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# An organisational cultivation of digital resignation?

*Enterprise social media, privacy, and autonomy*

Christoffer Bagger

Department of Communication, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

## Abstract

Enterprise social media (ESM) have largely gone ignored in discussions of the datafication practices of social media platforms. This article presents an initial step towards filling this research gap. My research question in this article regards how employees of companies using the ESM Workplace from Facebook feel that the implementation of this particular platform relates to their potential struggles for digital privacy and work–life segmentation. Methodologically, I explore this through a qualitative interview study of 21 Danish knowledge workers in different organisations using the ESM. The central analytical proposal of the article is that the interviewees express a “digital resignation” towards the implementation of the ESM. In contrast to previous discussions, this resignation cannot only be thought of as “corporately cultivated” by third parties, but must also be considered as “organisationally cultivated” by the organisations people work for. The study suggests that datafication-oriented media studies should consider organisational contexts.

**Keywords:** datafication, enterprise social media, privacy paradox, autonomy paradox, Workplace from Facebook

## Introduction

Today’s professionals are caught in the middle of at least two significant struggles related to the ubiquity of digital communication technologies in everyday life. The first of these struggles, which I here term the struggle for work–life segmentation, has been characterised by an “autonomy paradox”, where the ostensible flexibility offered by digital, mobile communication technologies leads to professionals finding it much harder to “get away” from work (Mazmanian et al., 2013). The second struggle – the struggle for digital privacy – has been characterised by a “privacy paradox” (Kokolakis, 2017), where individuals may express concerns with keeping their own personal data safe from unwanted intrusions but take very few concrete steps towards protecting themselves.

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In this article, I present an empirical study of how these two paradoxes overlap in the domain of working life with the implementation of a particular type of communications technology: Enterprise social media (ESM) (Leonardi et al., 2013). The central research question of this article is in what way, if at all, individuals view the implementation of an ESM as something which they are resistant to, with reference to the struggles for work–life balance and digital privacy. Specifically, I study users of the software Workplace from Facebook. This focus was chosen as Facebook has become an exemplifier of negative datafication practices, and thus acts as a threat to digital privacy (see Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013; Zuboff, 2019). At the same time, the platform has been associated with a potential for “context collapse”, which may challenge work–life segmentation (Vitak, 2012). However, this specific branch of their products has thus far not been mentioned by any of the significant works criticising them as a platform and as a company (e.g., Vaidhyanathan, 2018; Zuboff, 2019). Workplace thus acts as a strategic focus point for studying perceptions of datafication via social media in the context of work.

I interrogate this through a qualitative interview study of 21 Danish knowledge workers. This category of workers was sampled as the existing research suggests that they clearly experience the struggles with digital privacy and work–life balance. I draw on the explanation of the widely felt “digital resignation” (Draper & Turow, 2019) as an explanation for people’s attitudes towards potential datafication practices by corporations. As I will argue, the organisations (corporate or otherwise) my interviewees are a part of, are seen both as a potential buffer to which individual employees’ concerns of digital privacy can be outsourced, and as a source of potential threat towards digital privacy and autonomy in their own right. Hence, I therefore propose that digital resignation should not only be considered as “corporately cultivated”, but also “organisationally cultivated”. As both organisations (Bromley & Meyer, 2015; Perrow, 1991) and social media (Lomborg, 2014) are a pervasive part of everyday life, I suggest this as a consideration for the future study of the efforts for work–life segmentation and digital privacy.

## **The struggles for digital privacy and work–life segmentation**

An often unspoken, if necessary, competency in the contemporary job market is the management of boundaries between work and personal life (Banghart et al., 2018; van Zoonen et al., 2016). The increased pervasiveness of digital media in both the personal and professional realm has been linked to an increasing integration of these two domains (Villadsen, 2017; Wajcman, 2015). This is especially true for what we might term “knowledge workers”, who are characterised by a reliance on information and communication technologies in everyday life (Gregg, 2011). It should of course be noted that the ability to segment off personal life from other arenas is generally seen as a central part of living a good life for *all* types of workers (Wajcman, 2015; Zuboff, 2019).

