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From Face Time to Flex Time: The Role of Physical Space in Worker Temporal Flexibility

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Abstract

Despite the great potential for flexible work policies to increase worker temporal flexibility—the extent to which workers control when and where their work tasks are completed—organizational scholars have found that employees rarely use them for fear of career penalties. This study sheds light on this flexibility paradox by drawing attention to the overlooked yet crucial role of physical space. Using 14 months of field research during an office redesign at a large professional sales organization, I find that a reconfiguration of physical space intended to reduce costs had the unintended consequence of disrupting taken-for-granted greeting practices, noticing practices, and evaluative beliefs. Changes to social practices led employees to feel less concern about trait inferences of dependability and commitment arising from their physical presence and to experience greater temporal flexibility. The findings contribute to a model in which the relationship between flexible work policies and temporal flexibility is moderated by the physical space. By identifying the physical space as a novel determinant of temporal flexibility, the study reveals the structural underpinnings of the flexibility paradox and more generally contributes to our understanding of how physical spaces structure social life in organizations.

Keywords: temporal flexibility, flexible work policies, physical space, social valuation, work–family

Flexible work policies have diffused widely across organizations, and yet employees often experience limited temporal flexibility (Osterman, 1995; Glass and Estes, 1997; Kelly et al., 2008; Correll et al., 2014). This flexibility paradox is somewhat surprising given that flexible work policies such as working from home or flexible work hours have long been championed by consultants and human resource professionals as a solution to ever-growing productivity demands in contemporary workplaces (Dobbin, 2009). Scholars are increasingly recognizing the importance of temporal flexibility for enabling employee

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boundary-management preferences (Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate, 2000; Ramarajan and Reid, 2013), improving employee health outcomes (Rothbard and Dumas, 2006; Kelly et al., 2008), and reducing gender inequalities in the labor market (Pedulla and Thébaud, 2015; Goldin and Katz, 2016). Although flexible work policies can provide temporal flexibility when they are actually used, reducing this gap between policy and practice appears to require considerable prodding and intervention (Kelly, Moen, and Tranby, 2011; Kelly et al., 2014; Moen et al., 2016).

Organizational scholars have identified employees' fears of career penalties as the key explanation for why flexible work policies routinely fail to produce worker temporal flexibility. Employees often forgo beneficial flexible work policies because they worry that utilizing these policies can raise doubts about their work devotion and stall their advancement in the organization (Williams, 2000; Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002; Kellogg, 2011; Reid, 2015). This is because merely being seen as physically present in the office can lead observers to make spontaneous trait inferences of dependability and commitment (Elsbach, Cable, and Sherman, 2010). These concerns about the importance of ''face time'' appear to be valid, as there is evidence of wage penalties associated with using flexible work policies (Glass and Noonan, 2016).

This dominant explanation for the flexibility paradox—that employees avoid flexible work policies because they believe face time is important for cultivating perceptions of dependability and commitment—does not consider how structural workplace contexts might undergird this process. Extant studies link this stigmatization of flexible work policies to broader ideal worker expectations of total work devotion over family commitments (Williams, 2000), focusing on efforts to cultivate greater support and understanding of work–family issues (Perlow and Kelly, 2014). But this research does not consider how the relationship between flexible work policies and worker temporal flexibility might be affected by structural features of the work environment. I address this shortcoming by focusing on the overlooked yet crucial role of physical space in shaping temporal flexibility. Although recent scholarship has increasingly acknowledged that the configuration of physical space in organizations can structure patterns of social relations in unexpected ways (Elsbach, 2003; Elsbach and Pratt, 2007; Kellogg, 2009; Bernstein, 2012), we know little about how physical space could matter for temporal flexibility. This is an important oversight. As Lawrence and Dover (2015) have noted, ''places have been significantly overlooked in organizational research despite their potentially profound consequences for organizational life.''

What is the role of physical space in shaping temporal flexibility? Drawing on unexpected findings from 14 months of field research during an office redesign, I explore the structural underpinnings of the flexibility paradox, revealing how physical space moderates the relationship between flexible work policies and temporal flexibility. This study retheorizes the stigmatization of flexible work policies as a social valuation process that unfolds within the material structure of the workplace, identifying how physical spaces structure social life in ways that are largely taken for granted yet consequential for employees' experience of temporal flexibility.

THE FLEXIBILITY PARADOX: FLEXIBLE WORK POLICIES, CAREER PENALTIES, AND LIMITED TEMPORAL FLEXIBILITY

Temporal Flexibility

By ''temporal flexibility,'' I mean the extent to which workers can control when and where their work tasks are completed. While ''temporal flexibility'' is the term often used by management scholars (Evans, Kunda, and Barley, 2004; Briscoe, 2007) and economists (Goldin and Katz, 2016), it is consistent with the concept of schedule control sometimes used in the work–family literature (Kelly, Moen, and Tranby, 2011). Following Evans, Kunda, and Barley (2004: 3), I focus on temporal flexibility provided by flexible work policies allowing discretion over start and end times, as well as the ability to work from home, because workers can strategically combine both types of flexible work policies (Moen et al., 2013). For example, working from home can shift commuting time into work time, allow breaks to be used for personal tasks, and enable focused work tasks requiring isolation.

Temporal flexibility is important for employees because it can reduce work–family conflict and improve individual health and wellbeing outcomes (see Kelly et al., 2008 for a comprehensive review). There is a large literature examining the social determinants of health and establishing a relationship between work–family conflict and stress-related illnesses (Allen and Armstrong, 2006; Rothbard and Dumas, 2006; Schieman, Milkie, and Glavin, 2009). Recent field experiments have provided even stronger evidence that temporal flexibility can meaningfully reduce work–family conflict for workers (Kelly, Moen, and Tranby, 2011; Kelly et al., 2014; Moen et al., 2016). Hence organizational scholars have called for more research examining strategies to redesign workplaces to achieve greater temporal flexibility (Correll et al., 2014; Perlow and Kelly, 2014).

Employees can also use temporal flexibility to achieve their desired level of work/non-work role blurring. Boundary theory (Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 2008; Ramarajan and Reid, 2013) proposes that employee preferences for managing the work–home interface fall along a continuum from segmentation to integration. Some employees prefer to have a clear separation of roles, while others prefer to blur work and non-work roles. From this perspective, temporal flexibility can allow employees to enact their boundary-management preferences. Moreover, temporal flexibility appears to have a greater positive association with organizational commitment for employees who desire greater segmentation than for those who prefer integration (Rothbard, Phillips, and Dumas, 2005).

Temporal flexibility is also thought to improve the consistency of client service quality by limiting human error arising from overwork. For example, work hour reforms in hospitals were prompted by incidents of sleep deprivation among surgical residents leading to patient deaths (Kellogg, 2011). However, consistent service quality can be difficult to achieve under conditions of client-to-worker specificity—that is when clients expect to interact with a specific employee, when employees themselves vary in their work practices, and when employees have client-specific knowledge. Hence formal protocols that reduce reliance on one specific employee, and instead enable clients to work with multiple employees, can improve temporal flexibility for employees in client service contexts (Briscoe, 2007).

Although much of the literature has called attention to the benefits of temporal flexibility for workplace-level outcomes, economists have more recently argued that it may help remediate broader patterns of gender inequality in labor markets. This is because gender earnings gaps are highest in occupations that require unpredictable or extreme hours, and men disproportionally reap the benefits of this nonlinearity in pay with respect to work hours (Goldin and Katz, 2016). Some have argued that the gender gap in pay might vanish entirely if firms were to increase worker temporal flexibility and stop rewarding individuals for working longer or unpredictable hours (Goldin, 2014). Yet as Padavic, Ely, and Reid (2020) observe, senior leaders often venerate long hours and resist challenges to 24/7 work culture by deflecting blame to clients' demands and industry norms. Despite the importance of temporal flexibility for improving workers' wellbeing and reducing workplace inequalities, there have been few signs of progress.

Flexible Work Policies and Limited Temporal Flexibility

Flexible hours policies and work-from-home policies have been widely adopted across organizations, with practitioners and scholars viewing them as a viable strategy to give employees greater temporal flexibility (Glass and Estes, 1997; Galinsky et al., 2010; Correll et al., 2014). Human resource managers and consultants played a particularly important role in this diffusion process, successfully advancing efficiency rationales to convince managers of their utility (Dobbin, 2009). Hence companies with high-commitment work systems are most likely to adopt flexible work policies (Osterman, 1995). Recent field experiments have overcome some of the methodological limitations of prior studies (Kelly et al., 2008), providing strong causal evidence that flexible work policies can provide employees with greater temporal flexibility, meaningfully improving their wellbeing (Kelly, Moen, and Tranby, 2011; Kelly et al., 2014; Moen et al., 2016).

