AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Journal of Applied Psychology

ISSN: 0021-9010

2022, Vol. 107, No. 4, 560–580
https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000924

INTEGRATIVE CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Work–Leisure Blending: An Integrative Conceptual Review and Framework to Guide Future Research

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Since the industrial revolution, work and leisure have largely been considered opposing domains. A growing number of organizations, however, enable and/or promote blending leisure activities into the workplace. Similarly, several conceptualizations across different disciplines examine how work and leisure can coexist. These different conceptualizations have yielded a rich but fragmented theoretical account of work–leisure blending. To address this problem, we provide a comprehensive theoretical integration of multiple literature streams where research has explored work–leisure blending. Further, we develop a tripartite dimensional framework designed to elucidate the central dimensions of work–leisure blending (i.e., segmentation–integration, unstructured–structured, and independent–interactive) undergirding this phenomenon. Using this framework as a theoretical foundation, we then discuss important contextual considerations and future research directions related to work–leisure blending.

Keywords: work–leisure blending, organizational play, gamification, workplace fun, work breaks

> "My formula for utopia is simple: it is a community in which everyone plays at work and works at play. Anything less would fail to satisfy me for long" Burke (1971, p. 47).

Leisure is a familiar and fundamentally important aspect of human existence. Indeed, in a recent study by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), 96% of individuals age 15 and older reported engaging in some kind of leisure activity—such as watching television, socializing, or playing sports—on a daily basis. Moreover, a significant part of the modern economy revolves around providing and supporting individual and collective leisure experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2019). Indeed, neuroscientists have found that leisure has biological roots, concluding that play directly influences postnatal brain development and adolescent/adult social development (e.g., Montgomery, 2014). The literature also shows leisure has significant effects on individual and community well-being (Kuykendall et al., 2015; Putnam, 2000). However, work is also a central feature of human functioning both for extrinsic and intrinsic reasons. Indeed, the aforementioned U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) survey indicates, not surprisingly, that the majority of individuals spend many more hours each day working rather than engaging in leisure pursuits. Further, there is often a perceived value placed on work that is not afforded to leisure (Juniu, 2009). Given the centrality of both work and leisure to humanity, scholars across various disciplines have explored the complex and dynamic relationship between the two domains (Kurt et al., 2010; Liang, 2018; Mainemelis & Dionysiou, 2015).

Historically, the relationship between work and leisure has evolved over time due to various societal factors. For example, prior to the industrial revolution, most people experienced a blending of work and leisure in agrarian contexts (i.e., work was completed while interspersed with physical activity and when needed without separation from leisure). However, industrialization and urbanization associated with the industrial revolution led to a distinct demarcation between work and leisure (Kanter, 1997). At that time, organizations sought to optimize employee performance by designing tasks and workspaces to eliminate nonwork-related interruptions in order to facilitate greater efficiency, rationality, and control (Jett & George, 2003; Mainemelis & Altman, 2010; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). To illustrate, Henry Ford once declared "When we are at work we ought to be at work. When we are at play, we ought to be at play. There is no use trying to mix the two" (Ford & Crowther, 1922, p. 14). Yet, due to the advent of the technological and service revolutions, expanded opportunities for leisure activities (Mannell & Reid, 1999), and a young emerging workforce that values leisure more than older generations (Twenge et al., 2010), the work and leisure domains have become increasingly blended in many employees' work experiences (Lacanienta, et al., 2018; Liang, 2018; Petelczyc et al., 2018; Walker, 2011). For example, Forbes recently reported that a top 10 business trend is introducing "fun and games" into the workplace (Altman, 2015), and examples abound of corporate "playspaces" created for employees (Mainemelis & Altman, 2010).

This trend of increased blending between work and leisure mirrors the multidisciplinary research on the relationship between work and leisure. For example, neoclassical labor economics views leisure as

This article was published Online First September 13, 2021.

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capturing activities that exclusively occur outside of work—that is, in one's "free" or unobligated time—such that leisure is seen as a distraction from work (Becker, 1965; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). At times, research in the organization sciences has adopted this view, conceptualizing leisure as activities done outside of work (e.g., vacations, after work) enabling employees to cope with work demands and strain (Derrick, 2013; Sonnentag et al., 2008). However, different forms of blending work and leisure have increasingly caught the attention of scholars across disciplines. For example, the organization sciences have developed a stream of literature on "organizational play" (e.g., Mainemelis & Dionysiou, 2015; Petelczyc et al., 2018; Tökkäri, 2015), and a sizeable amount of "workplace fun" research exists in the health sciences and hospitality fields (e.g., Chan, 2010; Choi et al., 2013; Tews et al., 2013). In addition, other researchers have explored the impact of integrating gaming principles into the workplace (i.e., "gamification"; Oprescu et al., 2014; Robson et al., 2015), resulting in playfully designed work tasks. Cumulatively, these efforts and similar work in other fields have challenged the neoclassical notion (Kabanoff, 1980; Meissner, 1971; Parker, 1983) that work and leisure are fundamentally separate domains (Lacanienta et al., 2018; Walker, 2011). For that reason, a burgeoning body of research has emerged in the past two decades that examines how work and leisure are blended together (see Figure 1).

Unfortunately, given the multidisciplinary nature of this line of inquiry, as well as the complexities of work–leisure blending itself, scholars in one discipline rarely recognize or build on the work of scholars in other disciplines. For example, while reviews on organizational play (see Mainemelis & Dionysiou, 2015; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006; Petelczyc et al., 2018), workplace fun (Michel et al., 2019), and gamification (Ferreira et al., 2017) appear in the literature, they largely constrain their focus to a single, independent conceptualization, and overlook other conceptualizations of work–leisure blending. For example, Petelczyc et al. (2018) highlighted many activities that are often viewed as leisure (e.g., reading a book at work, social coffee break, workplace birthday parties) but are not included as forms of organizational play because they lack absorption and/or sociality. Similarly, prior reviews often overlook or exclude important forms of work–leisure blending, such as exercise at work (Barene et al., 2014), lunch breaks or microbreaks (Hunter & Wu, 2016; Trougakos et al., 2014), industrial recreation (Goldman & Wilson, 1977), and gamification of work tasks (Fetzer et al., 2017), and thus lack a holistic and integrative conceptualization of work–leisure blending.

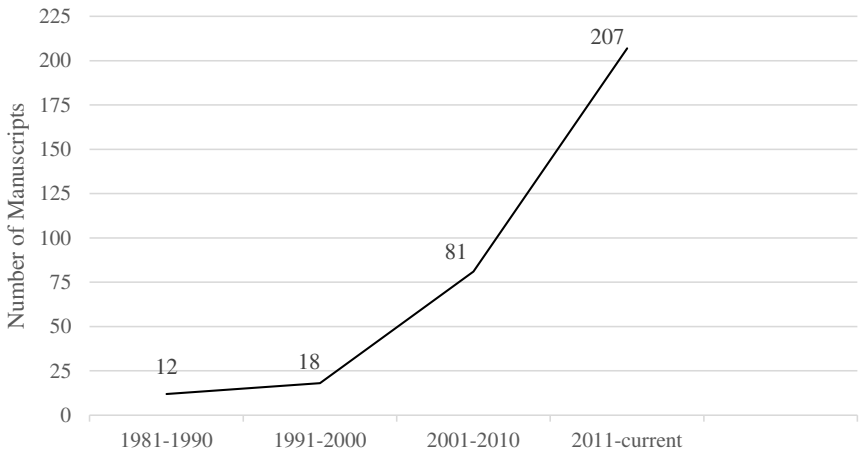
The lack of construct clarity and high redundancy in work–leisure blending concepts proliferated across independent research streams has resulted in "jingle-jangle fallacies" (Kelley, 1927) threatening the ability to further advance a cohesive body of knowledge. The "jingle fallacy" is the faulty assumption that two distinct phenomena are the same because they use the same name (Casper et al., 2018). Applying this to work–leisure blending, Petelczyc et al. (2018) and Hunter et al. (2010) largely refer to workplace fun activities and organizational play activities synonymously, even though research on these different concepts have developed separately (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). This occurrence is problematic because it causes ambiguity in the conceptualization of organizational play and how it relates to other constructs, thereby impeding theory development and research accumulation.

The literature on work–leisure blending also suffers from a related "jangle fallacy" (Kelley, 1927)—the faulty assumption that two things are unique because they merely have different labels. Specifically, concept labels across the literature are often repackaged or similar concepts have developed under different names in different disciplines. For example, the concept of gamification largely mirrors other concepts explored in different literature streams, such as "serious play" (Brooks & Bowker, 2002; Statler et al., 2011), "serious games" (Fetzer et al., 2017), "play as engagement" (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006), "play as work" (Costea et al., 2005), and "fun job responsibilities" (Tews et al., 2015). Such redundancy in concepts violates core scientific principles for precision in theorizing (Suddaby, 2010) and stymies valuable research on work–leisure blending (Block, 1957; Skinner, 1996).

