

HOLIWORKING: PERSPECTIVES ON NEW WAYS OF INTEGRATING HOLIDAY AND WORK

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Abstract:

Digitally enabled work arrangements such as remote work, mobile work, and digital nomadism have increasingly been researched. More recently, a distinct form of work arrangement has emerged that allows employees to relocate temporarily to a foreign destination where they simultaneously engage in both professional work and leisure activities. This study develops an empirically grounded, substantive theory of this emerging novel arrangement termed 'holiwork'. Employing grounded theory methodology, the research draws upon the experiences of six individuals engaged in holiwork. The findings illustrate that holiwork constitutes a complex blend of ambivalent feelings and experiences split between the novelty and alluring appeal of unfamiliar cultural environments and the continuous demands of their full-time professional responsibilities. These insights contribute to the literature on the sociology of digitally mediated work, offering theoretical implications for understanding new work arrangements shaped by digital connectivity and global mobility.

Keywords: Digital nomadism, grounded theory, holiwork, new ways of working, remote work.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of work is undergoing a significant transformation due to the increasing use of digital technology for organising tasks and the removal of geographical constraints (Felstead *et al.*, 2005). These changes fundamentally alter the meaning of work and reshape the relationship between work and leisure, too (Reichenberger, 2018). The confluence of multiple individual, societal and financial forces, along with growing dissatisfaction among employees with conventional ways of working, explains the need to organise work differently, both in terms of flexible locations and adaptable temporal structures, to offer more attractive arrangements and retain talent (Findlay and Thompson, 2017). Indeed, there is a mounting demand for flexibilisation of traditional office work, often experienced and criticised as monotonous and meaningless (Bailey *et al.*, 2019). The increasing alienation and escalatory logics of capitalist modernity (Rosa *et al.*, 2017) also spark the need for more creative arrangements that make work more appealing and meaningful (Küpers, 2021; Laaser and Karlsson, 2022).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work has become more desirable (BCG, 2021). The potential offered by digital technologies and advanced professional infrastructures facilitate the emergence of innovative work arrangements that aim to make work more engaging and satisfying while maintaining well-being (Martin and Hauret, 2020). The rise of ubiquitous access to digital infrastructures and mobile devices supports forms of flexible and remote working (Aroles *et al.*, 2022; Felstead, 2022; Mazmanian, 2013) and its virtualisation shapes the role of working space and places (Will-Zocholl and Roth-Ebner, 2022).

Against this background, this study examines the emergence of a novel form of work, labelled as ‘holiworking’ – a portmanteau combining the words ‘holiday’ and ‘working’. This study inductively develops a theory of holiwork, aiming to understand its defining characteristics while exploring the experiences of individuals engaged in this practice. By situating holiwork within broader transformations in digitally mediated and mobile work, this research contributes to our understanding of new flexible work modalities.

Holiwork represents a complex and puzzling empirical phenomenon within the sociology of work. While digital technologies enable work from virtually anywhere (Messenger and Gschwind, 2016), employment contracts continue to impose constraints on workers, producing the ambivalent experience of autonomy coupled with a sense of being tightly controlled (Mazmanian, 2013). Nonetheless, individuals engaged in flexible work arrangements reap the benefits from the security of employment while enjoying the freedom of mobile lives (Elliott and Urry, 2010). This dual prospect appears especially attractive to young professionals in remote-compatible roles (Reichenberger, 2018; Stich *et al.*, 2025). These members of a mobile vanguard occupy a pivotal position amid societal and organisational transformations driven by ubiquitous mobility (Cresswell, 2006), notwithstanding that this prospect remains limited to a minority of remote-compatible jobs (Wheatley *et al.*, 2024) and

is largely targeted at and accessible to a privileged global elite (Thompson, 2019).

Holiworking is provisionally defined as a novel form of organising work and holiday in which employees use digital technology to continue performing their usual job duties from a location abroad for a relatively extended period (typically, exceeding three months), during which they also engage in travel and leisure activities. Given the novel nature of holiworking, this investigation adopts a grounded theory method to theorise this work arrangement from an empirical base. The following research question guides this study:

How does holiwork emerge and how is it experienced by employees as a new arrangement to combine work and leisure?

The 'theory of holiwork' presented here distinguishes holiwork from other digitally enabled work arrangements. This theory is inductively developed following the tenets of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) from the experiences articulated by individuals who engaged in holiworking. This analysis identifies the unique qualities of this new arrangement, captured in twelve distinct codes, subsequently organised into four categories. These categories relate to the intricate nexus between work activities and personal interests, both theoretically and empirically.

Firstly, holiworkers embark on a tethered exploratory journey, feeling compelled to engage with and adapt to their new environment while managing the constraints of a temporally limited stay, balancing the desire for immersive experiences with practical realities. Secondly, they experience a distinct fragmentation of rhythms and temporalities as the full-time nature of their employment requires significant coordination and imposes limits on personal flexibility. Thirdly, while forming new social relationships abroad often evokes positive emotions, these connections are frequently perceived as transient, leading to feelings of disconnection. Fourthly, holiworkers benefit from the temporary nature of their stay abroad as part of and supported by a stable employment contract, which enables more explorative experiences while generating specific expectations and demands from their employers and sustaining ties to their home contexts.

Overall, holiworking encapsulates an inherent ambivalence in which holiworkers simultaneously enjoy the advantages of performing professional duties from scenic locations abroad while confronting the ongoing challenge of balancing leisure and labour. This dual condition and equivocal situation require them to skilfully navigate tensions between recreational pursuits and occupational responsibilities. They are also required to manage the complexities of forming new social ties in unfamiliar environments and maintaining existing personal and professional relationships in their home countries.

These findings contribute to the literature on the sociology of work, especially to research on remote work. For some time, various prior studies related to the sociology and management of work have investigated changes in the nature and purpose of working (Okhuysen *et al.*, 2013), especially through new work practices

(Aroles *et al.*, 2019), technologically enabled work (Mazmanian *et al.*, 2013), as well as the satisfactory relationship between work and non-work lives (Kelliher and Richardson, 2018), or workplace culture in remote settings (Felstead, 2022). As work is becoming organised in more diverse ways and organisations experiment with remote and hybrid arrangements, it is also more spatially dislocated in a fast-changing global context (Beck *et al.*, 2016; Parry and McDonough, 2024). Hence, holiwork can be seen as a novel work arrangement that pushes the traditional boundaries of work and life into mobile, inter-placed lives (Elliott and Urry, 2010; Howard and Küpers, 2017), where personal pursuits and work commitments blend. Thus, these results establish new frontiers of digitally enabled work arrangements.

