Is physical co-presence a prerequisite for Durkheimian collective effervescence? Reflections on remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic

Tom Vine

Published online: 21 Apr 2023.

Submit your article to this journal ⬚

View related articles ⬚

View Crossmark data ⬚

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Is physical co-presence a prerequisite for Durkheimian collective effervescence? Reflections on remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic

Tom Vine

The Leadership and Management Academy, University of Suffolk, Ipswich, UK

ABSTRACT
This paper explores why it is that so many of us regard virtual communication technologies as imperfect substitutes for co-present organisational interaction. In so doing, it invokes Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence; that is, the bonding phenomenon experienced between people in physical proximity. Initially, ethnographic data are presented from a Scottish commune known as the Findhorn Foundation, where the word 'energy' is widely used by participants to describe the feelings associated with co-present interaction. Macrosocial data are then drawn from the 'Return, Reimagine, Reinvent' series of reports published by McKinsey & Co. which documents remote working experiences during the pandemic. Both data sets suggest that even in an era of advanced virtual connectivity, physical co-presence remains a prerequisite for collective effervescence. Furthermore, the data reveal that while virtual connections are useful for routine communication, our sense of collective effervescence must be periodically 'recharged' by means of intermittent physical assembly.

Introduction

Though catastrophic in so many ways, our experiences of the global pandemic have afforded an extraordinary opportunity for insight. On reflection, many of us have concluded intuitively that virtual communication technologies are imperfect substitutes for physical co-presence, a feeling echoed in the emerging academic literature (e.g. Aagaard 2022; Koester 2022; Simola et al. 2023). This paper thus explores the much-neglected concept of Durkheimian collective effervescence; that is, the bonding phenomenon experienced between people in physical proximity.

The empirical strategy employed is two-pronged. Initially, and to establish a sense of historical context, I draw upon microsocial ethnographic data from the Findhorn Foundation, an alternative intentional community (or 'commune') in Scotland. Ostensibly, this is an arcane point of departure. However, it does provide an excellent means of getting to grips with the concept of collective effervescence. It also illustrates how ideas which are only now beginning to find traction in prosaic contexts have esoteric origins. Moreover, its pertinence is in the results; it was only during periods of co-presence that participants at Findhorn reported a feeling of collective effervescence (which they describe as 'energy'). Indeed, deliberate attempts by participants to recreate this 'energy' via virtual media were ultimately unsuccessful.

Having established this context, I then review macrosocial data courtesy of the 34 reports that make up the 'Return, Reimagine, Reinvent' research series published by McKinsey & Co. over the

course of the global pandemic. This series documents experiences of working remotely during COVID-19. Interpreted through the prism of collective effervescence, these data reveal insights directly comparable to those from Findhorn; employees report that while the virtual media many of us relied upon during the pandemic are effective in terms of routine communication, they are ineffective substitutes for the social connection experienced through co-present interaction in the workplace. Furthermore, the data from both Findhorn and McKinsey & Co. imply that collective effervescence must be 'recharged' periodically in order to remain effective. This helps explain that while most of us are content working individually (and/or remotely) for *some* of the time, we feel compelled to intermittently reconnect with our work peers on a physical co-present basis. This periodic reconnection serves the purpose of replenishing our reserves of 'effervescence'. It is no surprise, then, that so much of the public discourse surrounding postpandemic 'return to work' has favoured a hybrid approach.

The paper is structured as follows. I begin with an overview of the relevant literature in respect of Durkheim and collective effervescence. I then outline my methods before presenting and discussing both sets of data. Finally, I impart some concluding thoughts and delineate recommendations for future research.

(Re)introducing Émile Durkheim

Émile Durkheim is often touted as one of the three 'founding fathers' of sociology (e.g. Royce 2015). By comparison to Marx and Weber, however, Durkheim is unquestionably the least well cited of this trio (see, for example, citation metrics in Hughes, Sharrock, and Martin 2003). Nonetheless, Durkheim's thinking has 'shaped much of the work of post-war American social constructionists and symbolic interactionists' (Dobbin 2013, 206). Indeed, what distinguishes Durkheim from Weber or Marx is that his work is trained on the dynamics of social groups above and beyond broader preoccupations with ideology (Marx) or institution (Weber). It is for this reason that his canon is acutely relevant to this paper.

More generally, Durkheim's works – particularly *The Division of Labour in Society* [1893], *Suicide* [1897], and *The Elementary forms of Religious Life* [1912] can be just as fruitful for contemporary scholars of organisation as, say, Marx's *Capital* ([1867; 1885; 1894] 2008) or Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* [1905]. But a problem remains. Unlike Marx or Weber, Durkheim's work reflects an explicit desire to establish a *science* of sociology; this was certainly his intention in *The Rules of Sociological Method* [1895]. At first glance, then, Durkheim's epistemological aspirations jar with an interpretative study such as the one presented in this paper. Unsurprisingly, Durkheim has fallen out of favour for this epistemological bias. In 1981, Charles Tilly's (1981) provocatively titled 'Useless Durkheim' reflected a growing scepticism with the sort of Comtian sociology Durkheim apparently endorsed. Durkheim's positivism has continued to face a frosty reception in the world of critical theory, generally, and in the field of critical management and organisation studies, in particular. Since Burrell and Morgan's seminal (1979) text, *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*, the application of Durkheim within the realm of organisation and management studies has been at best tentative. For Burrell and Morgan, while Marx represents the *sociology of radical change,* Durkheim represents the *sociology of regulation.* In this way, they ascribed to Durkheim a discernible conservatism.

However, in 1996, in a direct rebuttal of Tilly's position, Emirbayer's 'Useful Durkheim' was published. Emirbayer directed attention away from Durkheim's positivism and instead focussed on one of his strengths: the ability to show how 'action within civil society as well as other historical contexts is channelled by cultural, social-structural, and social-psychological configurations' (Emirbayer 1996, 109, emphasis added). Later still, Shilling and Mellor (1998, 194) argued that

> [d]espite often being portrayed as a positivist, Durkheim developed a deep concern with society as a moral, religious force which stimulated in people an effervescent propulsion towards actions productive of either cohesion or dissolution … .

Shilling and Mellor themselves cite resurgence of interest in Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence dating back to the 1980s. Maffesoli's *Le Temps des tribus* (1988), for example, was not translated into English until 1996 but is astute in its treatment of Durkheim in late modernity. 'Such approaches', write Shilling and Mellor (1998. 195), 'highlight the potential of applying Durkheim's analysis … to new times'. More recently, in 'Useless Tilly (et al.)', Deflem (2007, 15) celebrates Durkheim in favour of what he calls 'the stubborn and strikingly ahistorical obsession with Marxist preoccupations … '. In each case, there is a feeling that Durkheim's wider work should not be tainted by his methodological ambitions to establish a science of 'sociological facts'; rather, we should focus on particular aspects of Durkheim's work where we are more likely to find analytical strengths. For Emirbayer, Durkheim is useful in terms of his conceptualisation of social action; for Shilling and Mellor, his theory of collective effervescence is invaluable; and for Deflem, Durkheim represents a valuable alternative for meta-sociological theorising to the all-too-dominant Marx. Indeed, it is in distinguishing Durkheim from Marx that we might fully contextualise these perspectives. In terms of theorising revolution, for example, a Marxist perspective might examine both its causes and its objectives. A Durkheimian perspective meanwhile – in embodying the social action emphasised by Emirbayer and collective effervescence emphasised by Shilling and Mellor – might instead focus on the process and mechanics of the uprising itself.