While digital communications media may be said to aid in enacting constant connectivity (Mazmanian et al., 2013), they also aid in processes of datafication (Breiter & Hepp, 2018). In these processes, many parts of social life are rendered into digital traces (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013). Broadly speaking, this may pose a threat to digital privacy, as this process can be said to grant new insights but also “makes it possible to keep track of people and regulate behaviour in new and problematic ways”

(Flyverbom, 2019: 6). In terms of scope, it is “almost impossible to perform most daily activities without revealing personal information and providing fodder for data brokers and big data organisations, whether they are private or public” (Mai, 2016: 193). This is especially relevant in the realm of communications and social media in particular, as, for instance, Jensen and Helles (2017) point out, with reference to the fact that humans “cannot *not* communicate [emphasis original]” (Watzlawick et al., 1967: 49). This, in turn, can become the subject of processes of predictive analytics that can have far-reaching consequences for an individual’s life (e.g., Zuboff, 2019).

### **Response and resistance: A pair of paradoxes**

For the purposes of this article, the struggles pertaining to work–life segmentation and digital privacy share an implicit wish to keep the domain of the personal bounded off from the professional. Previous research clarifying the two paradoxes have, in the general responses to the ubiquity of both, domain-integrating communications technologies and datafication practices, respectively. Both paradoxes highlight how individuals often act contradictory to their own expressed wishes as it pertains to both of these boundary creations.

When workers are given a great deal of professional freedom in the choice of their location, timing, and performance of work via digital technologies, they often end up “enacting a norm of continual connectivity and accessibility” (Mazmanian et al., 2013: 1). This is the so-called autonomy paradox where, contrary to potential expectations, the same knowledge workers do not necessarily conceive of this as something which makes them feel frustrated or trapped (Mazmanian et al., 2013). This performance of connectivity has also been conceptualised as a “cynical practice” (Villadsen, 2017) that individuals accept because they see it as advantageous.

The “privacy paradox” describes how, even though people express a great deal of concern with the increased datafication of their everyday lives, they take very few concrete and measurable steps in counteracting their own datafication (Kokolakis, 2017). In general, explanations for this have either tacitly or explicitly leaned on personal responsibility, thus individualising the struggle. This has historical origins, as the basic approach to privacy protection has, since the 1970s, mainly featured discussions of (lack of) two-party informed consent for information exchange (Solove, 2013). Many recent explanations for the privacy paradox have thus either highlighted a model of rational exchange or one of ignorance. In other words, in these studies, people are either engaged in rational exchange of their information or they are unaware that they are engaged in any exchange at all (see, e.g., Hoofnagle & Urban, 2014; Park, 2013). The explanation of rational exchange is not supported by the empirical findings that – for instance – privacy policies are some of the least-read documents in the world, according to recent scholarship (Obar & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2020). On the other hand, while the full extent and complexity of the “exchange” of data is likely poorly understood by the end user, this does not mean that users are fully unaware of the exchange. This has led to the emergence of a third explanatory model, as I discuss below: digital resignation (Draper & Turow, 2019; Hargittai & Marwick, 2016). This model serves as the theoretical grounding of this article.

## Digital resignation

In contrast to the two models discussed above, the most recent line of explanations for the privacy paradox has suggested that the end users have ultimately “resigned” to their datafication (Draper & Turow, 2019; Hargittai & Marwick, 2016). In the framework of digital resignation, the end users are dissatisfied with the pervasive monitoring in contemporary digital spaces, but also convinced of its inescapability (Draper & Turow, 2019). The feelings of resignation reported by many users originate with this perception of the inevitability of privacy violations (Hargittai & Marwick, 2016). However, Draper and Turow (2019) stress that this does *not* indicate a complete abdication of self-protecting behaviour. Draper and Turow have also demonstrated how this digital resignation is “corporately cultivated”. This means that the practices of opacity and obfuscation on the part of corporations are ultimately there to engender resignation in their end users. Despite the recently increased interest in the phenomenon of digital resignation, there seems to be little research on the phenomenon in a professional or organisational context. This article acts as an initial effort towards filling this research gap.

In this article, I proceed from an understanding of digital resignation as – at least in part – a discursive strategy for reflecting on one’s own practices with digital media. This resignation can then be uncovered in reflection (elicited here via qualitative interviews) in which practices are both recounted and reflected upon. All of this was further elicited by homing in on their experiences with – and reflections about their usage of – the ESM Workplace from Facebook.