Given these problems in the literature, the primary purpose of this integrative review is to provide an organized conceptual understanding of work–leisure blending and create an integrated theoretical framework to propel future research in this area. In pursuing this purpose, our research makes three unique contributions to the

Figure 1

Work–Leisure Blending Manuscripts Over Time (1981–2021)



Note. Prior to 1981 there were only seven total manuscripts since 1951.

literature. First, we conduct a multidisciplinary review integrating the growing research on work–leisure blending and reconciling the discrepancies that have emerged in conceptualizations of work–leisure blending (e.g., organizational play, workplace fun, gamification, industrial recreation and exercise, and work breaks) across multiple disciplines (see Table 1 for a summary). This integrative review, coupled with a proposed definition of work–leisure blending, adds clarity to the parameterization of the phenomenon, providing researchers a shared understanding of what constitutes work–leisure blending.

Second, to move the literature forward in a more organized manner, we create a unified theoretical framework that captures the primary aspects of work–leisure blending. We develop this framework by utilizing three theories that have seemingly disconnected disciplinary origins but together elucidate the experiences that occur at the nexus between the work and leisure domains. Specifically, we focus on one core tenet from boundary theory (which originates from sociology; Nippert-Eng, 1996a), border theory (which was born out of the organization sciences; Clark, 2000), and liminal space theory (which has roots in anthropology; Turner, 1967) to generate a coherent metatheoretical perspective that synthesizes past findings and highlights synergies across ostensibly fragmented lines of research and generally enhances our understanding of work–leisure blending. Adopting a gestalt framework to understand how and to what extent blending occurs between work and leisure parallels other theoretical approaches utilized to explain similarly complex phenomena such as emotional ambivalence (Fong, 2006), alternative selves (Obodaru, 2012), and organizational duality (Farjoun, 2010). Furthermore, viewing work and leisure through a holistic, nondirectional lens (i.e., work–leisure blending), our framework makes a contribution by moving away from the more traditional approach of treating work and nonwork domains as separate, unrelated entities with merely

Table 1
Key Conceptualizations of Work–Leisure Blending Across Disciplines

Key concept	Alternative labels	Examples	Disciplines and key cites
Organizational play (k = 69)	Digital play Diversionary play Identity play Informal play Play Play as engagement Play as work Play at work Play time Serious play Work as play	Board games, card games, and video games Company athletic teams (e.g., softball team) Skit and role-playing in idea generation Exploration of identity between work and play Spontaneous engaging in play as a means of coping with organizational life	Communications (Brooks & Bowker, 2002) Health Sciences (DesCamp & Thomas, 1993; LeVieux-Anglin & Sawyer, 1993) Library Sciences (Kurt et al., 2010; Leeder, 2014) Organization Sciences (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Kolb & Kolb, 2010) Psychology (Piaget, 1975; Reinecke, 2009; Winnicott, 1975)
Workplace fun (k = 105)	Cultures of fun Fun job responsibilities Humor games Leisure at work Management of fun Online games	Work-oriented social activities (e.g., office parties, happy hours, potlucks, birthday parties) Flexible work schedules to enable activities Casual/themed dress days Office design and décor Fun meetings (e.g., award ceremonies) Organizational activities (e.g., amusement parks, athletic events, theatres) Social media interactions at work	Health Sciences (Wear et al., 2006) Hospitality (Chan, 2010; Yang, 2020) Marketing (Karl et al., 2010) Organization Sciences (Ford et al., 2003; Karl & Peluchette, 2006; Redman & Mathews, 2002) Psychology (Abramis, 1989) Public Policy (Baldry & Hallier, 2010)
Gamification (k = 58)	Gamified course Game-like technology Gamification reward affordance Serious games	Leaderboards and badge recognitions Simulations of operating theatres Sales/Production competitions Storytelling and point systems Virtual reality simulations Games for idea generation Web-based gaming competitions	Computer Sciences (Garcia et al., 2017; Suh et al., 2017) Education (Hanus & Fox, 2015) Health Sciences (Mokadam et al., 2015; Rutledge et al., 2018) Hospitality (Xu et al., 2017) Library Sciences (Prince, 2013) Psychology (Oravec, 2015; Statler et al., 2011) Organization Sciences (Fetzer et al., 2017; Roth et al., 2015)
Industrial recreation and exercise (k = 50)	Discretionary time physical activities Exercise at work Industrial recreation Physical activities Recreation-based physical activity Workplace physical training	Soccer and Zumba classes Recreation-based health and wellness programs Resistance training sessions Adjusted schedules for recreation activities Stretching exercises Running, weight-lifting, and/or aerobic activities On-site sports and recreation equipment Planned recreation activities	Environmental Systems (Groves, 1981b) Health Sciences (Barene et al., 2014; Galinsky et al., 2007; Verhoef et al., 1993; Sjögren et al., 2005) Hospitality (Tsaur & Tang, 2012) Leisure Sciences (Bruton et al., 2012; McQuarrie, 2008) Organization Sciences (Jex, 1991) Psychology (Groves, 1981a)
Work breaks (k = 44)	Digital breaks Discretionary time Leisure-time Lunch breaks Microbreaks	Relaxing, social, and work-related lunch break activities Microbreaks from work tasks Digital break activities (e.g., Amazon shopping, Facebook, or internet surfing) Low effort, preferred, nutritional, or cognitive work breaks	Ergonomics (Dababneh et al., 2001) Health Sciences (Engelmann et al., 2011; Kim & Cho, 2015) Industrial Engineering (Balci & Aghazadeh, 2004) Organization Sciences (Coker, 2013; Trougakos et al., 2014)

spillover effects between them (i.e., Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Finally, with our proposed tripartite framework of work–leisure blending serving as a coherent conceptual foundation, we develop a broad array of future research directions that serve as valuable guides for expanding our theoretical and practical understanding of work–leisure blending going forward. These directions for future research are directly related to each dimension in our framework and revolve around questions regarding how the frequency, location, voluntariness, competitive nature, cultural context, and multilevel aspects of work–leisure blending influence its impact on and in organizations. We also discuss future research directions that jointly address how the three dimensions of work–leisure blending may interact to influence various organizational outcomes.

Defining and Reviewing Different Conceptualizations of Work–Leisure Blending

Providing a basis for our integrative review, we first detail and distinguish the domains of work and leisure to better define the concept of work–leisure blending. We then provide an overview of how we conducted our literature search on work–leisure blending. Next, we review the conceptualizations that fall within the nomological network of work–leisure blending that has been explored across a variety of disciplines, highlighting similarities and differences among the conceptualizations.

Defining Work, Leisure, and Work–Leisure Blending

In terms of defining and distinguishing the conceptual domains of work and leisure, the general consensus among scholars is that *work* entails instrumental tasks that an individual completes in order to receive goods and services necessary to support his/her life (Piotrkowski et al., 1987). These tasks are typically discretely assigned to a person within a market or organization (Kabanoff & O'Brien, 1980). In general, the purpose of these tasks is to acquire extrinsic benefits (e.g., money and status; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Locke & Latham, 1990) and support other facets of life (i.e., family, religion, or leisure), although some intrinsic benefits may also result (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

Leisure, on the other hand, is a more ambiguous domain to define because it has been conceptualized differently across various literature streams. For instance, organization sciences have described it as a time frame entailing activities (e.g., physical, social, or passive; Bakker et al., 2013; Mojza et al., 2010) that are intrinsically satisfying, pleasurable, and beneficial to the individual (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006; Sonnentag et al., 2014) or that allow the individual to psychologically detach from conventional work (Sonnentag, 2012). Early work in clinical psychology classified *play* in similar terms, with an emphasis on illusion and escaping reality as an early play impulse of children that remains in adulthood when faced with the strain of everyday life (Winnicott, 1971). Moreover, anthropologists have viewed play (leisure) as a process people experience as they develop and adapt to cultural identities within organizations (Huizenga, 1950; Turner, 1982). Some sociologists describe it simply as "free time" (Rapaport & Rapaport, 1974), or as activities individuals engage in after fulfilling professional, family, and social responsibilities (Dumazedier, 1967; Goffman, 1974). Also, while work is a set of organizationally prescribed tasks, leisure reflects freely chosen tasks that are distinct from ordinary life (Kabanoff, 1980; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). Aggregating across these conceptualizations, leisure can be defined broadly as tasks, activities, or events that are personally beneficial in some way (e.g., motivationally, affectively, socially, and/or health-related), while also having a sense of freedom or autonomous choice to participate in them that is unique from the conventions of traditional work. That said, although the benefits of leisure are primarily intrinsic, the benefits of work are primarily extrinsic (see Juniu et al., 1996). Of course, the opposite can occur; leisure can be perceived as extrinsically beneficial (e.g., health or status) and work can be perceived as intrinsically beneficial (e.g., meaningfulness; Spreitzer, 1995). Regardless, leisure and intrinsic satisfaction are intertwined more often than work and intrinsic satisfaction (Lacanienta et al., 2018) because "leisure activities are personally chosen and directed toward meeting individual rather than formally prescribed organizational goals" as is often the case with work (Kabanoff, 1980, p. 69; see also Kelly, 2009, 2012).