Despite the growing recognition of – and support for – Durkheimian analytics in the recent sociological work of Shilling and Mellor, Deflem, and Emirbayer, engagement with Durkheim in our native field of management and organisation studies has been more tentative. A generation ago Meyer and Rowan (1977) presented an early contribution to the conceptualisation of organisational behaviour in the vocabulary of 'myth' and 'ceremony', which was inspired in part by Durkheim's *The Division of Labour in Society*. More recently, Dobbin (2013) draws an insightful comparison between contemporary organisational decision-making and traditional tribal custom. In each case, habitual – rather than pragmatic – solutions are enacted to address the challenges faced. Perhaps most notable, however, Hirsch, Fiss, and Hoel-Green (2013, 228) argue that psychologist Elton Mayo's *Human Relations Movement* (which of course came to represent a welcome alternative to Taylorist management orthodoxy) 'built on Durkheim in developing its understanding of unity in small groups … [focussing] on the ways in which a new form of moral order could arise from belonging to a work group, a force that could counter the anomic aspects of industrial organisation and the division of labour'. But these invocations of Durkheim notwithstanding, engagement with Durkheim's work remains extremely unusual among scholars of management and organisation. It is thus hoped that this paper makes a modest contribution to address this deficit.

Durkheimian collective effervescence

Our understanding of Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence is drawn primarily from his last book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (published in 1912). However, Durkheim had previously developed a broader conceptual frame in *The Division of Labour in Society* (published in 1893) and *Suicide* (published in 1897). In each he focussed on the group or collective (distinct from most extant analyses which were trained on the individual). In *The Division of Labour in Society,* Durkheim identified how a sense of the collective could be achieved through two very distinct means: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity, associated foremost with pre-Industrial society, is achieved through kinship ties and common experiences. Organic solidarity, meanwhile, is associated foremost with post-Industrial society, and is secured by recourse to the interdependence that arises through economic exchange and, in particular, the mutual reliance between people precipitated by a division of labour. In *Suicide*, Durkheim advanced this understanding of social attachment to analyse suicide rates. He concluded that rates of suicide increase in circumstances where people experience anomie, or detachment from the group. Related to – but distinct from – these discussions is Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness. For Dobbin (2013, 206, emphasis added), 'collective consciousness emerges from the *interaction of group members* rather than from

the qualities of the individual'. In turn, of course, collective effervescence itself has often been compared to the idea of an 'altered state of consciousness' (see, for example, Winkelman 1986; Goodman 1990; Buehler 2012). Finally, Dobbin notes that '[l]ike Durkheim, Marx and Weber saw the human psyche as shaped quite fundamentally by social institutions; however, the process of collective meaning-making was much more fundamental to Durkheim than it was for either Marx or Weber'. (ibid) In his preceding works, then, Durkheim (i) prioritises the group – rather than individual – as unit for analysis; (ii) advances the idea of a collective consciousness; and (iii) argues that meaning-making is a communal process. It is from this theoretical base, then, that the notion of collective effervescence secures its conceptual precedence.

Ultimately, Durkheim's ([1912] 2001) 'collective effervescence' represents a powerful and vivid metaphor for enhancing our understanding of religion, sacred belief, and – more generally – the dynamics of assembly. He uses the term to describe the feelings of warmth and lucidity aroused when individuals become part of a group during gatherings, ceremonies or rituals. More recently, collective effervescence has been used to describe experiences at rock concerts (see for example Redmond and Holmes 2007). For Durkheim, however, it is these ecstatic feelings – rendered by the close interaction and intersubjective experience with others – that are often interpreted by participants as confirmation of transcendental or sacred intervention. Although – and as we have seen – much of Durkheim's work has been maligned in the last half century, it is surprising that this particular branch of his studies has had limited application in the discipline of religious studies since, and has been almost entirely overlooked in the field of organisation and management studies. Of course, there has certainly been interesting work within our native discipline in respect of emotion (e.g. Fineman 2000), passion (e.g. Brewis et al. 2006), and affect, 'spheres' and 'foam' (e.g. Borch 2009). However, for the purposes of this study, it was Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence that was deemed most appropriate. This is because it incorporates and actively contextualises *affect*, *emotion* and *passion*, while providing a more pertinent metaphorical alternative to either *sphere* or *foam*.

In order to fully understand the concept of collective effervescence, it is important first to acknowledge Durkheim's view of religion. Although he comments on the social significance of religion in his earlier works, notably in *Suicide,* it is the interpretation of religion he advances in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that is of special note here. Here his analysis focuses on secondary ethnographic data which described the ritualistic behaviour of Aboriginal Australians:

> The life of Australian societies alternates between two different phases. At times the population is scattered in small groups that go about their business independently … At other times, by contrast, the population is concentrated and condensed in particular places for a period varying from several days to several months. This concentration takes place when a clan or tribal group is summoned to meet, and on this occasion they hold either a religious ceremony or what ethnographers call a corroboree … . The very fact of assembling is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. (Durkheim [1912] 2001, 162–163)

Later still, Durkheim explicitly addresses this process in relation to the sacred: '[W]hen collective life reaches a certain degree of intensity it awakens religious thought, because it determines a state of effervescence that changes the conditions of psychic activity. Vital energies become overstimulated, passions more powerful, sensations stronger … ' (ibid, 317, emphasis added). This relationship is echoed in the secondary literature. For Shilling and Mellor (1998, 197, emphasis added), for example, 'During [collective effervescence] people … experience a certain 'rush of energy'.

Beyond this general account of collective effervescence, there are two specific aspects of Durkheimian collective effervescence that are especially pertinent to this paper: First, the importance of co-presence; and second, the need to periodically re-charge collective effervescence. Marshall (2002) suggests that Durkheim's description of ritual practice is premised on an impulse for co-present assembly. Furthermore:

> Probably the most significant result of co-presence … is deindividuation … As the name implies, deindividuation has to do with the loss of a sense of self, resulting in three important effects: (1) a strong sense of unity

with and liking for the group and its members, thus contributing directly to [a sense of] belonging; (2) behaviour that is … free from the normative and moral constraints that usually constrain it; and (3) a direct and positive impact on the participant's subjective state via its ability to reduce self-awareness. (Marshall 2002. 362)

Beyond the importance of physical co-presence, Durkheim ([1912] 2001, 250) also explains that, 'unfortunately, all forces, even the most spiritual, are worn away over time if nothing comes along to restore the energy they lose in the natural course of things. This creates a primary need that is … the underlying reason for a positive cult. The members of a totem can remain themselves, then, only if they periodically restore the totemic principle that is within them'. For its benefits to be maintained in the long term, collective effervescence must therefore be periodically restored. Of this phenomenon, Shilling (1997, 205) writes:

Durkheim … allow[s] us to view society as a bounded sphere of social order, but his complementary analysis of the 'fiery furnace' that accompanies the production and reproduction of specific social relationships sees this order as dependent on the somatic 'recharging capacities' of collective effervescence.

