe their firms 20 years ahead (García and López 2001; García et al. 2002) to face their succession as CEOs of their firms. Likewise, psychologists have used this approach to help patients cope with social change (Sools and Mooren 2012; Sools, 2020) and tourism scholars have adopted LF to imagining the future of travel (Tussyadiah and Miller 2019). In this paper we asked about hopes and fears, expectations around technology, work and leisure. We therefore argue that the adopted methodology helps the imagination of the future in a contextualized and nuanced manner (Sools, 2020).

In a web-based tool, participants were instructed to imagine their life digital worker in 2030 and to retrospectively address a letter from the future to someone living in 2020 to explain what juggling work and leisure will look like. Socio-demographic data was collected alongside the letters. To aid the imagination process, participants were given a limited number guiding questions to think about their experience of digital work and leisure in 2030. The questions referred to how work and leisure are experienced (e.g temporal, spatial, social details, types of work and leisure and their relation, use of digital technologies). Participants were allowed to include any additional aspects relevant to explaining their future life as digital worker. Participants were asked informed consent to use their letter for research purposes.

The participants

A total of 25 digital workers were recruited using a purposive sampling technique. Two criteria were used for the recruitment: a) working as a digital worker and b) having good narrative capabilities in English. The former criterion was defined to bring together the professional imagination (Pösö 2018) of a group of people sharing common knowledge,

problems, and concerns (Gabriel 2018) as well as hopes, dreams and wishes about the future (Sools, Tromp, and Mooren 2015). The latter criterion was applied according to Sools and Mooren's (2012) recommendation that to write a letter for the future participants should possess sufficient narrative competence.

Participants were selected using social networks sites including Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn in the period March-July 2020. Besides distributing calls through social media, the use of hashtags such as #digitalwork were followed to identify potential participants. Suitable participants fitting the inclusion criteria were contacted by direct messaging and email communication. An Instagram account was created for this purpose (@digitalworkandleisure_2030). *Table 2* summarizes the socio-demographic profile of the study's participants below.

Insert here Table 2.

Data analysis

To systematically analyze the letters which varied in terms in style and length, and to expose the knowable that future narratives carry; an analysis process based on a thematic template mode of analysis was adopted. First, template analysis was conducted on the textual data based on a-priori themes derived by using concepts previously identified in the literature such the SLP, mobility, connectivity, and digital technologies use. Second, an in-vivo coding procedure was used to facilitate the understanding of the underlying narrative threads and the final identification of the main themes (King and Brooks, 2017). To code and process the raw data the software for qualitative analysis MAXQDA was employed.

Starting from the a-priori template, the identification of different types of digital workers of the future was sought through an iterative process that involved looking for patterns, trends and contrasting a-priori and emerging themes across cases (King and Brooks, 2017). Four main themes were identified for this research: a) work-leisure relation, b) spatial-temporal mobility, c) virtual mobility, d) and connectivity. These identified themes were then organized in a four-dimensional attribute space following a type-building approach (Kuckartz 2014). In this process, the themes were explored searching for multi-dimensional patterns supporting the identification of emergent types of digital workers of the future. Thus, to identify differences across cases the work-leisure relation dimension was subclassified on an integrated-separated continuum while the spatial-temporal mobility, virtual mobility, and connectivity dimension were subclassified on a very low-very high scale. As a result, six emergent types of digital workers of the future were identified as displayed in *Table 3*.

Insert here Table 3.

Findings

The Emergent Types

The Digitally Cocooned Separator

The Digitally Cocooned Separator is the digital worker who has very low spatial-temporal mobility and performs all their work from their home base, from their virtual workspace:

I, too, work from home in my comfortable holographic workplace. With the help of micro-projectors, an advanced hyper-real lighting system, and super-fast Internet, my office is just one click of a button away. I just go into my study room and meet everyone else - their holographic selves in their own rooms, I mean. (P10)

This type of digital worker uses many new digital technologies, which help them stay connected to the world and to be able to do most of their work and leisure at home. They

see their work as purely undertaken for the outcome and they do not mind reducing the work they do as long as they have enough financial means to live.