The article is structured as follows. The next section reviews research on different types of digitally enabled remote work arrangements. The subsequent section presents the research design following the tenets of grounded theory and the fourth one presents the results. The last section discusses the findings, offers theoretical contributions and practical implications, reflects on some limitations and outlines opportunities for future research.

DIGITALLY ENABLED WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Work demands have historically required employees to go overseas for long- or short-term assignments. In the realm of long-term assignments, the literature has studied the experience of expatriates living in a foreign country, often accompanied by their families (Kraimer *et al.*, 2016). Long-term overseas assignments, although not compulsory, are not always accepted enthusiastically since employees must deal with the challenges of cultural adjustment, identity transformation or work demands (Selmer *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless, employees who accept such assignments experience positive benefits, such as discovering new cultures or living an exciting adventure with their families.

Alternatively, employees can go on short business travels abroad, known as flexpatriation (Demel and Mayrhofer, 2010), to attend specialised fairs or meet clients. As in the case of expatriation, the main driver of flexpatriation is work-related (Shaffer *et al.*, 2012). However, the latter raises fewer concerns for employees given the short nature of the assignments, which offer opportunities to have fun and enjoy different cultures, while not sacrificing their home base (Demel and Mayrhofer, 2010). Flexpatriation also allows employees to extend their professional network and enrich their social lives (Demel and Mayrhofer, 2010), even though these encounters remain largely casual compared to expatriation (Shaffer *et al.*, 2012).

Unlike expatriation and flexpatriation, other flexible work arrangements (including holiwork) cannot be realised without the support of digital technology insofar as they enable working from anywhere in three not mutually exclusive modes of work, namely: remote working, mobile working and digital nomadism (Messenger and Gschwind, 2016).

Remote working

Remote working allows employees to work from home or a location other than the employer's premises. Offering employees the choice to live and work from anywhere allows them to remain employed without needing to live in or near the firm's location. Even if employees are not physically co-located, the subjective perception of copresence – i.e. mutual attention, shared emotions and synchronised behaviours – outweighs physical co-location (Díaz Andrade, 2014). While the body is situated elsewhere, part of the sensorial experience still takes place in the disembodied office, thereby explaining why the physical distance of remote work is negated by the socio-emotional proximity of mediated interactions (Küpers, 2015).

The overreliance on digital technology can cause techno-distress on remote workers (Tarafdar *et al.*, 2024). The 'trap of constant connectivity' (Mazmanian, 2013) they experience can make them feel work is invading their personal lives. Remote workers also face the pressure to remain constantly available (Stich, 2020). This digital presenteeism creates risks of a techno-overload of work (Tarafdar *et al.*, 2024), potentially leading to overwork, burnout and poor work-life balance, which often requires managerial intervention. Even though the digital technology they use bears risks of techno-distress, it can also enable techno-eustress through flourishing opportunities to stay connected with colleagues and enrich their work (Tarafdar *et al.*, 2024). This oscillation between techno-distress and techno-eustress reflects the 'connectivity paradox' (Leonardi *et al.*, 2010), in which remote workers use digital technology to simultaneously connect with their colleagues (e.g. through instant messaging) and distance from them (e.g. with 'do not disturb' features). It can further lead to an ambivalent experience of job satisfaction and work intensification (Kelliher and Anderson, 2009).

Despite the risks of techno-distress and their detrimental impacts on mental and physical health as well as on personal time (Stich, 2020), remote work is still considered a highly attractive arrangement (Hamblin, 1995). Thus, employees often willingly embrace remote work and its enabling ubiquitous digital technologies (Mazmanian, 2013). Remote work is even experienced as empowering, resulting in feelings of professionalism, productivity, autonomy and control (Hill *et al.*, 1998). These positive attitudes are further fuelled by the generalised glorification of the 'always-on' work ethic (Matusik and Mickel, 2011). Indeed, the time saved by not commuting is usually reinvested in work, resulting in longer work hours (Hill *et al.*, 1998), although their leisure activities and social relationships are not completely abandoned (Pedersen and Lewis, 2012).

Mobile working

Mobile working is characterised by habitual work from multiple settings or constant movement as part of the job (Messenger and Gschwind, 2016). The mobile office includes locations, such as planes, clients' premises, airports, hotels and cafes, among others. Although employees may be forced to work in these 'third places' that are neither their homes nor their offices, they may also choose to do so to benefit from a change of scenery, social interaction or convenient facilities (Venezia and

Allee, 2007). Recently, the mobile office has extended to holiday locations – a phenomenon studied under the terms ‘workation’ or ‘bleisure’ (Stich *et al.*, 2025). This phenomenon encompasses a blending of work and leisure, generally conceived as a one-off, exceptional, casual and short-term arrangement granted to an employee to extend a holiday stay and that does not involve formal HR policies or legal frameworks (Stich *et al.*, 2025).

However, mobile workers might experience a ‘fixed instability’ or ‘rushing standstill’ of disruptive moves while working in and between ephemeral non-places (Küpers, 2015). In such super-modern ‘non-places’ (Augé, 1995), mobile work is experienced as impersonally flattened, alienating, lonely and uprooted, as these highly functional, anonymous and soulless transitioning milieus do not satisfy important human needs for embodied presence and deeper bonding, eustressful antidotes to techno-distress (Tarafdar *et al.*, 2024).

Recent literature discusses the challenges of adopting mobile working for multinational organisations, especially related to location-based flexibility (Wheatley *et al.*, 2024). Managers need to remain aware of the potential side effects of such flexibility, especially the ‘autonomy–control paradox’ in which employees work more because of their autonomy and feel controlled and constrained as a result (Mazmanian *et al.*, 2013; Putnam *et al.*, 2014). The exploitative nature of flexible work, leading to increased care responsibilities and working hours (Chung, 2022), further contributes to the contested status of the flexible firm (Pollert, 1988).