In his later collaboration with Mellor, Shilling develops this point further:

the incidence, intensity and scope of collective effervescence varies according to the relationships and activities characteristic of social groups. Furthermore, the effects of collective effervescence are, since they are rooted in emotion, characterised by a certain ephemerality and must be recharged if they are to have enduring significance. (Shilling and Mellor 1998, 197, original emphasis)

Perhaps most evocative of all, however, Collins (1998, 23) suggests that 'group-generated emotional energy … . charges up individuals like an electric battery, giving them a corresponding degree of enthusiasm toward ritually created goals when they are out of the presence of the group'.

Method

Two sets of data underpin this research. The first is immersive ethnographic data from the Findhorn Foundation; the second is documentary data published by McKinsey & Co. over the course of the global pandemic.

In 2009, and as part of the field work for my doctoral degree, I conducted an ethnography at the Findhorn Foundation, an intentional community (or commune) in Scotland. The research focussed on the interpretation of the experiences associated with life and work within this alternative setting. Since ethnography 'provides researchers with a way to examine cultures from the inside out' (Schwartzman 1993, 72) and 'is located at the shift from function to meaning' (Gellner and Hirsch 2001, 20) it captured my empirical aspirations effectively. Moreover, Shehata's (2006, 244–245) reflections on ethnography – described here as 'participant observation' – resonated with my broader ontological inclinations:

[I]t has always seemed to me that the most important questions in the social sciences are not about macro structures, large processes, or social institutions – but about people: living, breathing, flesh and blood, real people who, it turns out, whether intentionally or not, produce structures, set processes in motion, and establish institutions … [What is important is] how real people understand their situation and their world. There is no better method for providing these perspectives … than participant observation.

Ethnography was thus considered an effective tool for shedding light on the intangible concepts I was interested in: belief, belonging, ritual and identity. As will become clear in the findings section further on, the data from Findhorn help demonstrate that workplace togetherness (in the form of both co-presence and recharging) is vital for participants.

But the Findhorn experience is of course far-removed from most of our everyday realities. The widespread shift to remote working during the global pandemic, however, suddenly meant that overnight huge sections the world's population were compelled to reflect on the nature and purpose of physical co-presence. An analysis of data published as a series of 34 reports by management consultants McKinsey & Co. during COVID-19 thus constitutes our second set of data. This

macrosocial data is distinct from the principally semantic, close and ideographic data that character-ises ethnography. Figure 1 details each report's number, title, date of publication, and type. The five types of report are survey, interview, article, podcast and model. Survey sample sizes varied from $n = 195$ to $n = 5774$. Interview sample sizes varied from $n = 1$ to $n = 350$. For those reports that are labelled 'article', 'podcast' or 'model', while they typically drew on *extant* survey and/or interview data, their designation reflects the fact that no new data was presented in these particular reports.

It is unusual for academics to draw upon reports written by management consultants. However, in this case, the advantages were clear. First, academic research and publication is notoriously slow: the corporate world is rather different. More generous resource provision coupled with a culture premised on speed and productivity mean that large amounts of data can be collected, analysed, and published in the space of weeks rather than years. Second, this fast track publication technique means that retro-spective analysis (such as that offered here) can examine and reflect on how changes in priorities and attitudes unfold in real time, over the course of the pandemic. Finally, it is worth stressing that the tone and penmanship of the McKinsey & Co. reports is not as managerialist as critical management scholars might suppose. Reading through the material it becomes clear that many of the authors are

Report #	Report title	Date of publication	Report type
1	Reimagining the office and work after COVID-19	June 8, 2020	Article
2	Ready, set, go: Reinventing the organization for speed in the post COVID-19 era	June 26, 2020	Article
3	Communications get personal: How leaders can engage employees during a return to work	June 26, 2020	Article
4	COVID-19 and the employee experience: How leaders can seize the moment	June 29, 2020	Survey (n=800)
5	Reimagining the postpandemic workforce	July 7, 2020	Article
6	HR says talent is crucial for performance - and the pandemic proves it	July 27, 2020	Survey (n=195)
7	The long haul: How leaders can shift mindsets and behaviors to reopen safely	July 28, 2020	Article
8	Igniting individual purpose in times of crisis	August 18, 2020	Article
9	The need for speed in the post-COVID-19 era - and how to achieve it	Sep 9, 2020	Survey (n=853)
10	The hidden perils of unresolved grief	Sep 10, 2020	Article
11	Your organization is grieving - here's how you can help	Sep 17, 2020	Article
12	Rethinking capabilities to emerge stronger from COVID-19	Nov 23, 2020	Survey (n=1240)
13	Overcoming pandemic fatigue: How to reenergise organizations for the long run	Nov 25, 2020	Article
14	Grief, loss, burnout: Talking about complex ideas at work	Dec 8, 2020	Podcast
15	How COVID-19 is redefining the next normal operating model	Dec 10, 2020	Article
16	Organizing for the future: Nine keys to becoming a future-ready company	Jan 11, 2021	Article
17	Psychological safety and the critical role of leadership development	Feb 11, 2021	Survey (n=1574)
18	The new possible: How HR can help build the organization of the future	March 12, 2021	Interviews (n=350)
19	Fit for the postpandemic future: Unilever's Leena Nair on reinventing how we work	March 23, 2021	Interviews (n=1)
20	What employees are saying about the future of remote work	April 1, 2021	Survey (n=5043)
21	Help your employees find purpose - or watch them leave	April 5, 2021	Survey (n=1021)
22	Building workforce skills at scale to thrive during - and after - the COVID-19 crisis	April 30, 2021	Survey (n=700)
23	Five Fifty: The Great Exhaustion [Interactive online source]	May 4, 2021	Article
24	Grabbing hold of the new future of work	May 14, 2021	Podcast
25	What executives are saying about the future of hybrid work	May 17, 2021	Survey (n=100)
26	The search for purpose at work	June 3, 2021	Podcast
27	Back to human: Why HR leaders want to focus on people again	June 4, 2021	Interviews (n=70)
28	Culture in the hybrid workplace	June 11, 2021	Podcast
29	How to future-proof your organization	June 17, 2021	Podcast
30	Return as a muscle: How lessons from COVID-19 can shape a robust operating model	July 9, 2021	Survey (n=504)
31	It's time for leaders to get real about hybrid	July 9, 2021	Article
32	Three keys to building a more skilled postpandemic workforce	July 30, 2021	Survey (n=700)
33	'Great Attrition' or 'Great Attraction'? The choice is yours	Sep 8, 2021	Survey (n=5774)
34	What's next for remote work?: An analysis of 2,000 tasks, 800 jobs, and nine countries	Nov 23, 2020	Model

Figure 1. The reports that make up the 'Return, Reimagine, Reinvent' research series published by McKinsey & Co. during the COVID-19 pandemic.

progressive thinkers. Indeed, the series explores numerous themes above and beyond the archetypal diet of corporate drivel. These include ritual (Report #3), sensemaking (Reports #4, #8, and #28), social inequity (Reports #4, #28, and #30), social cohesion (Reports #2 and #5), dissonance (Report #8), grief and grieving (Reports #10, #11, and #14), social fabric (Report #13), wellbeing (Report #27), togetherness (Report #28), serendipity (Report #28), and, most pervasive of all, the importance of an existential sense of purpose (Reports #8, #21, #26, #29, and #33). Nonetheless, McKinsey & Co. no doubt had a functionalist end in mind in producing this series (in their own words, they intend for this series of reports to be used to 'help organisations lead the recovery'). Their overriding focus and style (which, admittedly, borders on hyperbole in places) is thus geared towards an executive readership. My own reading of the data is less functionalist. Rather, I approach the reports as a 'real time' evolving data set which reveals a flavour of remote working experiences during the pandemic. I therefore view the data both in a documentary sense, and in a retrospective discursive sense. I thus document – and interpret – the experiences described in the reports, and also identify how the data enable us to discern shifting attitudes as the pandemic unfolds.

