Phantasms collide: Navigating video-mediated communication in the Swedish workplace

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Abstract

Global telecommunications companies sell new technologies and services that aim to increase communication possibilities. This case study of one Swedish telecommunications company ('the Company'), examines how employee notions of video-mediated communication are embedded social meanings. These social meanings are purposefully linked to notions of efficiency in the workplace, the environment, corporate social responsibility and economic gain. Through advertisements, slogans, in-house incentive programs and company policies, the Company has achieved what could be described as a shift in employee attitudes towards working using video-mediated communication (VMC) – so-called video meetings. The shift is however, far from comprehensive and this consciously constructed understanding of video-mediated communication co-exists and conflicts with multiple other meanings – explicit, implicit and purposefully ignored. Often moral dilemmas arise as personal wellbeing in the short-term conflicts with corporate sales targets, budget restrictions and environmental goals to 'save the planet'. By detailing these different understandings and their inter-relations, the complex and purposed nature of video-mediated communication phantasms in a global telecommunications company emerges.

First Encounters of the video mediated kind

Advertisement 1. "First Meeting with the CEO of Emma S" (in Swedish)
(source: Telia Företag, YouTube)

The scene opens with a male employee sitting at his desk. He obviously works in a lab as he is wearing a white lab coat and his desk and office are filled with beakers, flasks and cosmetic product samples. There is a photo of Swedish model, Emma Wiklund on the wall, which suggests that she is either a spokesperson or model for the company. Given the title of the film – 'First Meeting with the CEO of Emma S' (Första mötet med VD:n för EmmaS) – we can assume that she is the managing director of the company, Emma S, and that Emma is this employee's boss. The man is at his desk preparing for a meeting. He is applying hand cream. An SMS notification tells him that Emma has arrived and to come to the conference room. The man starts to get nervous. It is a big meeting. Emma is the company's CEO, she is also famous (not to mention beautiful!). This is his very first meeting with her and he needs to make a good impression.

'Time to bring out the big guns,' he says to himself. 'Deodorant? Check! How's my hair? Good! Is my breath ok? Ew, onion breath! Quick, use some breath-freshener. Ok. So, how should I introduce myself? Should I say: 'Hello there, Emma!' No … too informal. 'Hi-ya!' No! Even worse. 'Good-day?' No, not that either. OK …'

Opening the door the man decides the best impression is a firm, manly handshake. In he goes, sees his colleagues at the table then turns to hear Emma greeting him – 'Hello! You must be Eric?' 'Huh?', he mumbles, and looks puzzled. It takes a few seconds for him to realise that it's a video meeting … and things are underway! Emma, sitting in her car on her way somewhere, has already started going through her comments on the product. Eric still has not sat down and is obviously unused to video meetings. He is not the only one! The text then explains – this man is one of the 75% of people not yet accustomed to having meetings via video. According to current studies only 25% regularly have video meetings. The narrator continues and promotes video meetings as a more efficient means of working. [End Advertisement]

This advertisement touches upon the marketing rhetoric on video-mediated communication (VMC) within the telecommunications industry. Efficient, no-fuss and informal, video meetings are presented as viable alternatives and even preferable to face-to-face meetings. But does this rhetoric ring true or is it just one version of a subjective, biased truth? Just as the advertisement above presents one interpretation of what video mediated communication is, this paper will present several more that are specifically connected to concerns about the environment and

climate change. These different understandings co-exist and are visible in the various discourse practices of one telecommunications company (from now on referred to as simply, 'the Company') and its employees.

Introduction

Multiple factors influence our interactions with technological artefacts: our individual background and worldviews; our understandings of the artefacts themselves; our expectations, prior experiences; our implicit and explicit agendas; and not least the current situation and physical context in which we find ourselves. This paper examines the various understandings of video-mediated communication (VMC) in the context of meetings in the Swedish workplace through the identification and analysis of a number of intertwining, overlapping and intersecting 'phantasms' (roughly defined here as those shared, flowing and changeable imaginings or perceptions of an artefact, social phenomenon or event which are embedded within diverse socio-cultural contexts) present in three types of discourse. The first type of discourse takes the form of 'external' Company discourse aimed at prospective customers and the general public such as advertisements, press releases and online reports. The second type is policy documentation – an 'internal' corporate discourse aimed primarily at Company employees. This internal discourse contains an element of externality as policy can also be used in Company efforts to establish a corporate image and identity that targets an external public – the potential customer. The third type of discourse is Company employee articulations as they rationalise their choice to communicate via video, telephone or face-to-face. Again, this discourse has both elements of the corporate but also of the 'extra-corporate' as employees draw upon notions from their home life and the general public sphere.