However, myself, I'm working less then I used to since I found the balance I was searching for between earnings and worked hours. (P9)

Work would be just for objectives, no more than that, very straight forward. (P8)

The Digitally Cocooned Separators prefer doing everything from the safety of their home or neighborhood, and they mostly only showcase interest for casual leisure activities, such as virtual travel or entertainment (watching online series, online cinema).

Everything is being bought online or in the stores few blocks away and the entertainment is online or in your neighborhood really close' (P8), 'After work, I sometimes go for a walk [...] There isn't much else that I do, except watch a silly competition show in which participants remotely tend their experimental crops on Mars [...] In weekends, I take trips with the kids to visit the past. (P10)

The Leisurely Lifestyle Seeker

The Leisurely Lifestyle Seeker is the digital worker who adapts digital work to support a leisurely lifestyle. This type of digital worker has a home base and likes to go abroad from time to time for a longer *workation*.

I am now writing from you from our new rental home in Positano. I and my boyfriend thought it would be great to move by the seaside for the summer. Adopting the Italian lifestyle was so easy for us, even the dog is feeling happier now that we take long walks on the beach almost every day. (P4)

The main reason you decided to fly for this edition is so that you can after the summit take a two-month workation with the whole family in South East Asia. We are planning on taking as much time off as we can, but we will still be able to work without any issue, and it also won't interfere with the kids' education, as they do most of their learning from a VR classroom with their tutor. (P23)

Generally, they prioritize projects which can assure more financial stability, but from time to time they also mix in work which they enjoy more even though it might be more challenging.

I usually worked on strategy and communication projects, but I started to miss the design part and the creative process behind it, so I accepted the challenge, even though it takes a lot more time and energy. (P4)

Both when they are in their home base or abroad, in a rental, they prefer to work from there instead of spending money and time to commute to other places to work from. They like to spread out their working hours through the day in order to mix in leisure slots.

Usually, I wake up in the morning, participate in the daily online meeting with the team, work a couple of hours on the most urgent tasks of the day, then we get the lunch together and relax for an hour or so. In the afternoon, I work some more hours. (P4)

I can do 3 hours in the morning, maybe 2 after lunch and the remaining 3 hours in the evening/night if I wish. (P17)

These digital workers stay available through their working hours and strive to keep themselves accountable to finish the tasks at hand so that they can really stay away from work in their leisure time.

My work/leisure time is around 20-25 hours of work, with the rest leisure time. I try to consolidate my work and not procrastinate it, so that I don't have the feeling of it hanging over my leisure time! (P24)

Their leisure time includes mostly casual and project-based leisure. When they are abroad, they seek cultural immersion. When they are at home, they also try to keep similar routines.

Working like this enables me to spend more time doing what I love, meeting new interesting people, learning languages while being in the country and eating nice food. (P17)

I am able to work as much as I need to, and still incorporate exercise, healthy cooking, and community involvement into my routine. (P16)

The Agile Lifestyler

The Agile Lifestyler is a digital worker with medium spatial-temporal mobility, who has a home base which they use as the main working place. These digital workers are generally very flexible about their working times and they like to vary their working places, from home, to physical offices or other public spaces.

I sometimes travel to close by lakes and work from the campground while my children are playing [...] The consulting agency also provides an office next to teleworking opportunity. (P1)

They seek employers or clients who allow them to customize their schedules and plans to enable an agile lifestyle, where they can always be adaptable in how they mix work and leisure times, and where they can decide when they want to focus more on one or the other.

The important question before going on a 2- or 3-day-hike is not if we have enough free days available or if there's a holiday that we could use. It's how's the weather's going to be and how does our workload look at the moment [...] Rescheduling things or the flexibility in adjusting projects have become regular elements instead of rare perks in our lives. (P6)

If I want to meet someone in a café at lunch that's easily possible with the flexible working hours. If I go on a hike with my kids and husband or go camping for a few days that's also possible. This freedom brings me joy and therefore I am happy to work on Sunday mornings before everybody wakes up or work at night when the others are sleeping. (P1)

The Agile Lifestyler has high virtual mobility, switching between many different activities and channels.