## Workplace from Facebook

Specific technologies may functionally “disappear” in the study of organisational life, both by virtue of being taken for granted and by virtue of being too complex to understand (Zammuto et al., 2007). For the reasons explained below, I expected this would not be the case with Workplace. As a rule, enterprise social media are digital platforms which have many of the same affordances as “public” social media platforms but are defined by being internal to a particular organisation (Leonardi et al., 2013). They are platforms characterised by the “many-to-many” communication that is associated with social media in general, as opposed to the usual understanding of intranet platforms as one-to-many, top-down communication in an organisational context (Heide, 2015). In other words, most ESM platforms “mimic in look, feel, and functionality popular social networking sites such as Facebook” (Leonardi et al., 2013: 2).

Facebook, evidently tired of being mimicked, launched their own ESM in 2016, Workplace from Facebook (formerly Facebook at Work and Workplace by Facebook). From a user’s perspective, Workplace functions much in the same way as the public Facebook platform, and it is accessible through mobile apps or web browsers. Users have individual profile pages in their own name, which they may edit and from which they can broadcast information and post updates. This information may then appear in the scrollable newsfeeds of other users. For more specialised information and communication, there are “groups” which can be joined, as well as one-to-one messaging in chat. The most significant deviation from the public platform is that all members of a given organisation are “connected” by default, and they can proceed to message, tag, or otherwise interact with one another without further technical barriers.

Datafication is a foundational aspect of the regular Facebook platform itself, and its parent company is a well-debated example in this regard (e.g., Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013; Zuboff, 2019). Facebook is also a highly criticised object both as a company and as a technology (see Karppi, 2018; Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Vaidhyanathan, 2018). Its enterprise counterpart thus acts as a strategically chosen object on the background of which the resistance (or lack thereof) to ESM as datafication technologies may be explored. This particular platform thus represents a key flashpoint where the two struggles (for digital privacy and work–life segmentation) intersect. The regular Facebook platform is an exemplar of well-known genres of communication in the everyday lives of millions of people (see Lomborg, 2014) which has now migrated into the domain of work. The regular Facebook platform is widely adopted in Denmark (Danmarks Statistik, 2020). For my interviewees, Workplace thus represents an example of “personal” communication venturing into the “professional” domain, and thus a potential additional threat to the ability to segment off the personal from the professional. This allowed my respondents to very clearly articulate how they believe the ESM platform does and does not differ from the personal platform and ultimately discuss how they feel it plays a different role – if any – in their lives. The unit of analysis is thus how they experienced this platform in their everyday lives, accessed by way of qualitative interviews.

## Data collection

### *Sampling and recruitment*

The motivation for the sampling was seeking a relative homogeneity in the interviewees as relatively young “knowledge workers” with some tertiary education behind them, while seeking a maximum variance in terms of what *kinds* of organisations they worked at. This was in order to reduce the potential “bias” sampling within a single organisation or a single industry. The aim was to uncover the experiences of knowledge workers using Workplace without emphasising a particular organisational setting.

As this was a relatively “rare” population, the recruitment strategy was mainly reliant on a network sampling (see Bryman, 2012; Lee, 2008). The organisations using Workplace varied in terms of size (ranging from 20 to 11,000 employees), and industry (including nongovernmental organisations, fitness, construction, communications, publishing, and medical technology). Potential organisations from which to recruit were identified via publicly available materials mentioning their use of Workplace. An initial respondent from each organisation was then recruited through my extended network (if possible) and, failing this, through contacting employees via official communications channels. After a completed interview, the initial respondent in a given organisation would then help solicit up to two more participants from the same organisation, though this was not always achieved.

Twenty-one interviewees, 14 male and 7 female, were recruited from eleven different organisations. Geographically, all but three worked in the capital region of Denmark. Their ages ranged from 26 to 36, with most being 30 or younger. Their status as knowledge workers meant they belonged to a category which is often at the forefront of feeling how communications technologies reshape the boundaries of working life (Gregg, 2011). Their relative youth meant they were generally in their first full-time jobs, which may be associated with presumptions of high personal investment in the workplace (Petersen, 2020). As

a minor consideration, I proceeded from the expectation that their relatively well-educated status might be an indicator of such cultural capital, since resistance to digital media is often related to large amounts of cultural capital (Portwood-Stacer, 2013). Thus, I had reason to expect they might experience the struggles for work–life balance and digital privacy clearly, and that they might be cognisant of criticisms of the companies behind social media platforms.