As noted earlier, while work and leisure have traditionally been viewed in opposition to one another and as distinct life domains, contemporarily they have been allowed and even advocated to coexist with one another within organizations (Altman, 2015). Unfortunately, research on the coexistence of work and leisure is disconnected, using different conceptualizations across unique disciplines. Consequently, our ability to build a cohesive body of knowledge on the forms and functions of work and leisure blending has been substantially constrained. Thus, we integrate various relevant conceptualizations of blending between work and leisure to form a single theoretical concept of *work–leisure blending*. We define work–leisure blending as the extent to which work and leisure domains are intertwined, such that leisure-oriented activities, principles, and orientations coexist with work-oriented tasks, features, or social dynamics.

Literature Search and Inclusion Criteria

Using our conceptualization of work–leisure blending, we explored the different ways work and leisure blend together by conducting a broad, multidisciplinary literature search including both quantitative and qualitative research. Due to the multidisciplinary nature of our review, we used Google Scholar to find articles and chapters related to different forms of work–leisure blending (i.e., organizational play, workplace fun, gamification, industrial recreation and exercise, and work breaks). Also, as work–leisure blending focuses on the coexistence of work and leisure, we included research that explored outside of work leisure pursuits that overlap with the work domain (e.g., *department* softball team, *on-site* gym, and happy hours with work colleagues), but excluded research focused on leisure activities that did not overlap with the work domain (e.g., community softball team and private gym). Concomitantly, we excluded research focused on leisure-to-work spillover effects that take place when leisure occurs outside of work and then spills over or crosses over across boundaries to impact employees' work (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Sonnentag, 2003). Finally, we excluded articles focused on work–family conflict/enrichment, as they were outside of the leisure-specific scope of our review. In turn, our broad literature search resulted in the compilation of 326 research manuscripts originating from numerous disciplines including: anthropology, communications, computer sciences, economics, education, environmental systems, ergonomics, gaming, health sciences, hospitality, industrial engineering, law, leisure sciences,

library sciences, organizational sciences, public policy, and sociology (see Table 1).

Reviewing Conceptualizations of Work–Leisure Blending

Different disciplines capture employee and organizational work–leisure blending experiences in a variety of ways. Table 1 summarizes this array of conceptualizations, and we review each of them below.

Organizational Play

To begin, the blending of work and leisure has been explored in the form of organizational play and similar concepts (e.g., play at work, informal play, serious play, and play time). According to Mainemelis and Ronson (2006), organizational play can focus away from (i.e., diversionary play) or toward (i.e., play as engagement) one's tasks. Providing an encompassing conceptualization, a recent review on organizational play defines play as "an activity or behavior that (a) is carried out with the goal of amusement and fun, (b) involves an enthusiastic and in-the-moment attitude or approach, and (c) is highly interactive among play partners or with the activity itself" (Petelczyc et al., 2018, p. 168).

Research on organizational play has emerged within different disciplines. For example, health sciences have examined how promoting playfulness among hospital staff aids in patient recovery (Stonehouse, 2014). In the library sciences literature, Leeder (2014) suggests team cohesion and commitment are enhanced by collectively playing noncompetitive board games, card games, and computer games. Communications scholars have explored how serious play activities (e.g., skit and role-playing) can generate creative ideas at work (Brooks & Bowker, 2002). Moreover, organization sciences research has examined how organizational play can be used in leadership development processes, such as leadership identity, cognitive abilities, and behavioral skills (Kark, 2011). In addition, they have explored how play in the form of organizing company softball and football teams impacts organizational learning, employee motivation, and commitment (Kolb & Kolb, 2010; Sørensen & Spoelstra, 2012).

Workplace Fun

Research on workplace fun is another example of how the blending of work and leisure has been explored. According to Fluegge (2008), workplace fun "involves any social, interpersonal, or task activities at work of a playful or humorous nature which provide an individual with amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure" (p. 18). Playful experiences are part of both organizational play and workplace fun, but they differ in that only organizational play must be absorptive or social whereas no such requirement exists for workplace fun (Petelczyc et al., 2018). For example, listening to a colleague's joke may not be an absorptive experience and reading a personal book at work is not a social experience, but both would be classified as manifestations of workplace fun. In that sense, workplace fun is a more encompassing concept relative to organizational play (Karl & Peluchette, 2006) because it entails a wide variety of activities at work (e.g., office parties, award ceremonies, potluck meals, and happy hours, see Ford et al., 2003), as well as office designs (e.g., unusual décor and spatial arrangements, see Kinnie et al., 2005), tasks themselves (Tews et al., 2015), policies (e.g., themed dress days; Chan, 2010), and even music (e.g., playing pop music to boost morale; Baldry & Hallier, 2010) that could be perceived as fun. Further, the collectively structured nature of workplace fun has also been positioned as a workplace climate (Fleming, 2005; Redman & Mathews, 2002).

Multiple disciplines examine the concept of workplace fun. For example, public policy scholars suggest workplace fun can enhance social identity among some employees, while generating potential resentment among other employees by intruding upon their private identities (Baldry & Hallier, 2010). Hospitality scholars show that workplace fun activities impact employee satisfaction, engagement, and performance (Becker & Tews, 2016; Choi et al., 2013). In the organization sciences, attending social events with coworkers and bringing family to company picnics is linked to higher employee closeness (Dumas et al., 2013). In the face of increasing demands, workplace fun has also been viewed as a form of social support, promoting job engagement and creativity (Abramis, 1989; Georganta & Montgomery, 2016). Medical researchers have likewise explored how doctors and residents have fun at work by using humor with each other about their patients (Wear et al., 2006).

Gamification

Gamification (i.e., applying gaming features or principles directly into work tasks; Prince, 2013; Sever et al., 2015) is another approach to capture work–leisure blending. Employees can independently gamify work tasks by selecting personally rewarding jobs (e.g., professional basketball players or professional creative writers) or crafting their work tasks to be game-like (De Bloom et al., 2020). Gamification can also be structured by organizational leaders (e.g., instigating a sales competition, using a simulation to train employees, or using role playing to brainstorm) to get employees to view the task as a game (Fetzer et al., 2017; Tang & Baumeister, 1984). Collectively, it is estimated that upwards of 70% of large companies utilize some type of gamification to enhance employee motivation and performance (Dale, 2014).

Forms of gamification have been explored across multiple disciplines as well. For instance, psychologists have explored the use of multigamification (i.e., coordinating and synchronizing simultaneous usage of multiple types of gamification; Oravec, 2015). Hospitality research has explored how gamification among employees promotes greater customer service experiences for guests (Xu et al., 2017). Scholars from the organization sciences have examined the use of gamification to generate better performance feedback and task enjoyment (Cardador et al., 2017) as well as the implementation of gamification to enhance motivation within crowdsourcing endeavors (Morschheuser & Hamari, 2019). Education researchers have explored how gamification in the classroom impacts student learning (Hanus & Fox, 2015).

Industrial Recreation and Exercise

Industrial recreation and exercise also blend work and leisure and have been explored under alternative labels (e.g., exercise at work, physical activities, and workplace physical training). Industrial recreation is generally implemented in the form of employee wellness programs, recovery programs, and/or the provision of physical fitness programs or facilities (Parks & Steelman, 2008)

that entail leisure-like activities. Most of these programs seek to help employees maintain healthier lifestyles, retain talented employees, and reduce work-related injuries (Schleppi, 1979).

An array of multidisciplinary research has explored how various types of physical activity at work (e.g., resistance training, exercise, cardio, stretching) produce superior health and fewer injuries at work. For example, health sciences research has linked exercise at work to enhanced physical well-being and psycho-social functioning (Sjögren et al., 2005, 2006), and wellness programs to reduced sick leave usage (Patel et al., 2013) and greater financial benefits for organizations (Baicker et al., 2010; Parks & Steelman, 2008). In addition, psychologists have explored the impact of health and wellness programs on productivity and job satisfaction (Groves, 1981a). Finally, leisure science research has explored the importance of having a fitness leader and peer-to-peer participation within workplace fitness programs (Bruton et al., 2012).

Work Breaks

The blending of work and leisure is also examined by research on work breaks and the activities engaged in during those breaks (e.g., microbreaks, lunch breaks, and digital breaks). Microbreaks, or short intermittent breaks from one's tasks (Bosch & Sonnentag, 2019), and lunch breaks are regularly used by employees to engage in leisure activities that blend into the workplace (Hunter & Wu, 2016; Rhee & Kim, 2016; Trougakos et al., 2014; Tucker, 2003). Some organizations encourage employees to take microbreaks throughout the day to enhance employee well-being (Sianoja et al., 2018). For instance, Google, IDEO, Adobe, Qualtrics, and other companies invite employees to take breaks from work by providing leisure activities (e.g., pets at work, hobby classes, ping pong tables, napping pods, and gourmet food and snacks) for employees to enjoy in as a means of rejuvenating personal resources and creating social ties (Kelley & Littman, 2001; Smith, 2013). In addition, the advancement of technology has enabled employees to take frequent smartphone, music, and gaming breaks throughout the workday (Rhee & Kim, 2016; Zacher et al., 2014).