You can read an eBook while listening to a podcast while writing something on your tablet, all at the same time in a matter of minutes. (P19)

They keep their availability extended, but they like to do it consciously and in exchange for the possibility to draw some boundaries when they feel they need it.

Consciously switching off is a skill one must learn [...] when you can master it [...] then you can really thrive on all the benefits that come with this type of working. (P6)

Turning off all technology at least for one day a week and from time to time for longer holidays got really important to balance work and leisure time. (P1)

They combine their work with casual leisure, mostly travelling and socializing with family and friends and some serious leisure, such as writing or long-term volunteering.

Most weekends I spend in Paris, Prague, Berlin, Vienna [...] I find quite a lot of time to teach outside of work as well. I've joined an organization that has its purpose to eradicate illiteracy on the globe by 2040. (P2)

Overall, they feel these digital workers have enough time for everything as long as they stay on top of managing their flexibility through using time and connectivity wisely.

Time is still of the essence and is the most precious resource we have so all these advancements have helped us to make good use of it. I can now work with you all to fight inequality [...] and at the same time dedicate myself to my writing, to my family and to my friends. (P5)

The Rather Be Analogue Creative Devotee

The Rather Be Analogue Creative Devotee used to be a mobile digital worker who is now settled in one place and likes to work from home.

I travelled for a little while but finally found a place to call it home. (P20)

This type of digital worker generally works in creative careers and includes devotees who managed to transform their hobby into their work using online platforms to find clients. Their virtual mobility is high as they have to manage between different clients and platforms. However, they try to reduce their availability as much as possible.

Too much connectivity takes over our lives, thoughts and privacy. (P25)

They find fulfillment in the creative process of their work and would rather stay away from too many new digital tools which can replace their craftsmanship.

There's a lot more new options for people to do work for close to zero but we don't care. That's for the annoying clients who don't understand the craftsmanship. (P20)

Sometimes they feel constrained by the requirements of their clients and would like to be able to maintain the same freedom they feel when they pursue their hobby without the pressure of the financial outcome.

You also know how much I hate it when customers impose these strict rules on my graphic style, but heck, we all need the money. (P13)

Even so, they are happy that they can develop their skills and get better at what they love to do. For them, digital work is a means towards being able to pursue their creativity in a technology dominated world, where they cannot earn enough money without digitalizing their work.

Nobody offered to buy the originals, just the digital artwork I comprise of them and post online. It's still something, considering how I used to joke around the fact that I doubt I'll ever be financially stable if I'd pursue a creative career. (P13)

The Rather Be Analogue Creative Devotee's work and leisure are mostly integrated in a flexible lifestyle where meetings with clients, deadlines, socializing activities in the community, sports and some occasional project-based leisure help to organize activity time.

The Technology Savvy Exploring Devotee

The Technology Savvy Exploring Devotee is a digital worker who has a home base, which they equally use as a workplace and as an environment for leisure. They are somewhat spatially mobile as they like to also work from coffee shops or from an office where they can meet other people to exchange ideas or just enjoy being surrounded by people.

We just like to hang out together and feel more productive as a team. Maybe it is not from where you work, but with whom you work. (P11)

These digital workers love experimenting with the newest digital technologies, which enable them to be available as efficiently as possible and to simplify their tasks.

Some builders and presets were added to the tools I also used before, so now some tasks are easier to be done automatically while also suiting the clients' needs perfectly. Also, we now have a universal app that enables you to mark the progress you've done on a project, so that the client gets an instant notification whenever you finish a new part of it. (P3)

They are occupational devotees who mention that it has become harder and harder to distinguish between work and leisure.

I promised you I'd write about work and leisure, but the truth is that it's harder and harder to separate those [...] My coaching and sparring sessions don't feel that different from hanging out with friends. (P12)

However, they do mention they experience the need to change what they are doing through the day to also pursue some other interests besides work, so they continuously engage in new serious pursuits.

And you know how I've always wanted to start illustrating things? Well now I've finally started to learn how to do this, and the digital board has also been very useful in this case. (P3)

I still enjoy the same benefits as before with having my own free time to explore my creative urges. (P7)

They also engage in casual leisure, such as socializing, sports or different forms of entertainment (watching movies, playing computer games). The life of the Technology Savvy Exploring Devotee is a continuous process of exploring new serious pursuits including plenty of technology.