### *Interviews*

Previous studies have tried to elicit qualitative experiences of datafication via, for instance, focus groups consisting mostly of university students (Hargittai & Marwick, 2016) or quantitative questionnaires of employees (Vitak et al., 2018). This study proceeded from a qualitative, one-on-one, interview-based methodology with a semistructured interview guide. This approach was chosen in order to explore people’s overall individual impressions and attitudes about their organisation’s implementation of Workplace, and whether they considered themselves subjects of adverse datafication processes because of this. The interview guide was designed to capture specific experiences with digital communications technologies in working life and subsequently offer my interviewees a chance to reflect on their practices and attitudes with Workplace. The interview design was thus broadly “*doxastic*” (Brinkmann, 2007) in its initial phases. Here, they first described specific experiences with the ESM (both their introduction to the platform as well as experiences of posting, commenting, liking, and consuming content) and their evaluation and attitudes about what purpose the platform served for both themselves as individuals and the organisation as a whole. In the closing phases, I turned to a more probing mode of interviewing. Here, I challenged and elicited responses about the struggles for digital privacy and work–life segmentation that might otherwise remain implicit. This was usually done by inquiring point-blank about their opinions – if any – about Facebook as a corporation. Following this, I asked whether they felt any worries about their organisation implementing a solution developed by this company and why.

The interviews usually ranged between one and two hours in length, with a single outlier lasting only 30 minutes. They took place between May 2019 and April 2020. Though the plan was to perform all interviews face-to-face, a combination of busy professional schedules and the Covid-19 pandemic led to more than half the interviews being performed remotely, usually at the insistence of the people I interviewed.

### **Analysis**

The analysis started from a mapping of the attitudes towards the potential datafication presented by Workplace in particular and the general trend of datafication in digital communications more broadly. Responses displayed a wide variety of attitudes towards their own datafication in both work and personal life. Building on the established explanations in the research, coding showed that these attitudes displayed tiny hints of rational exchange, some evidence of ignorance, and more prominently a broad category of responses consistent with resignation. I focused on resignation as a central model of explanation for the particular context of work. This was due to both to the frequency of signs of this attitude, as well as the overall finding, which was most surprising: I

could find no examples of active resistance or opposition to Workplace by virtue of the platform being developed by Facebook.

This led me to search for elements in the responses where people implicitly described Facebook the company (and whichever services and companies they associated and compared with it) in the initial sections of the interview. I compared these with their responses in the more confrontational final sections of the interview. As I will explicate below, people were usually neither entirely unaware nor uncritical of Facebook's practices, but usually found themselves surprised that they had never considered these criticisms vis-à-vis Workplace. Here, I interrogated the data for both implicit and explicit justifications for this oversight, as perceived by the people I interviewed. My aim was to situate the (lack of) resistance and criticism towards Workplace within the broader descriptions of life with digital media that the people in this study related.

In turn, this led me to seek out where the worries in the lives of my respondents with regard to the ESM technology may instead be located. This resulted in developing themes of people both *perceiving* a hypothetical danger in the immediate environment (the organisation), while *emphasising* the organisation as a source of safety vis-à-vis the datafication practices of tech giants. This then developed into my central proposal in this article: digital resignation can be thought of as not just “corporately cultivated” as a part of everyday life with media, as Draper and Turow (2019) put it, but it can also be an essential part of accepting one's position within, and belonging to, an organisation.

The analysis shows this by first exemplifying the general responses to the privacy paradox, before moving on to discussing how the autonomy paradox is negotiated across a range of digital media. Following this, I discuss how the negotiations of both paradoxes were related to the workplace as an organisational context.