The impact of work break outcomes is also addressed across multiple disciplines. For example, organization science research shows that distinct activities done during microbreaks and lunch breaks uniquely impact subsequent employee motivation and performance (Trougakos et al., 2014). Moreover, medical scholars show that 5-min intraoperative breaks benefit surgical outcomes (Engelmann et al., 2011) and that supplementary breaks benefit employee well-being (Galinsky et al., 2007). Finally, ergonomics research examines how incremental breaks influence employee production and discomfort (Dababneh et al., 2001).

Summary

As demonstrated in our review above, various concepts associated with work–leisure blending have received attention across multiple disciplines. However, the treatment in one discipline is often very different from, and even sometimes at odds with, its treatment in other disciplines. Moreover, while many different conceptualizations exist that are meant to capture work–leisure blending, these conceptualizations often only address one aspect of work–leisure blending. Thus, any single stream of research on work–leisure blending does not capture the full range of work–leisure blending, nor can it capture all the nuances associated with this phenomenon. Further, a proliferation of constructs purport to address work–leisure blending, but the conceptualizations are often redundant and lack assimilation. This underscores the need for organizing the literature on work–leisure blending to develop a more cohesive understanding of how this phenomenon unfolds and its impact on organizations.

Accordingly, we next organize the work–leisure blending literature by synthesizing three overarching theories that address the phenomenon of when work and leisure exist in a shared space and how individuals manage crossing the space between those two domains: boundary theory (Ashforth et al. 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996a), border theory (Clark, 2000), and liminal space theory (Turner, 1967).[1] In the following sections, we introduce each of the aforementioned theories and demonstrate how the various conceptualizations of work–leisure blending fit into these theories. Further, we highlight a key unique tenet of each theory that we expound upon to develop a tripartite dimensional framework that serves as a metatheory for better understanding the conceptual space occupied by work–leisure blending.

Assimilating Work–Leisure Blending Research: Boundaries, Borders, and Liminal Spaces

Numerous theories address the intersection between work and leisure, such as conservation of resources theory (Hunter & Wu, 2016) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Although these theories have been beneficial in terms of expanding research on the work–leisure interface, they largely view work and leisure as wholly separate domains whereby the individual benefits (downsides) of one domain enrich (hinder) the other domain. However, because work–leisure blending represents instances in which work and leisure are intertwined and inseparable in some way, these theories may be insufficient or incomplete for fully understanding the *blended* work–leisure experience. Thus, in terms of theoretically organizing the literature on work–leisure blending, we draw on theories that explicitly speak to interdomain blending. As noted above, we specifically draw on boundary theory, border theory, and liminal space theory—each of which we delineate below.

Boundary Theory

Nippert-Eng's (1996a, 1996b) sociological perspective was seminal in its use of *boundaries* as overlapping categories between work and home, acknowledging that the study of both the work and nonwork domains each becomes far richer when the categorical overlap between the domains is acknowledged and examined. These two domains are, however, idiosyncratically managed in terms of their boundaries, depending upon the individual. Further, Nippert-Eng (1996a) posited that shared boundaries are easier to span to the extent that the two domains are similar to one another and the mental/physical transitions between them are easily facilitated. Ashforth and colleagues (Ashforth, 2001; Ashforth et al., 2000)

[1] Early work–leisure paradigms in sociology and the leisure sciences (i.e., Parker, 1971; Kelly, 1972) allow for the possibility that work and leisure are similar activities and complement one another. However, these paradigms do not provide detailed explanation of the shared space between work and leisure that would inform the complex nature of this relationship to the same degree as boundary theory, border theory, and liminal space theory.

extended boundary theory by focusing on the identity transitions that can occur between two roles, whereby role boundaries in terms of permeability as well as time flexibility, delineate the scope and enactment of a given role (e.g., employee, athlete). Further, a central tenet of boundary theory is that a given pair of activated roles can be placed on a continuum ranging from high segmentation to high integration when considering the permeability and time flexibility of their boundaries as well as their similarity in features (Allen et al., 2014). Also, many personal (i.e., gender, individual preferences) and external factors (i.e., organizational constraints) can influence the degree of segmentation versus integration (Kossek et al., 1999).

In terms of work–leisure conceptualizations in relation to boundary theory, Yang (2020) positioned work and social media as two unique domains, or roles, to examine the antecedents and outcomes of employees' usage of social media at work. Similarly, work breaks (e.g., Altman & Baruch, 2010) and exercise at work (Barene et al., 2014) can be viewed as leisure activities with close temporal or physical proximity to the work domain. This lack of separation necessitates repeated boundary transitions between the two domains (Ashforth, 2001); transitions that are more or less difficult depending upon the similarities between the two domains. Finally, recent theorizing on digitally-oriented occupations with high degrees of personal travel (i.e., "digital nomads") contends that leisure (i.e., work breaks, recreation) is highly integrated with their workday because their entire work–leisure space is hybrid, including working and socializing across time zones (Cook, 2020).

Border Theory

Clark (2000) developed border theory within the organizational sciences to address the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life in terms of improving and/or diminishing individual well-being. Importantly, border theory is unique from boundary theory in that "border keepers" are posited as key constituents that enforce boundaries/borders, and blending is posited to occur to the extent that there are common border keepers between work and nonwork domains. In detailing border theory, Clark (2000) also contends that work and nonwork domains can be classified by their differences in valued ends and differences in valued means. Stated differently, the end goal for work and leisure is often not the same (Snir & Itzhak, 2002). Further, the process utilized to attain that end goal is often different for work versus leisure. Thus, employees often simultaneously pursue multiple different goals with different means in this newly created "borderland" which is not exclusively work nor leisure, and often it is governed by border keepers. It is in this blended space, or borderland, that border crossers often juggle conflicting demands when values are disparate, or they can gain a sense of balance when the blending gives the individual a satisfactory sense of wholeness. Further, sometimes the borderland space and border keepers intersect, such as when social media is used during the workday to maintain nonwork-based friendships (Pedersen & Lewis, 2012).

In relation to border keepers, theorizing within the organizational play literature has positioned certain activities as "play as engagement," suggesting that individual employees dictate how they view their assigned tasks as work-like or leisure-like (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). In these situations, the employee serves as his/her own border keeper in a very unstructured format. Similarly, occupations with a high degree of choice in terms of how/when work is completed facilitate more opportunities for employees to serve as border keepers of their leisure activities (i.e., work breaks) during the day (Iso-Ahola & Mannell, 2004; Sintas et al., 2015). On the other hand, gamification in the workplace, which highlights game-like features are often driven by organizational efforts and are more structured in nature. Indeed, Landers (2019) advocates that "management gamification" entails *organizational leaders* using gamification as a means of trying to improve managerial processes for the purpose of increasing employee motivation (p. 137). Moreover, workplace fun activities such as casual dress days, office parties, and office designs have more idiosyncratically originated border keepers; at times they are rank and file efforts by employees that serve as the designers/creators and other times they are purposefully carried out by the organizational hierarchy in a routinized fashion (Bolton et al., 2009).

Liminal Space Theory

Liminal space theory (Turner, 1982) originates from anthropology and proposes that a transitional space exists between two entities, whether it is a person's inner and outer reality (Winnicott, 1971), the threshold between stability and change (Turner, 1967), critical rites of passage in life (Piaget, 1975), or the transition between role identities (Ladge et al., 2012). All of these can be conceived as liminality, a transitional phase whereby one domain is not fully left behind, and the other domain is not yet fully occupied (Ibarra, 2003; Levinson, 1981). In essence, when liminality occurs, a person is between-and-betwixt two moments/periods/stages temporally or spatially. Unique to liminal space theory is that in this transitional space normal status structures are often suspended, which allows for boundless exploration of new possibilities (Kolb & Kolb, 2010; Turner, 1982). Further, the sociality of the liminal space is underscored by the possibility that a special camaraderie (i.e., communitas) can develop among people going through a liminal experience together that would not normally develop under typical circumstances (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016).

Previously, scholars have suggested that organizational play occurs in liminality because rules, norms, and designated social conventions that typically exist within the work domain are temporarily superseded, with play occupying the space between the real and imaginary (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). Similarly, gamification at work can create an intermediate space whereby employees feel they are simultaneously between both work and play (Ferrer Conill, 2017) because they are experiencing a game-like reality while completing their assigned job responsibilities. Arguably, recreation and exercise can also be categorized as liminoid experiences (Turner, 1974)—transitional moments in time creating a break from the normal experience but that retain some separation between domains. Importantly, for leisure activities such as within-the-workday exercise, it is the back-and-forth temporal transitions to and from work that qualify this as a liminoid experience.

Toward a Tripartite Dimensional Framework of Work–Leisure Blending

Together, the three aforementioned theories provide both a comprehensive theoretical foundation of work–leisure blending

and a way to organize the multidisciplinary research on the work–leisure interface. Thus, by drawing from a central tenet of each theory, we subsequently develop a tripartite dimensional framework of work–leisure blending to organize the array of leisure activities that have been explored across literatures under differing conceptualizations (see Figure 2). Specifically, we use boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) as the foundation for the dimension of *segmentation–integration*, border theory (Clark, 2000) as the basis for the *unstructured–structured* dimension, and liminal space theory (Turner, 1982) as the rationale for the *independent-interactive* dimension. These dimensions revolve, respectively, around (a) the degree to which leisure is integrated into work tasks, (b) the extent to which leisure activities are structured organically by employees versus designed formally by the organization, and (c) the degree to which interaction between participants is a fundamental element of the leisure activity. Organizing the literature in this manner enables us to reconcile the disconnected literature on work–leisure blending and also provides a gestalt theoretical foundation on which future research can flourish. Thus, in addition to organizing the literature on work–leisure blending via the tripartite dimensional framework, we also propose critical directions for future research that are related to each dimension in our framework.