The empirical data in this paper was gathered through online research of Swedish-based, marketing campaigns and websites, an examination of the Company's corporate policy documents and interviews with Company employees in Sweden. The data itself includes meeting policy documents implemented from as early as 2005 and in use up to the present day, transcripts of interviews with Company employees from 2010-2011, and contemporaneous advertising campaigns and publicity material from various companies active in the Swedish telecommunications market. The policy documents included policy drafts, email communications between Company employees about formulation and purpose of the policies, and the final, official versions of internal meeting policy from 2005 which functions in conjunction with the more recently updated travel policy from 2012. Eight semi-structured interviews with middle management and upper management level employees at the Company yielded a total of 16 hours of interview material for analysis. Advertisements and publicity materials range from YouTube versions of Swedish telecommunication company advertising campaigns, blog posts and websites were also collected based on their relevance to the key themes identified in the interview data – the future of work, the environment and employee wellbeing. In this paper, the three types of empirical data are focused around these three major themes and then contrasted to highlight the dilemmas that arise when the individual agenda meets with corporate and environmental concerns.

Background to video-mediated communication

What is video-mediated communication (VMC)? VMC is an analytical term derived from its predecessor, computer-mediated communication. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) generally refers to any type of communication that travels through the medium of a computer or computerised technology such as email, SMS and chat (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic 2004: 14ff). VMC incorporates this definition but specifies the presence of a visual component. In lay terms, VMC is any kind of video meeting ranging from free instant messaging video programs designed for private use to more business orientated set-ups, generally referred to as videoconferencing and telepresence systems. Previous studies on communication in the workplace have generally examined VMC in instrumental terms. Within human-computer interaction, studies of VMC usually examine specific elements of use such as turn-taking (Whittaker, 1995; Warnicke & Plejert, 2012), awareness and space (Dourish & Bly, 1992; Gaver et

al., 1992; Heath & Luff, 1992), time spent or completion of tasks (Finn, 1997), achieving co-presence (Gullström, 2006; Gullström, 2009; Beers Fägersten, 2009; de Souza et al., 2012), as well as framing technology's contexts in terms of motivations for, or barriers to, use (Räsänen, Moberg, Picha, & Borggren, 2010). Other approaches similarly investigate VMC technologies as tools for collaboration over distances and across cultures (Ishii, 1993; Nardi et al., 1995; Anawati & Craig, 2006). Some studies have addressed the more socio-cultural aspects of VMC using the concept of communication genres and sense making (Cerratto-Pargman & Lantz, 2002; Lantz, Cerratto & Walldius, 2004). These studies on VMC run the gamut from computer science to social science yet most have difficulty capturing its dynamic and socially situated nature.

Within the Company, the term 'video meeting' was used to cover any technology-based communication with the potential for visual communication. So-called video meetings at the Company often did not even involve the use of a video camera and those interviewed used the term to refer to a plethora of software packages available to them that had video meeting capabilities but were primarily used to share documents and slideshows during the meeting. That the actual use of a video component during meetings was rare did not seem to alter the classification of these meetings as video meetings for the majority of Company employees interviewed.

This diffuse definition of VMC based on the technological component, is not however the sole defining factor when defining VMC from the perspective of this study. Contexts – economic, social and organisational – are also key. The contexts in which VMC are situated are not limited to the direct circumstances of its use such as the room, the meeting and the organisation. Broader contexts such as VMC's potential for effecting corporate economic gain through sale of systems, maintenance, infrastructure and services (from the Company perspective), and through decreasing business travel-related costs (from both the Company and their customers' perspectives), emerge in all three types of discourse. This potential has arguably motivated subsequent rhetoric on the contribution of VMC to environmental sustainability efforts within the Company and among its competitors, which has in turn been addressed in scientific publications (see Lassen, Laugen, & Næss, 2006; Hilty et al., 2006; Urry, 2008). The rationale is that by decreasing work-related travel for meetings, an organisation's impact on the environment diminishes (Lassen et al., 2006). This assumption is a questionable one especially once the production, maintenance and actual use of video communication technologies are taken into consideration (see Borggren, Moberg, Räsänen & Finnveden, 2013). For this paper however it suffices to acknowledge the underlying presence of such logics on VMC and the environment and interpreting them as the perceived economic and the environmental benefits of VMC. This characterisation of VMC, and its link to particularly the environment, is present in all three fields of discourse – employee, advertising and policy – and it will be shown that it is from this point uncertainties and dissonance perhaps arise.

