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Blurring the boundaries of work during COVID-19: teleworking and gender

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Abstract

The boundaries of work are blurred in many ways in modern working life and in special ways during the COVID-19 era. In addition to time and place, the study examines the blurring of work boundaries regarding emotional, aesthetic, spiritual and social labor with a survey conducted in a consulting company operating in Finland (N 87). The study analyzes, from an intersectional perspective, the issues of blurring the boundaries of work at different genders during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study found that emotional labor is gendered in such a way that *women place empathy and men in the encounters of working life.* Aesthetic labor has changed tremendously with both genders due to teleworking, but the ways of aesthetic labor have become more gendered. Spiritual labor, or different mental techniques, is practiced fairly evenly, but where men state that they do not practice any technique, women experience a bad conscience for not doing it. Research shows how blurring and drawing the boundaries of work in teleworking is not genderless, but gender is reflected in many ways in experts' perceptions of teleworking.

Introduction

The past two year have changed working life - and especially the working life of knowledge workers. Spring 2020 forced all those telecommuting whose work could be done away from work. In Finland, this meant more than a million employees (The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2021). Telework affects people in different ways, depending on their educational and professional background, as well as other factors (such as gender, age, disability, ethnicity and place of residence). Studies on the effects of mass compulsory teleworking have already been published, but there are only few studies on the gender effects of the blurring of the boundaries of mass teleworking caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Finland (Karjalainen 2021; Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta et al. 2021). This article scrutinizes the topic with the help of a survey of employees of a knowledge work company operating in Finland.

Teleworking, or multi-place work, is a broad-based new form of doing work, albeit familiar in expert work. Telework has grown strongly over the past 10 years: even before the corona pandemic, less than half of Finns worked remotely and the share of senior employees was almost 60% (Sutela et al. 2019; The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2021). On the other hand, only 4% of wage earners had their main place of work at home (Sutela et al. 2019). The pandemic pushed almost half of wage earners to teleworking (The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2021) mainly at home or at the cottage, thus radically changing the way work is done in Finland. Mandatory teleworking forced organizations to review their policies and enable a wider range of employees to work from home. Even before the corona pandemic, research has shown that teleworking is often more effective than at the work office and that many employees telework to get work done without interruptions (Niemistö et al. 2017).

European studies show that domestic work and care during the pandemic have fallen on women, especially mothers (Hennekam & Shymko 2020; Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir 2020; Manzo & Minello 2020). In Finland, equality is often taken for granted and gender mainstreaming is unnecessary (Saari 2013). However, there is no reason for this, as women regularly do more housework in Finland (Känsälä & Oinas 2016). The study examines how the boundaries of work move, blur, and become gendered in corona-era telework.

Gender and work boundaries

The corona pandemic has accelerated many trends in working life. For example, the nature of work and with it its boundaries have changed in Finnish working life in recent decades, but the mass transition to teleworking made these changes visible. In knowledge work in particular, this change has been highlighted as the specialized and highly trained workforce of experts and the knowledge they manage play a significant role (Alvesson 2004). The importance of individual and organizational flexibility is increasingly emphasized in autonomous knowledge work, and one of its key features is the blurring of work boundaries. The teleworking caused by the corona pandemic put organizations and workers in a new position in terms of work flexibility and job boundary practices.

The boundaries of the work can be defined in many ways. One aspect is the distinction between work and the rest of life, where the boundary between them can be seen as flexible or inflexible depending on how much it is possible to move across the border (Ashforth et al. 2000; Nippert-Eng 1996). Companies have varying practices for the flexibility of work boundaries, in addition to which corporate culture influences how the boundaries between work and the rest of life are understood and how flexible an individual perceives their own room for maneuver (Alvesson & Willmott 2002; Kossek & Lautsch 2012). At the same time, organizations often assume their operations are based on gender neutrality, where the most qualified individuals are rewarded, and overlook the inequalities typical of masculine career structures (Geiger & Jordan 2014). Flexibility is often seen as synonymous with over-long workdays (Bathini & Kandathil 2019), placing employees with different life situations and with different caring responsibilities in an unequal position. Also in knowledge work, the blurring of work boundaries is linked to gendered organizational hierarchies (Acker 1990; Hearn & Louvrier 2014) and multi-level injustices in organizations that arise from different starting points and characteristics of individuals (Lutz et al. 2011).