Digital nomadism

Digital nomadism combines independent, work with a lifestyle based on adventure and travel to different locations (Reichenberger, 2018). Digital nomads are often freelancers dedicated to digital work – e.g. programming, storytelling – who take advantage of relatively lower living costs in other locations (Mancinelli, 2020). They epitomise the ‘always-on’ culture by choosing to work truly anytime and anywhere, in a romanticised, lifestyle-led mobility (Aroles *et al.*, 2022). They seek experiences far from home that can be considered alienating (de Loryn, 2022). This urge to travel blurs the boundaries between work and leisure, where both seem intrinsically motivating and fulfilling in a quest for holistic freedom (Reichenberger, 2018). For digital nomads, digital technology simultaneously serves their emancipatory ideal (as it expands their work choices) and constrains it through the meta-work they have to do through it (e.g. finding a flat to rent) (Aroles *et al.*, 2022), thereby potentially creating ambivalent feelings of techno-distress and techno-eustress.

It is worth noting that the travel digital nomads undertake may involve elements typical of business trips, such as work-related tasks intrinsic to the services they provide. Because digital nomads are generally self-employed, they have to manage their own travels (Aroles *et al.*, 2022), which is time-consuming and may therefore paradoxically lead to a paucity of leisure time (Wajcman, 2008) since cultivating true leisure can be more demanding than work itself (Beatty and Torbert, 2003). Moreover, the need to advertise themselves online across multiple platforms (Gershon, 2024) puts digital nomads in a tension between freedom and

precariousness and pushes them to constantly self-manage boundaries between work and leisure across changing geographies (Aroles *et al.*, 2022). This tension positions digital nomadism in the wider context of a gig economy (Vallas and Kovalainen, 2019).

Table 1 offers a comparative summary of the digitally enabled work arrangements discussed here across different dimensions: employment status, job types, mobility pattern, work delivery, organisational control, working hours, work orientation, work intensification and technological dependence.

Table 1. Dimensions of digitally enabled forms of work

Dimensions	Remote Working	Mobile Working	Digital Nomadism
Employment status	Employed	Employed	Freelancer
Job types	Most office-based, remote-compatible jobs	Remote-compatible and hyperconnected jobs	Full remote jobs
Mobility pattern	Low mobility	Constant move	Permanent global travel
Work delivery	Mostly digital with some onsite engagements	Mostly digital with frequent offsite engagements	Digital
Working hours	Predictable	Predictable	Unpredictable
Work orientation	Collective	Collective	Individual
Work intensification	Work may spill over personal time	Work may spill over personal time	Work may fuse with personal time
Technological dependence	High	High	High

RESEARCH DESIGN

Neither pre-conceived ideas nor pre-existing conceptual frameworks were imposed on the data; the codes and categories emerged inductively, following the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). The inductive nature of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) lends itself to developing an explanatory account of holiwork while allowing an iterative, flexible approach in the analysis. As grounded theory is specifically designed for developing new theories, it is well-suited for studying the emerging holiwork phenomenon.

Data collection

Given the nascent nature of the holiworking arrangement, six professionals were purposefully sampled (Patton, 2015) and interviewed to produce theoretical generalisations as opposed to statistical generalisations (Urquhart, 2023). At the time of data collection, these holiworkers were employed full-time in France and took advantage of the opportunity their employers offered to work abroad for a period ranging between three months and a year in locations that could arguably be

considered holiday destinations. This opportunity emerged from the partnership between their employers and a French company that promotes flexible work arrangements and supports employees willing to work remotely in selected destinations.

Participants provided their voluntary and informed consent to take part in this study, including being interviewed and audio-recorded. In line with established ethical research practices, personal information, including names and affiliations, was replaced with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The participants, all in their twenties, were employed in remote-compatible roles across diverse sectors within various small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Table 2 shows information about the participants and interviews.

Table 2. *Information about the interviewees*

Pseudonyms	Anna	Charles	Julien	Martin	Romane	Rose
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Male	Female	Female
Industry	Services	Education	Technology	Marketing	Services	Services
Nature of work	Marketing	Sales	Consulting	Consulting	Production	Marketing
Seniority (years)	3	1.5	5	2.5	1	1.5
Holiworking location(s)	Mexico	Indonesia, Thailand, Canada	Thailand	South Africa	Mauritius	Mauritius
Trip duration (months)	3	12	6	6	3	3
Co-travel	With partner	Alone	Alone	Alone	With Rose (colleague)	With Romane (colleague)
Interview duration	1h00'	1h29'	55'	1h09'	1h23'	1h50'

The semi-structured interviews were guided by a flexible interview protocol that allowed participants to articulate freely their perceptions, feelings, and everyday practices (Silverman, 2022). The conversational tone encouraged open-ended reflection, enabling participants to narrate their experiences of holiworking and how they managed their job responsibilities and leisure activities without imposing external interpretations, while remaining attuned to the participants' situated perspectives.

All interviews were conducted in French via video conferencing by the lead author, with occasional participation of a research assistant, during March and April 2023. Interviews ranged from 55 to 110 minutes in duration, were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed in full and translated into English by the lead author. This material constitutes the empirical foundation from which the theorisation of

holiworking emerged.

Data analysis

Anchored in the interpretive paradigm, this study adopts a constructivist version of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) to explore the emergent and experientially grounded phenomenon of holiworking. This approach arguably situates holiworkers in a hybrid state of work and holiday, and is particularly suited to this inquiry as it emphasises co-construction of meaning, inductive theorisation, and sensitivity to participants' lived realities – fitting for a phenomenon that is still under-theorised and empirically uncharted.

Data were analysed through a recursive and iterative process involving initial, focused and theoretical codes. In the first phase, initial codes were generated by breaking the data into meaningful units while remaining sensitised to participants' language and meanings. To enhance analytic rigour and mitigate individual bias, the authors independently coded the full dataset before comparing results to produce the initial codes.

Next, through successive rounds of comparative analysis, the initial 71 codes were distilled into a more analytically parsimonious set of 12 focused codes, based on conceptual overlap and relevance to the research questions. Finally, in the theoretical coding stage, the focused codes were grouped into four higher-order categories. These categories offer a coherent analytic framework that forms the theoretical scaffolding for understanding holiwork as a novel and hybrid mode of digitally mediated labour and leisure. Table 3 illustrates the analytic path from empirical narrative to theoretical insight.

