"I check my emails on the toilet":
Email Practices and Work-Home Boundary Management

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ABSTRACT

Email is widely used as a means of communication, a task management system and an archive and it often seems impossible to live without it. Our always-online society expects us to be available 24/7 at the cost of potentially blurring the boundaries between work and personal life. Furthermore, mobile and hand-held devices have made it even easier to be connected and therefore increased the sense of needing to be available to respond at any time. Whilst research to date has focused on identifying email practices on the desktop, little has been done to understand

present evidence that demonstrates that mobile phones are not always used as Matthews et al. [13] suggested.

Helping people manage their growing email archives and number of messages exchanged is still a core problem in the email management literature. Based on a critical review of work-life boundary theories [4, 15, 16] and email management [7, 12, 20, 22], Capra et al. [3] carried out survey-based research on how email is used by university employees in both work and personal contexts. Using a social and behavioural perspective, they aimed to understand the key differences in email management practices between personal and work accounts. They were also interested in investigating whether comparing personal and work email practices could shed more light on the role of email on the maintenance of work-home boundaries. For their particular subset of users, they found that work-home boundaries are blurred in a bidirectional but asymmetrical manner (with work interfering more in personal life than vice versa) and that email constitutes an important boundary management artefact. Just like Nippert-Eng [14] found that keys and calendars are used as physical artefacts used for both integrating and segmenting work and personal domains, so can email be considered a digital artefact of such sorts [3].

Building on this research, our study aims to fill the gap in understanding email management strategies across devices by addressing two main limitations from the Capra et al. [3] study: the lack of focus on mobile technology and their use of a survey methodology. Firstly, although their data was collected in 2010, when mobile technology was already popular and available, the authors did not appreciate the role mobile technology can have in email management practices. To the best of our knowledge there has been little research that has studied how people process email depending on the device used. For this reason in our study we were particularly interested in understanding users' processing strategies for work and personal emails on multiple devices (computers and mobile technologies). Secondly, whilst their use of a questionnaire enabled a large number of responses to be collated, one limitation is that there was limited opportunity to