And yet scholars have shown that employees rarely reap the benefits of this diffusion because they worry that using flexible work policies may result in career penalties. Employees' fears of career penalties are based on a belief that ''face time''—the amount of time they are observed physically present in the office—is necessary to signal work devotion to colleagues and managers (Kossek and Van Dyne, 2008; Correll et al., 2014; Perlow and Kelly, 2014). Flexible work policies can result in career penalties because merely being seen working in the office can lead observers to make trait inferences about employees' dependability and commitment (Elsbach, Cable, and Sherman, 2010). Even individuals who support work–family issues may contribute to this problem because trait inferences occur spontaneously, without intent or knowledge of this social valuation process by observers. Employees' beliefs about the importance of physical presence as a proxy for work devotion can lead them to expend considerable effort managing perceptions about their working hours. For example, Reid (2015) found that consultants often exaggerate their work hours in conversations with colleagues in order to bolster their reputations. Employees also seek out ''high-visibility'' work (Perlow, 1999: 67), believing that exposure to managers will enhance their upward mobility in the organization. This dynamic may be greater when performance evaluation systems use forced rankings because employees can feel even greater

pressure to distinguish themselves from others by managing all available performance signals, including physical presence (Sharone, 2004). These concerns about face time are consistent with the broader literature on social valuation processes (Lamont, 2012; Zuckerman, 2012), which emphasizes the tendency of actors to engage in valuation opportunism, exploiting the fact that prevailing valuations are shaped by both objective and socially constructed factors.

Trait inferences about dependability and commitment arising from physical presence reflect widespread acceptance of expectations of the ideal worker. Flexible work policies tend to conflict with prevalent employer expectations of total work devotion over family commitments (Williams, 2000). These ubiquitous ideal worker expectations encourage overwork in contemporary organizations, with ''greedy institutions'' (Coser, 1974) demanding ever more productivity in the form of increased work hours for managerial and professional employees who are exempt from overtime pay (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004; Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl, 2013). Thus higher status employees report higher levels of conflict between work and personal domains (Schieman, Milkie, and Glavin, 2009). These ideal worker expectations can manifest overtly when supervisors impose work demands during non-work hours (Perlow, 1998) and directly sanction individuals who use flexible work policies (Kellogg, 2009, 2011), but they can also occur subtly when supervisors' lack of articulated support for flexibility is interpreted as disapproval (Kossek et al., 2011). Hourly wage returns to overwork have increased in recent decades (Cha and Weeden, 2014), suggesting that companies are increasingly rewarding employees for working extreme hours.

Employees' concerns about the importance of face time appear to be valid. Recent studies have shown that the use of flexible work policies does result in career penalties (Kalleberg and Reskin, 1995; Glass, 2004; Wharton, Chivers, and Blair-Loy, 2008; Glass and Noonan, 2016). Glass and Noonan (2016) found that employees who take overtime work home suffer slower earnings trajectories, with overtime work completed at home yielding earnings growth of about $3.50 an hour less as compared to overtime work completed at the office. While previous studies have found mixed results (Weeden, 2005; Heywood, Siebert, and Wei, 2007), Glass and Noonan's (2016) longitudinal fixed-effects model overcomes some of the endogeneity biases in prior work. For example, high-performing employees are often more likely to use flexible policies (Kelly and Kalev, 2006), and flexible policies are associated with high-performance organizations (Osterman, 1995). Flexible work policies may be particularly damaging for employees who are not assigned to powerful supervisors (Briscoe and Kellogg, 2011) and when flexible policies are not widely used by high-status employees (Munsch, Ridgeway, and Williams, 2014).

Physical Space

Research examining the relationship between flexible work policies and temporal flexibility has largely focused on informal processes of social judgement, with comparatively less attention to the role of formal structures. However, Kelly and Kalev (2006) showed that formal registration procedures can discourage temporal flexibility by creating a system of negotiated perks whereby employees have the right to ask for, but not a right to use, flexible work policies. And formal procedures such as knowledge management tools,

standardized routines, and organizational communications to clients have also been shown to increase temporal flexibility for employees by reducing clients' reliance on specific workers (Briscoe, 2007). Hence it may be important to pay more attention to how structural features of employees' work context could affect their experience of temporal flexibility.

Physical space is one important structural feature of workplaces that has been largely overlooked in research on temporal flexibility. Most qualitative studies in organizations tend to briefly describe the material environment, treating it like a passive backdrop where organization life unfolds rather than ''an active ingredient'' in producing social action (Finnegan, 2008; Lawrence and Dover, 2015). Some have suggested that physical spaces might heighten feelings of work–life distinction through the set of meanings conveyed by the material environment. For example, Nippert-Eng (2008: 189) suggested that the sterile aesthetic of the laboratory, with fluorescent lighting, linoleum floors, white boards, and gene-mapping diagrams, evokes a strong distinction between scientists' work and personal lives. This approach is consistent with a large body of psychological research showing how aesthetic features of spaces—such as illumination, temperature, and odor—can serve as stimuli triggering a range of physiological responses (Zhong and House, 2012). But it is not clear how these perceptions of work–life distinction might affect behavioral outcomes, specifically the use of flexible work policies.

The broader literature on physical space in organizations (Elsbach and Pratt, 2007) provides two suggestive insights for why the material environment might matter for temporal flexibility. First, certain kinds of physical spaces can encourage risk-taking behaviors among employees. Several studies have shown that spaces providing isolation can allow employees to feel comfortable engaging in thick or emotive social interactions (Sundstrom, Burt, and Kamp, 1980; Becker et al., 1983; Carlopio and Gardner, 1992; Manning, 2014), collectively experimenting and learning new techniques (Bernstein, 2012), or covertly mobilizing for organizational change (Kellogg, 2009). Because flexible work policies represent a source of risk for employees' reputations, it is possible that physical spaces that enable risk-taking might encourage employees to use these policies. Yet while this research suggests that physical space could be relevant to risk-taking, it is not clear what specific features of physical space might be relevant for employees to feel more comfortable using flexible work policies.

Second, research on physical space has shown that employees can express valued identities through the material environment. When office designs allow a high level of personalization, employees can use personal artifacts to display their work and non-work identities to others (Elsbach and Pratt, 2007). They may decorate their workspace with photos of their families, awards conferred by their company, or objects that convey professional expertise (Wells, 2000; Bechky, 2003; Byron and Laurence, 2015). In non-territorial office spaces where employees cannot personalize their space, they are more likely to seek out other opportunities to convey their valued identities, using portable artifacts or discussing their personal lives with others (Elsbach, 2003). This is relevant because the stigmatization of flexible work policies involves a desire to display a valued identity—that of the ideal worker who embraces total work devotion over family commitments. The design of the physical space may affect how employees signal aspects of this identity to others, and this could have consequences for temporal flexibility.

What is the role of physical space in shaping temporal flexibility? This is an important question because scholars have largely explained the weak relationship between flexible work policies and temporal flexibility by invoking employees' fears of career penalties; very little attention has been given to the role of physical space in this social valuation process. Given that physical spaces are generally thought to structure interpersonal interactions in organizations, this study aims to understand what role, if any, physical space might have in shaping temporal flexibility for workers.

METHODS

This study involved 14 months of in-depth field research during an office redesign at the national sales division of a *Fortune* 500 company, which I refer to by the pseudonym "BigCorp." More than 500 employees were located at the site, the majority of whom worked on either a customer team managing sales with a specific large customer account or on a brand team managing sales across product categories. BigCorp was an ideal research setting to examine the role of physical space in temporal flexibility for several reasons. First, the office redesign allowed me to exploit variation over time to examine changes in temporal flexibility by comparing the same employees' experience in the old office (assigned cubicles) with their experience in the new office (unassigned mix of workspaces). Second, the office redesign was initiated because of cost-reduction efforts unrelated to flexible policies, mitigating against endogeneity concerns about the office redesign signaling greater management support for temporal flexibility. Finally, flexible work policies remained consistent over the study period, and no other notable changes (i.e., mergers, acquisitions, management changes, downsizing, policy changes) occurred in this time, facilitating reasonable comparisons between the old and new office spaces.

I embraced an explicit discovery epistemology (Locke, 2011), which has often been referred to as abduction (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014; Behfar and Okhuysen, 2018). Rather than entering the field site with a rigid set of predetermined hypotheses, the researcher using this methodology searches for unexpected findings that existing theories cannot explain. The goal is to generate new theory by inductively discovering a surprising empirical puzzle of theoretical significance and then deductively developing and refining the emergent explanation. By combining induction and deduction, the abductive method aims to avoid common pitfalls of a rigid field research design—namely forcing the qualitative data to fit a pre-selected theory or collecting qualitative data that simply confirm what is already known. This approach is similar to grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) but is much more explicit about the role of surprising findings based on existing literature and the need to rule out alternative explanations. Hence many scholars have described abduction as a more accurate description of how empirical scientists actually collect and analyze data in practice (Ketokivi and Mantere, 2010). This pragmatic strategy lends itself to mixed methods, embracing any data, whether qualitative or quantitative, that can help solve the empirical puzzle at hand (Small, 2011).