Table 3. *Inductive construction of the categories*

Codes	Categories
Scrambling to discover places Contrasting different realities Grasping a desired paradise	Tethered exploratory journey
Coordinating tasks and communications Managing flexibility Reflecting on the experience	Divided rhythms and temporalities
Coping with remote work Longing and connecting with loved ones Developing fleeting relationships and networks of contacts	Enduring and transient sociability
Receiving support and encouragement Retaining a secure job while abroad Keeping a life to return to	Temporary stay and permanent employment

FINDINGS

Tethered exploratory journey

The tethered exploratory journey category symbolises the urge to explore and absorb what their local environments offer within the limits that the temporal stay imposes. Specifically, it refers to how holiworkers actively engage with their temporary environments while consciously navigating the professional constraints they were exposed to, and emphasises a dual focus on discovery and adaptation, balancing the desire for immersive experiences with the practical realities of a defined stay. Three codes shape this category: scrambling to discover places, trying to immerse in the local context and grasping a desired paradise.

Scrambling to discover places encapsulates the efforts of holiworkers to make the most of their limited time to explore and acquire knowledge or learn about their host countries. They repeatedly referred to how fulfilling new encounters are:

“the first thing I wanted to do was to discover Thailand ... the cultures ... the country ... It is gratifying” (Julien); *“the desire to discover the world ... is still pretty important”* (Martin); *“to ... open myself up to the world and make new discoveries every day”* (Anna).

This urge to discover was, however, curbed by the temporary nature of the holiwork stay. For instance, Charles said that *“one year ... goes by very quickly, especially when you discover a lot of things”*, and Julien estimated *“six months to a year [are needed] to discover something else”*. Participants explained how they managed their limited time to explore their new environments. Martin described his habit: *“Monday, Friday at full throttle ... and then the weekend to discover the country”*. Rose explained that *“as soon as we have finished working, we go back out, we discover something, a new place or whatever”*. She added that discovering places created a different routine from the one in France: *“time passes more quickly”*. Because our participants were full-time workers with job responsibilities, they often only had weekends to explore their host countries. As Anna reasoned, *“because we were only there for three months, so we had to make the most of it”*. Therefore, holiworkers were aware that their discovery journey was a restricted venture.

Contrasting different realities reflects our participants' desire to immerse themselves in local contexts while simultaneously endeavouring to uphold familiar standards. Anna wanted to *“meet people with different experiences ... discover the local culture”*, while avoiding *“play[ing] the old French idiot”*. Romane strongly recommended the experience *“to see what happens elsewhere, because you grow so much from an experience abroad”*, while Martin talked about the *“cultural enrichment”* associated with *“meeting people, places, environments, landscapes”*. Immersing in their host countries involved getting a deep understanding of the local context that served as the basis for comparison to what they know about their lives in France. Rose acknowledged that holiworking allowed her *“to understand a new way of life and to take a step back from our own situation”*, while Martin recognised that living in *“an unfamiliar environment”* allowed him to discern *“the socio-cultural differences that exist*

here”.

Holiworkers also observed differences in the material conditions. Martin noted “*a gulf between people who are very rich and people who are very poor ... two completely different worlds living together [in Cape Town]*”. Her experience in Mauritius made Romane realise that “*not everything [she has in France] is taken for granted*” and concluded, “*we are very lucky*”. Rose complemented, “*lucky to be French because of all the advantages and living conditions we have*”. Holiworkers emphasised their interest in meeting, connecting and living with local people. For example, Charles wanted to relate to “*local customs*” and Anna wanted “*to go with an open mind and be willing to immerse [herself] in the local habits and customs*” and even “*to participate in the local economy and ... to learn the local codes*”. Martin hoped his interactions with locals were “*not a one-way street*”. At the same time, despite holiworkers’ desire to be immersed in their host environments, the status of their immersion remained elusive and limited as they were aware that, in a way similar to travellers, they were just “*passing through*”, as Charles and Martin stated.

Grasping a desired paradise refers to the pursuit of an idealised destination that elicits a profound sense of wonder among holiworkers. However, this quest simultaneously demystifies and unveils the realities of their holiday working environments, challenging preconceived notions and uncovering the true nature of these locations. Charles was “*working in paradise*”, Julien “*live[d] on a paradise island*”, and Romane described Mauritius as “*the honeymoon destination par excellence*”. Anna portrayed Mexico as “*a corner of paradise, with landscapes just as different as the others ... [a] postcard-worthy scenery ... something crazy to be able to see that every day*” and recognised that “*even after three months, [I am] still amazed*”. Rose also described her location as “*a postcard setting*”, while Romane felt lucky “*to hear the birds all the time and to see the sun*”.

However, the paradise captivation tended to fade away as they got to know their host countries better. Rose related that despite being “*in a very beautiful site ... you look on the ground, it is full of rubbish*”. Julien reflected that “*photos on Instagram [can be misleading because] when you go there in periods that are maybe less touristic ... you see very dirty beaches*”. Despite Romane’s fascination with the Mauritius landscape, she was “*enormously [shocked to see] a lot of rubbish*”. Besides her disenchantment with the untidy condition of her host country, she expressed her disappointment with the socioeconomic reality she encountered: “*[Mauritians] are very separate from each other ... It does not really correspond to my values.*” Thus, part of the discovery journey involved the ambivalent realisation that paradise was fragile and could be illusionary.

Divided rhythms and temporalities

The category of divided rhythms and temporalities encompasses how holiworkers negotiated, navigated and reconciled their professional obligations and leisure activities as they attempted to blend in with and integrate into local cultures and communities. Three codes contribute to this category: coordinating tasks and communications, managing flexibility and reflecting on the experiences.

Coordinating tasks and communications entails managing the possibilities and challenges of remote work by establishing new work routines. Charles reflected, *“It is complicated to be a salesman because you always have to be ‘on-site’ ... We have missions and we have to fulfil them”*. Similarly, Julien explained, *“We are always in contact with customers, so we have to adapt to their schedules”*. This condition weighed heavily on the selection of the destination, as Rose explained, *“We had the choice between Cape Verde, South Africa and Mauritius, which did not have much of a time difference [with France]”*. Romane elucidated how she chose her destination, *“I did several simulations ... particularly for Bali ... I realised that the time difference was not feasible”*. Martin chose South Africa *“because I had to be in a reasonable time zone, not too far away from my clients”*. Julien decided on *“Thailand because there is a five-to-six-hour time difference with France, and that did not stop us from being able to work every day and always be available for our clients”*.

