

Drawing the line between work life and private life

Thanks to digitalisation, globalisation and the rise of the knowledge economy, we can perform many of our work-related tasks whenever and wherever we like¹. This fact inevitably leads to a blurring of the line between work life and private life. Individuals differ in the ways that they separate, integrate or mix these different worlds. Boundary theory deals with these issues.

Boundary theory recognises three different types of people: segmenters, integrators and those who are a combination of both². Depending on the type, different strategies should be used when working from home. Employees should reflect on whether their own personality suits working from home.

It is not just working from home that has made the boundaries between work life and private life more fluid. This trend began with the advent of digitalisation at work. A clear spatial separation between work life and private life has become a thing of the past in many occupations. Permanent accessibility and information overload can mean that employees keep thinking about work even after the working day ends. The result can be sleep problems, health problems and tensions in their social life³. This makes it all the more important to devise individual strategies which define personal boundaries and make it easier to combine the different areas of life.

Facts

- Boundary theory recognises three kinds of people: segmenters, integrators and those who are a combination of both.
- Each type has different needs.
- Successful boundary management requires self-reflection and self-awareness.
- Rituals, structures, rules and open communication with one's family make it easier to draw boundaries.
- Managers should recognise which category each employee belongs to.
- Managers should take individual needs into consideration.

Opportunities

Before you can draw clear boundaries, you have to be aware of your own needs. Working from home provides an opportunity to take a good look at yourself in order to define your own boundaries between different areas of life. The Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts has developed a **self-test** for determining an individual's boundary type². Those who reflect on their own preferences, needs and obligations are better able to draw a line between work life and private life, even when working from home, and reduce stress as a result. Flexible working hours can go a long way towards ensuring that the different areas of life do not clash. Flexible working hours are ideal for integrators in particular.

Sources

¹ Organisator 2019

² Ashforth et al., 2000

³ Grebner et al., 2011

⁴ Wharton University 2020

Risks

For segmenters, working from home can lead to increased feelings of stress. The clear spatial separation between work life and private life has gone. This type of person needs clear boundaries. Here it can be useful to set up your office in a separate room at home, to introduce rituals at the start of the working day, and to let your family know that you do not want to be disturbed at work⁴. Otherwise, segmenters run the risk of becoming unhappy when working from home. Conversely, integrators run the risk of becoming unhappy over the long term with the clear structures of office life and need more flexibility. Both integrators and segmenters can be individually challenged and motivated through good, clear and personalised management.

Relevant OHM offers

- Resilience
- Stress
- Digital detox
- Sleep
- Healthy immune system