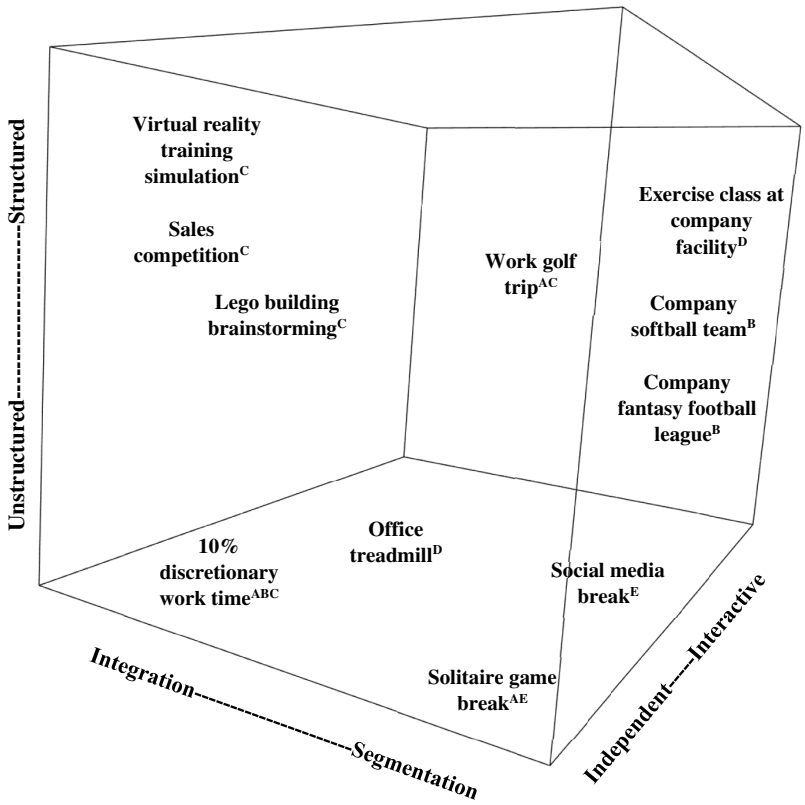
Segmentation–Integration Dimension

Conceptualization

A key concept from boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) that serves as a dimension of work–leisure blending is the segmentation–integration of leisure with the work itself (see Figure 3). In other words, this dimension highlights the extent to which leisure is cognitively, behaviorally, and/or temporally intertwined with work tasks along a segmentation–integration continuum (Kreiner, 2006; Nippert-Eng, 1996a). At one end of the continuum is *low integration* (high segmentation), whereby leisure at work is distinctly separate from work tasks in terms of their cognitive and/or behavioral overlap in boundaries, as well as the temporal flexibility of those boundaries. When leisure is segmented from work, boundaries are quite impermeable (i.e., cognitive/behavioral transitions across roles are difficult) and inflexible (i.e., not temporally malleable), making the leisure experience an almost wholly separate pursuit from the work task. This fits with the organizational play literature in that some forms of play are viewed as diversions from the work itself (e.g., office parties, internet surfing, or socializing with colleagues), with dedicated time frames during the workday (Abramis, 1990; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). For some, different

Figure 2

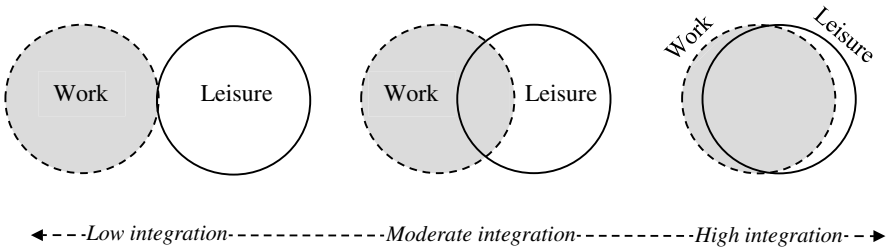
Proposed Tripartite Dimensional Framework of Work–Leisure Blending, With Illustrative Examples of Leisure Activities



Note. Conceptualizations of work–leisure blending represented by the leisure activities are as follows: [A] Organizational play; [B] Workplace fun; [C] Gamification; [D] Industrial recreation and exercise; [E] Work breaks.

Figure 3

Continuum of the Segmentation–Integration Dimension of Work–Leisure Blending



forms of exercise at on-site workout facilities (e.g., weightlifting or pickup basketball) are another type of leisure pursuit that often entails cognitively and/or behaviorally separating oneself from one's work tasks. Sonnentag and colleagues' research on psychological detachment also aligns with the idea of low cognitive integration (Sonnentag, 2012; Sonnentag et al., 2008; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007), by contending that psychological detachment occurs when people mentally disconnect from work and do not think of job-related issues when away from the job (Sonnentag, 2012). As such, microbreaks, lunch breaks, and any activities during the workday (i.e., Trougakos et al., 2008, 2014) that entail employees stepping away from their work tasks for a specified period of time (i.e., behavioral segmentation and temporal inflexibility) and/or mentally detaching from their work tasks (i.e., cognitive segmentation), but still occurring during the workday, would be indicative of low integration between work and leisure.[2]

Although low segmentation can be beneficial in the way of psychological detachment, potential drawbacks for this type of segmentation–integration do exist. For example, Iyer and Davenport (2008) noted that when employees are allowed to playfully pursue their own ideas during their own free time at work (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006), they often feel intense pressure to create something of value for the company during that time. Moreover, recasting free time as expected work–leisure blending could be resentfully interpreted by employees as managerial pressure and organizational control for the purpose of labor exploitation (Mainemelis & Dionysiou, 2015; Walker, 2011). Furthermore, employees returning from the diversion of leisure during the workday may view their central work tasks as boring or feel resentment and negative affect because their leisure time has ended (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006).

On the other end of the segmentation–integration continuum is *high integration*, where the boundaries around each domain are permeable (i.e., easy cognitive and/or behavioral transitions) and flexible (i.e., temporally malleable). In essence, with high integration, no cognitive, behavioral nor temporal distinction exists between the work task and the leisure activity (Allen et al., 2014), uniting them into a single gestalt domain. In some cases (e.g., athletes and actors) leisure behaviors may be an integral part of work in that the leisure activities are essentially viewed as one's work tasks (Elsbach & Hargadon, 2006; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). It is in those moments that employees can experience personal benefits and satisfaction from their work that outweighs even monetary rewards (Abramis, 1990; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006), which has been conceptualized as "serious play" (Jacobs & Statler, 2006), "serious games" (Fetzer et al., 2017), "play as engagement" (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006), and "fun job responsibilities" (Tews et al., 2015). Furthermore, employing game design elements (e.g., point systems, leaderboards, levels, challenges, and gaming dynamics such a fantasy, competition, and curiosity) into work tasks (i.e., gamification; Robson et al., 2015) can make the cognitive and behavioral aspects of work mimic a typical leisure experience while also allowing for a sense of completing work and leisure simultaneously (i.e., temporal flexibility). Thus, gamification can constitute high integration between work and leisure. It is these such instances of high integration that work–leisure blending can foster what Csikszentmihalyi (1991, 2000) calls "flow," and relatedly, a sense of meaning and enjoyment (Mainemelis & Dionysiou, 2015).

However, there are some instances in which high integration between work and leisure can result in negative outcomes. For example, high integration, which can often occur among gamification and play as work activities, may make it more difficult for employees to detach from work (Ashforth, 2001; Küpers, 2017) and can produce excessive focus on the work itself (i.e., workaholism and work rumination) while ignoring proper attention to important logistical concerns such as deadlines and budgets (Mainemelis, 2010; Mainemelis & Epitropaki, 2013). In addition, if poorly implemented, high integration could lead employees to overlook the functional side of work in favor of the leisure side of work. Indeed, Oravec (2015) suggests that integrating multiple forms of gamification into the workplace can result in conflicts and contradictions among roles and rules, creating greater stress and hindering core task completion.

Work–leisure blending can also manifest as *moderate integration* in that integration might be a complex combination of high and low across cognitive, behavioral, and temporal aspects of integration. For example, an employee may physically take a break from his/her work tasks (i.e., low behavioral integration) to take a short walk outside (i.e., temporal inflexibility), but still continue to cognitively process his/her work during the walk itself (i.e., high cognitive integration). Similarly, an employee can cognitively detach from his/her work by surfing the internet (i.e., digital break) while continuing to behaviorally and temporally be part of a

[2] Although psychological detachment can also occur in mornings before work, and during evenings, weekends, vacations, or sabbaticals outside of work (e.g., Feuerhahn et al., 2014; Fritz et al., 2010; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Hecht & Boies, 2009; Sonnentag et al., 2008; Strauss-Blasche et al., 2000), we exclude this work because our integrative review focuses on the communal space whereby work and leisure at least minimally coexist—the domains at the minimum share a temporal boundary that allows for cognitive/behavioral residue across multiple boundary transitions.

teleconference at work. Moreover, treadmill desks in the workplace may constitute low cognitive integration and high behavioral integration because the employee's attention is wholly focused on work while his/her body is simultaneously exercising. Importantly, in this scenario, it is the high temporal flexibility that allows for the different degrees of cognitive and behavioral integration between work and leisure.