The individual's own ways of perceiving the boundaries between work and other life and different work and life situations vary, as do the willingness to mix or separate areas of work and other life (Moazami-Goodarzi et al. 2015). These perceptions and desires also change at different stages of the career as well as in different life situations (Desrochers & Sargent 2003; Ford & Collinson 2011). The blurring of the boundaries between work and other life affects how work and other life are defined and separated (Fleming & Spicer 2004). In Finland, the responsibility for caring for a family is still borne more often by women than men (Känsälä & Oinas 2016). Thus, in addition to the support of the organization and the supervisor, the opportunities for women with families to advance in their careers are still strongly influenced by the support of a potential spouse (Heikkinen et al. 2014).

The stretching of work boundaries is reflected in various ways, such as the excessive flexibility required of employees due to busy and excessive work (Correl et al. 2014), as well as the leakage of work to other spheres of life and decentralization over time and space (Karjalainen et al. 2016; Niemistö et al. 2017). On the other hand, the development of information technology and teleworking have been found to improve job satisfaction (Castellacci & Viñas-Bardolet 2019). According to the Working Conditions Barometer conducted in August-September 2020, as many as 92 per cent of Finns who worked remotely were satisfied with the smooth running of telework during the corona situation. The survey was conducted at the same time as the survey that created the blurring boundaries of the work on which this study is based.

The pace of modern working life consumes many. According to the Working Conditions Barometer, more and more wage earners find their work mentally difficult and almost half experience harmful stress at work - for example, 12 per cent of wage earners and 37 per cent of employees are always or often experiencing mental fatigue (The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020). In 2018, 15 per cent of wage earners felt a serious risk of burnout at work and 43 per cent thought so from time to time. The threat of

burnout has become more gendered: about two-thirds of women are at risk of severe burnout and about half of men. (Sutela et al. 2019.)

Blurring the boundaries of work in teleworking

The boundaries of work are blurred in many ways in modern working life and in special ways during the corona era. In addition to the blurring of the time and place of work, work flows into new areas of life. The boundaries of work become blurred regarding emotional labor (Hochschild 1983), aesthetic labor (Caven et al. 2013), spiritual labor (Karjalainen 2022) and social labor (Fleming 2009). This blurring of the work boundaries is typical for demanding expert work.

Emotional labor refers to the utilization of emotions in the modern service economy. According to Hochschild (1983), in emotional labor, employees are expected to display and use a certain kind of emotion that is appropriate to implement the organization's strategy. Emotional labor can vary from superficial to profound emotional work, as well as from customer situations to feelings about the work itself (Miller et al. 2007). In telework, emotional labor can be expected to change as encounters move to different digital platforms.

In aesthetic labor, the employee has to comply with holistic standards of appearance and appearance in the aesthetic work included in his or her work input (Caven et al. 2013). At the societal level, aesthetic labor can be linked to capitalist, neoliberal, and social discourses in which the body is viewed as a commodity (Esposito 2015). The demands of taking care of oneself, such as wellbeing (Cederström & Spicer 2015), being fit (Huzell & Larsson 2012) and demonstrating wellbeing and being in good shape (Warhurst & Nickson 2009) have been identified as part of the work. Self-care related to working life is considered to include the preservation of personal wellbeing and the effort to make the most efficient use of oneself and one's own resources (Bressi & Vaden 2017). Teleworking can be seen as changing aesthetic labor, as there is no visual context for teleworking and online conferencing requires different types of aesthetic work.

The concept of spiritual labor describes harnessing an employee's spirituality as part of work (Karjalainen 2022). In spiritual labor, the organization sees the spirituality of its employees as part of its own resources, or the spirituality is utilized in customer work. Spirituality becomes a new task that must be handled excellently, and failure to do so results in a bad conscience and a sense of inadequacy. Previous research has found that women saw mindfulness exercises as an improvement in endurance or effectiveness (Hyvönen & Karjalainen 2020). Their own resources were seen as an organizational asset and this initial assumption was not called into question. Spiritual labor in teleworking highlights the dimensions of spirituality and the organization's assumptions about what belongs to the sphere of work.

Another emotion-based recent research concept, social labor (Fleming 2009; Anderson et al. 2016), helps to look at friendships and networking in the context of demanding expert work. Personal friendships and networks are instrumentalized and become part of work. Creating and maintaining work-related friendships and networks in teleworking raises new questions about the nature of both social labor and friendships and networks.