But you know me. I thrive on surfing the waves of the unexplored and of translating complexity for other people, so they can make the decisions they need to. (P12)

At the end of the day, even if they had the option not to work for income, they would still mostly want to keep working.

The truth is that most of the work I do I'd do even if no one paid me - and thanks to UBI being introduced in Denmark in 2027, I actually could get away with not working. But what would I do then? Nah, I can't see myself NOT working. (P12)

The Global Lifestyle Devotee

The Global Lifestyle Devotee is the type of digital worker with very high spatial mobility, who lives in multiple places around the world pursuing a lifestyle which embodies a very integrated approach to work and leisure.

I partly own multiple homes in multiple countries and travel with my family every three months to a different home. We don't split our life between holiday and work, our lifestyle has a lot of play, fun and work built into it and we navigate between them seamlessly to support our wellbeing. (P14)

They have some favorite places which support their lifestyle, so they do not seek so much novelty, but rather spend the year living in a few places where they already feel part of a community.

All in all, I've slowed down my travels; you can call me a slo-mad. I'm staying a couple months here and there, Myanmar being my favorite. (P18)

You have a home base in Bali [...] It's a big house and it's filled with members of your community. None of you live there full time, you dip in and out, each person probably spending about six months of the year there [...] The rest of the year is spent between places you love. (P22)

They are very flexible about where they can work from, but they particularly enjoy using co-working spaces because of the community and the sense of being more focused, or cafes.

I love working from a coworking space [...] There are 30-40 stable members and we are like a big family' (P15).

These digital workers pursue their passion for a lifestyle focused on travel, and manage to convey it into devotee work through different forms of content creation and lifestyle-oriented entrepreneurship.

Your work life is now divided into three main parts: book writing, podcasting and continuing to grow your publication and newsletter about the digital nomad movement. (P22)

Their work and leisure are a perpetual life project in which one supports the other.

A typical day in your life consists of working every single day by engaging in leisure activities...Then later in the day, you write about what you learned and that, eventually, becomes the content of your subsequent books. (P21)

While they are adapted to the *always on* culture, which has come to be part of their lifestyle, they tend to control the number of hours spend for work.

I usually work four hours per day. Don't get me wrong, it's a very dedicated and productive work time. Back in the days it would be pro-longed to eight hours. (P15)

These digital workers use many different digital technologies and seek to automatize or outsource time-consuming tasks in order to dispose of greater time to dedicate to clients and what they love doing most. They shift between many different projects and they are mostly spending non-work time for financial return on other serious leisure pursuits (e.g. sports), casual leisure, or project based leisure (e.g. volunteering).

Once in a while you are invited to give a speech to high school kids about overcoming adversity despite all odds, or about becoming a digital nomad. You now help others pursue their passions because you know what's like to be lost and stuck in a life that does not make you happy. (P21)

Days off aren't necessarily at the weekends, they're whenever it feels right. They're spent exploring, whether that's hiking, kayaking or helping out with a local community or simply relaxing. (P22)

I love to start my day surfing or just spending with my family. (P15)

Discussion

Our research sought to conceptualize future oriented types of digital workers in 2030 based on both work and leisure orientation, using the concepts of the SLP, mobility, and connectivity (Table 3). In line with Hilbrecht (2007) the findings of this study demonstrate a changing perspective on the work-leisure relationship. Self-determination, autonomous and flexible arrangements at the crossroad between work and leisure will proliferate in the future. This will lead to the emergence of a new work-leisure paradigm will much differ from the dichotomous view of work and leisure referenced in established literature (Snape et al. 2017). Such paradigm implies the need for developing an understanding of liminal experiences in which in-betweenness is created maintained and dissolved (Vesala and Tuomivaara 2019). In line with Dittes et al. (2019) the findings of

our study highlight those digital workers of the future will adopt a diverse range of strategies to create balance and structure in response to the blurred boundaries between private and work life.