Future Directions

While our review uncovered segmentation–integration as a defining aspect of work–leisure blending, several inquiries related to this dimension merit further investigation, such as how contextual factors influence the impact of segmentation–integration on work outcomes. For example, Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) argue that "different settings are conducive to identity work and play" (p. 15). Indeed, place identity theory (Proshansky et al., 1983) suggests that the *physical location* of work–leisure blending affects employees' reactions to the activities (Winnicott, 1975). Specifically, leisure science research has used place identity theory to explain how individuals develop attachments to different places or entities that offer personally beneficial leisure activities. These attachments develop as individuals experience place identity—that is, "the mixture of feelings about specific physical settings and symbolic connections to place that define who [they] are" (Raymond et al., 2010, p. 2). Solidifying the importance of place identity theory, research has found that individuals' perceptions of and behaviors toward leisure-providing entities (e.g., ski resorts, mountain ranges, community organizations) vary based on their attachment to those places. Moreover, place attachment to leisure providers has been found to generate greater user loyalty (Alexandris et al., 2006) and satisfaction (Hwang et al., 2005; Kyle et al., 2003). Linking place identity theory to our framework, we propose that due to perceptions of the place, the impact of segmentation–integration may depend in part on the physical location of the leisure activity. For example, it is possible that the effects of low integration on employee attitudes toward the organization, such as organizational commitment, may be stronger if the leisure activity occurs in the actual workplace (e.g., lunch meetings, on-site recreation facility) rather than off-campus (e.g., golf course or restaurant). This may happen because such activities foster a more concrete attachment to and identification with the organization. In contrast, place identity may be reduced when the leisure activity is located off of the organization's campus, thereby reducing the impact of low integration activities on employee attitudes.

The *frequency* of work–leisure blending is another contextual factor holding potential to influence the effects of segmentation–integration on work outcomes. Based on the core and balance model of leisure (Melton et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2009; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001), which originates from the family sciences literature, regularly planned or routine leisure activities (i.e., core activities) generate enhanced family cohesion as a result of greater family interaction and communication. More novel and intermittent activities (i.e., balance activities), however, challenge the status quo, forcing the family to adapt to change and be more flexible. Within the work domain, the routine versus novel nature of leisure activities likely interacts with segmentation–integration to impact how employees respond. For example, it is possible that novel but low integration leisure activities, such as a professional development program at a dude ranch, may enable the team to have more unique conversations with each other and generate more creative innovation than through more routine low integration activities, such as weekly happy hours (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). It is also unknown how intermittent low integration activities (e.g., scheduled exercise work breaks), compare in terms of their employee consequences with more routine high integration activities, such as sales competitions (i.e., gamification exercises).

Similarly, experiencing variable levels of a phenomenon over time has been shown to have differential effects on employees relative to experiencing stable levels of a phenomenon (e.g., challenge stressor variability over time hurts performance, while stable levels of challenge stressors facilitate performance; Rosen et al., 2020). Thus, the variability of any particular form of work–leisure blending may be partly tied to the integration–segmentation nature of the activity, with activities that are integrated into the work itself being more stable over time since the leisure is tied to the employees' day-to-day work tasks, while segmented activities may vary over time. Hence, exploring how the frequency of segmented and integrated activities influences effects on employees and organizations is a ripe topic, and our framework coupled with the core and balance model of leisure provides a theoretical foundation for these types of explorations.

Unstructured–Structured Dimension

Conceptualization

The second dimension of work–leisure blending captures the source responsible for structuring, designing, and delivering the activity (i.e., employees vs. the organization). Highlighting the unstructured–structured dimension, leisure science scholars differentiate between leisure activities designed by employees from those designed by an organizational entity (provider) such that "any time a provider . . . intentionally manipulates some aspect of an experience . . . it would be considered a structured experience." From this perspective, "Unstructured experiences occur primarily when the participant is also the primary experience provider" (Duerden et al., 2015, p. 603). Thus, we describe this continuum by differentiating among unstructured, semistructured, and highly structured activities.

The unstructured–structured dimension aligns with tenets of border theory (Clark, 2000) highlighting the existence of border keepers who "are especially influential in defining the domain and border" between work and leisure because they oversee the planning and execution of the activities (Clark, 2000, p. 762). Leisure sciences research refers to these individuals as experience managers, or designers, being that they directly control the leisure experience (Duerden et al., 2015). Further, cocrossers (i.e., other employees) can participate with the activity designer in crossing the borderland between work and leisure domains (Clark, 2000), often referred to as "codesigners" in the leisure sciences research (Duerden et al., 2015). In the context of work–leisure blending, this occurs when the border keeper (designer) of an activity invites or recruits others to participate in or consume the planned leisure activity. This cocrossing, or codesigning, promotes a collaborative value creation process between the activity participants and the designer(s) in developing the leisure activity (Lacanienta & Duerden, 2019).

At the low end of the unstructured–structured continuum are *unstructured* leisure activities that are entirely designed and done by the employees themselves in a bottom-up approach. Examples include an employee taking a break to play solitaire or employees collectively planning a social lunch break. These unstructured activities hold a high potential to promote personal benefits because they are designed and implemented by the employees and thus are likely to be perceived as leisure (Glynn, 1994; Kark, 2011; Lacanienta et al., 2018). Indeed, in early definitions of play, a lack of organized structure and customized experiences were espoused elements of play (Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky, 1967), making unstructured activities more likely to be perceived as enjoyable (Payne et al., 2008). Unfortunately, unstructured activities that originate from employees may not be supported by the organization, resulting in a strong demarcation between leisure and work and a situation where employees must choose between one activity that is supported by the organization (i.e., work) and one that is not (i.e., the unstructured leisure activity; Clark, 2000; Duerden et al., 2018). Thus, those who regularly engage in unstructured leisure activities at work may be viewed by others in the organization as unmotivated and even counterproductive (Petelczyc et al., 2018).

Further along the unstructured–structured continuum are *semi-structured* leisure activities that the organization to a degree supports or sponsors, thereby bestowing some level of organizational validity upon employees to promote and organize them. For example, an employee may be permitted to voluntarily organize a Pilates class in an on-site gym or organize a company-sponsored softball team. The bestowal of authority, albeit informally, onto employees to voluntarily facilitate leisure activities enables the blending of work and leisure by weakening the strong demarcation between the two domains in that both are to some extent supported by the organization (Clark, 2000). Moreover, more structured leisure activities are likely to include more than one employee because organizations are more prone to support activities that have a critical mass of employee demand and benefits. When employees engage in leisure activities with one another, the activities potentially facilitate the development of strong social ties among employees (Hunter et al., 2010; Sørensen & Spoelstra, 2012). Indeed, Bruton et al. (2012) discovered that having a volunteer leader with some degree of organizational authority to organize and lead fitness activities facilitates employee participation and enjoyment. Importantly, semistructured activities can retain a sense of freedom and cocreation among employees when they own the design and execution of the leisure activities (Lacanienta et al., 2018).

At the far end of the unstructured–structured continuum are *highly structured* activities. These are designed using a top-down approach by organizational leaders themselves or employees whose primary role is to design and execute the senior managers' leisure activities. Health and wellness programs or annual award celebrations are examples of highly structured leisure activities. In addition, health sciences research shows that hospital administrators employ "play specialists" to train, plan, and promote playful leisure activities among employees and patients as a means of enhancing patient care (Stonehouse, 2014). Due to the formal nature of highly structured activities, greater employee participation is generally expected. Such is the case when management uses gamification to instigate a sales competition to motivate employee performance or design training simulations to enhance employees' skills and experience (Dubbels, 2013; Orta & Ruiz, 2016). As organizational leaders formally encourage participation in their leisure activities, the demarcation distinguishing work from leisure further diminishes, facilitating more seamless border crossing between the two domains (Clark, 2000). Moreover, managers are likely to view employees participating in the structured leisure activities as organizationally committed rather than counterproductive. However, the top-down nature of highly structured leisure activities lessens employees' opportunities to cocreate their leisure experiences, reducing the potential for employees to personally benefit from engaging in them (McGillivray, 2005).