Data and methodology

The article is based on a research project that examines the blurring of the boundaries of work of professionals during the corona era. This article focuses on a survey conducted in one work organization on the blurring of work boundaries in teleworking. Solve (pseudonym) is an information work company

operating in Finland that specializes in business-to-business consulting, especially in information and communication technology (ICT) and various types of outsourcing services. In the findings section, these are referred to as ICT, outsourcing and others. The company has a few hundred employees, all highly educated. The company offers its clients business consulting in several sectors, some of which have traditionally been male-dominated, some female-dominated and some equal. In Finland, when the labor market is vertically segregated (Palencia-Esteban 2019), Solve is a suitable organization for the survey, as its employees are evenly composed of women and men.

In March 2020, the organization relocated virtually all of its employees to teleworking. Prior to that, telecommuting had been an exception and employees had been assumed to work primarily on either the organization's or customers' premises. Thus, teleworking rights were extended to everyone at once, and the organization found that jobs that were still considered necessary to be delivered in the workplace a moment ago were not. All meetings were transferred to digital platforms, and almost no one visited the workplace, although it was possible in principle.

The survey was conducted in September 2020. A link to the anonymous survey was sent to all staff and just over 40% responded to the survey by the deadline. At the time of the survey, the employees had been working remotely for 6-7 months and there was no end date. The survey was answered by 87 employees, of whom 30 were men and 57 were women, there were no respondents choosing non-binary or omitting the information. The number of employees was fairly even in all age groups and taking into account the nature of the consulting industry: 18 people aged 20-29, 36 people aged 30-39, 25 people aged 40-49 and 8 people aged 50+.

The survey asked open questions about the blurring of work boundaries related to telework: Tell us about your teleworking day; What do you miss from working life before the corona crisis; Has the corona era brought anything good to your work life; How you utilize your emotions at work; How you maintain your networks and friendships remotely; How, because of work, taking care of your appearance has changed during the corona period; Do you use any technology to succeed / thrive at work? (e.g. mindfulness, meditation, mental exercises, or other); How the corona crisis is shaping expert work; Other thoughts on the boundaries of work and telework during the corona period. With the exception of background questions (gender, age, industry), the questions did not refer to gender or caring responsibilities, in order to avoid directing the answers towards gender reflections. The data were analyzed by thematic content analysis, which was theoretically informed (Braun & Clarke 2006; Guest et al. 2012). Thematic analysis addresses the attitudes behind the answers that appear in the lives of the interviewees (Bacchi 2005). This provides access to established ways of meaning that the interviewees take for granted and their conscious commitment to certain values and goals.

Findings

The blurring of the boundaries between work and other life and the relationship between work and care have a decisive impact on the careers and coping of many. In telework in particular, the boundaries of work become blurred. When work is done at home, the beginning and especially the end of a working day may become blurred. Because the boundaries of work slip more easily than usual in teleworking, it requires organizations and employees to learn and manage new skills and practices. Many were now, for the first time, thinking about the boundaries of their work and how to manage them. Each respondent contemplated the blurring boundaries of telework concerning time and space, although this was not directly inquired in the survey:

Teleworking has been a good thing for everyday life. The problem, however, is that when there is enough work for every moment during the day, it is often difficult to draw the line between work and leisure. Unfortunately, work will often dominate leisure time as well. – female, 30-39 years old, no care responsibilities, (8)

Teleworking has brought a lot of flexibility to everyday life but also a lack of time management. New routines need to be learned for remote work so that even some sort of boundary between leisure and work is maintained and does not overload oneself. - female, 30-39, no care responsibilities, (16)

Sometimes it would also be more comfortable not to have work at home all the time. That the computer could be left in the office and I could be completely free after a working day without the possibility to open the computer. – female, 30-39, no care responsibilities, (69)

Regarding the blurring of work boundaries, issues related to time and place were highlighted as the organization moved virtually all of its employees to telecommuting. In Solve, the workforce was instructed to work remotely and the work was done mainly at home, a few respondents had a place to work in a cottage or their old hometown. According to *preliminary* data from the latest Working Conditions Barometer (The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2021), the corona situation has increased the workload of almost a third of wage earners, and the results show that the workload has increased the most among women, white-collar workers and municipal wage earners. The length of the working day for employees at Solve increased by 29%, it was the same length for 57%, and 14% reported a shortening of their working day, and a few percent more men reported a longer working day than women did.

There was no difference between the genders in the descriptions of the employees about the course of their own teleworking day: if the answers had been listed without gender, the reader would not have been able to deduce it from the answers.