In terms of work-leisure relations what can be observed from our results is that only one type of digital workers of the future, The Digitally Cocooned Separator type (low spatial-temporal mobility, high virtual mobility, no connectivity out of working times), tends to perceive work and leisure as completely separated life domains. This type of workers perceives work as an activity strictly pursued for the financial outcome and resembles the archetype of the usual 9 to 5 worker who engages in work for some hours in a block and perceives leisure as after work activity. This type of digital workers envisions work and leisure being centered around that the home as a main center of life. Casual leisure activities contribute to relaxation and enjoyment.

The Leisurely Lifestyle Seeker (high spatial-temporal mobility, high virtual mobility, low connectivity) and the Agile Lifestyler types (medium spatial-temporal mobility, high virtual mobility, medium to high connectivity) perceive work and leisure as separated life domains, but they still engaged in blending together work and leisure activities. They predominately see digital work as a means to increase the amount of time they dedicate to the experience of leisure. Through the day, they move more in and out of work and leisure times and spaces.

The Agile Lifestyler type aims at balancing between times when work is allowed to extend over leisure and times when leisure is allowed to extend over work. The advantages of extended connectivity are consciously exploited by drawing clear

boundaries between work and leisure times and places. Differently, The Leisurely Lifestyle Seeker type mostly spreads work hours through the day as a strategy to include leisure time slots in between their work activities. This type favors a sequence of fully focused work and leisure activities which is achieved by minimizing distractions. Moreover, emphasis is placed on the completion of the daily work tasks without allowing extensions of their availability for work in the leisure time. For this type the main benefit of digital work lies in a structured but agile management of work and leisure transitions to support a leisurely lifestyle.

The Rather Be Analogue Devotee (low spatial-temporal mobility, medium virtual mobility, medium to low connectivity), The Technology Savvy Exploring Devotee (medium spatial-temporal mobility, high virtual mobility, high connectivity), The Global Lifestyle Devotee (very high spatial-temporal mobility, very high virtual mobility, high to very high connectivity) types showcase a very integrated approach to work and leisure as they experienced devotee work. These types of workers aim to transform their serious leisure into their work through a constant blending of work and leisure experiences. Working hours and scheduled routines are adopted to enable a balance between work and leisure activities. The Rather Be Analogue Creative Devotee type tends to engage in both serious leisure and casual leisure. While working with clients poses constraints that decrease the leisurely character of their work emphasis is placed on maximizing the more fulfilling aspects of work. The Technology Savvy Exploring Devotee type is always on the lookout for new serious leisure. Usually, they do not feel the need to take a break from work because it was work, but mostly because they just want to devote time and improve at other serious leisure.

For this type of digital workers, the use of digital technologies helps to automatize unfulfilling tasks and to dedicate more time to commissions and to the more fulfilling activities. The Global Lifestyle Devotee type presents the most integrated approach to work and leisure. Clear work schedules are however needed to keep some balance in their lives. This is because their work and leisure are interconnected to a degree to which they still need to always be available to work even when they were not actually working. Such lifestyle closely resembles the *always available* work culture described by Erickson et al. (2014).

Generally, it was observed that compared to 2020, digital workers envisioned their future self in 2030 having a work/leisure lifestyle based on a lower intensity spatial-temporal mobility and a higher virtual mobility compared to 2020. In particular, the home is seen as a predominant workplace of the future thus contrasting current work/life trends such as the digital nomadism movements portrayed by Reichenberger (2018) and Schlagwein (2018). One common motivation behind the slowdown of global travel seems to be related to the need to belong to a community, an aspect which deserves more attention when it comes to the future of digital work. Furthermore, our findings indicate that the future organization of the time, location and organization of work and leisure will vastly deviate from the 9 to 5 work tradition as argued by Jensen (2018) and Dittes et al. (2019). A further observation is that most of the types envisioned that their relation to digital technologies and connectivity has to become more conscious in response to the autonomy paradox (Mazmanian, Orlikowski, and Yates 2013). Digital workers of the future might become more interested in how to tackle the problems highlighted by contemporary literature (e.g. Ens, Stein, and Jensen 2018; Jensen 2018) occurring from an extensive use of digital technologies and connectivity (Erickson et al. 2014).