The abductive field research method is particularly appropriate for studying the role of physical space, because organizational research in this area is nascent (Elsbach and Pratt, 2007). A more open-ended and flexible research design should provide a stronger methodological fit here than a rigid research

design that is better suited for testing mature theories (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). Consistent with my field research methodology, I began by examining BigCorp's office redesign as the focal empirical phenomenon, armed with knowledge of multiple relevant literatures. I was surprised when I discovered employees describing both a decline in face time after the office redesign and greater comfort in utilizing flexible work policies. This discovery revealed an interesting empirical puzzle: why did the office redesign increase temporal flexibility for employees? To make sense of the unexpected findings, I triangulated between multiple data sources to develop a theory of the role of physical space in temporal flexibility.

Data Collection

The research process involved collecting multiple sources of data to assess the effect of the office redesign on temporal flexibility. These included (1) observation, (2) semi-structured interviews, and (3) company survey data. Triangulation between multiple data sources gave me confidence in my interpretations, ensuring strong fit between emergent theory and data.

Observation. Over the span of 14 months, I conducted approximately 1,400 hours of observation, split between the pre-change (Time 1) and post-change (Time 2) periods. This was enabled by BigCorp giving me an employee badge, a desk, a company e-mail address, and full access to talk to anyone in the organization. I entered BigCorp six months prior to the redesign and spent roughly three days a week at the office. I sampled for range (Weiss, 1994), learning as much as possible about the context by integrating myself into the organization and being as helpful as possible. Participant observation involved following six sales teams and the human resources (HR) team, as well as assisting with administrative tasks and data analysis. Non-participant observation involved passively examining how people used the office space and opportunistically joining meetings, training sessions, corporate events, and social activities. I also observed the ongoing bi-weekly lunch series with employees and the company's most senior executives, where employees were encouraged to share their thoughts about how to improve work at BigCorp.

Consistent with the discovery epistemology approach, I did not initially expect that my field data would guide me toward the research topic of temporal flexibility. Hence I did not discuss my research purpose as related to flexible work policies and instead expressed a more general interest in studying the office redesign. My immersion in the research site prior to the change in physical space allowed me to gain a high level of familiarity with the organizational context and employee social practices, facilitating meaningful historical comparison of changes after the introduction of the new office space.

After the office redesign, I focused on producing comparisons of the post-redesign (Time 2) operations with the pre-redesign (Time 1) operations. This involved continued participant and non-participant observation in the organization for eight more months, as well as frequent informal discussions with employees about how the office redesign had affected their experiences at work. These historical comparisons led me to develop hypotheses about changes in social practices and temporal flexibility. Observation—particularly

informal discussions with employees—led to the discovery of the core empirical puzzle and emergent theory of the role of physical space in temporal flexibility.

Semi-structured interviews. I conducted 50 semi-structured interviews during Time 2 to further develop and refine the theory that emerged from participant observation and informal discussions with employees across the organization. Informants were randomly sampled from a population list of employees located at the research site and reflected a diversity of gender, rank, and department. I interviewed 28 women and 22 men; 14 administrative employees, 11 junior managers, 16 middle managers, and 9 senior managers and executives; 21 sales employees, 16 marketing employees, 5 logistics employees, and 8 internal function employees. Interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes in length and took place at a location of the informant's choosing, typically in meeting rooms inside the office or at a nearby café. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed with participants' consent.

Informants were given a general statement about the purpose of the research that indicated interest in hearing their ''opinions and insights on the new office space.'' During each interview, I began with open-ended questions about their feelings about the office redesign, and I later asked specifically about their use of flexible work policies. I introduced myself to informants as an academic researcher and promised confidentiality of responses, and I was transparent about my access and observations in the company being facilitated by BigCorp executives. I initially thought this affiliation might yield some hesitation in discussing their utilization of flexible work policies because it could be a sensitive topic. However, informants appeared receptive to this ambiguous insider–outsider status (Lofland and Lofland, 1995) and seemed quite willing to talk candidly about their experiences. I present the qualitative data using labels indicating gender, function (sales, marketing, logistics, or internal), and interview number.

Interviews are well suited for an analysis of employees' experience of temporal flexibility. This is because the stigmatized nature of flexible work policies leads employees to minimize observable behaviors and discussion. Although my observations provided valuable insights about the organizational context and employees' social practices more broadly, the interview data enabled privileged access to individuals' subjective and affective understandings, which are otherwise difficult to study (Weiss, 1994). This allowed insight into the motivations underlying individual decisions to access flexible work policies, their perceptions about the risks involved, and their comparative experience of temporal flexibility in the two office spaces.

Company survey data. I include results from a company survey in Online Appendix A (http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0001839220907891) and refer to them in the main findings to corroborate my qualitative insights. BigCorp collected the survey six months after the office redesign (Time 2) with simple random sampling yielding a response rate of about 69 percent. Although BigCorp had also conducted a Time 1 survey, respondents did not have unique identifiers, so the same people could not be linked across survey waves. I therefore relied only on data from the Time 2 survey, which asked respondents to

retrospectively rate their experiences in the old and new office spaces, facilitating analysis of within-person variation and controlling for time-invariant unobserved characteristics of individuals. The company designed the survey primarily to identify potential issues with technology and maintenance, but some survey items were constructed based on their own employee focus groups and were relevant to my research question. I obtained the survey data after I had already analyzed the qualitative data and developed the theory presented in this paper. Therefore the survey data did not contribute to the identification of the empirical puzzle or to the explanatory theory-building process. Instead, they provided a unique opportunity to triangulate with the qualitative data, giving me greater confidence in my interpretations and helping me generalize beyond those employees sampled in my observation and interviews.

Analytic Approach

The analytical strategy was to generate a processual theory by exploiting variation over time (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). This involved examining the effect of the office redesign using Time 1 (old office space) versus Time 2 (new office space) comparisons. Rather than comparing the experiences of employees assigned to different physical spaces (a cross-sectional/between-subjects comparison), the research design compared the experience of the same employee in the old office space and the new office space (a longitudinal/within-subject comparison). This approach improves the accuracy of interpretations by ruling out alternative explanations arising from differences in stable individual characteristics or work contexts. Hence I compared my own observations before and after the office redesign, and my interview informants and company survey respondents compared their own experiences before and after the office redesign.

Time 1 versus Time 2 comparisons occurred prospectively in the observational data and retrospectively in semi-structured interviews and company survey data. Although interview informants seemed perfectly willing and able to recall the information they provided, several features of the study design reduce the risk of bias arising from recall accuracy issues in retrospective accounts. These correspond to the key event factors that are known to affect respondents' recall accuracy: the passage of time, temporal landmarks, event distinctiveness, and topic importance (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski, 2000). First, respondents were asked to compare their experiences in the old and new office spaces, which were separated by a relatively short time interval of about six months. Second, the office redesign served as a distinct temporal landmark, eliminating uncertainty about the reference period by clearly demarcating Time 1 (old office) from Time 2 (new office). Third, the event under question—the office redesign—occurred only once, eliminating any confusion about which office space was being asked about. Finally, the topics of the research were important to employees given the considerable impact of the office space and flexible work policies on employees' daily routines and overall quality of life. These features should facilitate recall accuracy and reduce measurement error.

The qualitative data were stored, organized, and analyzed using NVivo qualitative research software. The analysis involved constant comparisons between Time 1 and Time 2. In the first round of analysis, I conducted open coding

(Strauss and Corbin, 1998), focusing on identifying empirical themes relating to how informants described their experience of temporal flexibility in the old and new office spaces. These codes were then grouped into second-order codes with empirical themes being distilled into conceptual categories that corresponded to either Time 1 (old office) or Time 2 (new office). The final round of coding produced the aggregate dimensions ''changes to greeting practices,'' ''changes to noticing practices,'' and ''changes to evaluative beliefs.'' These aggregate dimensions were inductively identified by 22, 56, and 58 percent of informants, respectively. The emergent theory from the qualitative data was then supplemented by an analysis of relevant items from the company survey data.

FINDINGS

I found that the physical space served as a powerful structural determinant of temporal flexibility. Although employees had access to the same flexibility work policies—a work-from-home policy and a flexible hours policy—in the old office and in the new office, their level of temporal flexibility changed considerably after the office redesign. Changes in physical space disrupted and transformed taken-for-granted social practices, reducing anxieties about career penalties and strengthening the relationship between flexible work policies and temporal flexibility. After the office redesign, employees experienced greater temporal flexibility, which manifested in greater control over work timing and location. The findings indicate that the relationship between flexible work policies and temporal flexibility is moderated by the physical space.

Flexible Work Policies

BigCorp offered highly progressive flexible work policies that were available to all employees working at the site and did not change during the study period. The flexible work policies had been in place for several years prior to the office redesign and allowed all employees to use flexible hours and to work from home at their discretion. While many companies require employees to request access to flexible work policies from their managers (Kelly and Kalev, 2006), at BigCorp, these flexible policies applied to all employees by default and allowed considerable discretion in work timing and location.