Future Directions

The structured–unstructured dimension suggests that the organization's involvement in work–leisure blending "trickles down" to affect employees and groups within the organization, whereas employees' organic structuring of work–leisure blending activities "bubble up" to impact groups within the organization. In this sense, work–leisure blending is inherently a multilevel phenomenon. Unfortunately, the majority of research on work–leisure blending has focused primarily on individual-level outcomes (Petelczyc et al., 2018) rather than group-or organization-level outcomes (for exceptions see Han et al., 2016; Kark, 2011; Sandelands, 2010; Tökkäri, 2015; Walker, 2011). However, there is great potential for exploring the *multilevel implications* of work–leisure blending within the structured–unstructured dimension. For example, community-structured leisure, such as sports leagues and parks (Putnam, 2000), affect community-level outcomes, making communities differentiable based on their emphasis on providing collective recreational opportunities. Similarly, organizations could be differentiated by the amount or type of work–leisure blending they encourage or structure. Indeed, the extent to which work–leisure blending is structured by the organization may capture a specific type of organizational climate (Patterson et al., 2005; Schneider et al., 2017), which, in turn, could produce various organizational outcomes (e.g., organizational engagement or collective turnover; Barrick et al., 2015; Call et al., 2015) that trickle down to groups (e.g., cohesion, adaptability, or competition) and employees (e.g., commitment or innovation). Conversely, unstructured forms of work–leisure blending could emerge from the bottom up to impact group—and organization-level outcomes. Unfortunately, it is unknown how unstructured versus structured activities differentially relate to individual, team, and organizational outcomes. For instance, are organizational outcomes more strongly impacted by structured leisure activities, whereas individual outcomes are more strongly impacted by unstructured activities? Could organizationally designed activities resonate across levels to produce negative effects at lower levels of analysis, or employee-designed activities pose problems that are homologous at both the group and organizational level? It would be prudent for future research to explore these and other questions that adopt a multilevel framework to contribute a work–leisure blending perspective to the burgeoning area of multilevel research (e.g., Chen et al., 2005).

Moreover, the *voluntary nature* of participation in leisure activities—or the perceived freedom employees possess to choose to engage in the activities (Kelly, 2012)—may directly impact how highly structured activities are received and responded to by employees. Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002) contends that having control over one's experiences generates greater intrinsic satisfaction, perceived freedom, and positive affect during the

experience (Duerden et al., 2018; Trougakos et al., 2014). Building on this idea, scholars have argued that a defining aspect of leisure compared to work is that the former entails a set of chosen tasks while the latter imposes tasks (Kabanoff, 1980; Kelly, 2009, 2012). In turn, leisure and organization science research demonstrate these benefits can be negated when recreation participation is viewed as obligatory by another entity (e.g., Duerden et al., 2018; Lacanienta et al., 2018; Spraggon & Bodolica, 2018). Thus, the voluntary nature of employee participation may in part determine how employees respond to highly structured activities (Fleming, 2005; Fleming & Sturdy, 2009; McGillivray, 2005). For example, employees could potentially see highly structured activities where there is limited volition to participate as a means of managerial monitoring or even discipline (Ferrer Conill, 2017; Russell, 2013; Walker, 2011). Indeed, Mollick and Rothbard (2014) discovered that gamification, as a highly structured leisure activity, depletes resources when consent is not present, but enhances positive affect when employees consent to it. Moreover, Trougakos et al.'s (2014) research found that employees who had low work break autonomy reported resource depletion during social breaks, while those with high work break autonomy reported resource recovery.

However, building on these findings, we suggest that it would be beneficial for future research to explore whether voluntarily participating in the leisure activities has unique effects across the different types of structured leisure activities (i.e., organizational play, gamification, exercise). For instance, are the potential negative effects of mandatory gamification on employee outcomes less than that of mandatory organizational play? Beyond that, given that coworkers—not the organizational leaders—can also impose social expectations for other employees to participate in their unstructured leisure activities, scholars would benefit by exploring whether voluntary participation has similar effects when activities are unstructured. For example, does an unstructured fantasy football tournament among coworkers feel less voluntary if there is a strong social pull to participate in the activity, and if so, how does that impact employees? These and similar questions could be explored further to examine the role of voluntariness in how unstructured versus structured work–leisure blending affects work-related outcomes.

Independent–Interactive Dimension

Conceptualization

The third and final dimension of work–leisure blending addresses the interactive aspect of workplace leisure. Specifically, this dimension captures work–leisure blending as ranging from an independent experience to one that involves significant social interactions with others engaged in the same activity. Turner's (1982) liminal space theory provides a perspective for understanding this independent-interactive continuum of work–leisure blending by suggesting that liminal experiences break down traditional social hierarchies, liberating individuals from the normative structures and expected roles associated with hierarchical contexts. Simply put, within liminal spaces, individuals are not constrained by regular social roles and structures and are therefore unfettered to express themselves and interact with each other more authentically (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). As Turner (1982) notes, "the more spontaneously 'equal' people become, the more distinctively 'themselves' they become; the more the *same* they become socially, the less they find themselves to be individually" (p. 47). Consequently, these groups form what Turner calls *communitas* (Turner, 1969), which describes the sense of unity that forms among participants during liminal experiences. To illustrate, Sandelands (2010) argued that play "is not about the individual persons but is about the whole of the human community" (p. 72).

Contrary to the idea that leisure is inherently social, some scholars suggest that leisure can be experienced in isolation from others (Glynn, 1994; Petelczyc et al., 2018). Indeed, some of the earliest conceptualizations of leisure framed it as an *independent* activity. Greek philosophers, for example, viewed leisure as "a state of being in which activity is performed for its own sake or as its own end" (de Grazia, 1964, p. 13), with pursuits falling under this classification including solitary activities (e.g., meditation and art). Over time, economists expanded the meaning of leisure to capture individual activities that occur during "discretionary" time (Becker, 1965). From this perspective, "leisure is activity—apart from the obligations of work, family, and society—to which the individual turns at will, for either relaxation, diversion, [or] broadening knowledge" (Dumazedier, 1974, p. 133).

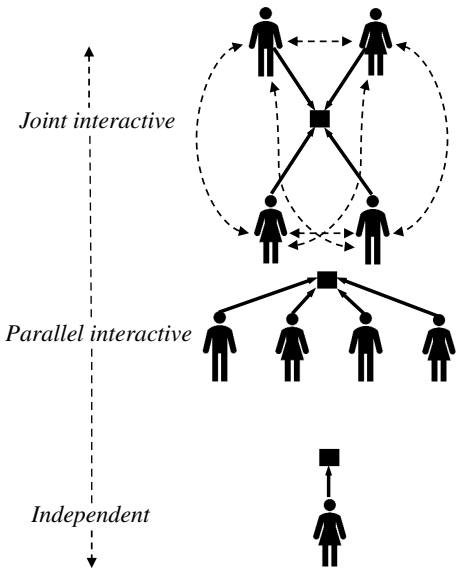
Leisure can also occur in social contexts, whereby norms and participation become shared across employees. Using bowling leagues and bridge clubs (among others) as examples of leisure-based social groups, Putnam (1995) argues that collective leisure activities create a public good called "social capital" from which individuals and societies derive immense value. In turn, social capital—defined as "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual" (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243)—creates a thrust for collective action and influences communities' vitality and functioning (Jacobs, 1965). In this sense, leisure is more than just an individual phenomenon; rather, it can manifest as a shared communal activity, in which individuals participate in the same activity thereby producing collective outcomes.

Considered together, the aforementioned perspectives and research identify interactivity as a determining feature central to workplace leisure activities. Illustrating the extremes along the interactivity continuum, Sandelands (2010) argues leisure can be experienced and enacted independently; however, it is only through social play (interaction) that leisure is able to create and transform culture. Similarly, empirical research has shown the positive impact of both isolated *and* social breaks on individuals' affective responses (Rhee & Kim, 2016; Trougakos et al., 2014). Nonetheless, just because leisure activities can be completed within a social context does not mean all social activities are highly interactive. Even seemingly social leisure activities may differ in the degree participants interact with one another (Orthner, 1976). For instance, some shared leisure activities require a high degree of interaction (e.g., playing a game of cards), whereas others require less interaction (e.g., watching a movie together).

Thus, the independent-interactive continuum entails several types of leisure activities (see Figure 4). For example, at the independent end of the continuum are leisure activities individuals may engage in independently at work (e.g., playing computer games, reading books, or surfing the internet). None of these leisure activities require another person, even if they occur in the social context of work.

Figure 4

Continuum of the Independent–Interactive Dimension of Work–Leisure Blending



However, further up on the continuum are *parallel-interactive* activities that are inherently more shared, but they can occur with limited or no levels of interaction. For example, organizations can provide yoga classes, video game arcades, golfing, or other activities that individuals physically experience together, but interaction is not required nor sometimes encouraged. Another example is company parties during which employees are encouraged or motivated to be social but not forced to do so. Indeed, Dumas et al. (2013) found that while individuals use work parties to build closer relationships with coworkers, the relationships that are primarily deepened are those between employees with similar demographic profiles. Finally, at the far end of the continuum are *joint-interactive* activities that occur when groups are *required* to interact during the activity. An example is a highly interactive and interdependent team trust-building exercise (e.g., team scavenger hunt or an Outward-Bound leadership development course; Petriglieri & Wood, 2005).