Holiworkers endeavoured to make themselves available to their colleagues and clients in France despite their different schedules, as Romane illustrated, *“I told them, ‘Do not hesitate to contact me on WhatsApp. I am reachable’”*. However, she acknowledged the challenges of remote coordination for an extended period:

“The three-month package is ideal and allows you to have a little break from your routine in France without turning everything upside down ... leaving for a year requires a lot of organisation beforehand”.

These quotes demonstrate how holiworkers harmonise business affairs and leisure activities, ostensibly conflicting occurrences.

Managing flexibility is about how holiworkers handled the high degree of autonomy they enjoyed while meeting their work duties. Charles described his leisure-work routine in Thailand: *“In the morning, I go surfing [while] people are asleep in France ... I get back to the PC [around 11:00] ... I get into work mode ... They know my slots ... I know theirs”*. *“My schedule is very flexible”*, he added. Julien took *“the whole morning to do what we want”* before starting work. Moreover, when he wanted to explore Thailand, *“I take ... my computer. I go where I want and sit in a bar or a co-working space”*. This statement revealed how Julien took work with him wherever he went. Anna went scuba diving in the afternoons in Mexico and highlighted how the flexibility of holiworking allowed her to leave the routine she had in France behind and still fulfil her obligations:

“I wanted a quality of life that was a bit better than the ‘commute-work-sleep’ routine ... The time difference was not a hindrance ... It was more of a strength because ... I had a time slot in common with the French team and a time slot for myself.”

Romane finished work at 16:30, which allowed her *“to do a lot more things after work ... that we would not necessarily do in France”*. Yet, the impossibility of changing employment, the full-time employment situation and work-imposed deadlines set the boundaries of holiworkers’ flexibility.

Reflecting on the experience refers to how holiworkers understood and made sense

of their holiday and work state. Romane said that despite her work duties, she perceived *“a bit of a holiday because ... it is still a sense of wonder”*. Julien felt *“relaxed, like when we are on holiday”*. As Rose reasoned, *“If I think of holidays, I think mainly of hiking and cocktails, if I have to give two words. Well, here I can have both”*. Holiworkers' European salaries also allowed them to enjoy some pleasures in their host countries that would be unaffordable in France, such as eating *“every day at the [local] restaurant for nearly six, seven months now, whether it is morning, noon or evening”* like Charles, who feels he lives like a *“king of oil [because] the cost of living in Asia is not expensive”*.

Yet, the feeling of holiday was not complete. In Martin's opinion, *“a holiday is a defined period in the year or leave and rest, of total and disconnected rest completely detached from your work ... I get holidays when I take time off here”*. As such, holiworkers used their holiday entitlement during their holiworking time. For instance, Anna reflected on the week she took off, *“You really feel like you are on holiday ... forget about everything else and enjoy it more than when you have to work in the morning”*. Still, holiworking retained the characteristics of conventional work. Martin pondered, *“In the landscape of the professional world ... I realise that [holiworking] is very classic in the end”*. Also, holiworkers seemed conflicted in their identities as travellers and did not want to be perceived as tourists. Rose argued, *“I am not a tourist; I am a resident!”* Anna and her boyfriend were concerned about *“not being considered as locals taken for tourists”* who locals try to rip off with inflated prices. Holiworkers are in the equivocal situation between holidaymakers and residents, confirming again the ambivalence of their experiences.

Enduring and transient sociability

The enduring and transient connections category characterises how holiworkers managed their professional and affective links with colleagues and loved ones, respectively and simultaneously related to new, fleeting acquaintances. Three codes shape this category: coping with remote work, longing and connecting with loved ones, and developing fleeting relationships and networks of contacts.

Coping with remote work refers to holiworkers' recognition of the limitations remote work imposed on collegial interaction and how they tried to overcome them. Romane alluded to the *“little contact with the team in France”* and reflected on the communication challenges with the team, *“I do not necessarily get any feedback from them. So that side of things is complicated to manage”*. To compensate for these issues and maintain fluid communication with her team, she organised *“video cafés, once a week, where we discuss things other than work”*.

Martin said, *“I miss being in the office ... just turning around and saying, ‘I am not sure about something’ and I will ask”*. He used technology *“via Hangout”* to be *“closer”* to the team but admitted, *“it is a lot less human”*; he misses *“having lunch with [his] colleagues, chatting, all the informal stuff”*. He admitted he did *“not like 100% teleworking”* and felt relieved that *“it is for a definite period”*. Anna also *“felt a little less involved ...when we are face-to-face, we exchange ideas much more easily than when we have two hours of video with the team”*. She longed for the *“coffee breaks or lunch breaks,*

where you can get away from work, and you can talk about things that are not work-related". Still, they all decided to holiwork, aware of the implicit challenges of the remote work package.

Longing and connecting with loved ones refers to how holiworkers experienced and dealt with the temporary separation from their family and friends. Anna recognised "separation from loved ones" as a challenge and elaborated "especially after a couple of months, when you start to miss the people around you", while recognising that the frequent communication during her time overseas was strengthening the connections – i.e. "we are perhaps a bit closer [now than before]". Martin expressed that a reason to return home soon was "my family, my friends whom I miss". Romane stated that "at some point, I also need to be with my family and friends". They visited her and were "always very present, always calling". These seemed to be sacrifices inherent to holiwork.

Interestingly, holiworkers also saw this separation as an opportunity to gain autonomy. Martin enjoyed "being more independent ... being on your own". Charles was also "valuing and taking advantage of [his] freedom". Relatedly, this positive experience of having a "personal space" emphasised self-relationship, for instance through travelling alone or being with oneself, which according to Rose "really makes you think about your situation and allows you to put things into perspective". Similarly, Martin recognised that holiwork "allows taking a step back". Thus, holiworkers described the experience of missing connections with family and friends after some time, but also appreciated the separation as an opportunity to gain autonomy.

Developing fleeting relationships and networks of contacts describes how holiworkers, due to the nature of their brief and transient stay, only establish ephemeral and short-lived connections with people they meet during their sojourns. These fleeting interactions are sporadically interspersed with efforts to forge more enduring friendships, highlighting the duality of their social integration processes.