What is a 'phantasm'?

First and foremost it is important to note that here VMC is understood to be simultaneously a technology and a socio-technical phenomenon. From this starting point examining how VMC is represented, written and talked about, provides an important step in understanding its social lives (see Anderson, 1983; Appadurai, 1986; Calhoun, 2002). This paper takes this theoretical perspective on the social lives of technologies further and shows how discourses on VMC can highlight the conflicts and dissonances that are inherently present. To do so, the focus is shifted from the technology use onto meaning and the typically anthropological concern of how various meanings intersect, conflict and co-exist. Feminist scholars have analysed the socio-technical and its visual representations from a similar standpoint. Using a methodological framework, which Åsberg & Lum (2009) refer to as "feminist visual studies of technoscience", focus is drawn onto the social meanings underlying (visual) representations and how these affect our interactions with technologies (see Åsberg & Johnson, 2009; Åsberg & Lykke, 2010). I use this feminist visual studies framework to delineate VMC and its visual representations and then contrast these with how VMC is articulated in textual and verbal discourse. By

supplementing the visual media of advertisements with textual and verbal forms of representation such as policy documents and interview statements, this study interprets the socio-technical phenomenon of VMC as a dynamic, continual and relational negotiation rather than a fixed utterance. Key to this endeavour is the notion of 'phantasms'. Favero characterises phantasms as linked to "the flow of representations and discourses of other places and other times that are inserted into locality through enhanced technologies for information flows and the identifications and modes of social mobility" (2003: 576). Therefore 'phantasm' as a concept-metaphor (Moore, 2004) with its emphasis on representation, leaves room for not only visual expression but also textual and verbal forms of expression thus connecting data that might otherwise seem unrelated. This suits the purpose of this study in which the empirical data collected is comprised of oral, textual and visual forms of articulations.

The usefulness of the term 'phantasm' also lies in its metaphorical ability to bridge the gap between sensibility and intelligibility, experience and rational-cognitive understanding, the intellect and emotions (Favero, 2003). This allows space for conflicting logics and active reasoning between multiple and sometimes discordant social meanings, diverse situations and multiple agendas. Herein lies one of the major strengths of this approach. By allowing space for inherent conflicts and prioritising active reasoning, phantasms can be used to upset a more traditional and static approach to VMC which might be tempted to define perceptions of the socio-technical phenomenon in binary terms such as drivers or barriers for use. These dichotomies are ultimately problematic, as what is in one context a driver for use may in others become a hinder. 'Phantasms' also make visible "the juxtaposition of observations of the signs and objects that flow through the space …" of the workplace and which are woven into the representations of the Company and its employees (Favero, 2005: 554). It is precisely this juxtapositioning of the explicit (sometimes conflicting) logics of policy and advertising discourses on VMC, and the less tangible implicit 'illogics' of employee discourse found within the empirical evidence, which is explored in this paper. I argue that the three bodies of empirical data employ a number of 'phantasms' on VMC that collide and compete when VMC is discussed in relation to the environment.

While it is difficult and perhaps counterproductive to categorically define these phantasms, a number of key phantasms on VMC can be identified in the empirical data. These phantasms of VMC are of course inextricably intertwined with topics as far-reaching as the promise of a bright future with flexible work practices, 'saving the environment' and better wellbeing to the more obvious associations of face-to-face meetings and team morale in the workplace. In all three types of discourse – policy, advertising and employee discourse – phantasms on VMC are shown to be "a tangle of materialized figurations" and navigating these is a process of trying to resolve conflicts and reach a state of harmony (hózhó) (Haraway, 2011). How employees navigate these dissonant views in their day-to-day is evident in their discourse on VMC. Using a reconfigurable process of reasoning, employees assess these different phantasms in real time and take tentative stances on VMC to suit temporary circumstances and resolve conflicts within and between these phantasms. Just as the myth of the coyote that accompanies Grandma Margaret's string figures draws our focus onto the importance of the talk that accompanies action Haraway, 2011), it is the discourse that happens around the use of VMC that gives insight into its social lives. This discourse – visual, textual and oral – ties VMC to larger dialogues on the environment, the future of work and employee wellbeing thus revealing underlying assumptions on the nature of VMC, and the workplace.