### *Techlash – or lack thereof*

I expected to encounter very explicit resistance to the implementation of Workplace in particular, and of Facebook and technology companies in general. My suspicion was grounded in the fact that the interviews were performed in 2019 and early 2020, a period of immense public debate and numerous public scandals, surrounding Facebook in particular. What I found, instead, was a description of attitudes which I found best mapped on to the explanatory model of “digital resignation” (Draper & Turow, 2019). When pressed about their knowledge of the data collection and business practices of Facebook as both a company and a platform, the people I spoke to were far from ignorant, if occasionally somewhat hyperbolic in their summaries:

[I am] aware that all of this is probably very evil and dangerous and that all sorts of crap is being collected about you. But on the other hand, I'm like “I'm probably not all that interesting – go nuts” [laughs]. (woman, 26, IT company)

The above quoted respondent was not alone in expressing an attitude like this. The underlying assumption seems to be that – vis-à-vis the technology companies, one is, as an individual, pretty uninteresting, and therefore one is less concerned with any potential datafication one might be subject to. As another put it, “big data is worth a lot – but my personal data? Not worth that much” (man, 27, medico-technical company). In general, I interpret the interviewees as being aware of the monetisation models of

ostensibly “free” social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and so on. A few even volunteered variations on the axiom “if you’re not paying then you are the product” (man, 29, medico-technical company). This, if nothing else, displays at least a surface-level awareness of datafication processes. The effects of these datafication processes were something which my respondents were able to conceptualise and criticise in the abstract – but they offered little in terms of concrete examples from their own lives. In other words, they did not themselves feel adversely targeted by these processes. This in turn contributed to a feeling of not being personally affected by these processes *at all*.

This does not mean that the interviewees did not criticise Facebook as a company, or their multiple platforms and services. The criticism was more often aimed at the practices they felt these platforms encouraged, rather than how they themselves felt subjugated or exploited by these platforms. This criticism was also not without its nuances. Occasionally, my interviewees would express some degree of admiration or recognition of the business empire built by Facebook, even if they found its societal impact at large to be less than ideal.

That being said, while “ignorance” could not serve as an overall explanation for accepting the implementation of Workplace in particular, there were still some areas of confusion and doubt, most notably around the business model (“I might imagine some of the payment to be in data” [man, 28, publishing company]). While this ambiguity about the business model might be suspected as leading to a greater feeling of threat to one’s autonomy, this was not what was expressed in the interviews. Rather, the uncertainties expressed attained to the level of the *communicative per se*. The implementation of ESM was not perceived as a source of danger due to their potential for exploitative datafication by either Facebook or the organisation people worked for, but due the danger they represented as communicative arenas. This becomes even more clear in the subsequent sections.

### *Professional and personal lives embedded in media*

All the people I interviewed described a life lived across digital communication tools and social platforms – platforms which in some way crossed the boundaries of their work and personal life. This could refer to answering a personal text in the middle of the workday, checking their e-mails on a Sunday evening to be prepared for the coming week, or merely taking a few minutes to scroll through their Facebook feed or check their Snapchat messages if they felt like they needed a break at work. Nobody among my sample was not a user of several social media – and crucially, everyone had a Facebook profile. In this way, digital communications crossed the boundaries between the domains of the personal and professional with great frequency.

The reasons given for this were varied and multiple. Overall, however, I take this to be a sign of the “integration” of professional and personal life that is often characteristic of knowledge workers (Gregg, 2011). This was pointedly expressed by one project manager, who reflected on the trouble with separating these spheres of life accordingly:

But I’m also convinced that you aren’t two people. I am just as much my work-personality as I am my private-personality. It has only caused me [more] stress to try and separate it. (man, 30, project leader)

To be clear, this did not mean that no efforts were being taken to separate the spheres of the personal and the professional, merely that the people in this study had an awareness of themselves in different contexts, and of having to negotiate context-appropriate communicative practices.

Returning to the idea of ESM, these appear as a category of media which blurs the boundaries between these two realms. Workplace in particular may be an especially boundary-blurring technology, as its design, affordances – and to some extent its branding – are very reminiscent of a platform that people are already familiar with, and which may occupy a specific position within their everyday lives. As one interviewee expressed it:

Connecting more closely with my colleagues is not something I'm seeking out on a daily basis. They're colleagues, and I don't need there to be a mishmash for them to end up somewhere between friends and colleagues. I'm trying to keep my private life out of it, and I feel like Workplace is somewhere in the middle. (man, 28, medico-technical company)