Julien said that he moved to Thailand, he expected to "make friends ... [but] it is difficult because each time we meet people, well, they are on holiday, so we create links with them, but after two, three weeks they leave. So I find myself a bit alone". He elaborated: "Ko Samui is very touristic. People come, they visit, they leave either to visit another part of Thailand or to go back home". Indeed, holiworkers had few opportunities to build strong and long-lasting relationships. Charles recalled how he felt out of place at a network event for French entrepreneurs in Bali, "I met people who were digital nomads, people who were setting up or had a business ... Well, I did not have a company, I am not an entrepreneur ... I am a salaried employee". Martin felt "unpleasantly surprised" about how superficial the relationships remain even with locals, who are "biased because I might be [perceived as] a tourist".

Despite the frustration of not being able to build new lasting friendships, holiworkers derived satisfaction from meeting new people. Anna valued the casual exchanges with French people because "they give you their experience and that makes you mature; they give you ideas". As Romane explained, "It is always enriching to get to know people, even if you never see them again".

Temporary stay and permanent employment

The temporary stay and permanent employment category represents the sense of continuity with and commitment towards the employer that allows employees to holiwork without affecting their entitlements. Three codes shape this category: receiving support and encouragement, retaining a secure job while abroad, and keeping a life to return to.

Receiving support and encouragement represents how holiworkers were supported by their employers before and during their stay, and demonstrated loyalty to the company that offered them this opportunity. Holiworkers acknowledged their fortunate situation – e.g. *“How lucky I am ... not to have had a professional break between this intercultural experience and my work”* (Martin), *“I was lucky enough to find the company that could help me reconcile these two projects”* (Anna) – and recognised their employers’ progressive approach towards innovative employment arrangements. Julien considered his employer *“quite open to new things ... always listening and trying to put the employees in a better position”*. Romane appreciated her *“CEO’s desire to see his employees fulfilled”* and her colleague Rose added, *“we are really lucky to have him ... he is open”*. Charles praised his manager *“because she ... allowed me to realise one of my dreams ... she could have just put a new job offer on LinkedIn and ‘Ciao, bye Charles’ ... she was very kind to accompany me on the project”*.

The encouragement by employers to take up on the holiworking opportunity did not soften participants’ awareness of the hierarchical work relationship. Anna said, *“there is still an employer involved, and you are still dependent on that employer”*. Moreover, holiworkers recognised that job obligations take precedence; once at their destinations, they swiftly organise their lives around work. Rose reasoned, *“You quickly get into a new routine”*. Martin’s experience corroborated how work activities were prioritised:

“I arrived on the 2nd of February; I was on leave until the 6th of February. I had a few days to settle in, get to know the city, discover the space and the path that would become my daily route to co-working.”

Indeed, co-working spaces were the preferred location for holiworkers, although they occasionally worked from home.

Retaining a secure job while abroad refers to the challenges of working in an unfamiliar environment while enjoying job security. Charles reasoned, *“I am on a permanent contract, so I benefit from the mutual insurance and things like that”*. He recalled the advice he received, *“If things do not work out ... we do not want you to be unhappy. You can come back whenever you want”*. Julien shared a similar view:

“I know people who have left their job to travel ... After a while, they do not have any more money ... They take the first job they find, whereas here you have the possibility of going to another country while keeping your job.”

Indeed, job security made the holiworking arrangement particularly attractive. Martin asserted, *“the holiworking adventure was very well defined and very secure ... a*

reassuring format ... I am still in my job". He reflected that "I am not 20 anymore ... [to] tak[e] the risk of leaving for two months and not finding a job in another country". Romane corroborated, "being able to travel while keeping my job, it is quite incredible ... to be able to keep a link with France and not to leave everything behind. It is still comfortable!" She was determined to continue her professional endeavours in France. Charles "wanted to travel, but with a little safety mattress", which was his job security and salary. He reassured, "I know very well that I am going to go back". Anna emphasised the job security aspect: "The holiworking experience ... is about being able to travel while continuing your job ... I really just loved the fact that I could keep my job". However, she recognised there was a price to be paid when she compared holiworkers against digital nomads:

"We are perhaps a little less free to move around as they do, wherever they want, whenever they want ... If they want to work for three hours and surf for three hours ... no problem at all ... They can come when they want and leave when they want."

Keeping a life to return to refers to the safe feeling that the holiworking experience was temporary and that there was a home to return to afterwards. For some holiworkers, travel was hindered by their attachment to home, but the temporary nature of the stay and the possibility to return made it amenable. Martin wondered, "Am I going to be able to go away for that long?" Romane, who was very close to her grandmother, reflected, "She is not eternal unfortunately. So, by leaving for longer, I tell myself that there is a potential risk of her dying one day".

Nevertheless, everyone considered that the opportunity to travel was to be seized. For instance, Rose wanted to escape a difficult personal situation and expressed the "need to leave now", while Romane felt, "I needed to get out of this city, which was suffocating me a little bit ... but I do not want to leave my job". Holiworking thus represented an opportunity to take "a little break from your routine in France without turning everything upside down", stated Romane, who was subletting her flat during her stay so that "when I come back, I have the flat, I have a roof over my head". Charles was also reassured by the safety of being able to return home: "I can go back whenever I want. Who is going to stop me from going back in fact?" Holiworkers enjoyed their time abroad, but also looked forward to their return home: "I am enjoying being here. But I will still be happy to go back to France in August and get back to that life", expressed Martin. Romane also wanted "to move forward in France, to build other projects in France" once she returned. Julien concluded, "I know that when I go back to France, everything will be the way it was before, except that I will have memories in my head". Unless holiworking created a desire to travel more, as was the case for Rose, "coming back to France in a month and a half, it twists my guts when I think about it, I do not want to go back at all ... this way of life suits me perfectly".

DISCUSSION

Overall, holiworkers experienced multiple ambivalences during their stay. This was manifested by the simultaneous presence of contradictory feelings or states during

their holiwork experience. The concurrent presence of challenging situations and enjoyable experiences illustrates how holiworkers strive to make sense of their situation. The ambivalent experiences reveal that their given situatedness holds personal and interpersonal significance, which is not only pleasant or unpleasant. The simultaneity of various ambivalences refers to situations characterised by mixed feelings, attitudes and responses, often related to the transient nature of their stay and its assessment.