I start really early because I work at home and it doesn't take time to go to work, the mind is calmer because the blood pressure doesn't rise during rush hour driving. I work until the lunch usually without a break but I like a longer lunch break and I go for about a 10 minute walk during lunch hour which is really good and I get to straighten the body for a while. The afternoon often goes with meetings. I end my working day at about 5 pm but sometimes I continue in the evening after playing sports. I feel better because I don't spend time traveling or sitting in traffic jams. I can also rhythm the day more easily because I am not dependent on e.g. use of office facilities because I work at home - female, 40-49, no care responsibilities, (4)

Teleworking days are great at home. Only the training of the new staff has suffered a little during the corona period. I would rather be present to talk and guide them to a new job. – male, 40-49, no care responsibilities, (5)

Similarly, no gender differences were found in the questions on what the respondent missed about working life before the corona crisis and whether the corona era had brought something good into their own work life. There was also no difference in the reporting of the blurring of the boundaries of work due to the corona pandemic, but there were gender differences between work and other life, especially in care and housework, and in other dimensions of blurring of the boundaries of work.

Care and housework

Teleworking is also a gender and care issue. Care responsibilities affect teleworking and put families, and especially parents of young children, in a more difficult position than many other groups. The study highlighted the strong change in the daily lives of caregivers with the transition to teleworking. Men mentioned family responsibilities relatively more often than women in their responses, mainly in the form of fetching children to and from kindergarten. Men emphasized sociality towards children, or lack thereof:

> Basically, children can be now be seen during the day when they come from school. In practice, it hardly materializes because I myself am so caught up in meetings. - male, 40-49, school-age children, (36)

> I wake up late and eat breakfast normally. I work at my remote workstation, where a child often harasses or makes noise if not in daycare. - male, 40-49, a small child, (12)

> The duration of working days can also be considerably more flexible - you do not have to leave at a certain time just because of the kindergarten schedules. I am not any more in such a rush. – male, 40-49, small children, (17)

Teleworking brought children closer and granted flexibility to the family life, at least on the surface level. Yet there were gender differences - although women also referred to childcare, they talked more about men about cooking and laundry.

> Teleworking saves time because time is not spent on business trips. Even during a teleworking day, you can easily do laundry. - female, 30-39, no care responsibilities, (9)

> At home, work goes as smoothly as in the office, but at home it is easy to do other things (e.g. housework and cooking) and the days go by. Breaks are also forgotten and you find that you sometimes work in too long sections. - female, 30-39, no care responsibilities, (16)

Most praised the fact that telecommuting had brought unhurriedness to the day because commuting to kindergarten and to work had ceased. There was, however, a harsher side in the stories of women in particular. Especially in the families of two working parents, the situation had sometimes become difficult:

> From the perspective of a family with children, I can say that this time has been very challenging and has really gone to the limits of exhaustion when kindergarten-age children have been home and both parents are doing demanding expert work. I have worked from morning to night and even on weekends to get all the work done, there has not been much time to take holidays. There has been no relief from the employer. There is no childcare available anywhere and you have to manage to do it yourself. I have to say that a lot is really required of experts in this time. - female, 30-39, small children, (76)

> Work ergonomics are poor. I work on my laptop either on the couch or at the dining table. There is no separate screen available. Our study is used by a my spouse who also teleworks. When the kindergartens were closed in the spring and the children were at home, I worked in the sauna as it was the quietest place in the house. - female, 30-39, small children, (35)

One of the obstacles in women's career development in particular is the workload of care responsibilities. When looking at wellbeing at work, the gendered care has a decisive effect on participation in working life, and especially on women's career opportunities (McKie et al. 2013). Care is also a career issue: women's career development is hampered by unequal structures in working life. The unequal distribution of care reduces men's opportunities as fathers and in care in general, which in turn has negative effects on, among other things, families, relationships and child-parent relationships (Kangas et al. 2017).

Emotional labor

According to Arlie Hochschild (1983), the modern service economy requires the utilization of emotions and can be equated with the exploitation of manual labor in factories. Employees are expected to display and use a certain kind of emotion that is appropriate to implement the organization's strategy. Although the majority of the literature deals with the emotional labor of service professions such as waiters or salespeople, in a demanding expert work, emotional labor is often more subtle, but also more demanding, as colleagues and customers need to be assured of reliability, presence, interest and long-term commitment. The challenges of emotional labor in teleworking were highlighted:

> Interpreting others and "reading" emotions is also difficult when not seeing and experiencing the other person normally. I don't think a video connection will replace this, because watching a picture is somehow weird, among other things (presentation, browsing documents, etc.). – male, 30-39, no care responsibilities, (15)

> I try to maintain a positive atmosphere by always communicating kindly and investing in the tone of communication. I find it even easier to give feedback remotely. - male, 40-49, small children, (17)

Emotional labor can range from superficial to profound emotional labor, as well as from customer situations to feelings about the work itself (Miller et al. 2007). Several complained that there was no opportunity to discuss emotions at work:

> Q: Do you take advantage of emotions at work?