This returns to a central point of this article, namely that integrating an enterprise social media – or at least Workplace in particular – represents integration of the communicative sociability usually associated with social media (Lomborg, 2014) into working life. This sociability is usually associated with the domain of the personal, and it can be hard to ascertain what to make of it within the realm of the professional organisation. What was described overall is the fear of a “context collapse”. A “context collapse” is, in the broadest sense of the term, a description of when different social contexts collapse within the experienced world of a person and is often discussed with attention to social media (Vitak, 2012). I return to this point below, suggesting that this is where the anxieties about Workplace were most clearly felt – rather than in any experience of surveillance or datafication. Here, I return again to the autonomy paradox: The onus seems to be on the individual to create their own boundaries, if not with regards to their actual work tasks, then at least in terms of their communicative engagement with their organisation as such. These unclear expectations are a disturbance to the perceived autonomy, since it becomes unclear for the individual how they are expected to – for instance – react to content on the ESM outside of work hours.

### *Organisations as sites of danger and safety*

In general, presence on online platforms has often been construed as a risk, due to the presence of multiple audiences from a variety of contexts, and the resulting potential for “context collapse” (Vitak, 2012). This is no less problematic within the context of organisational communication and can lead to a variety of coping and self-silencing strategies on the part of the employees (see Madsen & Verhoeven, 2016). This is congruent with the findings, that – at least in a Danish context – the opposition towards increasing surveillance is strongly felt within the workplace (Wiecek & Sætnan, 2002), and opposition to surveillance or monitoring of and via digital technologies being especially strongly felt (Jørgensen, 2019).

The immediate environment – their place of work – plays a far greater role in the fears and antipathies of employees than the tech corporations do. In some cases, the separation of the professional and the personal actually ends up strengthening the resignation,

since the realm of the personal is already seen as datafied. Protecting the realm of the professional is thus a secondary concern.

The people in this study were primarily concerned with surveillance of their immediate vicinity, and the communicative difficulties this perceivably creates. When asked what they worried about regarding data and metrics on the platform, they were far more prone to say they were concerned with their own superiors using it as a metric for performance, or systematically noting who did and did not like a post by a superior, than they were concerned with, for instance, Facebook or Google gaining access to any of this information:

[Hypothetically] We might find out who we are supposed to let go by looking at something they don't... that they are not aware they are being measured on. I don't think we are either clever or cynical enough to do that in here. But it does cross my mind when I see people push out [these kinds of software]. (woman, 26, IT company)

This was also compounded by a few of the testimonials noting some of this lack of clarity in the rules for the communication that takes place on these platforms, and how this communication may or may not be interpreted adversely or used in unintended manners *within the organisation*. Here, I would like to surmise that insofar as my respondents feel digitally resigned (see Draper & Turow, 2019), they do so because of their general resignation towards the media environment of their organisations. Workplace becomes a software utilised in everyday work much like any other medium, and any privacy concerns are *outsourced* to the organisation.

Because they belonged to an organisation which expected them to use this software, they expressed some confidence that this was a decision which had been made by someone in the organisation with the appropriate knowledge. It was assumed that this person or persons had the requisite expertise to make this decision. Accordingly, the ESM is accepted by my interviewees in line with any other piece of software they are expected to integrate into their everyday professional duties. This is not to say that the people in this study were uncritical of the implementation of the ESM, or of the people who they perceived as making the decision to implement it. Still, no one expressed concerns that this decision had been made in ignorance – at least insofar as the underlying business models and potentials for datafication were concerned.

One mitigating factor here might be that the this study is mainly situated in a Scandinavian context, where societal trust is at a high level (Delhey & Newton, 2005). Similarly, public expectations of sustainability, transparency, and equity in the workplace are often highlighted as Scandinavian characteristics (e.g., Strand, 2009). This might contrast with a perceived erosion of social trust linked to the rise of datafication technologies in, for instance, the context of the US (e.g., Zuboff, 2019). As any direct nation-to-nation comparisons are beyond the scope of this article, I merely offer it as a point of future consideration.