Therefore, holiworkers navigate in a liminal sphere, occupying a transitional state between their fixed employment and the relative freedom of living playfully. They straddle the boundaries of work and leisure, constantly negotiating the balance between work demands and leisure activities. The paradisiac settings they temporarily inhabit heightens their liminal experience. The juxtaposition of working in an idyllic location creates a sense of in-betweenness, where the holiworkers are neither fully immersed in the vacation experience nor fully engaged in their work.

Unlike traditional secondments that are often part of career-driven and expertise-based mobility programs related to foreign operations (Kraimer *et al.*, 2016), holiwork is not about being abroad for career or task purposes. Holiwork is distinguished by its hybrid model: it is neither traditional expatriation nor a 'jolly'. It is a structured, supported and accessible way for employees to maintain their regular work responsibilities while living abroad and engaging deeply with local cultures. This combination of professional continuity and cultural immersion distinguishes holiwork from other digitally enabled forms of work.

Towards a theory of holiwork

The emergent, substantive theory of holiwork derived from this grounded theory study is formulated in the following terms:

Holiworking embodies a fundamental ambivalence. On the one hand, holiworkers benefit from digitally enabled flexibility, mobility, and communication technologies that allow them to perform professional tasks from locations typically associated with leisure and relaxation. On the other hand, they face and contend with the complex challenge of balancing the pleasures of a holiday with the demands of full-time employment. This dual condition and equivocal situation require holiworkers to negotiate the tensions between leisurely pursuits and occupational responsibilities. Simultaneously, they must navigate the complexities of building new connections in unfamiliar locales while preserving both personal and professional relationships back home.

The theory of holiwork put forward here needs to be related to existing theories – i.e. 'theoretical integration' (Urquhart, 2023). Integrating the four inductively derived categories developed in the previous section into the extant literature offers an advantageous frame of reference to discuss the ambivalence of holiwork and explore its theoretical implications.

Firstly, holiworkers seem to be on a tethered exploratory journey, discovering places envisioned as paradisiacal while working (Reichenberger, 2018), and trying to

establish new relationships while maintaining existing ones (de Loryn, 2022). This finding is connected to the literature on expatriates' experiences, which also involves cultural discoveries, as individuals seek exciting adventures to enrich their social and inner lives (Demel and Mayrhofer, 2010; Selmer *et al.*, 2021; Shaffer *et al.*, 2012). Digital nomads also embark on such lifestyle-led mobility based on adventure, travel and leisure to escape a monotonous life (de Loryn, 2022; Reichenberger, 2018). However, holiworkers exhibit a compressed agency in decision-making to optimise limited time, such as prioritising high-impact experiences over passive observation. The journey thus remains psychologically 'tethered' to the impermanence of the stay, shaping how participants frame their experiences. Overall, this journey reflects the influence of temporal constraints on how individuals negotiate belonging, identity and meaning in transient environments.

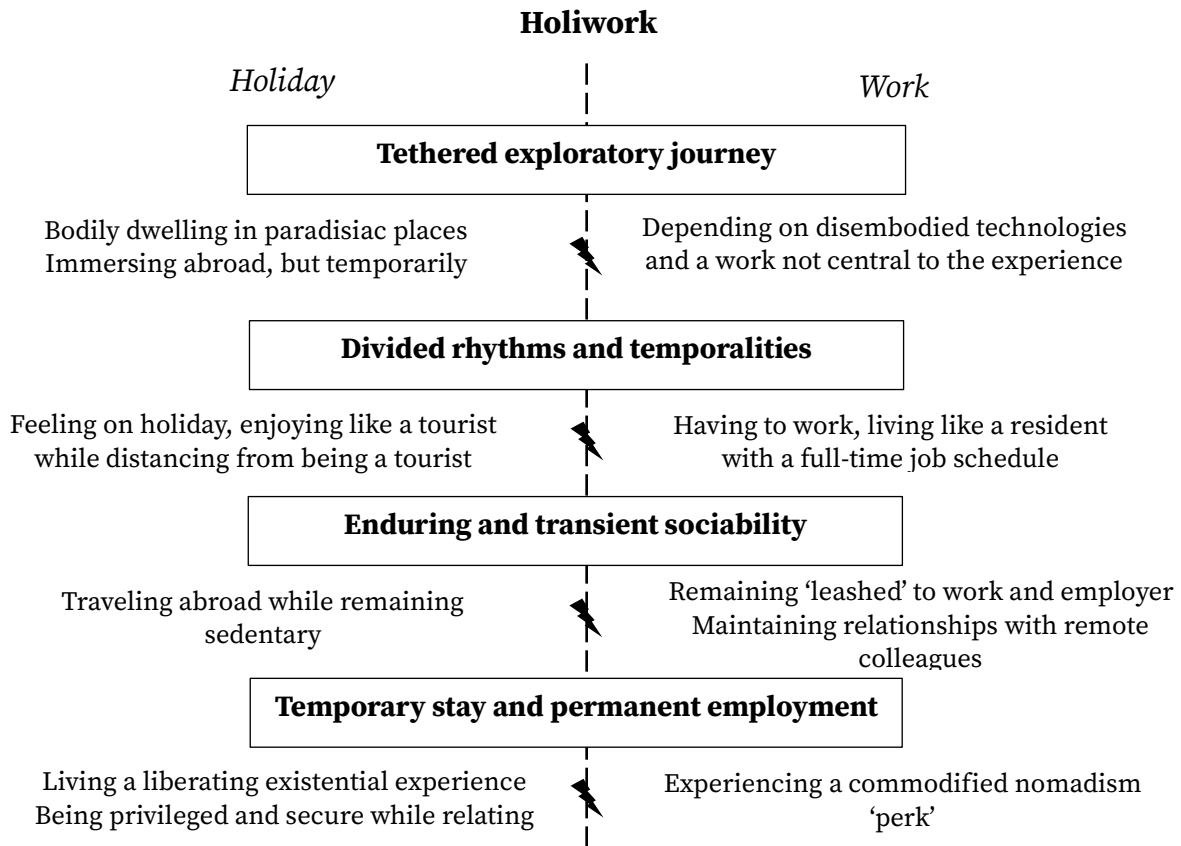
Secondly, holiworkers experience a unique fragmentation of temporal rhythms as the full-time nature of their roles requires extensive coordination and restricts their autonomy. This finding resonates with the difficulty of disentangling work time from leisure in digitally mediated contexts (Pedersen and Lewis, 2012; Stich, 2020). The ambivalence holiworkers face resembles the digital paradoxes mentioned in literature (Leonardi *et al.*, 2010; Mazmanian *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, holiworkers had to deal with the additional strain of time zone mismatches and the potentially distracting nature of leisure-oriented surroundings.

