

# Family Rituals 2.0

## – the Employers' Perspective

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# Family Rituals 2.0

- Multi-disciplinary
- Social sciences + design + technology
- Funded by the EPSRC



Royal College of Art  
Postgraduate Art and Design



Bournemouth  
University



University of the  
West of England

# Overview

- Research Aim
- Contextual thinking
- Data generation
- Interim findings from employers
- Mobile worker recruitment



“Family Rituals 2.0 seeks to understand individuals’ values held in everyday rituals and the situated social context of mobile workers, and how digital technologies might be used to support inclusion in these rituals for those who are away from home.”

# Key issues in mobile working

- Issue of terminology – mobile work/mobile worker broad terms
- Most workers are mobile in one way or another
  - Travel to work
  - Travel for work
  - ‘Commuter marriages’
- This project is concerned with: workers who live at home but whose mobility makes them physically absent from family on a regular basis
  - Ad-hoc trips
  - Routine absence
- Experience of absence – what is missed?
- Potential tension in positive and negative aspects of mobile lifestyle (for worker & family):
  - Freedom, autonomy, and career advancement
  - *versus* –
  - Absence, stress, and loneliness

# Contextual research

- Families and home
- Rituals and family rituals
- Mobility and copresence
- Mobility in the course of work
- Work/life balance

# Family and home



- Contested and extensively debated terms
- Family does have meaning to people
- Move from normative image to inclusive
  - more than mum + dad + son + daughter
- Home as place
  - Permeable & flows
  - Practical, symbolic, imaginary
- Family practices
  - Mundane, ordinary activities
  - Temporal - life course, rhythm, seasonal
  - Shaped by travel and mobility together

# Rituals

- Rituals as (social) practices
  - Symbolic and value laden
  - Religious moving to secular (e.g. Christmas)
  - Mark events, transitions, etc...
  - Gift relationships
  - Performative

# Family rituals

- Family network identity
  - Collective memories etc...
  - Carried memories (photos, cloth, hair)
- Lifecycle rituals like weddings, funerals, etc...
  - Family 'traditions' within these
  - Religious 'rites of passage' (transitional)
  - Religion may impact on family participation
- Mundane/quotidian family rituals
  - Animate routine activities like meals, bedtime, etc...
  - Family specific/contextual
  - Less visible but more prevalent?



# Mobility and copresence

- Growth in mobility – national and global
  - 58.5m air trips from UK 2012
    - 7m business travellers
  - 18.6m overnight business trips in GB 2011
- ICT impact
  - Supports business/social relationships
  - Not replaced travel
- Copresence
  - Obligations
    - face-to-face, face-to-place, face-to-event
  - Richness of face-to-face interaction
  - Exchange of tacit knowledge
  - Focus on business interaction rather than family

# Work/life balance

- Important for workers:
  - Life/job satisfaction, relationships, family cohesion, mental health
- Important for employers:
  - Employee attraction and retention
- The role of ICTs:
  - Flexibility, autonomy, home-working
  - *Blurred boundaries, 'work' encroaching on 'life'*
- Concept criticised:
  - Over-simplistic
  - Narrow samples: westerners, dual-earner families, 'professionals'
  - 'Genderblind'
- Work/life conflict
- Work/family balance
- Work/family border theory

# Data generation

Stakeholder (employer) interviews

Mobile worker/  
Family interviews

Mobile worker/  
Family ethnography

Technology prototypes

# Talking to employees

- Understand
  - Prevalence and nature of mobile work in organisation
  - Work-life balance policies
  - Technologies offered to workers
- Opportunity
  - for accessing workforce
  - Enrolling into stakeholder network

# Who were the employers

- 11 completed (aim is 20 interviews)
  - Hotel/tourism
  - Transport/Logistics
  - Consultancy
  - Media
  - NGOs
- SMEs to large businesses
- National and international