VMC and the 'future of work' phantasm

The view that the Company and their services were part of a rosy future emerged in employee discourse on VMC and set the tone for their interviews. Employees formulated opinions of VMC and the 'future of work' by drawing on general public opinion, personal experience and media representations of VMC (advertisements, popular culture, websites and media reports). One primary phantasm on technology in general paints the picture of innovation and technology as instrumental in building a better future. Be this true or not, VMC is not immune to this rhetoric. Corporations work hard using visual cues, marketing campaigns and suggestive brand names

to present VMC as 'next generation', 'immersive', 'collaborative' and 'flexible' technologies. Video communication systems like the one in Image 2 are almost futuristic in their design and give the impression of an exclusive and space-age experience.

Image 2. A demonstration of a high-end video meeting system (Cupitt, 2011)

The technocentric view of a better future is also common when it comes to the workplace and 'work'. Here we see the 'future of work' envisaged as one where employee lives are flexible, not bound to the office and where the nine-to-five day is a thing of the past. In the empirical data VMC and this 'future of work' is often mentioned as something of the near future or 'best present' – a goal to aim for. Evoking the idyllic summer imagery that is universally loved in cold, dark Sweden, both advertising and employee discourse hint at the potential of VMC to allow for more flexible work practices and equate this, perhaps erroneously, with improved employee wellbeing. A blog post made by one Swedish telecommunication company champions video mediated communication's potential to enable flexible work practices while simultaneously underlining the perceived link between VMC, reduced costs, carbon emissions and reduced travel (the environment) and employee wellbeing (see "Many chose to work from home…"). In his interview, Company employee, Patrick talks of holding a video meeting while sitting on a jetty as the ultimate vision of the future of work:

> " This is where we [at the Company] are going to revolutionise things … We're lifting things to the next level … now someone can be sitting at home. Someone else on a jetty in the countryside and you're all having a video meeting and can see each other. "

Patrick was not the only one to talk of taking work away from the office. Marketing materials such as the Office.se advertisement, "Travel-free meetings: Video meetings in the Cloud – Ideas should travel, not people. Smart solutions for meetings", uses visual cues to suggest that working while on holiday in your summer cottage or while on a beach in the sun is "the way of the future". Looming behind this phantasm of VMC and the 'future of work' is the problematic where we are constantly at work. This worry was almost completely absent from all discourse on the 'future of work' phantasm and this contradictory notion – and in the Company view perhaps contrary – is overlooked in the moment as phantasms are created which place the employee, their work, their company and their technology in a utopian future of an eternal (working?) summer.

VMC and 'the environment phantasm'

In general the empirical data suggests that the 'environment' phantasm is directly based on, but is not limited to, notions of VMC as an alternative to travel as well as a valid alternative to face-to-face meetings and a means of increasing work efficiency through saving time otherwise spent on travel. The inspiration for this study was to examine VMC from a sustainability perspective so it should be noted that the repeated emergence of the environment phantasm is partially a consequence of this, but it is also a product of Company goals and individual employee concerns for the environment. Policy at the Company clearly dictates that meetings should primarily be held using technologically-mediated communication. The Company is of course a seller and a provider of services connected with VMC as well as the technology itself so forefronting VMC is to their distinct advantage. They sell not only telecommunications infrastructure such as cables, networks and transmitters but also telecommunications services including technical support, software upgrades, maintenance, and installation and usage monitoring and tracking. Already in advertising and employee use of phantasms that characterise VMC as a flexible tool to help employees work away from the office, undercurrents of another powerful view on VMC emerge – that VMC can help 'save the environment' by reducing work-related travel. Reasoning goes that if a company's employees travel less, then the corporate carbon footprint is reduced which has a positive effect on the environment. Holding video mediated meetings does not usually require travel so logically they present an environmentally friendly alternative. This tie between not travelling, holding video meetings and the environment may be a strategic one made to increase sales or improve a company's image but it was a connection both policy and the majority of Company employees made. As Kenneth put it when talking about VMC in conjunction with travel: "You become more efficient and then of course, you are helping save the environment. We all need to do that."