Reports compiled by other consultancies were considered for use in this paper (as were those compiled by media outlets, including BBC, Al Jazeera, and The Economist). However, McKinsey & Co.'s was by far the most comprehensive; it was the only one to be presented as part of an ongoing series (which enabled shifting attitudes to be identified over the course of the pandemic); and it was open access. All reports were downloaded and printed. The data were then analysed in accordance with the techniques of thematic analysis (see, for example, Braun and Clarke 2006). This involved an initial read-through of the reports, during which a basic code frame was developed manually. This was achieved by breaking down the data into component parts and giving each of those parts a label or 'code'. Using this code frame as a provisional index of key themes, the entire data set was then subject to multiple rounds of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves further reading and rereading of the data set, during which recurring themes and subthemes can be identified (see, for example, Clark et al. 2021). This approach enables the researcher to derive not just repeated instances of the themes identified in the original code frame (for example, by identifying synonymous phrases or analogous scenarios), but also to identify relationships between those original themes, as well as subordinate and superordinate themes. In this case, data saturation was reached following seven rounds of thematic analysis.

Findings and analysis

Dataset 1: collective effervescence at the Findhorn Foundation

My research at the Findhorn Foundation yielded some fascinating insights in respect of organisational dynamics, one of which hinged on the concept of collective effervescence. For a comprehensive discussion of the findings, readers are directed to the thesis itself (see Vine 2011). For the purposes of this paper, however, the relevant coverage is presented in abridged form.

The intentional community – or commune – which is today known as the Findhorn Foundation was established in Scotland in 1962. The community founders cultivated a vision of life premised on an apparently synergetic blend of spiritual and ecological sensitivity. Today the community has approximately 300 residents, most of who work for the community either directly or in the form of related business ventures providing both conventional and esoteric products, services and residential programmes and work experience weeks (or 'workweeks') for the thousands of visitors to the Foundation each year. It is the largest intentional community in Europe and a powerful 'brand' within New Age circles. I spent a total of six weeks living and working within the community in 2009–2010. Demographically, I discovered that the vast majority of visitors to the community are single or divorced, and either precariously employed or retired; it thus became apparent that the sense of organisational participation that Findhorn offers – particularly on its residential programmes – was a principal part of its appeal.

Over the course that research, I encountered a number of terms (both spoken and within relevant written documents) that were either meaningless outside of Findhorn or had a specific meaning in the context of the community. However, the present discussion is dedicated to the most impenetrable and enigmatic of these terms: *energy*.

On my first visit to the community, I enrolled on the introductory programme known as 'Experience Week'. This course is a pre-requisite for those seeking admission to live and work in the community on a long term basis. On arrival, I joined my co-participants in Findhorn's Community Centre building. The rest of my group had already arrived and were sat on comfortable armchairs arranged in circular formation, a configuration which reflected the round architecture of the room itself. We were asked to introduce ourselves and say a little about what had led us to come to Findhorn. This was to be our first 'sharing' session. We each spoke in turn. For some, this was an opportunity to convey their New Age credentials. Invariably, those assembled spoke with enthusiasm. Some spoke for in excess of twenty minutes. Celine, a softly spoken Belgian woman in her fifties, and one of the last to speak, said simply:

> I came for the energy.

She smiled broadly. Her statement was greeted by others among us with sounds and gestures of affirmation and approval, as though struck by both the simplicity and poignancy of the utterance. It represented a clear juxtaposition to the extensive biographies that had been offered by other participants, but from the impressions they gave now, effectively and concisely embodied what they had struggled to say in verbose monologues. Anna, one of the coordinators (or 'focalisers', in Findhorn parlance), responded passionately:

> Yes! People come to Findhorn to feel the energy! I do hope you feel it this week!

From this session on, I hear the term used daily. I hear it spoken by participants and focalisers alike; and read it in official documentation, web pages and books written about the community and its related interests. As I was soon to discover, it is a word which is difficult to comprehend for one new to New Age discourses. Later in my research, I noticed a clear correlation between the utterance of the word 'energy' and singing. During a subsequent visit to the community, for example, I made the following entry in my field notes:

> I woke at about 7am to the sound of the door closing to the entrance of our bungalow. Rochelle [one of my co-workers] had just come in. Intrigued as it was so early, I asked her where she'd been. "I've just been to a Taize singing session in the Hobbit Hole" [a stone-built chamber partially emerged in the earth, and nicknamed the 'Hobbit hole' as it apparently resembles Bilbo Baggins' dwelling described by Tolkien.] "Oh Tom', she continued, 'you must come for the energy! You can watch the energy going from person to person …. different harmonies overlap … you can feel the exchange of energy … and there's this wonderful feeling of warmth".

However, use of the term 'energy' was not limited to discussions of singing. On my second visit to the community, the two women I chat to in the community library are enrolled on a programme called 'Positive Energy'. They tell me that the programme's title alludes to a collaborative, constructive outlook on the one hand and to renewable sources of energy on the other. And following our Experience Week, and as part of an email circular initiated to maintain contact between us, we receive a Christmas message from one of our group, Bruno:

> My dear Findhorn flowers. I want to say thank all members [of] our "family" for being a part of this wonderful [experience]. It was a miracle to come together at this angelic place and share your energy with us … I send you love and light for the next year. Bruno.

As with the singing, the context in which Bruno uses the term is discernibly communal; it implies the sharing of energy in a social context. On a later workweek, the term was apparently used in a similar context. One of my field notes for our second day's work reads as follows:

> During the morning gathering (or 'attunement', in Findhorn parlance), Jeff made an interesting comment. When discussing the plan for the day, he said he didn't want "to disband our working teams" because apparently yesterday these teams generated "an effective energy".

Although in one sense Jeff may have been using the term in the prosaic sense of stamina, I now understood that it also described a sense of social togetherness. Indeed, in the fold of group assembly, I was beginning to recognise this feeling myself. 'Energy' was, it seemed, a native term for collective effervescence. Interestingly, and as we saw earlier in the paper, the word 'energy' was a synonym Durkheim used, too.

Findhorn, energy and the importance of co-presence

A few days after our Experience Week, our group received an email from Louis:

> Dear All. After coming back from the wonderful Experience Week we shared last week I have to write something in order to stay connected … I am convinced that distance in miles makes no difference to these feelings … Our next task will be to find a way to stay in resonance with Findhorn and you to conserve all the good and loving feelings we developed there. My first thought today was to meditate. I hope we can all stay tune[d] into the energy of Findhorn. Louis

It was then suggested by Bruno that we try to synchronise our meditative practices. In the subject field of a later email, Bruno wrote 'our family meditation'. The email contained instructions as regards this synchronised meditation:

> My dear friends. On Friday 31st of July at 06:00 am light a candle in front of you. We [will try to establish] a connection with our lovely family-circle! I look forward to meeting you again on Friday!