These insights pose questions about the future meaning of the boundaries between work leisure and other aspects of life such as family. In line with the study of Cousins and Robey (2015) this paper thus contributes toward a better understanding of how management of the boundaries between life domains is to become. However, we recognize that factors, such as age, personal and family circumstances or the effects of the current Covid-19 pandemic could have influenced these preferences. We also acknowledge that while the imagination of the future enables the access to unavailable knowledge engrained into one's experiences (Gabriel 2018), this very knowledge is shaped by the context in which it was acquired and shared. Changing demographical factors such as age, family structure, caring responsibilities, and job roles may influence what is to become and the nature of the different digital worker lifestyle types described in this paper.

While the different worker lifestyle types proposed in this research represents plausible future manifestations of the changing relationship between work and leisure the identified four-dimensional attribute space and its characteristics offer a framework to monitor how these changes evolve over time. As such this paper contributes a valuable instrument to the debate on the relationship between work and leisure. It shows that the work/leisure paradigm is to be understood as multidimensional construct rather than a dichotomous one as currently illustrated in literature (Snape et al. 2017). This paper further encourages reflections on how work-leisure relation and spatial-temporal mobility, virtual mobility, and connectivity shape the meaning of work and leisure. From a SLP (Stebbins 2015) point of view the advanced four-dimensional attribute space enables a systematic assessment of how future digital workers may experience different forms of leisure.

Conclusions

The future digital worker types presented in our paper serve as a way to navigate through different alternative representations of plausible futures. We interpret the proposed types of digital workers of the future as possible manifestations of the multiple driving forces that are changing the nature of work and leisure. As such, we do not see future digital worker types neither as mutually exclusive nor as variations of a common theme.

Despite the complexity, we can observe that the identified future digital worker types indicate that digital work could be the vehicle by which to facilitate occupation devotion. Stebbins's (2014) observed that organizations fail to create occupational devotion due to strict deadlines and heavy workloads. By contrast, focusing on understanding the underlying factors which enable devotion, there is potential for digital work to have a more leisurely character. Furthermore, from the perspective of organization, adopting an agile management style and process inspired by *job crafting* (Hancock, Lazaroff-Puck, and Rutherford 2020) to encourage digital workers to feel involved in designing their work arrangements and how their tasks are performed could be beneficial. Moreover, the observation that digital workers of the future will be more interested in managing their use of technologies and connectivity to their virtual work places more consciously should set the tone for organizations to also promote mindful usage (Colbert, Yee, and George 2016). These policies can be co-created with digital workers.

Regarding the meaning of work and leisure, the future digital worker types support the notion that work and leisure activities are no longer necessarily distinct, but have contested meanings (Sintas, De Francisco, and Álvarez 2015) and digital workers feel an increased blurring between different life domains (Vesala and Tuomivaara 2019). As stated by Sintas and colleagues (2015), under these circumstances the traditional

understanding of and distinction between work and leisure might become irrelevant to how people working in occupations transformed by digital technologies organize their lives. These future work and leisure orientations that point towards a removal of time and space constraints have a number of implications for the leisure and tourism sector, many of which are already evident. Viewed through this lens, our study contributes to the debate about the meaning of work and leisure (Filho 2010). We hope our paper encourages reflection from organizations and also the leisure and tourism community who traditionally treat work and leisure life domains are distinct.

Finally, our research has limitations. In terms of the methods, the types which resulted from the data analysis are supported by small sample sizes and unequal gender distribution. Furthermore, the participants were highly skilled and educated digital workers, reflecting a bias towards a certain type of worker and lifestyle. Broader demographic and socio-economic characteristics were not collected from the sample, thus limiting the ability to offer a more nuanced contextualization of the identified types. Also, the LF approach constrains the participant to write about only one vision of the future even though they might have more potential perspectives in their minds (Sools 2020). As well as addressing these biases, future research could refine the types identified by interviewing digital workers pertaining to each type identified described to further investigate the motivations behind their orientation towards work and leisure and the more complex embodied practices involved.