While far from an irrefutable fact, the view that VMC is linked with a concern for the environment is not only part of policy and employee discourse, it is something global telecommunication companies have been careful to publicise (see "Environmental benefits of Telepresence", " Remote meetings instead of air travel"). The Company's phantasms on VMC in their advertisements also underscore this configuration of notions – travel, VMC and the environment. Phantasms such as those depicting VMC as environmentally friendly, enabling more flexible work practices and better for employee wellbeing are all geared towards sales and instructing potential customers on the benefits of VMC. As one telecommunications company website states:

> " ... with distance meetings [telephone meetings, video meetings] efficiency is increased, you avoid travel and travel costs and you can quickly return to work after each meeting. In addition this way of working gives an increased environmental awareness and a 'greener' day. "

(see 'Meeting Services'/'Mötestjänster')

In policy, VMC is set in relation to the organisation and its employees. Future customers and the general public are not completely out of the picture however, as policies on VMC inform corporate social responsibility statements and have an indirect influence on the corporate image. The Company's meeting policy first implemented in 2005 and still in effect today, clearly states that all meetings are first and foremost to be technologically mediated. "During the planning stage of a meeting, the value of holding a virtual meeting should always be considered" (meeting policy, 2005). The meeting policy was strengthened by a travel policy that also underlined the importance of using mediated meeting forms over travel (travel policy excerpt, 2008). Not only was this stated in policy but also in an internal document, 'Meeting Guidelines' (2005), which instructed team leaders and department heads on which kinds of business trips to approve. This perception is in turn reinforced by the Company's policy practices, which "treat the meeting policy as a basis on which to develop and revise corporate travel policies" (email communication, 2013). The primary agenda was to make sure that meetings involving colleagues located in different geographic locations were held using

technologically mediated means (telephone, web-based meeting services, video conferencing etc.) (meeting guidelines, 2005). The Company would then be 'talking the talk' and 'walking the walk', which as well as aiding the environment and reinforcing their Corporate Social Responsibility declarations, had the added bonus of being a brilliant sales and marketing tactic.

In an effort to stop work-related travel, the Company implemented a no-travel mandate in 2008 as a complement to their existing travel and meeting policies. This succeeded in dramatically reducing the Company's carbon emissions by forbidding any and all work trips temporarily. Although figures have since increased they are still below the pre-2008 level (internal document, "CO2 reductions … 2001-2010", Lundén 2012). This 'stop' (resestoppen) was so dramatic that it is still referred to by Company employees in relation to work-related travel. One interviewee related the chaos that ensued:

> " We [our project team] were at a kick-off in Åre [ski resort in Sweden] when they introduced the no-travel mandate and we were like, are we going to be allowed to go home? "

Jokes aside, the travel mandate was so strictly enforced that it succeeded in shocking employees into accepting and absorbing into their discourse, the link between travel, face-to-face meetings and their consequences, firstly economic and secondarily environmental. During the interviews, questions on video meetings without exception elicited answers that focused on travel and usually called forth mention of policy. An interview with Karen highlighted this.

> " … [travelling for meetings] should not be the first choice. The first choice is always to have a telephone meeting or a web meeting. Travel is option two … that way everyone benefits. The policy helps here and I think that we should think about the environmental consequences… it is not very environmentally friendly to fly. Planes, trains and cars … they are all significantly less environmentally friendly than video meetings or ringing someone. "

Karen was not the only one who mentioned both travel and policy in relation to VMC and the environment. With the majority of interviewees explicitly connecting travel, VMC and policy in their interviews it becomes apparent that policies on meetings and travel are integral to Company employees' perceptions of VMC especially when it comes to the 'environment' phantasm. A number of employees even failed to distinguish between the two types of policy and referred to them collectively as the Company's 'environment policy' (miljöpolicy).