That Bruno used the term 'family-circle' is interesting. First, that he considered us family conveys the closeness felt over the course of the week spent living and working together. This was clearly something Bruno sought to rekindle, if only over the electronic ether. Second 'circle' implies the importance of the time we spent as a group together; inevitably we sat or stood in a circular configuration to attune, share and experience together. Finally, that Bruno wrote 'I'm very happy to meet you again on Friday' implies that although actual co-presence would be impossible, the plan was to emulate the experience of co-presence through our synchronised meditation. Louis responded:

> For the meditation on Friday, I need [to envisage] a place to meet. I suggest that in the "warm up phase" we [imagine meeting] in the upper room of the Community Centre were we met so often and look into the same candle, before we go into the meditation.

Louis implied that he would be better able to re-connect with the Findhorn experience, and – especially – our group if he imagined both a space (the Community Centre) and props (the candle) with which he was familiar. In terms of 'energy' these synchronised 'meetings', which were from this point scheduled for the last Friday morning of each calendar month, began well:

> Hi friends … I was very tired on Friday morning, but it was very nice to meditate. I imagined the room where we met and could really feel the circle and the presence of people meditating with me. I felt the groupenergy moving, fading … Till next time … Celine

However, and in spite of a concerted effort on the part of those on the email circular, especially Louis and Bruno, these monthly meditative meetings did not prove viable. Following the next month's synchronised meditation, for example, Bruno wrote the following:

> My dear Findhorn flowers … I was not alone this morning – but it was not the same power from our circle [as] last time … Please imagine what a gardener (with sunflowers in his heart) would do, when he looks to the garden-bed and only a few flowers want to grow … Bruno

As a gardener, Bruno was fond of using horticultural metaphors. In this case, his metaphor was used to express concern at the insufficient 'power' our synchronised meditations produced that month, a trend that was set to continue. The frequency of emails exchanged by the group during the months following the Experience Week itself reflected the fading feelings of collective effervescence. By far the highest number of emails (47) were sent in July 2009, the month immediately after our

Experience Week. At the point, the feelings of 'energy' were still fresh. Hereafter, the frequency of emails declines rapidly (to just 3 in November) before increasing again (to 11) in December 2009 owing to the exchange of Christmas greetings. In the New Year, the frequency of emails once again declines. In the months of April and May 2010, no emails were circulated at all. Several (6) were exchanged in July 2010 to mark the anniversary of our Experience week and then a few more (3) the following Christmas. The very last message on this forum was sent in February 2011. In spite of the group's best efforts to maintain a sense of 'energy' from our disparate locations, these endeavours were ultimately unsuccessful.

Findhorn and the 're-charging capacities' of collective effervescence

As we have seen, for Durkheim ([1912] 2001, 250), 'all forces, even the most spiritual, are worn away over time if nothing comes along to restore the energy they lose in the natural course of things'. For its benefits to be maintained in the long term, collective effervescence must therefore be periodically restored. Relatively few participants actually live permanently at Findhorn. The vast majority spend a few weeks or months at a time in its fold, and return periodically. Indeed, it seems most of the participants I met on the workweeks did precisely this. Cherie, a retired nurse in her late sixties said by way of introduction on one such week:

> I am reconnecting with Findhorn once again … this is my … . fourth … or fifth time here … I am recharging my Findhorn batteries.

Similarly, on another workweek, Rochelle commented thus:

> Every now and then, I hear a voice … it's my soul calling [she cupped her hand around her mouth to emphasise the fact that the voice is distant and coming from afar] "Findhorn" … [she paused for effect] … "Findhorn" … [she paused again] … "Findhorn" …

Dataset 2: collective effervescence in the McKinsey & Co. reports

For service sector employees, lockdown meant being hunched over a temperamental laptop getting to grips with virtual communication technologies. 'Quite simply, when 'COVID-19 happened, we all moved to a Zoom world' (Report #29: 9). It is the ramifications of this move that the McKinsey & Co. series of reports is dedicated. However, of the broader purpose of the McKinsey & Co. reports, the following excerpts are instructive:

> Across industries, leaders will use the lessons from this large-scale work-from-home experiment to reimagine how work is done – and what role offices should play – in creative and bold ways. (Report #1, 2)

> [T]he pandemic [has] accelerated experimentation. (Report #29, 3)

> Once in a generation (if that), we have the opportunity to reimagine how we work. In the 1800s, the Industrial Revolution moved many in Europe and the United States from fields to factories. In the 1940s, World War II brought women into the workforce at unprecedented rates. In the 1990s, the explosion of PCs and email drove a rapid increase in productivity and the speed of decision making, ushering in the digital age as we know it today. And in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic drove employees out of offices to work from home. (Report #31: 1)

COVID-19 represents an extraordinary opportunity for reimagining. It represents a macrosocial experiment of extraordinary scale. So what did the data reveal?

COVID-19 and the importance of co-presence

Most of the coverage in respect of the importance of co-presence in these reports is presented in terms of its practical value. These include fairly prosaic coverage relating to the salience of nonverbal communication and the importance of the infamous – if clichéd – 'management by walking around' (see for example Report #5). However, there is also a greater sense of both existential depth and nuance to the coverage. To this end, a broader argument in support of co-present interaction is

made in the series by reflecting on some of the documented shortcomings of remote working. These include the experience of frustration; the adverse effects of alienation; the role of serendipity; and, most notably, the observation that interpersonal interaction generates an intangible 'energy'. Each is examined, below.

Frustration – Marbled throughout the series is a clear sense that despite the myriad advantages of remote working in respect of efficiency, its isolating effects have elicited deep-seated frustration. This is captured, most memorably, as part of a reflective piece in Report #14:

> [On the one hand] I've been blown away by how much we've been able to do in a completely remote environment. But this has also made clear how much we [have missed physical interaction]. I'm like a caged animal, honestly. (Bill Schaninger, quoted in Report #14, 2)

Alienation – Interviewed for Report #19, the chief executive of Unilever, Leena Nair, reflects on her experiences of remote working during COVID-19:

> It's been a difficult year. This is my life's work, being with people. It's been personally very difficult to be alone in a room, day after day, look[ing] at the screen, and not hav[ing] a chance to meet other human beings. (Leena Nair, Report #19, 4)

Later in the series, in a report focussed on the HR function, the authors reflect on the alienating effects of the gradual shift towards self-service HR solutions:

> Many European [Chief HR Officers] said that they wanted to transform their functions to engage more directly with the workforce and move away from self-service solutions. They stressed that key processes should be undertaken face-to-face. (Report #27, 3)

More poignantly, one of the authors of Report #24 is unequivocal:

> I'm hopeful that after the crisis, we never take being in each other's presence for granted again. (Bill Schaninger, Report #24, 6)

Serendipity – Early on in the series, the authors of Report #5 ask the following question:

> Have you ever run into a colleague in the hallway and, by doing so, learn something you didn't know? Informal interactions and unplanned encounters foster the unexpected cross-pollination of ideas – the exchange of tacit knowledge – that are essential to healthy, innovative organizations. Informal interactions provide a starting point for collegial relationships in which people collaborate on areas of shared interest, thereby bridging organizational silos and strengthening social networks and shared trust within your company. (Report #5, 6)