BigCorp's HR policy guide outlined a flexible hours policy and a work-from-home policy. The flexible hours policy allowed employees to choose their own start and end times each day. Employees could begin working as early as 7 a.m. or as late as 9:30 a.m. and could accordingly stop working between 3 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. depending on their start time. The company's work-from-home policy allowed employees to work from home at their discretion, with no requirements to formally report time worked outside the office. These policies were made available to employees with the expectation set in the HR policy guide that employees use good judgment to make sure that they did not ''have an adverse effect on achieving business results or create undue burden for the team or other employees.'' Although employees were encouraged to use this discretion responsibly, the policy reaffirmed the company's intent to ''facilitate employees having the flexibility to balance work and personal needs while

allowing [BigCorp] to manage resources, attain objectives and meet business and customer needs.''

Although BigCorp offered highly progressive policies, their utilization by employees was mixed. Despite having the option to work from home or adjust their working hours, some felt anxious about using these policies, fearing that ''if you are not at your desk, people will think you've checked out'' (FM39). Flexible work policies were not completely decoupled from practice, as is common in many organizations. While they certainly did not exist solely ''on the books'' or as a form of symbolic compliance at BigCorp, many employees accessed them infrequently and cautiously prior to the office redesign. As one informant explained:

> [E]ven though you come to [BigCorp] as a new hire and they say, ''it's not about face time, it's about results,'' and all these things, you still will feel obligated to have that face time in the office. Regardless of if your manager says it doesn't matter, you still have the feeling that it matters. (MS37)

Employees' fears about negative career consequences were somewhat surprising given the company's strong espoused support for flexibility. Prior to the office redesign, I attended a mandatory onboarding training for new employees in which one of the most senior BigCorp executives gave a presentation about work norms, outlining the company's flexible work policies and encouraging new employees to take advantage of them to achieve a healthy work–life balance. BigCorp executives emphasized that because roles were very demanding, the flexible policies were intended to provide employees with the autonomy to balance heavy work responsibilities with personal and family needs. All new employees were informed of these policies as part of the routine employee onboarding training. I also noticed that it was standard practice for employees to include a call-in number when scheduling meetings with more than two people, just in case someone was working remotely. This feature was seamlessly integrated into the calendar management software that all employees used to schedule meetings. HR managers were also highly supportive of flexible work policies and spoke about them during meetings as a valuable way of preventing employee burnout and stress-related medical leaves.

Changes to Physical Space: From Assigned Cubicles to an Unassigned Mix of Workspaces

The old office space featured standard cubicles that were assigned to individual employees. There were two slight variations of this configuration across floors. Most floors had a traditional assigned cubicle design where each employee had an individual cubicle with high partitions and was co-located with members of their work team. A few floors had a similar design except with slightly lower partitions between cubicles and with clusters of cubicles assigned to each work team rather than to individual employees. In most of these teams, however, employees would typically choose the same cubicle each day, effectively resulting in an informally assigned cubicle arrangement that was practically identical to the first layout but with slightly lower partitions. Meeting rooms designated for different work teams were also available on each floor.

The new office design, referred to as the ''BigCorp Campus,'' was a non-territorial (Elsbach, 2003) or activity-based design. This involved changing two dimensions of physical space—workspace assignment and workspace heterogeneity—by replacing assigned cubicles with an unassigned mix of workspaces with no booking requirements. The BigCorp Campus significantly reduced the number of floors occupied in the leased BigCorp building. Varied workspaces were available on each floor and intended for particular task needs. *Library space* consisted of large clusters of study carrels, usually located on far ends of the office, away from louder high-traffic areas. *Open areas* had minimal or no partitions and featured modern furniture, including a mix of long high tables, low comfortable chairs, and small tables. Similar to a lounge, this type of area was intended for casual conversations or work requiring relatively low concentration. *Break-out rooms* were small closed-door rooms located throughout the office, intended for one- to five-person meetings or for private phone calls. Finally, *conference rooms* were large closed-door rooms varying in size (for 6 to 20 people), which required advanced booking. Artist renderings of the old and new office spaces are provided in Online Appendix B for a visual comparison.

All BigCorp floors were sequentially ordered and connected by elevators and staircases, and employees could access any workspaces on any floors throughout the day as needed, with no booking requirements except for the large conference rooms. Prior to the office redesign, the company provided optional document digitization services for the contents of filing cabinets, as well as optional training sessions on digital notetaking. Employees continued to use the same portable laptop computers that they had in the old office space. The new office also provided lockers scattered throughout all floors of the building with reprogrammable passcodes, allowing employees to use any locker to store personal items such as coats, shoes, or bags. This allowed them to move from space to space as needed throughout the day without having to carry anything other than their laptop computer.

The office redesign was not intended to improve temporal flexibility among employees. Rather, it emerged when executives decided to engage in creative cost reduction by minimizing the company's real estate needs. Company executives were advised by their commercial real estate services partner that valuable space reduction opportunities existed that could reduce the high costs of renting many floors of office space in a major city center. This was because employees' assigned cubicles were never fully utilized due to normal business activities taking place away from the cubicle (e.g., meetings, phone calls, customer visits, breaks, vacation time). Activity-based or non-territorial office designs have become increasingly popular in recent years, with companies adopting them partly because they reduce the total size of the office space by accounting for normal employee time away from their desks (Needleman, 2009; Bennett, 2014; Park, 2014; Rosenberg and Campbell, 2014). Senior leaders were transparent in informing employees that the office redesign was motivated by cost-reduction efforts, rather than trying to frame it as an effort to improve the current office space. The company president unveiled plans for the upcoming BigCorp Campus during the annual end-of-year meeting for all employees. He explained that there was ''substantial underutilization of the office space'' and that the redesign would ''present a smart opportunity to

reduce costs while also maintaining a comfortable and modern work environment.''

After the announcement, many employees raised concerns about how the new office space would function, raising a variety of potential problems related to crowding, noise, storage, and logistics. Although the company solicited feedback and aimed to proactively address these issues through town halls and planning committees, employees' expectations were clearly mixed prior to the launch of the BigCorp Campus. Given that the office redesign was presented as a cost-savings effort and not a work–life balance initiative, it does not appear that employees' perceptions of management's intent were related to changes in temporal flexibility.

Changing Social Practices and Increased Temporal Flexibility after the Office Redesign

The new BigCorp Campus appeared to reduce employees' concerns about managing perceptions of work devotion through constant physical presence. Many employees described feeling more comfortable using flexible work policies—working from home and flexible work hours—which many previously utilized with apprehension. As one employee explained:

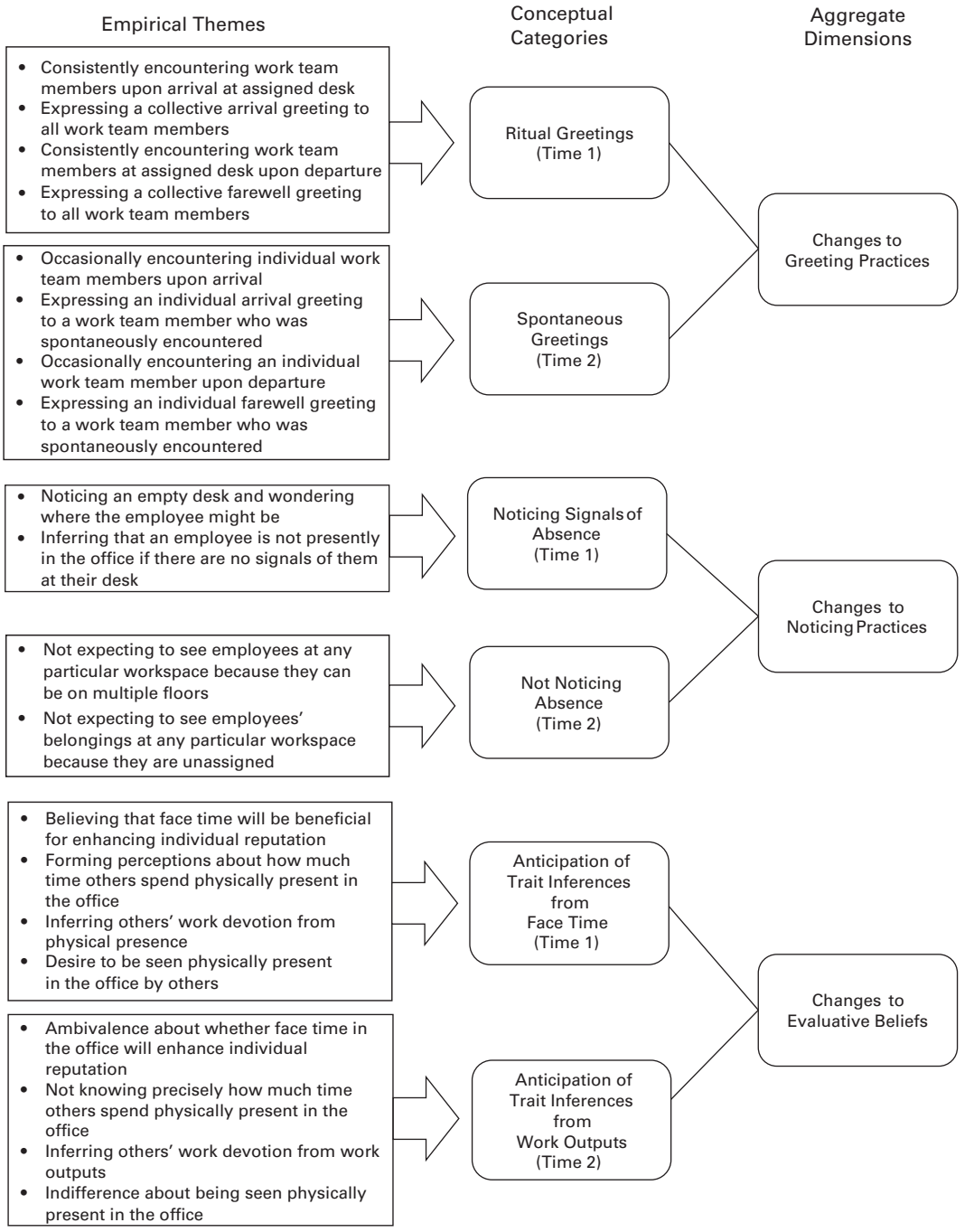
> Before when we had the cubicle setting, we could see where everybody is at the same time, and you felt the pressure to always be there. . . . Whereas now I'm at the customer at least three times a week, and to me I feel that it doesn't matter where I work, and I think this [new] office environment enables it because I can go to the customer and then go to the coffee shop and work from there between another customer call. (MS20)