While VMC was initially seen as a tool for efficiency in the workplace and cost-saving on travel, after the policy implementations, it has also become associated with the environment. Fredrik summed up this triumvirate in one sentence: "It [travel for meetings] costs money and destroys the environment … and takes time out of your day, really." As it turns out, it is this particular phantasm on VMC and the environment that causes the most internal conflict among employees. The moral burden of acting in an environmentally responsible manner – without sacrificing too much – was difficult for Company employees to resolve even in discourse, let alone in practice. As one team leader conceded:

> " I have not really decreased my travelling actually so from an environmental perspective I have not succeeded … I have succeeded in getting my team to travel less but I can't say I have travelled less myself really. "

For Company employees, the occasional work-related trip was often seen as a necessity for both work-related and family-related reasons despite the representations in both advertisements and policy. Ultimately, the 'environment' phantasm evokes tricky moral dilemmas that need nimble navigation, contains inherent conflicts between and within advertising, policy and employee discourse as well as often being incompatible with the next phantasm, VMC and employee wellbeing.
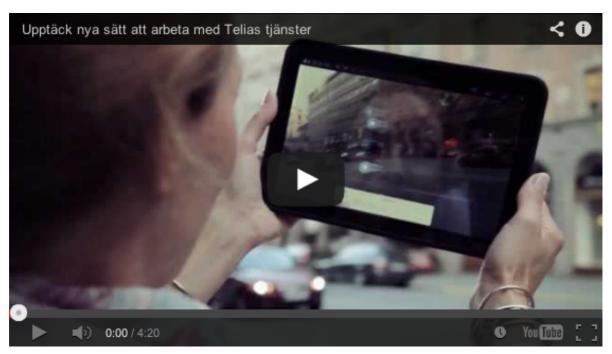
VMC and the 'employee wellbeing' phantasm

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> " Seriously, you are much more efficient when you don't have to waste time travelling. "

Carl backed this up with an emphatic:

> " Give me three telephone meetings, 30 minutes long each over a day-long meeting anytime! "

Advertisement 2. New ways of working… (in Swedish)

(source:Telia Företag, YouTube)

Both Carl and Mats were self-professed 'happy employees' who felt their wellbeing was being taken care of by the Company's approach to work. The choice to employ this phantasm when reasoning about VMC is therefore relatively easy to contextualise – loyal employees who share the Company vision and goals subscribe to the 'employee wellbeing' phantasm. Anna, a department head at the Company in Stockholm, also saw VMC and other technologically mediated forms of communication as indispensable for her wellbeing:

> " … I was in Gothenburg two times a week… before I had children and it was ok. But now it just wouldn't work. I wouldn't be able to have this type of job and be away two days in the week. But now I can hold a managerial position and have a family – all because of these great tools [video and telephone meeting technologies, email and chat]. I can have my meetings, I can even be at home with them if they are sick. Or if their school or kindergarten shuts early… pick up, drop off etc. I work a lot at home, in the evenings because that is where I can be contacted. "

Anna's statement is linked both to wellbeing and the future of work phantasms but is not entirely unproblematic. One of the underlying messages is that travel and commuting take valuable time out of life. But what about the stress of working in a space intended for relaxation, such as the bedroom? Just as in Advertisement 2, new technological 'solutions' are characterised as allowing you to work in bed, at the breakfast table during your commute to work – anywhere, everywhere, anytime. Although advertisements often glide over the topic (see "Corporate Presentation") or even contradict it (see Advertisement 2), Anna mentioned the stress of constantly being 'available' in her interview and that she strictly managed her time so that work did not intrude on personal, family time – something she considered key to her own personal wellbeing. Anna had even taken courses on how to avoid 'technology-induced' stress. This issue of stress was however never used as an argument against using VMC in any form of discourse – advertisements, policy or in employee discourse – and was not a part of the 'employee wellbeing' phantasm which had a tight focus on the benefits of VMC, not its faults.

Navigating VMC – an analysis of the conflicts, dissonance and orchestrated harmony among phantasms

I have now identified some phantasms that represent VMC as: technologically advanced and part of the 'future of work'; a means to save the environment; and as a contributing factor for efficient and flexible work practices which result in increased 'employee wellbeing'. There are of course phantasms that directly contradict these that were not so popular in either advertising, Company or employee discourse. These can include understanding VMC as unable to replace face-to-face communication and as a threat to personal wellbeing. These phantasms co-exist in all forms of discourse and although not all are propounded or consciously acknowledged, they require navigation.