Later in the series, the authors of Report #28 make the point that virtual working via videoconferencing precludes possibilities to interact with individuals outside one's own team, department, or division. This is because the carefully engineered and targeted nature of videoconferencing precludes chance encounters:

> In a regular office, the rhythms of a workday offer lots of opportunities to collaborate outside your immediate team. (Report #28, 4)

And this begs a more important consideration in a world premised on efficiency, efficacy and narrowly-defined purpose:

> What about a role for serendipitous interactions to spark ideas? Is there a role for serendipity in a hybrid world, where the function of the office is so planned and purposeful?. (Report #28, 6)

The 'energy' from interpersonal interactions – In a near identical vein to its use at Findhorn, the word 'energy' is used to describe the bonding phenomenon between people in physical proximity throughout the McKinsey series. On the opening page of Report #11, for example, the authors note that

> … more than a few of us admit privately that remote work is an emotional challenge for ourselves, for our teammates, and for our organization as a whole … some colleagues miss the office, others the commute, still others

> the energy they draw from in-person interactions with customers, clients and colleagues. These losses must be addressed and mourned. (Report #11: 1)

The use of the word 'energy' in this context is analogous to its use at Findhorn. And, as at Findhorn, there is implicit recognition that the use of the word 'energy' in this context describes collective effervescence even if the authors of the report are unfamiliar with the latter term. Perhaps even more remarkable, two reports later, the authors open with the following declaration:

> Leaders must actively manage the energy of their workforces, cultivate the quality of employee relationships, and demonstrate a capacity for resilience to recharge their organizations in crisis. (Report #13, 1)

Not only do we have another invocation of the concept of energy, but here the authors refer – explicitly – to the need to 'recharge', another discernible connection to Durkheim's original theorisation, and expanded upon below.

COVID-19, recharging and hybrid working

Notably, and with an eye on developing an effective hybrid model, the McKinsey & Co. reports stress the following:

> Consider all the research showing that building new relationships is better done in person. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 39 percent of employees struggled to maintain a strong connection with colleagues as informal social networks weakened and people leaned in heavily to the people and groups with who they most identified. Anchored in facts such as that, leaders have a concrete reason for why some amount of face time is critical. (Report #31, 4–5)

Moreover:

> Meeting employees where they are means signalling awareness that there is a deeper undercurrent of beliefs that will take time to surface and understand, accompanied by a clear commitment that the organization will continue to listen for, process, and act on those signals. (Report #31, 5)

This latter comment is interesting: *an awareness that there is a deeper undercurrent of beliefs that will take time to surface and understand.* Does this, perhaps, hint at both the importance and enigmatic nature of collective effervescence? Of course, for McKinsey & Co. and particularly for their client organisations, a vocabulary that speaks directly to organisational benefits is likely to have more traction, but this bias is probably part of the reason employees have such difficulty understanding what it is about being in the office that is so important to them – not as employees, but as human beings.

There is some implicit recognition early on in the series of reports that working remotely cannot be a definitive end in itself. So, for example, in the opening report of the series, the authors ask the following:

> Has working from home only succeeded because it is viewed as temporary, not permanent? (Report #1: 2)

The implication here is that remote working during the pandemic has been successful only because there has been an overarching prospect of returning to the office, and the familiar routines that return will rekindle. Indeed, the authors of Report #3 invoke the power of co-present ritual:

> Rituals create a sense of familiarity and reassurance. They help navigate loss and celebrate joyful events in our lives … . People often turn to rituals because the psychological processes underlying them have been shown to have a stress-reducing component. (Report 3: 6)

Of course, most students of organisational behaviour will be familiar with the pertinence of ritual as a key component of organisational culture. However, the coverage here is more than a glib repackaging of this generic idea; it hints at the importance of periodic ritual as a means of renewing employee bonds which has a direct bearing on discussions of collective effervescence:

> [The periodic ritual] is the point at which the social ties that bind the organization together are refreshed and reinforced and renewed. (Report #3: 6)

The vocabulary used (i.e. 'refreshed', 'reinforced' and 'renewed') bears a striking resemblance to that which we associate with Durkheim in respect of the importance of intermittent physical assembly as a means of recharging our sense of collective effervescence. Reading through the series chronologically it became clear that remote workers missed the office and wished to reconnect with it on an *intermittent basis*. Of course, the implicit recognition of periodic reconnection (or 'recharging' in Durkheimian vernacular), invariably implies that a hybrid model of work will prevail. But what, exactly, does hybrid work look like? Interestingly, the approach to hybrid evolves over the course of this series of reports. Early on, the emphasis is very much on a binary either/or approach to hybrid work. This early coverage suggests that some individuals prefer to work remotely while others prefer to work in the office. A comment in Report #1, for example (June 2020), suggests the following:

> Many employees liberated from long commutes and travel have found more productive ways to spend that time, enjoyed greater flexibility in balancing their personal and professional lives and decided that they prefer to work at home rather than the office. (Report #1, 2)

Later that summer, more companies recognised the potential for hybrid working. However, the reports implied that most still regarded this as a binary scenario. The authors of report 5, for example, note the following:

> As the pandemic begins to ease, many companies are planning a new combination of remote and on-site working, a hybrid virtual model in which some employees are on premises, while others work from home. (Report #5, 1)

However, further on in that report, the either/or scenario is challenged:

> First let's eliminate the extremes. We'd recommend a fully virtual model to very few companies … On the other hand, few companies would be better off choosing an entirely on-premises model, given that at least some of their workers need flexibility because of work-life or health constraints. That leaves most companies in the middle, with a hybrid of remote and on-site working. (Report #5, 3)

It is not until Report #9, however, published in September 2020, that we first have recognition that remote working may not be a binary phenomenon:

> [Our] survey respondents expect at least some of these changes will remain once the pandemic ends. Consider expectations regarding remote and hybrid work, for example. Fifty-five per cent of leaders anticipate that at least half of their organization's workforce will be fully or partially remote postcrisis. (Report #9, 2)

Partially remote. This is a minor – but significant – concession. It is now no longer a question of remote *or* physical, or even a case of *which* types of work will be remote or physical. Instead, there is now a suggestion that at least some employees may wish to do a bit of both. Here, then, we have a call for contingency. Finally, towards the end of the series, there is recognition that the choice is primarily an existential one, and that the vast majority of employees favour a hybrid approach.

> One reason I think hybrid is here to stay is that it's what employees want. In a survey we did, 30 percent of employees said they'd be likely to switch jobs if they were required to be fully on-site. And more than 50 percent said they'd like to work at least partially remotely. (Report #28, 7)

Concluding thoughts

In this paper's opening discussion, we recognised that engagement with Durkheim's canon is limited in our native field of management and organisation studies. While there has been some nascent work acknowledging Durkheim's precedent in conceptualising organisational behaviour in terms of myth and ceremony (Meyer and Rowan 1977), organisational decision-making (Dobbin 2013), and, more broadly, an analytical emphasis on the group rather than the individual (Hirsch, Fiss, and Hoel-Green 2013), there remains significant as-yet-untapped potential to his oeuvre. It is

hoped, therefore, that this paper makes a small contribution towards addressing this deficit, and – most notably – takes a determined step to embed the concept of collective effervescence in our discipline's consciousness.