> A: Hardly, there is no place for feelings. - woman, 40-49, no care responsibilities, (4)

> There is no talk of emotions. We are talking about achievement and output. Same mentality as before telecommuting - male, 20-29, no care responsibilities, (29)

Some took advantage of the technology that telecommuting brings to express the desired emotional state:

> Through Teams, voice is of great importance. You can tell if the person is calm / tired / happy, etc. Of course, the sound can also be slightly modified to sound what you want. – female, 30-39, no care responsibilities, (48)

There was a difference in the answers as to how the emotional labor was described and in which contexts of meaning it was placed (Bacchi 2005). Both women and men reported doing emotional labor, but women put a little more emphasis on empathy in emotional labor while men talked about encouraging co-workers by pep talk.

Aesthetic labor

Aesthetic labor constructs a certain kind of image and social status, and thus it reproduces intersectional power relations (Mears 2014). In aesthetic labor, employees are expected to dress and construct their appearance in accordance with the guidelines and organizational culture provided by management (Caven et al. 2013). Through the commercialization and objectification of the physicality of employees, employees have become part of the aesthetics of the organization (Witz et al. 2003), leading to certain criteria for the aesthetics of employees (Warhurst & Nickson 2009). These criteria faced a significant change after employees ended up working remotely for a long time. As aesthetic labor is strongly gendered, the change was especially great for women:

> Q: How has caring for your appearance changed during pandemic?
>
> A: Quite radically, make-up and the choice of clothes are completely skipped for the days when I was just working at home. (Teams in remote meetings don't have to keep the video on, and hardly anyone stops). - female, 30-39, no care responsibilities, (16)
>
> When I work from home, I dress mostly comfortably, I don't do makeup, etc., while I would always dress neatly for the office and wear make up every day. I always hope that if, for example, a camera needs to be on in a meeting, this will be announced in advance. Even then, I mainly wonder what is shown on the camera (e.g. the hair must be done only in the front). - female, 30-39, no care responsibilities, (40)

Women report that time and money was saved when they did not have to get to work in the morning. Men also reported a reduction in aesthetic labor, especially for shaving and hairdressing:

> Dress and personal hygiene will certainly not be given the same attention as before. Beard grows and collared shirts & suits stay in the closet :) - male, 30-39, small children, (59)

Although make-up and other dressing up had been significantly reduced, other criteria creeping into the aesthetics of the workplace, such as physical fitness (Huzell & Larsson 2012), had not been forgotten. An expert's fit body is believed to demonstrate their motivation, self-discipline, responsibility, willingness, and ability to work (e.g., Haynes 2012). Many people now said they were investing in fitness:

> I care less about my appearance but more about my health. I don't wear makeup during the day or wear business clothes. I always wear tracksuit. This brings a lot of extra time to the day. Despite this, my appearance has by no means "crumbled" but on the contrary, I spend more time on exercise and wellbeing, only the useless work on appearance has been left out. - female, 30-39, no care responsibilities, (27)

The answers reflect the internalization of aesthetic labor. Wellbeing (Cederström & Spicer 2015) and healthy people are thought to be able to perform the tasks assigned to them: this idea is also entrenched in management ideology (Cederström & Grassman 2008) and is reflected in recruitment, selection and productivity decisions (Huzell & Larsson 2012).

Spiritual labor

Previous research has found (Karjalainen 2022; Karjalainen et al. 2019) that spiritual labor and various mental exercises become gendered in the context of working life. This is also reflected in the responses on teleworking and work boundaries. To the question, "Do you use any technology to survive / thrive at work?