This was initially a puzzling finding given that the office redesign was created to reduce real estate costs and was not conceptualized as a work–life balance initiative. The office redesign was not accompanied by any other notable changes at BigCorp—company policies, senior leadership, work demands, and work processes all remained constant during this period.

Why did employees feel more comfortable accessing flexible work policies after the office redesign? Drawing on rich qualitative data from interviews and observations, I identify the mechanisms underlying increased temporal flexibility. I find that the office redesign disrupted several taken-for-granted social practices—greeting practices, noticing practices, and evaluative beliefs—with employees consequently experiencing greater temporal flexibility in the new office space. Figure 1 summarizes the data structure for changes between Time 1 and Time 2, visualizing how I moved from empirical themes to conceptual categories and aggregate dimensions in the analytical process.

Changes to greeting practices: From ritual greetings to spontaneous greetings. Prior to the office redesign, I observed several greeting practices that reinforced awareness of colleagues' presence in the office. When employees arrived at the office each morning, they would usually greet their team while setting up their workspace. While taking out their laptops and arranging their belongings, employees would spend a few minutes casually socializing, discussing their weekend plans, children's activities, and other

Figure 1. Qualitative data structure for changes in the old and new office spaces.



personal matters. This almost always occurred each time a colleague entered the office, resulting in a mutual awareness of the order in which colleagues arrived in the morning:

> It was nice to say hi to your team and sort of chit chat a bit as people trickle in. But you do end up getting a sense for who comes in when, and those sorts of daily pleasantries do make you a bit self-conscious about when you come in . . . because even though you don't want to make an entrance, it's hard not to when everyone's there to acknowledge you. (ML14)

Another informant explained that ''you feel obligated to come in early in the morning just because of the fact that you're going and sitting beside your manager'' (FS41). Employees would engage in a similar greeting ritual at the end of the workday. When leaving the office, they would typically address their work team with some kind of farewell greeting: ''Okay guys, I'm heading out. Have a great evening!'' These greeting rituals occurred with great predictability and represented a seemingly inevitable routine until they were disrupted after the move to the BigCorp Campus. As one informant told me:

> In the old environment, my cubicle was right next to my manager. And he was pretty traditional in the sense that he would come in bright and early and leave pretty late. And so when I'd be ready to leave the office in the evening, I'd look over and see that of course he is still there. Like, I knew that as far as productivity was concerned . . . I probably wasn't going to be getting much more done. But sometimes I'd hesitate to leave with him still there—not that he'd say anything bad. He'd be very polite and tell me to have a good night. . . . Whereas now [in the new office space], he doesn't see me at the end of each day. So it's not a given that we would have that interaction. (ML40)

After the office redesign, greeting rituals no longer occurred in a routine manner. Employees began their mornings at different workspaces and were no longer consistently seated with the same group of colleagues. When they arrived at work, they would no longer sit in a designated area with their entire work team. While they might randomly encounter colleagues while walking through the office or choose to sit with colleagues that they notice, this was no longer inevitable. The same was true when leaving the office at the end of a workday: employees would no longer extend a farewell greeting to their team before leaving the office. As such, formerly predictable greeting rituals gave way to unpredictable, spontaneous greetings in the BigCorp Campus. This led employees to feel more comfortable using the flexible hours policy because their arrival and departure times were no longer highly visible. As informants explained:

> Yeah, it was always flexible before, but just the fact that you know that people know if you are in the office or not, even if I didn't have to be in the office. . . . You were like ''oh, people will know exactly what time I came in and know exactly what time I left''—which shouldn't matter, but I feel like subconsciously you don't want people to be always aware of every single thing. So in this environment it is awesome because sometimes you are here earlier, and sometimes you are here later. (FM27)

> I think when you have a dedicated space you do expect to see other people, like my team or my boss or whoever. If people expect you to be here every morning, people expect to see you, and when you are not there it is obvious. But [in the new office space] . . . it feels like now it matters less exactly where you are. (MS29)

The elimination of assigned workspace made it easier to arrive and exit the office discreetly. If other employees saw someone entering or exiting the

office, it was unclear whether this actually represented that person's arrival or departure from the office, rather than simply representing a break from work. One informant explained how she was able to attend a medical appointment without concerns about negative judgments that existed in the old office space:

> I recently came in at 10 because I had an appointment, and it just so happened that [the company president] and [vice president of sales] were sitting right there as I walked into the office. And I didn't really have qualms about "will they see me coming in late?" because for all they knew I could have already come in and gone. Like, it was late enough that I could have been going out for coffee. I mean, it just so happened that I actually was showing up for work at 10 that day because of the appointment. . . . So I actually think it's a little bit enabling versus [the old space]. (FS4)

The change in greeting rituals also reduced anxieties about inaccurate perceptions of arrival times to the office. One informant explained that to save time commuting, he would always arrive in the office long before rush hour, starting work a few hours before the rest of his team and thus leaving much earlier than them. With nobody present to see him arrive at the office so early in the morning, he would worry that his colleagues might incorrectly assume he was leaving work early at the end of the day:

> For me to leave at 4 is no issue [after the office redesign]. I think in the old environment, I felt less comfortable doing that. It's very rare that people leave at 4. It's not the norm. I think people come in later and then stay later. . . . I know that I am an early bird. . . . So they wouldn't see me come in but they *would* see me leave. (MS20)

Others also felt less concerned about misperceptions about when they ended work. With the spontaneous greetings produced by the new office, it was less likely that colleagues would notice departures and fail to recognize continued working activities occurring off-site. One informant explained that he no longer worried about work time during his long commute being unrecognized:

> [In the old office] I certainly felt like I would have to justify my time schedule to other people. Commuting from [a distant town] is a drain, so I like to work during my commute. But then, people might have wondered, "Why is he coming in at that time and leaving at that time?" Well, I've put in two hours of work time on my commute, which you don't see but which people might have that perspective of "Oh well, he's not putting in his time." No, I am putting in my time. Everyone puts in their time. People put in time at home, when they might be sitting down with the family and they're working on stuff. People don't necessarily see that. So now [in the new BigCorp Campus] you don't feel like you're being watched or judged for your time and how you're spending it. Because you shouldn't be. It should all come down to whether you're delivering on your results. (MS32)

The spontaneous greetings after the redesign did not appear to reflect intentional efforts to prevent colleagues from tracking one's time spent in the new office. Employees would still sit with team members at times, but this happened spontaneously—when they crossed paths—rather than predictably. The reason employees did not consistently cluster with team members was

because of the large size of the office and the meeting-based culture that encouraged movement throughout the day. First, since the office spanned several floors, all members of a work team were unlikely to be on the same floor at any given time. Even if they were on the same floor, two people would not necessarily see one another because of the considerable size of each floor and the walls separating different types of work areas. This finding is consistent with responses to a survey item showing a decrease in the extent to which employees knew where to find one another after the office redesign (see Online Appendix A). Second, the company's meeting-based culture meant employees' workdays generally consisted of a mix of meetings and ''heads-down'' work time. The company survey provides support for this meeting culture, as employees reported spending on average 27.9 percent (S.D. = 19.54) of their work time in meeting rooms across both time periods. Frequent meetings reflected the team-based nature of the company, with employees working on cross-functional teams and needing to meet with different functional experts to ensure smooth delivery of their sales operations. Employees would frequently book meeting time with colleagues through Microsoft Outlook's calendar system, which allowed employees to self-manage their available meeting timeslots. Hence employees would not typically sit in one spot for the entire day and would instead move among different workspaces and meeting rooms located across different floors of the office.

By eliminating assigned workspace, the office redesign disrupted the daily greeting rituals that routinely occurred in the old office during arrival and departure times. The new office space produced a shift from greeting rituals to spontaneous greetings, contingent upon running into work team members when arriving at the office or leaving at the end of a workday. This reduced the extent to which employees worried about colleagues' and managers' perceptions of their work time and consequent trait inferences about their dependability and commitment. With less concern about career penalties arising from flexible work policy use, employees experienced greater temporal flexibility, setting their start and end times with less fear of negative judgments from others.