So what does it mean to 'navigate phantasms'? In this paper, 'navigate' refers to the way in which the employees, advertisements and policy explicitly and expressly reason in their discourse on VMC. Based on the empirical data gathered, this navigation involves the three leading phantasms presented here – the 'future of work' phantasm that enables flexible work practices; the 'environment' phantasm in which VMC reduces work related travel; and the 'employee wellbeing' phantasm where VMC increases work efficiency and saves time otherwise spent travelling. Critical perspectives to these three main phantasms do not explicitly appear in either the policy documents nor in the advertisements and publicity material that have their purpose in marketing a product and producing a positive corporate image. It is only in the interview material that a more cautious, less utopic vision of VMC emerges. In the interviews, Company employees often simultaneously reinforce the phantasm of VMC as environmentally friendly and offering more flexibility in the workplace while choosing to abandon it in certain strategic circumstances. This is a part of how employees, advertising and policy 'navigate'.

During their interviews, employees both subscribe to the phantasms linking VMC with the environment, the future of work and employee wellbeing while simultaneously navigating around them using alternative logics, reasoning and rationales. In doing so they call upon other phantasms, relating to VMC such as notions on face-to-face meetings and personal wellbeing, to support their decisions. The Company discourse, Swedish advertisements and Company employees all cultivate phantasms about VMC that are geared towards promoting its as an innovative technological 'solution' to very real economic and environmental problems created by work related travel. These phantasms are often linked to a concern for the environment. But this link is a tenuous one and can easily backfire. There are many reasons individual employees chose to abandon the environment phantasm. VMC has its limits technologically speaking and sometimes-bad video quality, poor sound and a feeling of distance outweigh the environmental benefits of not travelling. Not travelling is still attractive to Company employees – although not often for altruistic reasons. In one interview for example, the need for a better quality of home life is used as justification for flying across the country for meetings. Rather than taking the train as policy had recommended by one employee regularly flew so as to have more time at home with the family. Karen said:

> " I try not to be here [Stockholm] at all but I fly, yes. It is not really logical but … As I have to travel every second week, it is a huge relief to be home by 6:30 pm instead of 9:30 pm. In this case, I put myself first which I really shouldn't do but I do anyway. "

Remember also that Karen had earlier on in her interview (and this paper) explicitly mentioned that travelling for meetings was not something employees should do (12). Karen was not the only one to contradict herself during the course of the interview. Nor was she the only employee who regularly commuted by plane rather than use VMC, which all still agreed was the most 'environmentally friendly' option. Most even acknowledge that commuting directly contravened company directives and policies but still felt they needed to 'put themselves first'. According to policy discourse, all travel was to be avoided and if it could not be avoided then it was to be via train – the more environmentally aware choice. Despite quoting policy often, Company employees were quick to confess that they usually ignored it and travelled anyway if there was a real need. Simultaneously acknowledging yet ignoring policy, Company employees like Karen were both apologetic and defensive as they justified their choices. The choice to ignore the no-travel alternative of VMC unsettles any phantasms based on these premises (the 'environment' and even the 'wellbeing' phantasm), forcing employees to choose alternative ones. This choice addressed their 'right' to a healthy balance between work and home life, which was seen as important for their personal wellbeing. This 'personal wellbeing' phantasm stands in opposition to the 'employee wellbeing' phantasm of VMC previously presented and conflict, disharmony and unresolvable dilemmas ensue which require navigation.

Another phantasm used by employees to traverse the dominant 'environment', 'future of work' and 'employee wellbeing' phantasms, is that of the importance of face-to-face meetings for team building. Here the argument put forward by employees was that: No matter how high the carbon footprint sometimes you just had to meet your work colleagues. As one employees said, "Ingenting som är bättre än one-to-one" ("Nothing beats one-on-one!"). It was necessary to meet your fellow team members every now and then in order to boost morale and bond. As Carl explained:

> " … sometimes you forget that you have colleagues in Gothenburg. We don't have the same interaction when working… I am totally convinced that it is devastating [for a group] if you can't meet face-to-face in the long run. "

Apart from helping build morale, face-to-face meetings were usually characterised as the best types of meetings to have when brainstorming or starting a project. Robert commented that meetings that meant getting 'to the bottom of things' (att bottna i saker) were better held when everyone was in the same room.