Future Directions

While our review uncovered the importance of the independent-interactive aspect of work–leisure blending, many questions about this dimension remain unanswered. First, the *level of competition* in blended activities may influence not just the level of interaction between employees during the activity, but perhaps more importantly, how they interact with one another. For example, interactive leisure activities such as pickup basketball and monthly recognition ceremonies are founded upon or entail a degree of competition, while yoga or book clubs are more collaborative in nature. Social comparison theory argues that employees make self-evaluations about their efficacy and worth based on how they compare to others (Festinger, 1954), and, as such, highly competitive activities are likely to make social comparisons more salient because most competitions end with a clear winner and loser. Depending on whether employees win or lose the competition, a variety of emotional responses may result (Matta & Van Dyne, 2020). This same risk holds true for more independent activities as well. For example, while some gamification research suggests that individual sales competitions motivate higher sales numbers, more efficiency, and less errors (Brouwer, 2016; Mokadam et al., 2015), other research shows that competitive gamification can lead to employee burnout, hyper risk taking, lower psychological safety, and even social undermining as a means of winning the competition (Bader, 2013; Barratt, 2017; Brouwer, 2016). Research could thus explore whether interactive collaborative leisure activities make social comparisons less salient and promote greater high-quality group dynamics than less interactive competitive activities. In addition, from a practical perspective it would be fruitful for researchers to examine whether the interactivity of the leisure activity impacts whether competitive activities have positive versus negative team outcomes. For instance, the multiteams literature (Chen et al., 2019) could explore how the degree of interactivity shared between teams during leisure impacts the effects that team-to-team competitions have on the system's overall performance.

Second, the interactive element of work–leisure blending may not only be impacted by the level of competition in leisure activities, but also by *cross-cultural* factors that determine how individuals in that culture generally interact with one another (Lee & Wohn, 2012; Pang & Proyer, 2018). Hofstede (1980) highlighted multiple distinctions across cultures that can impact organizations (Taras et al., 2010), and those cultural dimensions could be explored in conjunction with the independent-interactive dimension of work–leisure blending. For example, leisure activities that are more independent may align better with individualistic cultures (Hofstede, 1980), whereas collectivistic societies are likely to embrace leisure activities that are higher on collaborative interactivity. Moreover, interactive leisure activities may be affected by power distance. For example, while liminal space theory would suggest that interactive leisure activities should blur hierarchical boundaries in organizations, these types of leisure activities may be less accepted in high power distance cultures compared to low power distance cultures. Finally, future research could explore whether employees are more receptive to interactive leisure activities in cultures where work is more central to individuals' identity (Parboteeah & Cullen, 2003). For example, is it possible that in countries where work hours are longer (e.g., on average, employees from Mexico work 41.3, while employees from Germany work 26.2 hr/week; Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020), highly interactive leisure activities are better received by employees since there is less time and opportunity for pursuing interactive nonwork leisure opportunities?

Finally, the degree of interaction within a leisure activity may also have differential effects at the individual level. Specifically, the personalities of the participants of the leisure activity may impact whether the activity is rejuvenating versus depleting. For instance, extraverts may be rejuvenated, while introverts are exhausted by highly interactive activities. Inversely, introverts may enjoy highly independent activities, while extraverts view them as less fulfilling.

A Collective View of the Tripartite Dimensional Framework

Although the dimensions of our framework have been discussed separately, work–leisure blending quintessentially entails activities that are configured to varying degrees across the three dimensions

simultaneously (see Figure 2 for examples). This implies relations among the dimensions. For example, high-integration leisure activities that are also highly interactive are often suggested within the gamification literature as illustrations that maximize brainstorming and innovation among team members (Roth et al., 2015). However, within the context of innovation, high integration can also occur for independent leisure activities, such as daily or weekly discretionary time utilized within an employee's work tasks (Walker, 2011). Similarly, leisure activities can vary across all three dimensions of work–leisure blending concurrently. For example, on-site company-developed physical exercise classes are typically low integration, highly structured, and interactive. Although low integration (i.e., segmented), the moderate degree of interaction coupled with being highly structured might afford employees the opportunities to experience more personal and social health benefits from such leisure compared to highly structured leisure activities that are more independent in nature (i.e., solitary walks during the workday). While these are just a few examples, exploring the synergies among the dimensions of work–leisure blending, and their relative effects, provides perhaps the most fertile opportunity for future research. Such explorations would allow for different types of work–leisure blending to be compared to one another in relation to the same outcomes.

In terms of synergies among dimensions, our theorizing suggests that since work–leisure blending creates the opportunity for liminal spaces to operate as identity workspaces (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010) where employees can craft their own unique identities that best satisfy both work and leisure (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010), engaging in *any* work–leisure blending activity is likely to enhance organizational commitment. However, leisure activities that are meant to enhance affiliative bonds among employees (i.e., highly interactive) may serve an additive function that heightens employees' sense of commitment beyond other leisure activities.

Synergies might also occur in terms of motivational outcomes. For example, it is possible that unstructured (vs. structured) design processes in the context of a high integration, gamified competition (i.e., involving employees in designing the rules and/or rewards in the gamified competition) promote greater buy in, ownership, and personal benefits from participants in the competition. If empirical studies found support for this possibility, then allowing employees to design their own gamified tasks may promote longer lasting employee attentiveness and motivation. As another line of inquiry, given that highly integrative activities may lead employees to be hyper-engaged in their work (Halbesleben et al., 2009), could the effects of those integrative activities be augmented by added social pressures that may arise if the integrated activities occur within team settings and are highly interactive? If so, then organizations may offset the potential negative effects that integration has on hyper-engagement by ensuring that a part of the blending experience is independently experienced. While dimensions may interact with one another, future research should also explore exponential effects a single dimension may have in relation to outcomes. Specifically, it would be compelling for future research to explore the extent to which the work–leisure blending dimensions have a curvilinear effect on different outcomes. For example, while segmented forms of work–leisure blending may initially benefit performance by promoting recovery through psychological detachment (Sonnentag, 2012), at what point do they become "too much of a good thing" (Hambrick, 2007) and distract employees from completing their tasks (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006)? In addition, people that engage in more interactive leisure activities at work may have greater social networks and visibility. However, managing a large social network due to too much interactive work–leisure blending may distract employees and at some point, hurt their performance.

Practical Implications

In addition to its theory and research contributions, our integrative review can guide managerial and organizational practices. Specifically, by organizing the various conceptualizations and literature under a common framework of work–leisure blending, we provide practitioners with centralized knowledge and categorical classification of leisure activities that might be used to tailor interventions and/or promote specific opportunities for work–leisure blending. In turn, this allows organizations to have a framework from which to design activities and initiatives around work–leisure blending, and to understand some of the potential benefits and costs of designing and implementing those activities.

Specifically, our proposed framework provides a balanced explanation of both the positive and negative consequences of work–leisure blending for managers to consider. For instance, we discuss the motivational benefits of high integration between work and leisure, while also recognizing that *extremely* high levels of integration can promote workaholism or hyper-work engagement that can undermine employees' well-being (Clark et al., 2016; Halbesleben et al., 2009). Moreover, we detail how unstructured leisure activities are more likely to be perceived as leisure by employees, but these unstructured activities are also more likely viewed as counterproductive activities by others in the organization. Of course, highly structured leisure activities are less likely to be viewed as leisure by employees, but they are condoned and approved by the organization and are easier to monitor. With this balanced information, managers can accurately weigh the costs and benefits of different work–leisure blending approaches.

Next, alongside the organizational advantages of work–leisure blending are its health benefits for employees. Indeed, we review evidence demonstrating that distinct forms of physical activity at work reduce usage of sick leave (Henke et al., 2010; Patel et al., 2013) and enhance employee health and well-being (Christensen et al., 2011; Sianoja et al., 2018). Of course, focusing on employee health and well-being in the workplace via fitness wellness programs can also promote financial success for organizations (Baicker et al., 2010; Parks & Steelman, 2008). Nevertheless, highlighting the potential advantages, as well as the potential downsides, of work–leisure blending introduces—or perhaps reintroduces—work–leisure blending as a potential tool by which organizations can influence employee health and well-being.

Finally, our tripartite dimensional framework provides impactful considerations that have become increasingly relevant due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic. With organizations embracing more flexible work arrangements—primarily telecommuting—they may not be able to host traditionally structured leisure activities that are in-person at the workplace, and, similarly, the social benefits of joint interactive leisure activities may be missing from employees' daily lives. To counter this, it is prudent for organizations to empower employees to capitalize on the flexibility of working from home by engaging in more unstructured leisure activities throughout the workday. This may be especially beneficial in helping employees

manage the increased strain associated with the high levels of uncertainty caused by the pandemic (Trougakos et al., 2020).

Conclusion

With organizations and scholars alike promoting the blending of work and leisure, a developed understanding of work–leisure blending is both theoretically and practically important. To promote the progression of new opportunities for research on work–leisure blending, our integrative conceptual review assimilates concepts and theories from diverse literature streams to provide a shared understanding of this phenomenon among researchers. Furthermore, the tripartite theoretical framework of work–leisure blending that we develop not only helps organize our current understanding of work–leisure blending but also facilitates the ability for future scholars to more exhaustively and systematically utilize work–leisure blending in their theorizing and empirical research. Finally, we hope the suggested future directions offered in our review help to spur additional research in this area based on our organizing framework.

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Received April 6, 2017
Revision received April 4, 2021
Accepted April 6, 2021 ■