Changes to noticing practices: From noticing signs of absence to not noticing absence. The old office also encouraged noticing practices, with the visibility of employees' assigned desks heightening concerns about career penalties for employees wanting to occasionally work from home. Because employees had grown accustomed to seeing the same people around them each day, an empty desk would serve as a highly salient visual cue alerting others to the fact that someone was not physically present in the office. As one informant described, ''It was like there was a stigma if you were not behind your desk'' (FI18). In the old office, it was quite obvious when an employee was working in the office, even if they were temporarily away from their desk. Artifacts such as a half-full coffee cup, a bag of chips, a jacket on the back of a chair, a purse on the floor, or a secured laptop could all symbolize their presence. In the old office, the material cue of an empty desk led some to feel anxiety about negative judgments produced when accessing the work-from-home policy:

> I think what role [the office redesign] has played is that you don't feel that bit of the formality of "if the lights are not on in your office, where are you?" Does that make sense? Whereas now if you are not seen, it doesn't mean that you are not working. Right? And so you don't feel as guilty. (MS23)

> So previously, when I had a desk and I was sitting with my team, I felt a greater obligation to be here 9:00 to 5:00. Whereas today I did not have a meeting till 10:30. So I fired up my laptop and ate my breakfast in my pajamas and worked at my kitchen table from 8:00 right through quarter to 10:00, as I don't feel like I am being watched now. Whereas previously, [people would think] "Uh [he's] not at his desk, he is not working." . . . Before I would have been more reluctant to work part of my day at home. (MS17)

By eliminating assigned workspace, the new office space made it difficult to discern whether employees were actually in the office or working from home. Without an assigned desk that was visibly empty, and without the expectation of seeing the same people each day, the new office made it possible to more discreetly access work-from-home options. Rather than noticing an empty desk where one might expect a certain colleague to be working, the new office featured many workspaces scattered across multiple floors. In this new configuration, employees would not expect to see colleagues or managers at any specific workspace. As informants explained:

> You're not expected to show up in any one place. If your desk is always in one place, it's very obvious when you're not at the desk. Even when you're in a meeting or something, someone will notice. Over here, nobody really notices whether you're here or not. I mean, people notice you when you're here. But if you're not here and working from home, people might just assume that you're sitting on another floor or in a library area. So if you have to do a doctor's appointment and come in late, there's less of the tail between your legs. (FS44)

> I [no longer] have a place to sit down. I don't have to worry that I have a place beside you and you never see me. . . . You'll see me when you see me. And I'll see you when I see you. . . . It's more fluid. So I think, for me, I don't feel the need to come in every day and be seen. (FM21)

Although employees described feeling less judged by colleagues and managers, many were quick to clarify that this had been a largely implicit process rather than purposeful monitoring. Employees' high mutual awareness of each other's presence or absence in the old office simply reflected a taken-for-granted noticing practice at BigCorp: "It's not that I used to keep track of people [in the old office], but you can't help but notice that someone is not at their cubicle when you see them there each day. It just triggers a thought that something is different. Whereas now, there isn't anything to trigger that thought" (MI46). Another informant explained that although she had always been supportive of flexible work policies, she would still find herself noticing when colleagues' desks were empty in the old office:

> It's probably more of a mental thing. When you used to sit in a specific spot all the time [in the old office] with your department, your manager was there, your associate director was there. People were looking for you, and if you didn't show up physically, it was like "Oh, where's so-and-so today?" . . . I can even remember myself thinking, "Why is that person coming in late?" Like, even in *my* head. I think that's gone, and I

> think it gives everybody more ownership for making sure that they get their stuff done no matter where they are. Even if people are going through stressful times in their personal life, or illness or whatever, you don't think "Uhh, I'd better get in so that people see me." It's more, "I want to get my work done, so maybe I'll stay home and do it." (FS10)

The office redesign made it more difficult to discern whether employees were working on a different floor in the office, working from home, or visiting customers. In the old office, employees would expect to see colleagues at their assigned desks and would notice deviations from this expectation. These noticing practices led employees to fear flexibility-related career penalties arising from trait inferences about their dependability and commitment. After the office redesign, employees did not have a single assigned desk to draw attention to their presence or absence. In the new office, the material environment no longer triggered moments of noticing absence and contemplating where an employee might be. Thus the change in the physical space produced a shift in noticing practices, making employees more comfortable using the work-from-home policy and increasing their level of temporal flexibility.

Changes to evaluative beliefs: From anticipating trait inferences from face time to anticipating trait inferences from work outputs. The changes in greeting and noticing practices were related to subsequent changes in evaluative beliefs, with employees experiencing less fear of career penalties associated with flexible work policies. Before the BigCorp Campus redesign, employees had assigned cubicles near their colleagues and managers, and this facilitated trait inferences of dependability and commitment from patterns of physical presence in the office. Consequently, informants expressed a need to "show up and be on" in the old office, experiencing pressure to be physically present in order to cultivate a strong professional image. As one employee explained, "In the old space, you had the traditional feeling that you had to punch in at 9, you had to punch out at 6. You may not have been productive in that time there, but it was an expectation of the work environment" (MI46). It was well known that career advancement involved not just strong work results but also presenting a strong image of oneself in order to "inspire confidence" and "show up strong with senior leaders." This was widely acknowledged among employees and openly discussed in more formal contexts such as professional development talks with senior executives and HR leaders. Moreover, being physically present in the old office meant inevitable exposure to one's colleagues and superiors because physical presence provided opportunities to be seen:

> If you're not seen, it's hard to have the image. . . . It's just like a product. You want to be in front of the customer, but not just for the sake of it. You want to have the chance to communicate your brand equity. For a person, it's the same thing. You want yourself to continue to be reminding others of who you are and what you stand for. (MM15)

After the move to the BigCorp Campus, managers no longer experienced constant daily exposure to all employees. Managers would continue to see their employees in meetings, as they did in the old office space, but managers would no longer see employees as consistently as they did when they had

assigned space with their teams: ''You're never working in the same space, you don't have a set spot that you go to. In the previous environment you would see [your team] on a day-to-day basis, versus now you'll see them on a project-by-project basis'' (MM9). Although employees might run into their managers during the workday, such interactions no longer occurred predictably in the new space. As one informant explained,

> As a manager I am no longer necessarily going to see all of my people every day before and after. . . . It has not been an issue so far, and I think it's a little bit more empowering of a work environment. Like you have to take charge—what do I need to get done today? Who do I need to find? Do I need to set up time with them? You're a little bit more in control of your work in making sure it gets done, but I don't think that's a bad thing. (FM5)

Informants did not complain about having difficulty getting work done due to less daily visibility to managers. Even though managers did not sit beside their employees every day as in the old space, they would continue to have weekly 1–1 meetings and weekly team meetings. These standing meetings occurred on all teams I observed, and managers could also find alternative ways to contact employees between standing meetings (e.g., e-mail, instant messenger, and requesting additional meetings).

Many managers felt that the new office configuration reduced their reliance on physical presence as a proxy for work devotion and increased the importance of actual work outputs. Company expectations remained as strong as ever, with annual bell-curved appraisals continuing to produce exactly the same quantitative distribution of employee ratings as before. However, managers could no longer form accurate perceptions about how much time employees spent at the office versus working off-site or how early or late they worked at the office. Many felt that this led to a greater reliance on employees' work outputs rather than the sheer amount of time spent at the office, diminishing the tendency to reward employees for long yet inefficient work hours:

> I do think the BigCorp Campus has contributed to a more performance-based culture. I don't care if you're putting in 14 hours a day or if we never see you. Why should we give credit to people who are in front of a screen for 8 hours but don't accomplish anything? Not only is it costly, but it's not a good way of working. (Senior executive, field notes)

> But then results speak for themselves now. . . . Do I really care if they spend every minute at their computer, or if they go for a dental appointment, or if they take a quick run down to Starbucks while they are working? Like not really. . . . The onus is put on that person. It's your responsibility to manage your heavy work load and deliver. And I actually see that people deliver outstandingly. We trust all our people, but I also know they have work cut out that is measurable, that has to be done, and that is not going anywhere. (FS16)

These changes in managerial evaluation practices were not lost on employees. Many felt that work outputs had become more important than face time in the formation of trait inferences: ''It enables me to be more flexible with my time. . . . It doesn't seem like I need face time or I need to be in from 9 to 5 because everyone else is. I can do what is most productive for myself

and my team'' (FI28). Even if employees attempted to manage perceptions by coming in early in the morning or leaving late at night, such tactics were no longer likely to be noticed in the new office space. Efforts expended on building a reputation through superficial appearances were thought to be less effective than before: ''You're going to get dressed, but you're not going to be dressed in a certain way, like 'Is the shirt pressed? Are my shoes all shiny?''' (MS3). Managers and colleagues would not observe an employee spending long hours at the office unless they happened to be on the same floor during the same duration of time. Apart from meetings with team members or managers, being physically present at the office no longer ensured hours of visibility, as it had in the old office. Greater equivocality about flexibility-related career penalties enabled many to feel more comfortable working from home or using flexible work hours: ''I don't have to get up so early, to rush to work, to get the transit or ride in, and in the evening I don't even have to rush back. . . . So I feel more productive and rested'' (FS13). After the office redesign, informants described feeling less concerned about signaling devotion through physical presence and more concerned about work outputs:

> I know what I need to do to get my work done. I need to do that whether I'm working from home, working in the car, working at the customer side, sitting in [the BigCorp Campus]. It doesn't make a difference. . . . It's no longer about dressing up and coming into the office and sitting in a meeting but not necessarily contributing. (FS2)

> As much as we have historically said we live in an entrepreneurial work environment, it was not an entrepreneurial work environment. The new BigCorp Campus much more lends itself to that kind of a feel. You really become accountable for your deliverables. How you get there, as long as it's following the rules, is up to you. But you've got to deliver the deliverables. It's a much more of an adult type of environment as compared to the old space, which was much more of a traditional child–teacher type environment. (MS49)

In short, the office redesign changed employees' evaluative beliefs, with employees shifting from anticipating trait inferences from face time to anticipating trait inferences from work outputs. Because managers experienced a decline in the salience of physical presence as a proxy for work devotion, employees felt less anxious about lost opportunities for reputation-enhancing exposure and less concerned about the potential for negative judgements from others when accessing flexible work policies. These changes in the physical space led employees to believe that face time had a less important role than work outputs in the formation of trait inferences, and employees consequently accessed flexible work policies and experienced greater temporal flexibility in the new office space.

Company survey data support the qualitative evidence that workers experienced greater temporal flexibility in the new office space (see Online Appendix A). Employees reported statistically significant ($p < .001$) decreases in pressure to stay late or come in early in order to demonstrate commitment to managers or peers. Employees also reported working an additional .27 days from home per week in the new office, equivalent to an annual increase of 14 days or 112 labor hours ($p < .001$). Because working from home is a highly valued perk, however, employees may have had incentive to underreport changes

in utilization to avoid negative management perceptions in a company survey. Thus while the true effect size is difficult to estimate, the quantitative results are statistically significant, and the pattern of results is consistent with the qualitative findings.

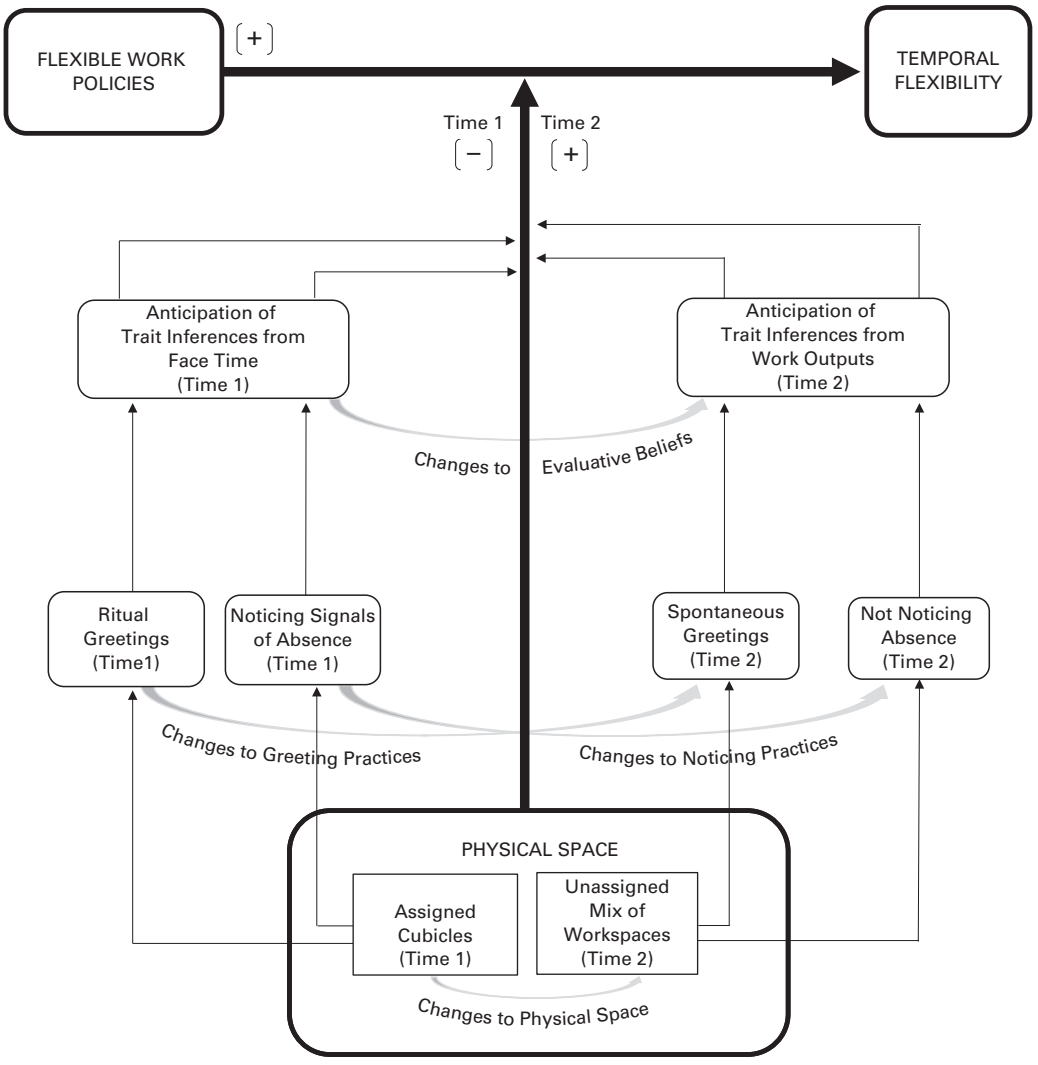
DISCUSSION

Flexible work policies have diffused widely across organizations, and yet employees often experience very limited temporal flexibility. Organizational scholars have explained this flexibility paradox by citing employees' fears of career penalties arising from trait inferences about their dependability and commitment. Studies have shown that this is why employees routinely forgo beneficial flexible work policies and instead spend long hours at the office so they can be seen by colleagues and managers (e.g., Correll et al., 2014; Reid, 2015). Yet little is known about how structural workplace conditions might affect the relationship between flexible work policies and temporal flexibility. The present study identifies the physical space as a powerful structure affecting employees' decisions to use flexible work policies. Using field research during an office redesign at a single organization, I find that the physical space powerfully structures social life, undergirding evaluative beliefs about the importance of ''face time'' for cultivating perceptions of dependability and commitment. This organization's change in physical space disrupted taken-for-granted social practices, with employees experiencing less fear of career penalties related to their use of flexible work policies and consequently increasing their use of those policies.

The study's core contribution is to identify how physical space can moderate the relationship between flexible work policies and temporal flexibility. Figure 2 summarizes the model that emerged from the findings. The change in physical space at BigCorp—from assigned cubicles to a mix of unassigned spaces—disrupted and transformed taken-for-granted social practices and evaluative beliefs. This involved a shift from greeting rituals to spontaneous greetings, from noticing signs of absence to not noticing absence, and consequently from employees anticipating trait inferences from face time to anticipating trait inferences from work outputs. In the new office space, employees felt less pressure to spend long hours physically present at the office to demonstrate their work devotion to others. The changes in greeting practices, noticing practices, and evaluative beliefs led employees to increase their utilization of flexible work policies and to experience greater temporal flexibility in the new office space.

This theoretical model advances research on temporal flexibility by anchoring employees' fears of career penalties to concrete social practices embedded in the physical work environment. Prior studies have tended to describe the stigmatization of flexible work policies as a stable aspect of organizational culture, using concepts such as work devotion norms (Williams, 2000; Blair-Loy, 2003), the ideal worker image (Kellogg, 2011; Reid, 2015), and perceptions of unsupportiveness (Behson, 2005; Hammer et al., 2011) to explain why employees anticipate career penalties associated with using such policies. These explanations have been useful for understanding why limited temporal flexibility often exists in organizations, but they do not specify the structural workplace conditions that facilitate negative trait inferences of dependability

Figure 2. Model of physical space as a moderator in the relationship between flexible work policies and temporal flexibility.



and commitment. This study locates these subjective employee perceptions of risk within specific social practices that are contingent on the structure of the physical environment. This sheds light on how fears of flexible career penalties arise through everyday interactions that are largely taken for granted in organizations. By ''emplacing'' temporal flexibility, the study suggests that these stigmatization processes may be more structurally determined than previously considered.