# Key findings: terminology

## Who is considered a mobile worker?

- Executives and Business travellers
- ‘Expatriates’ (staff posted abroad)
- ‘Peripatetic workers’
- ‘Home’ workers
- ‘Remote workers’
- Seasonal workers
- Professionals travelling between regional offices or to distant worksites

# Key findings: Mobility expectations

- Mobility integral e.g. air crew, employees expected to be reading and willing to travel
- Globally mobile employee
  - Longer periods of absence
  - Career development
  - International experience
- Short term business travel

# Key Findings:- Who Travels

- Sector/company dependent
  - National – shorter absence
  - International – longer absence
- Mobile personnel
  - Air crew, lorry drivers, tour operatives, etc
  - Business executives – senior/regional managers, etc
  - ‘status’ of mobile worker varies

# Key findings: Why travel?

- Attend meetings
- Drum up business, expand clientele
- Setting up and manning new offices/branches abroad
- Training purposes
- Acquire new skills/experience (esp. as part of career development strategies)
- Reach distant work sites
- Moving between regional offices
- Driving haulage vehicles

# Key findings: image

Importance of work-life balance

- Family friendly company
- Family friendly policies

# Key findings - Policies

- No 'one size fits all' policy
- Case by case negotiation with line manager
- Needs accommodated
- Influenced by years of service, personal needs, and previous record of time off etc
- Nothing specific for 'mobile workers'

# Key focus: policy focus

- Time off/rotas
- Flexible working (e.g. hours, place)
- Women employees
  - Maternity leave
  - Return to work
- Re-iterates ‘traditional’ family structure

# Key findings: benefits of wlb

- Staff **retention** (especially skilled and experienced staff) and **attracting** good candidates.
- Part of promoting staff health, wellbeing, and happiness
- Staff **satisfaction** (and its relation to productivity).
  - Impact on customers
- **Productivity** levels and staff **effectiveness**
- **Fatigue avoidance** (shifts/tours of duty)
- **Complying** with industry regulations and legislation (e.g. on working hours)

# Key findings: connecting up

- Absent mobile workers often equipped for work communication
  - Problems with time differences & connections
- Senior staff trusted to self manage
  - Concern about burn-out/overworking
- Less senior managed remotely
- Surveillance relates to
  - Being in the right place at the right time
  - Performance
  - Reducing isolation
  - Safety

# Summary

- Absence due to mobility integral in many ways
- Companies vary in perspective and attitude
- Work life balance policies positive
- But very few specific policies for mobile workers
- Technologies deployed for workers to use/connect for work
- Need to communicate to family while away not part of business considerations?

**Do you regularly stay away from home because of work?  
We want to explore how you manage this in your daily life at home.**

**You can take part in the Family Rituals 2.0 research project in one of two ways:**



### **1. Talk to us:**

**We'd like to talk to you and your family about your experiences of working away from home.**

We'll come and see you twice, for about 60-90 minutes each time. In the first visit we'll ask you some questions about your work travel and ask you to engage with a family activity log. We will then visit you for a second time to talk to you and your family about what you have included.

At the end, we will give you vouchers from Love2Shop as a token of gratitude for your time.

### **2. Tell us more and try our designs:**

**We'd like to talk to you and your family about your experiences of working away from home. From what you tell us we will design a new prototype just for you, to keep for three months. This type of involvement is a bit more lengthy, and will mean staying in touch with us, intermittently, for a total period of 9 months:**

First we'll come and see you to ask you some questions, for about an hour. We'll also give you a small set of activities to do and things to play with over the following month.

When we see you a second time, we will bring the prototype we have designed for you. This will be a few months after our first visit.

Three months after that we'll come back for a third and final time to collect the prototype and see how you've got on with it.

At the end, we will give you vouchers from Love2Shop as a token of gratitude for your time.

Our visits will be arranged well in advance, at a time that suits you.

Please send an e-mail to [family.rituals@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:family.rituals@uwe.ac.uk) saying which option you'd like your family to be considered for.



Multidisciplinary research to support work-life balance for mobile workers in the digital age