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Tables

Table 1. Digital workers types

Type	Description	Author(s)
Nine to fivers	Nine to fivers work from a single place of employment with limited mobility and flexibility.	Ens et al. (2018)
ICTs based mobile workers	ICT-based mobile workers engage in a form of remote work which is not dependent on a fixed location.	Valenduc and Vendramin (2016)
Digital nomads	Digital nomads are mobile knowledge workers, who engage in nomadic practices characterised by intense mobility without stable workplaces, working times or fixed organisational anchors.	Jarrahi and Thompson (2017); Ens et al. (2018); Reichenberger (2018); Winkelhake (2018); Valenduc (2019)
Mobile knowledge workers	Mobile knowledge workers perform work beyond an organisation's premises.	Jarrahi and Thompson (2017)
eLancers	eLancers perform work over the Internet. They can be self-employed workers or employed by an organisation on an hourly or project-based contract.	Schroeder et al. (2019)
On-demand workers	On-demand workers are in continuous employment relationship with an organisation but without a pre-defined volume of work and remuneration. Workers and employer manage availability for work and demand through online platforms.	Valenduc and Vendramin (2016); Valenduc (2019)

Prosumer workers	Prosumers are workers who produce and consume digital knowledge with limited or without any contractual agreements.	Valenduc (2019)
Gig workers	Gig workers are workers who attain ad-hoc projects from online specialised platforms and agencies or sell products and services online.	Ens et al. (2018)
Travelling elite	The travelling elite refers to workers who travel to a high extent for business purposes in stable employment conditions.	Ens et al. (2018)
Crowd workers	Crowd workers are both amateur and professional freelancers who work on virtual micro-tasks in a project-based manner on which the price is set by auction.	Duward et al. (2016); Valenduc and Vendramin (2016); Valenduc (2019)
Cloud workers	Cloud workers are highly qualified workers who exchange knowledge and ideas with organisations through short-term collaboration agreements.	Ruggieri et al. (2016)
Liquid workforce	The liquid workforce refers to workers who are sourced through the worldwide pool of the crowd and the cloud based on their knowledge and expertise to work on specific projects.	Winkelhake (2018)
Wikinomics	Wikinomics are qualified workers who voluntarily collaborate without hierarchy, pressure or compensation to gather, maintain up-to-date and share knowledge through the Web.	Winkelhake (2018)

Table 2. Socio-demographic profile of participants

Content	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	17	68%
Male	8	32%
Age		
20-29	12	48%
30-39	10	40%
40-49	2	8%
50 or above	1	4%
Education		
Highschool diploma	2	8%
Bachelor degree	13	52%
Master degree	10	40%
Employment status		
Working as employee	8	32%
Working as self-employed	17	68%
Occupation Field		
Arts and design	4	16%
Business consulting and management system	5	20%
Education	6	24%
Information services and data processing	3	12%
Media, broadcasting and publishing	3	12%
Software development	3	12%
Tourism	1	4%
Marital status		
Living with a partner	9	36%
Married	2	8%
Single	14	56%

Table 3. Digital workers lifestyle types in 2030

Type	Work-leisure relation	Spatial-temporal mobility	Virtual mobility	Connectivity
The Rather Be Analogue Creative Devotee (n = 3)	Integrated, a mix of serious pursuits (devotee work and serious leisure), casual and project-based leisure	Low	Medium	Medium to low, avoid extended availability
The Technology Savvy Exploring Devotee (n = 4)	Integrated, a mix of serious pursuits (devotee work and serious leisure) and casual leisure	Medium	High	High, focused on efficiency
The Global Lifestyle Devotee (n = 5)	Integrated, a perpetual lifestyle of serious pursuits (devotee work and serious leisure), project-based leisure and casual leisure high	Very high	Very high	High to very high, “always on” culture is embodied in their lifestyle
The Agile Lifestyler (n = 5)	Towards integration, both oriented towards work (non-devotee) and leisure, a mix of enjoyable work, casual leisure and some serious leisure	Medium	High	Medium to high, with some limitations
The Leisurely Lifestyler (n=5)	More towards separation, mostly oriented towards leisurely lifestyle (mostly casual leisure and serious leisure) which they can take advantage of by completing digital work (non-devotee)	High	High	Low
The Digitally Cocooned Separator (n=3)	Separated, they only pursue work (non-devotee) for the outcome and after work they engage in casual leisure	Low	High	No connectivity out of working times