The findings also extend our understanding of social valuation processes in organizations by showing how physical spaces can alter the salience of face time as a proxy for work devotion. My findings offer support for research showing that face time produces spontaneous trait inferences of dependability and commitment (Elsbach, Cable, and Sherman, 2010), but I advance these

insights by providing evidence that certain kinds of office space can reduce the returns to face time. This fits with Elsbach and colleagues' (2010: 753) call for organizations to encourage managers to consider employees' work output and contributions rather than time spent working in the office. This trait inference approach is consistent with the broader literature on social valuation (Lamont, 2012; Sauder, Lynn, and Podolny, 2012), which suggests that valuations are shaped by both objective factors (i.e., performance) and socially constructed factors (i.e., status beliefs), and that self-interested actors often attempt to exploit socially constructed factors to bias valuations (Zuckerman, 2012). I advance this valuation literature by providing a novel empirical case of physical space altering the relative salience of established valuation criteria. This suggests that employees' strategies for valuation opportunism inside organizations—for example, exploiting face time to encourage trait inferences of dependability and commitment—can become less successful over time when the physical space changes and valuations become anchored more closely to objective conditions.

The findings also build on research examining interventions for improving temporal flexibility, identifying physical space as an unexplored pathway for change. Prior studies have focused on interventions using training and dialogue to cultivate support for work–family policies (Kelly, Moen, and Tranby, 2011; Perlow, 2012; Kelly et al., 2014; Moen et al., 2016). Identifying physical space as an unexplored intervention strategy is an important contribution because extant training-based interventions experience several limitations: companies focused on cost reduction may be unlikely to adopt them, effective implementation involves considerable effort, and sustaining the culture change may be challenging in the long term (Perlow and Kelly, 2014). Leaders are often hostile toward efforts to challenge the dominant 24/7 work culture (Kellogg, 2011; Padavic, Ely, and Reid, 2020), which is why many extant interventions fail to produce meaningful change. By contrast, non-territorial or activity-based offices are often adopted for cost-reduction purposes rather than purposive efforts to challenge the work culture. This type of structural intervention might create more enduring change than episodic interventions. Thus physical space may represent a fruitful avenue for future research on temporal flexibility.

Although the study examined a change in physical space in a single organization, the theoretical model should be transferable to other organizational contexts. The key social practices disrupted by the physical space occur in many organizations; they are not unique to BigCorp, nor is the broader concern about face time. My informants' experiences are also consistent with many descriptions of anxiety about flexibility-related trait inferences in the literature (Moen et al., 2013; Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl, 2013; Reid, 2015). In additional analysis of the company survey data, I did not find that the effect of physical space varied by department or demographic group, which further suggests the findings may be relevant to other work contexts or employee populations (tables available upon request). Yet companies may not be equally likely to adopt such an office design, particularly if executives do not perceive non-territorial or activity-based spaces as compatible with the nature of their work (e.g., if employees never work off-site or visit clients). Finally, it is important to note that BigCorp is somewhat unusual in that it had high baseline management support for temporal flexibility. One might expect to observe even larger effects in organizations where baseline support is lower and employees' fears

of flexibility-related career penalties are more salient. Future research should more systematically explore the moderating effect of physical space across workplaces with varied work content and baseline levels of support.

This study builds on organizational research on physical space (Elsbach and Pratt, 2007), offering empirical evidence of how physical spaces can structure social practices in organizations. Psychological studies have shown that physical spaces can induce sensory responses (Zhong and House, 2012), and social network studies have demonstrated the power of proximity in determining tie formation (Rivera, Soderstrom, and Uzzi, 2010). But what remains undertheorized is how physical space can produce relational consequences in organizations, affecting everyday employee work behaviors (Elsbach and Pratt, 2007; Harvey, 2010). I build on recent relational studies of physical space (Elsbach, 2003; Millward, Haslam, and Postmes, 2007; Kellogg, 2009; Bernstein, 2012; Manning, 2014), illustrating how changes in the configuration of space can disrupt and transform extant social practices in organizations with important consequences for temporal flexibility. This study thus offers additional empirical evidence of a relationship among physical space, social practices, and social cognition. This practice-based approach represents a productive way to uncover how physical spaces structure patterns of interaction through ritual or routine behavior.

Finally, the findings add nuance to research on physical space in organizations by suggesting that some types of non-territorial office designs may be more beneficial than previously considered. Prior studies of non-territorial office designs have tended to focus on negative outcomes, highlighting conflict over ownership of space (Brown, Lawrence, and Robinson, 2005) or emphasizing the role of personalization (Byron and Laurence, 2015) and consequent identity threat (Elsbach, 2003). In contrast, I did not find any evidence of these particular negative outcomes at BigCorp or any other negative unintended consequences of the office redesign. My interview informants generally expressed greater satisfaction with the new office space, as did the company survey respondents. But the office redesign in this study differed from that examined in many previous studies of non-territorial designs in that it removed assigned space while also adding a mix of heterogeneous space options available to all employees. The study thus calls attention to the importance of design variations in non-territorial offices. By highlighting the positive role of physical space on temporal flexibility, the findings balance the existent focus on negative outcomes in the literature, suggesting that certain types of non-territorial offices may yield different behavioral outcomes.

Extensions and Future Directions

Future research should more carefully examine the productivity implications of activity-based or non-territorial office spaces. Employees may be more productive in these spaces for several reasons. First, employees may spend less time on valuation opportunism (e.g., face time) and more time on activities more directly related to advancing organizational goals. Second, greater temporal flexibility may increase employees' commitment to the organization, reducing their turnover risk and increasing positive organizational citizenship behaviors. And third, if employees are better able to accommodate their work–family needs, they may experience less family-to-work strain, improving their

productivity during work hours. Yet there is also potential for performance to decline if employees are less productive while working from home or if they begin to prioritize personal needs over work responsibilities. Although employees and managers I spoke to described neutral or positive productivity effects, it is difficult to assess whether work performance actually improved as a result of the office redesign. During my 14 months at BigCorp, I did not observe obvious indicators of decreased productivity after the reconfiguration of space (e.g., managers complaining about employees' lack of commitment). My informants were also quick to emphasize that they used the policies in accordance with business needs. Moreover, based on their internal performance measures, senior executives were not concerned about negative productivity effects and did not add any restrictions to the company's flexible work policies. While these insights are suggestive, a limitation of the study is that I did not have data directly measuring worker productivity. This represents a promising avenue for future research as it fits with calls to develop and test the business case for temporal flexibility (Correll et al., 2014).

Although collaboration was not the focus of this study, my findings have interesting implications for understanding how physical spaces can shape collaboration in organizations. Many informants told me that in the old office space, they tended to interact only with people assigned to the same floor, whereas they were exposed to a wider range of people in the new office space. This suggests that office designs encouraging movement across spaces (such as between floors of a building) may be able to alter daily interactions and perhaps even the more durable structure of employee networks. Although network research has long shown that people who are located near one another are more likely to form social ties (Festinger, Schachter, and Back, 1950; Reagans, 2011; Sailer and McCulloh, 2012; Chown and Liu, 2015), less is known about how spaces can be redesigned to encourage greater network diversity. My study suggests that non-territorial or activity-based spaces may help overcome functional boundaries, encouraging interaction between employees from different parts of the organization. Future research could systematically assess these effects, using office redesigns to understand whether non-territorial spaces might affect network diversity and whether these changes can improve the diffusion of knowledge across the organization.

Another promising direction is to assess whether non-territorial workspaces might affect career penalties related to flexibility, such as reductions in salary trajectories and promotion chances. Although my findings show that the change in office space reduced employees' fears of career penalties, this provides only suggestive evidence about the reality of career penalties. Because my focus was on understanding employees' decisions to use flexible work policies (or not), what ultimately mattered was their perceived risk of career penalties (whether accurate or inaccurate). There is good reason to think employees' perceptions may have been accurate and that flexible policy users experienced fewer career penalties in the new office space due to the declining salience of face time. But this issue warrants further investigation because it could have implications for remediating workplace inequalities arising from differences in employees' ability to work extreme or unpredictable hours (Pedulla and Thébaud, 2015; Goldin and Katz, 2016). Future research might use longitudinal HR data to systematically assess whether the salary trajectories

and promotion chances of underrepresented groups change in periods with a non-territorial versus open-cubicle office design.

The diffusion of new office designs should create exciting opportunities to better understand the effects of physical space in organizations. Popular business press articles have described the ubiquitous open-cubicle office design as ''soul-destroying'' (Bennett, 2014), declaring that ''the open-office trend is destroying the workplace'' (Kaufman, 2014). As managers search for better solutions and experiment with new office designs (Davis, Leach, and Clegg, 2011), researchers should be able to examine how different features of the physical environment shape patterns of interaction. Organizational scholars can exploit these new sources of variation to better understand the consequences of physical space for a variety of organizational outcomes such as knowledge sharing, performance, and innovation.

Organizational scholars have long noted that workers' temporal flexibility is limited despite the widespread adoption of flexible work policies. By identifying physical space as a moderator in the relationship between flexible work policies and temporal flexibility, this study reveals a structural underpinning of this flexibility paradox. The findings here suggest that the stigmatization of flexible work policies does not represent a stable or amorphous aspect of organizational culture; instead it unfolds through concrete social practices that are facilitated by the physical space. Far from serving as a passive background, the physical space that workers find themselves in powerfully structures organizational life in ways that are often taken for granted yet deeply consequential.

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Supplemental Material

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