## **Discussion: An organisational cultivation of digital resignation?**

Work and organisations play a central part in our everyday life (Perrow, 1991), and the context of the professional, in particular, seems more and more poised to be the most

important realm in everyday life (Gregg, 2011). Therefore, I advocate that the increasingly critical inquiry of the last few years about the role that technology platforms play in everyday life be supplemented with an awareness that life plays out in and through a variety of organisations. These organisations have a role to play in how digital technologies are shaped, and how they shape everyday life in turn. While social media are usually discussed as having to achieve a critical mass of users through network effects (Chesney & Lawson, 2015), the structured context of an organisation can provide far more concrete motivations for signing up, even if these memberships may involve questionable datafication practices. Alternatively, this context may afford diffuse communication norms that complicate a segmentation between the personal and the professional, and this constitutes a problem for which the organisation is at least partially responsible. As this study has demonstrated, even if the communicative norms and datafication practices are merely *unclear* (as opposed to explicitly harmful), then this poses problems as well. If the knowledge workers in this study place great trust in the organisations they work for, this is not exactly remarkable. The organisations of everyday life are already marked by their potential to create structures that offload and outsource tasks, worries, and concerns. “Faced with any problematic situations, the modern impulse is to create more organizational structures”, as organisational scholars Bromley and Meyer (2015: 4) put it. This “outsourcing” of worries – which I have discussed in this article as a variation of “digital resignation” – is not necessarily total. Nonetheless, it leaves a great deal of employee trust and resulting responsibility in the hands of organisations. The individuals I have spoken to during this study have *resigned* themselves both to being datafied subjects in the hands of third-party technology companies and have also *resigned* themselves to following the decisions about the implementation of Workplace and similar technologies in their companies. This creates the possibility of an employee that is not just under surveillance or quantified (Ball, 2010; Moore, 2017), but outright datafied.

Both the struggles for privacy and work–life balance were met with what I would term a sense of resignation (see Draper & Turow, 2019), which was justified by a reliance on – or perhaps resignation to – the organisation. The outcome of this are high levels of organisational responsibility. Not only are their employees digitally resigned in a general sense, but they are also resigned to the solutions their companies require them to use, and the datafication this entails. This presents a real risk of an increasingly asymmetrical power relation, with the organisation potentially quantifying and evaluating ever more domains of professional life, creating more uncertainty for the employee (Moore, 2017). While ESM are hailed as allowing greater knowledge sharing and dehierarchisation (see, e.g., Heide, 2015), this must be tempered with an awareness that if people are unsure of either the communicative norms or the potential datafication they undergo, this may be a serious hindrance to their perceived freedom to act. These asymmetrical power relations also mean that workplaces were viewed, on the one hand, as a source safety vis-à-vis the surveillance of tech giants, while on the other, still being a source of danger in terms of *internal* surveillance via ESM technologies. It must be stressed, however, that this was mainly a hypothetical concern – judging by what was relayed to me.

This study is limited to an exploratory, qualitative study of a limited number of Danish “knowledge worker” participants. Future studies may fruitfully explore whether this phenomenon of digital resignation in an organisational setting may be found more broadly among all types of workers and in other national contexts. Furthermore, it has

been beyond the scope of this paper to map the actual affordances for datafication inherent in ESM technologies, and *whom* exactly these potentials benefit. This has appeared as an important source of uncertainty in the experiences of my interviewees, and thus provides a fruitful venue for future research, if the concept of digital resignation is to be comprehensively explored in working life.

## Conclusions

The struggles for privacy and autonomy in the face of the increased ubiquity of digital communications find a very salient overlap in the arena of working life. The ability to wall off personal and professional life is generally seen as a desirable quality, yet also as something which is complicated by the ability to be not only “always on”, but also “always tracked” by digital communication technologies. As I have argued, enterprise social media in particular are a potential site for these struggles to come to the forefront in the lives of individual people.

While one might expect a large degree of criticism to emerge from employees in the face of the implementation of this specific software, this was not what this interview study of 21 knowledge workers uncovered. Instead, they displayed attitudes congruent with the concept of “digital resignation” (Draper & Turow, 2019). In the discussion portion of this article, I emphasised how this resignation was to some extent “organisationally cultivated” by the mechanisms of both control and trust that play a part in organisational belonging. The “worry” about third-party datafication was *outsourced* to “someone else” in the relevant organisation and mitigated by a general trust in the organisation’s structures and safety measures. However, some lingering doubt about the potential for intra-organisational surveillance remained among some of the people in this study.

I end with the recommendation that future studies of media – considered as technologies of communication and datafication – should consider the organisational contexts in which these media unfold, as well as the datafication capabilities inherent in professional digital media per se. These organisations and media should both be discussed as social contexts and as accountable agents in their own right.

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