The theoretical account of collective effervescence advanced at the outset of this paper, coupled with the empirical insights from Findhorn, have together enabled us to make sense of the discussions relating to social connection identified in the McKinsey & Co. data. It seems that a significant portion of the working population experienced difficulty maintaining social connection during the global pandemic. Our experiences of lockdown remind us that physical co-presence is imperative if we are to realise a sense of social togetherness, and that we require intermittent physical interaction if we are to maintain the benefits of collective effervescence. Irrespective of how sophisticated our virtual communication technologies become, there remains a deep-seated human compulsion for physical proximity. It would seem that Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence is much more than an evocative metaphor.

The word 'energy' is used both at Findhorn and in the more conventional work contexts reported by McKinsey & Co. as an implicit, intuitive and accessible synonym to describe Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence. In both sets of data, the word is used to describe situations and experiences born of social togetherness. As we have seen, the word is used synonymously with collective effervescence by Durkheim himself (for example, Durkheim [1912] 2001, 250) and this same substitution is echoed in the secondary theoretical literature (for example, Shilling and Mellor 1998, 197). Perhaps most notable, however, two significant features that Durkheim uses to help define collective effervescence (that it emerges only in instances of co-presence, and that for its effects to be retained in the longer term it requires 're-charging' by way of periodic physical reconnection), apply similarly in the reported cases of 'energy' at both Findhorn and in the McKinsey & Co. reports.

Although Durkheim developed his concept of collective effervescence in the context of religious activity, we have seen how in more prosaic contexts (such as working with others) comparable effervescent currency is procured through the co-present context of assembly. These findings also resonate with Durkheim's broader deliberation. In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim initially argued that 'there is a constantly decreasing number of beliefs and collective sentiments that are both sufficiently collective and strong enough to assume a religious character' (Durkheim [1893] 1997, 120). Within a few years, however, Durkheim reversed his position. He came to believe that many modern, social institutions are religious in character, that is, they possess collective beliefs, values, and practices that profoundly shape moral identities (Cladis 2001). In this sense, Durkheim might have been more authoritative had he called his 1912 publication 'The Elementary forms of *Organizational* Life'.

Certainly, and as we have noted, it seems clear that both Findhorn and the data contained in the McKinsey & Co. reports reveal that co-presence is a prerequisite for collective effervescence. Attempts to replicate co-present 'energy' at Findhorn via synchronised meditation (but from disparate geographical locations), ultimately failed. Equally, and time-and-again, the respondents in the McKinsey & Co. reports commented – as the pandemic intensified – that they felt like proverbial 'caged animals', restricted as they were, to electronic interaction. And from this it became clear that intermittent physical assembly was necessary to recharge that sense of collective effervescence. At Findhorn, this involved visitors periodically returning to the Foundation to participate in a residential programme or workweek; during COVID-19, this manifested itself – later on in the pandemic – in comments which revealed an overwhelming preference for hybrid work, as opposed to the fully remote, or fully on-site, alternatives. Of course, these observations beg further discussion in at least two areas. First, what might an effective hybrid work rhythm look like? Second, how do these findings relate to broader concerns with neoliberal proclivities?

The recharging rhythm

Although it seems clear now that the postpandemic 'return to the office' is taking a hybrid guise, its degree and character remains disputed. The perspectives in the McKinsey & Co. reports in respect of

the 'hybrid rhythm' (by which we mean, how the pattern of on/off site might work most effectively), are diverse and many. So, for example, in the opening report of the series, the authors impart the following advice:

> Organizations should identify the most important processes … and reenvision them completely. This effort should examine [employees'] professional-development journeys (for instance being physically present in the office at the start and working remotely later) and the different stages of the projects (such as being physically co-located for initial planning and working remotely for execution). (Report #1, 3)

Here, it seems, the rhythm is assumed to be driven primarily by the business' or project's agenda. By the time we get to Report #18 (March 2021), however, there is a suggestion that the divide is based on a weekly temporal unit:

> The office is important, but you don't need to be in the office five days a week. We've shown that. We think across the world, and it really depends of local context. People will come back to the office, whether it's two days, three days, four days. It's what we're calling a hybrid work arrangement, with a physical workspace and a digital workspace. (Report #19, p5)

Indeed, from this point on, the coverage in the McKinsey & Co. reports suggests that the split will hinge around the working week, as opposed to the working day, working month, or working year. That is, the coverage centres on the number of days per week the employee will be in the office, as opposed to – say – the number of hours per day, or the number of weeks per year. So, for example, in Report #21, the following conclusion is reached:

> The majority of employees would like to work from home at least three days per week in the future.

And, in Report #31:

> nearly three-quarters of around 5,000 employees McKinsey queried globally would like to be working from home for two or more days per week, and more than half want at least three days of remote work.

That this discussion is contingent on the number of days per week the typical worker will be 'in the office' (as opposed to, say, the number of hours, weeks or months) is interesting. That it isn't debated suggests – perhaps – that there is an unexamined consensus that this represents the appropriate temporal unit on which to hinge our deliberation. Notably, many other participative commitments in life are configured in accordance with comparable temporal frames. For the devout, for example, a visit to a place of worship is typically a weekly affair. And so too is entertainment. In the trance-electronica song 'God is a DJ', the late Maxi Jazz of iconic British band Faithless, says of the nightclub: 'This is my church'. On one level, this is little more than a trivial pop culture reference. On another, it invokes the common participative currency between very different types of organisation, as well as reminding us that just as churchgoing follows a weekly rhythm, so too does nightclubbing. But, of course, for many of us it is not the church or the weekend entertainment venue that represents our primary means of weekly organisational participation (and hence collective effervescence); it is our place of work.

The ramifications for neoliberal proclivities

COVID-19 aside, as our lives become ever more subject to a fluid agenda, partly – but not entirely – metered out by neoliberal predispositions, there is it seems an overlooked anthropological concern. We live in a world, particularly in the West, where kin patterns are restricted to nuclear (and post-nuclear) configurations. Long gone are extended kinship groups. Our need to interact with multiple others must therefore be satiated beyond family. But few of us have a weekly fixture at a place of worship, nightclub, sports team or common interest group (Vine 2021). For many of us, our significant site of organisational participation remains our place of work. And if we take seriously Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence, it is clear that

some aspect of physical co-presence in respect of work must remain; not purely for organisational benefits, but because it seems to be immanent to the human condition. Interestingly, Hirsch, Fiss, and Hoel-Green (2013, 234) conclude that.

> Durkheim would likely find problematic contemporary employment relationships which are at-will, subject to severance at any time, likely to be temporary, lacking fringe benefits, and are on the verge of being outsourced. In such employment relations, it is difficult for individuals to develop the sense of community and shared inter-dependence that Durkheim thought essential for solidarity to emerge.

Beyond the specific concerns associated with work during the global pandemic, the data gleaned from the McKinsey & Co. reports help illuminate concerns associated with the neoliberal shift towards post-bureaucratic organisation, in which fewer and fewer people work in formal, 'tangible' and stable organisations and more and more people instead 'opt' for homeworking, contracting, temping and self-employment. The large scale remote working 'experiment' that the global pandemic has afforded implies that while ostensibly desirable in terms of the economic flexibility they afford businesses, these post-bureaucratic employment practices are unlikely to cultivate a sense of collective, belonging or, dare we say, effervescence. To the extent that togetherness can be said to exist in the conventional bureaucratic workplace in which employees tend to have stable jobs and so get to know their co-workers well, then in an epoch characterised by post-bureau-cratic aspirations, a principal source of this togetherness is denied. Perhaps, therefore, a keener rec-ognition of collective effervescence – and its mechanics – will constitute yet more evidence that neoliberal work practices in which employment becomes ever more precarious have deeply alienat-ing effects.

