
Family Rituals 2.0

Family Rituals 2.0 is a research study that seeks to better understand how employees who have to travel away from home as part of their work (mobile workers) manage their work/life balance. Specifically, it is interested in how digital technologies may facilitate connections between the absent mobile worker and his/her family, especially in relation to taking part in family rituals at-a-distance.

Family Rituals 2.0 is a two year multi-disciplinary research project funded by the EPSRC through the Digital Economy funding call 'Sustainable Society: Achieving work-life balance in a digitally dependent world'.

The research involves four academic institutions: University of the West of England, Bristol; Newcastle University; the Royal College of Art; and, Bournemouth University.

Background

Family Rituals 2.0 starts with the assumption that people will continue to be absent from home due to work-related travel.

There have always been people who have travelled in the course of work, from fishing to sales, to migrant workers. Faster travel (especially air travel) and developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have contributed to the recent unprecedented demand for international business travel as part of a growing global economy.

Generally research has focused on how ICTs could substitute for travel. However, it is acknowledged that face-to-face meetings often complement a suite of communication tools and remain an essential part of knowledge exchange practices, networking, and business promotion. International business travel continues on an upward trend.

Growth in business travel and tourism, and in the global movement of goods, has ensured that there are many areas of employment that

also service national and international mobility (e.g. air crews, tour operators, freight distributors, etc.). Employees in these mobility service sectors are also subject to time away from family and home.

Employees who are absent from family and home because of work often develop particular routines and practices with their family to accommodate absence. While existing research demonstrates that there are particular stresses related to absence and managing departure and return events, being away can be perceived as both positive and negative experiences by employees.

Family and home can be conceived in many different ways, and there is extensive debate in the social sciences about these concepts. The research is therefore enabling research participants to define their own interpretation of family, recognising heterogeneity of family arrangements. More important to Family Rituals 2.0 is the way in which families enact everyday life and accommodate the absent family member. Therefore the research takes forward the perspective that *family practices* give meaning to family life. These are the everyday activities like going shopping, playing, work, etc; and more significant events like holidays, birthdays, etc; that invoke the organisation of time and space.

Family practices include *ritual practices* that have meaning for the whole family and may be context-specific, as well as incorporating more generic rituals such as enacting religious festivals, weddings, or funerals. The research is concerned with identifying what *family rituals* include from the prosaic to the significant, and the relationship between mobile work and such rituals.

In taking forward the research, Family Rituals 2.0 draws together multidisciplinary perspectives of work, family, rituals and mobility. It will utilise research approaches from the social sciences, human computer interaction, and design.

Aim

The aim of the research is to understand how digital technologies can support work/life balance when an employee is away from home.

Specifically it will seek to add to knowledge about the positive and negative impacts of travelling away from home in relation to being absent from such rituals, as well as exploring how rituals are re-interpreted or emerge at-a-distance utilising existing technologies.

Methodology

Family Rituals 2.0 is deploying a number of different methodological approaches across the project. These include social science research, design probes, and technology prototyping.



UWE and Bournemouth University are collaborating on two substantive elements of the data generation.

Stakeholder engagement

Family Rituals 2.0 is inviting employers to participate in the research in two ways

Firstly, interviews will be convened with twenty Human Resource managers from a range of employers including those in the tourism, transport, finance, pharmaceutical, and Information Technology sectors. The interview seeks to gain an understanding of employers' perspectives on mobile work and issues of work-life balance.

Secondly, employers can join the stakeholder network to receive updates on research findings, and to attend a knowledge exchange event showcasing outcomes from the digital technology prototyping.

Understanding Family Rituals

Twenty four mobile workers and their families will be invited to participate in two depth interviews to explore a number of aspects of their lives and the impact of mobile working.

Here the research will be concerned with identifying with participants what routine and significant family practices might be

considered family rituals. It will explore the different interactions that give these practices meaning to family members, taking account of non-verbal elements such as memory, touch, and emotion. It will also investigate how existing technologies are used by family members to communicate.

To give meaning to the research, only families in which two or more family members either share a home or see each other on a daily basis will be included in the research, in order to gain the sense of regularly shared ritual practices. However, Family Rituals 2.0 is enabling participants to articulate who is their family, while recognising that family may include a number of different relationships (e.g. grown up adult living with parents, parents with young children, partners without children, etc.).

Findings

Emergent findings will be disseminated through a number of mechanisms including interim reports posted on the Family Rituals 2.0 webpages.

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