> " ... then we sit together and really discuss things until we get right to the point. You feel you have the time to discuss things properly too ... when you need to sit down for a long time, then I doubt I would be able to bear doing it in any other way than face-to-face. "

The phantasm (the face-to-face phantasm) at play here is that VMC, albeit symbolic of future, flexible work practices, saving the environment and employee wellbeing, is still not good enough for in depth or delicate discussions. In instances when meeting genre or the reason for holding a meeting was special, many interviewees begin to characterise VMC as not allowing for a deeper engagement. In the opinion of Jan, this was especially the case in brainstorming meetings:

> " you sit and you brainstorm or something like that and ... and there is a buzz around the table which you can't hope to follow if you are in a videoconference or ringing in on the telephone. "

This opinion that you lose out by using VMC is reflected in comments interviewees had on how much more could be gained just by meeting someone in person. Some opinions such as it being better to meet someone for the first time in person are a well-known part of general discourse on VMC. The parallel between VMC at work and those phantasms on free instant messaging video programs used in the home take the 'face-to-face' phantasm beyond the Company and even the workplace context. Research reports that a general increased connectedness enabled by free instant messaging video programs calls helps in achieving 'closeness' between family members but that there are different levels of closeness (Kirk, Sellen, & Cao, 2010).

It is in these situations and with this constellation of requirements that the 'environment', 'future of work', and 'employee wellbeing' phantasms of VMC, which are based on the assumption that face-to-face communication can be replaced by mediated forms of communication, begin to collide with those phantasms of VMC that have agenda other than the promotion and sale of VMC. The 'nothing beats one-on-one' phantasm, depicts VMC as insufficient in certain settings while the 'personal wellbeing' phantasm hints at the stress of always being online even at home and the importance of time with the family. Ultimately the 'environment' phantasm of VMC and even the 'future of work' and employee 'wellbeing' phantasms sit in uneasy relation to each other in employee discourse. Furthermore, they conflict with occasional and strategic decisions to choose the 'face-to-face' or 'personal wellbeing' despite policy and advertising discourse and the rhetoric of the loyal employee.

Conclusion

I have presented a variety of context-specific phantasms relating to the socio-technical phenomenon of VMC in the Swedish workplace that touch upon the environment, employee morale and wellbeing, new ways of working and even the importance of meeting in person and time with the family. While far from a comprehensive list, identifying these phantasms in different forms of discourse and highlighting their collisions, allows this study to create a unique topology of the discourse on VMC. In this paper we have been tracing the paths people take as they navigate the 'tangle of phantasms' in order to create a temporary and well-reasoned 'harmony' if only for a moment. Although both policy and advertisements nicely circumnavigate the incompatibilities between numerous phantasms on VMC, the interview data gathered shows

clearly how difficult it was for Company employees to resolve these conflicts in discourse. If meeting in person was necessary, the time wasted on travel and the cost both financially and environmentally were reasoned away using phantasms that emphasised the paucity of VMC. These rationales were common in discussions about team morale, intense collaborations and on issues that were more personal than professional. When it came to conversations on the future and the Company's goals and image, phantasms that depicted VMC as environmentally friendly and technologically advanced took centre stage while those that showed VMC's capacity to help employees work more efficiently, spend more time with the family and to forego long commutes formed a harmonious chorus.

That caring for the environment is so central to the phantasm of VMC at the Company and yet is so often ignored is by far the most significant and confounding discovery made. The desire of an individual to have a better quality of life in the short term conflicts with long term more societal goal of 'saving the planet'. Problematisation of this moral 'environmental' dilemma is absent from the 'official' story told in policy documents and publicity materials. Instead, publicity campaigns champion VMC as stress free and easier than commuting. This is of course contradicted by phantasms of VMC as difficult to use, unreliable and ultimately disappointing as well as those that address the stress caused by 'always being online'. This conflict is similarly difficult for Company employees to resolve conclusively and it seems unlikely ever to be. Instead the negotiations, navigations and rationales constantly continue, being renewed, reworked and reconfigured. It is the journey that counts, right? Not the destination? So in a quite positive way, Company employees, the Company in its advertisements and policy are doomed to continue their day-to-day lives with their discourse on VMC constantly in a state of disharmony and dissonance.

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