Recommendations for future research

Inevitably, the methodological traction of this paper is limited. While the data from Findhorn provide a reasonable sense of analytical depth, the McKinsey & Co reports are unlikely to have been drafted in accordance with the rigour we would typically expect of conventional academic enquiry. This is, of course, the price we pay for data which are produced rapidly, as was the case here. As more judicious accounts of remote working experiences during the pandemic are published in the coming years, Durkheim-inspired scholarship is encouraged to train its attention on these accounts so as to augment the emergent conclusions here imparted. More generally, and as already noted, further work in terms of more accurately charting effective 'recharging rhythms' as well an enhanced recog-nition of the importance of collective effervescence as a means of resisting the gradual shift towards more precarious workplace norms is to be welcomed. Beyond these research directions, however, it is hoped that future work will also explore three other avenues. First, building on the understanding of collective effervescence advanced in this paper, how should we seek to reshape physical work-spaces in the wake of the pandemic? The reports in the McKinsey & Co. series (notably Reports #1, #19, #28, and #30) advocate reshaping of physical spaces that prioritise and advance interperso-nal connection. But, notably, there is scant detail as to what – exactly – such spaces might look like. Second, there is much in the McKinsey & Co. reports that is interesting, but not directly relevant to this discussion. So, for example, the April 2021 report comments that some employees have reported increased levels of stress and burnout while remote working. This is left unexamined and one cannot help wondering to what degree this is a ramification of Foucauldian self-surveillance. Finally, although current virtual communication technologies are unable to mediate collective efferves-cence, perhaps future advances in science will eventually make this feasible. Such advances will of course demand a re-evaluation of organisational dynamics, as well a fresh examination of hitherto unresolved existential and posthumanist tensions.

Disclosure statement

References

Aagaard, J. 2022. "On the Dynamics of Zoom Fatigue." *Convergence* 28 (6): 1878–1891. doi:10.1177/13548565221099711.

Borch, C. 2009. "Organizational Atmospheres: Foam, Affect and Architecture." *Organization* 17 (2): 223–241. doi:10.1177/1350508409337168.

Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. *Successful Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Brewis, J., S. Linstead, D. Boje, and T. O'Shea, eds. 2006. *The Passion of Organizing*. Malmo: Liber & Copenhagen Business School Press.

Buehler, A. 2012. "The Twenty-First-Century Study of Collective Effervescence: Expanding the Context of Fieldwork." *Fieldwork in Religion* 7 (1): 70–97. doi:10.1558/firn.v7i1.70.

Burrell, G., and G. Morgan. 1979. *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*. London: Heinemann.

Cladis, M. 2001. *'Introduction', in Durkheim, É [1912] (2001) The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Clark, T., L. Foster, L. Sloan, and A. Bryman. 2021. *Bryman's Social Research Methods (6th ed.)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Collins, R. 1998. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dahler-Larsen, P. 1994. "'Corporate Culture and Morality: Durkheim-Inspired Reflections on the Limits of Corporate Culture." *Journal of Management Studies* 31 (1): 1–18. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6486.1994.tb00329.x.

Deflem, M. 2007. *Useless Tilly (et al.): Teaching Comparative-Historical Sociology Wisely." Trajectories, Newsletter of the ASA Comparative and Historical Sociology section* 19: 14–17.

Dobbin, F. 2013. "'Chapter 9: How Durkheim's Theory of Meaning-Making Influenced Organizational Sociology'." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sociology and Organization Studies*, edited by P. Adler, 200–222. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Durkheim, É. [1893] 1997. *The Division of Labor in Society*. New York: The Free Press.

Durkheim, É. [1895] 1982. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. London: Macmillan.

Durkheim, É. [1897] 1997. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. London: Routledge.

Durkheim, É. [1912] 2001. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Emirbayer, M. 1996. *Useful Durkheim. Sociological Theory*. Vol. 14, 109–130. doi:10.2307/201902.

Fineman, S. 2000. *Emotion in Organizations*. London: Sage.

Gellner, D., and E. Hirsch. 2001. *Inside Organizations: anthropologists at work*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

Goodman, F. 1990. "A Trance Dance with Masks: Research and Performance at the Cuyamungue Institute." *The Drama Review* 34 (1): 102–114. doi:10.2307/1146010.

Hirsch, P., P. Fiss, and A. Hoel-Green. 2013. "Chapter 10: A Dukrheimian Approach to Globalization." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sociology and Organization Studies*, edited by P. Adler, 223–245. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hughes, J. A., W. W. Sharrock, and P. J. Martin. 2003. *Understanding Classical Sociology: Marx, Weber, Durkheim*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Koester, A. 2022. "Why Face-to-Face Communication Matters: A Comparison of Face-to-Face and Computer-Mediated Communication." In *COVID-19, Communication and Culture: Beyond the Global Workplace*, edited by F. Rossette-Crake, and E. Buckwalter. 1st ed, 115–133. Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781003276517.

Maffesoli, M. 1996. *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. London: Sage.

Marshall, D. A. 2002. *Behavior, belonging, and belief: A theory of ritual practice. Sociological theory* 20: 360–380.

Marx, K. [1867; 1885; 1894] 2008. *Capital: An Abridged Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Meyer, J., and B. Rowan. 1977. "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83: 340–363. doi:10.1086/226550.

Redmond, S., and S. Holmes. 2007. *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*. London: Sage.

Royce, E. 2015. *Classical Social Theory and Modern Society: Marx, Durkheim, Weber*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Schwartzman, H. B. 1993. *Ethnography in organizations*. SAGE Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984119

Shehata, S. 2006. "Ethnography, Identity and the Production of Knowledge." In *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, edited by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea , 244–263. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Shilling, C. 1997. "Emotions, Embodiment and the Sensation of Society." *The Sociological Review* 45 (2): 195–219. doi:10.1111/1467-954X.00061.

Shilling, C., and P. Mellor. 1998. "Dukrheim: Morality and Modernity: Collective Effervescence, Homo Duplex and the Sources of Moral Action." *British Journal of Sociology* 49 (2): 193–209. doi:10.2307/591309.

Simola, A., V. May, A. Olakivi, and S. Wrede. 2023. "On not 'Being There': Making Sense of the Potent Urge for Physical Proximity in Transnational Families at the Outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Global Networks* 23 (1): 45–58. doi:10.1111/glob.12382.

Tilly, C. 1981. *'Chapter 4: Useless Durkheim' in As Sociology Meets History*. New York: Academic Press.

Vine, T. 2011. "Searching for Sanctuary in Alternative Organizations: An Ethnography of a New Age International Community." PhD thesis, University of Essex.

Vine, T. 2021. *Bureaucracy: A Key Idea in Business and Society*. London: Routledge.

Winkelman, M. 1986. "Trance States: A Theoretical Model and Cross-Cultural Analysis." *Ethos* 14: 174–203. doi:10.1525/eth.1986.14.2.02a00040.