(e.g., mindfulness, meditation, mental exercises, or other)" the men replied mostly simply by stating that they were either practicing some technique or that they were not doing any exercises. Women, on the other hand, fostered a feeling of inadequacy:

> Sometimes meditation, and TRE [trauma releasing exercises] should be practiced as I have studied it. – female, 40-49, no care responsibilities, (53)

> No, but I should. – female, 20-29, no care responsibilities, (58)

> I don't, although it would certainly do me good. – female, 40-49, no care responsibilities, (75)

Feelings of inadequacy followed women, regardless of whether they did wellbeing exercises or not:

> I should, but I don't take advantage of these. I participate in meditative yoga once a week. – female, 20-29, no care responsibilities, (45)

> I don't practice, but maybe I should. I have tried to take more exercise in my daily routine and therefore also body care. - female, 30-39, no care responsibilities, (61)

Women reiterated the desire for perfection as an employee observed in a previous study, making wellbeing oriented technologies as part of the burden of unfinished tasks (Hyvönen & Karjalainen 2020). The pursuit of perfection through self-care is always in proportion to the prevailing social and cultural reality, although the dynamics behind the culture of the workplace and in working life remain easily invisible (Cederstöm & Spicer 2015).

Maintaining networks and working relationships during telework

Based on emotional labor, a recent research concept in organizational research, social labor (Fleming 2009; Anderson et al. 2016) can be used to look at networks and friendships in a work context. Telework is often exhausted by social interaction (Felstead & Henseke 2017) and thus long-term full-time telecommuting radically changed the way work-related networks and friendships are maintained. Many respondents reported asking in the beginning of telework period for news in remote meetings, but soon became tired of the practice. Women talked a little more about their friendships, but the social relationships at work were talked about in much the same way regardless of gender.

> Helping and cheering colleagues is definitely part of my own work identity. It seems to be more difficult to apply remotely. Among other things, my own attitude, enthusiasm and smile are heard well in customer calls, and that is why I pay attention to it, whether I work remotely or in the office. - male, 30-39, small children, (59)

The differences were reflected in the fact that several women said that they were introverted or withdrawn and that teleworking was therefore well suited to them:

> I have found that I feel much better when I work remotely. I am an introvert in nature and tired of excessive noise in the office or constant human contact. – female, 30-39, no care responsibilities, (80)

> On the other hand, it is a relief that there has been no need to practice small talk. In the past, I wanted to take myself to the so-called discomfort are and make small talk. But this

situation has allowed for social isolation where social skills have not had to be used. I wonder, of course, whether this will result in a complete decline in social skills and a move away from discomfort. - female, 40-49, a child, (54)

Women reported also a bad conscience regarding the maintenance of networks and friendships at work: more should have been done. The men did not indicate this bad conscience, although they did not report any further doing such work.

Discussion

Ongoing and accelerating work change processes will affect humanly, socially and economically sustainable working life in many ways. The structures and contents of the work, the required knowledge base and livelihoods are changing and the meanings of the work itself are expected to change. The acceleration of globalization, demographic change, new technologies and climate change are having a wide-ranging impact on all societies and organizations in the world of work, with different capacities and opportunities to respond to new challenges and opportunities. Finland has many strengths, due to which the change of work can be controlled and it can produce positive results for many people and areas of work. In these processes of change, people and groups of people are in quite different positions. The opportunity to use one's abilities, to advance one's career and to be treated fairly has a decisive effect on wellbeing at work.

The study found that the boundary between work and other life became gendered as care and housework were distributed unequally. In addition, emotional labor became gendered: women emphasized empathy and men pep talks in the encounters of working life. Aesthetic labor had changed tremendously with both genders due to teleworking, but the ways of aesthetic labor had changed became gendered. Spiritual labor, or different mental techniques, was practiced fairly evenly, but where men stated that they did not practice any technique, women answered "I do not practice, but should." The effects of the corona crisis on future expert work for women highlight self-management, loneliness and growing responsibility. Research shows how blurring and drawing the boundaries of work in telework is not genderless, but gender is reflected in many ways in experts 'perceptions of telework and the future of telework.

The workload become individualized in working life and placed to the employees' own responsibility. However, organizations, and especially those in management positions, have also a legal responsibility to monitor the workload and working hours. Especially knowledge workers' overtime is often invisible and burdens them. In evermore fragmented knowledge work, it is common for experts to work invisible overtime: according to the Working Conditions Barometer (The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020), 18% of senior staff work overtime on a weekly or more frequent basis. It is important to prevent congestion through the division of labor and ethically sustainable management of organizations, not just by individualizing problems from overload to individuals. Structural problems primarily require structural solutions.

The responsibility for organizing telework cannot be left to an individual employee alone. If the employer requires the employee to work remotely, it should ensure sound working conditions. Leadership needs to be developed that supports the employee's ability to focus on their work and be able to do their job well. The employee must not be solely responsible for their performance and work process. Fairness and equal treatment are key in realizing the full potential of the changing world of work. Gender-specific and equality measures, as well as action at the workplace level, are key to developing a stable and prosperous society and future working life.

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