Thirdly, holiworkers report positive affective responses when establishing new relationships, yet these were often accompanied by negative ones, like feelings of disconnection due to the transient, ephemeral and superficial nature of such relationships. This results in a blend of loneliness, fear of missing out, social isolation, alongside excitement, discovery, autonomy and personal space away from home. The literature on remote workers indicates that they are also troubled by an ambivalence between isolation and connection (Leonardi *et al.*, 2010), partly due to their disembodied and sometimes ephemeral offices that increase physical distance while enabling virtual copresence (Diaz *et al.*, 2012; Küpers, 2015). In the case of holiwork, this ambivalence seems to be strengthened by the rich yet casual physical social encounters they make abroad and that are in stark contrast with the virtual connections they struggle to maintain.

Fourthly, holiworkers benefit from the nature of their temporary stay abroad as part of a permanent employment contract that enables more discoveries while generating specific demands and reciprocities from their employers and maintaining embeddedness in their home countries. This finding is unique to holiworkers, as it is neither directly connected to digital nomads (who may travel for years), nor to expatriates (who do not intend to return home), nor to remote workers (who do not travel at all). However, the expatriation literature recognises how weak roots in their home countries 'push' expatriates abroad (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010). In contrast, holiworkers seem to remain embedded in both their jobs and home communities while temporarily abroad. The findings thus highlight the complex nature of the holiworker's lifestyle. While it offers unparalleled opportunities for personal growth and work-life integration, it also presents unique

challenges that require careful navigation and a willingness to embrace the inherent contradictions. Figure 1 below depicts the overarching patterns of tension and ambivalence in holiwork.

Figure 1. *Overarching patterns of tensions and ambivalences in holiwork*



Opportunities for further research

Further research can complement the results of this study, while taking into account the limitations of this study. A potentially fruitful research avenue would be the investigation of digitally mediated disciplining practices that holiworkers develop to manage boundaries between work and leisure (Aroles *et al.*, 2022). Such practices may also be embedded in organisational processes through HR policies, and be related to outcomes such as work engagement, organisational identification, withdrawal intentions or self-rated job performance (Laaser and Karlsson, 2022).

The impact of holiwork on tasks performed during the stay also deserves further investigation. Further research could also be conducted about personal and professional identities, as the unique status holiwork offers represents a line of identity performance that refers to actions related to the blending of work and social life with its specific frictions. Since this research covered only the holiwork period, longitudinal research could reveal how the holiworking experience develops over

time, and especially once holiworkers have returned to their home countries. Empirical studies could investigate the temporal nature and boundaries of holiwork compared to digital nomadism within the overall acceleration of *time and life in digital capitalism* (Wajcman, 2008) and *the altered nature of employment* (Vallas and Kovalainen, 2019). In addition, further research could be done on the technologies that digitally enframe, shape and format the relationships, time and space of holiworkers (Howard and Küpers, 2017) or that generate new forms of techno-distress and techno-eustress for them (Tarafdar *et al.*, 2024).

Our findings, derived from a relatively homogeneous sample, may not have shown the same manifestations of the holiworking phenomenon if participants were from diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, further research may explore this arrangement in other cultural contexts, while considering their legal and tax complexities.

Conclusion

Emerging from the discontent of millennials disillusioned with their work experiences, employees have sought novel configurations of work that meet their desired lifestyle. In this context, holiwork constitutes a novel modality for relating and reconciling personal pursuits and work commitments, alleviating certain ambivalences by supporting global travel underpinned by stable employment and secure income, albeit presenting other dilemmas. Holiwork enables the members of a certain mobile vanguard to navigate their professional and personal lives in a dynamic interplay between settlement and movement, proximity and distance, and immediate involvement and co-presence. Consequently, they oscillate between different states of being: nomadic displacement and settled relocation, thereby transforming traditional boundaries and perceptions of work and life into 'mobile lives' (Elliott and Urry, 2010) that are 'inter-placed' (Howard and Küpers, 2017). Thus, it allows them to truly work from *any-where*, while continuing to be connected to *some-where*, thus not getting lost in *no-where*.

The findings of this study show that it is essential for holiworkers to adopt strategies to manage the ambivalent experiences and liminal states inherent in their work-leisure lifestyle. Such strategies include establishing clear temporal and spatial boundaries between work and leisure or maintaining effective communication with colleagues and managers about work-leisure balance. Engaging with the local community also fosters a sense of belonging and strengthen connections to the location. These measures promote a balance between work and leisure, enabling holiworkers to thrive in the paradisaical environments they inhabit temporarily, enhance their well-being and become well (Küpers, 2005). Employers should also be wary of the risks of fragmenting the workforce through holiworking. Individualised work arrangements feed the emergence of new inequalities in the labour market between those who can work remotely and those who cannot. The latter may not be 'holiwork-able', calling for new regulations and policy frameworks.

Even though holiwork is not a widespread practice yet (Caulier, 2022), it has the potential to become one since it simultaneously enables employees to discover the world and continue working, while giving their employers a secure legal framework,

abiding by labour and tax regulations (Vallas and Kovalainen, 2019). This potential is of particular appeal to young professionals and to those with previous international experiences or favorable attitudes towards such experiences (Stich *et al.*, 2025). It is, however, bound to a minority of remote-compatible jobs, probably fated to be offered to only a select few highly performing employees, and currently thwarted by the post-Covid corporate resistance to remote work (Wheatley *et al.*, 2024). As an innovative and appealing work arrangement that caters to the evolving needs of the modern workforce, holiwork reflects significant societal and organisational changes and transitions based on the ubiquity of mobility and advancing technology, contextualised by globalisation and individualisation trends. Hence, it warrants rigorous attention and examination from organisational practice and scholarly research to understand its extensive impact on the everyday professional lives of individuals and its far-reaching implications.

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