



WORKING BETWEEN THE HOME OFFICE AND COMPANY OFFICE

Previously, there was little reason for employees to be jealous of the self-employed. Too much professional uncertainty, too much responsibility, too much organisational effort. But, at the latest with the advent of the home office, people who have to leave the house in the morning to go to work do get a wistful look in their eyes. Ultimately, working in your pyjamas just a few metres from your desk and bed sounds like a dream come true in terms of self-determination and a work-life balance. And as the working world becomes more flexible, the concept of the home office is moving into the world of salaried employees too. The question is: Can it work? And if yes, how?

WORK AS A SOCIAL ACT: WHY THE OFFICE ISN'T ONLY IMPORTANT FROM A BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE

Any given (open plan) office is a buzzing, living organism. For better and for worse. If you want to work constructively and productively, you have to hide away from colleagues, the ringing telephone and the boss, watching you like a hawk. But if you are lacking inspiration or have to solve a tricky problem, colleagues, the telephone and your boss are close to hand. And so obstacles are quickly eliminated and the job can be done more smoothly.

Even though people in the office play a role and have to meet certain expectations as *homo oeconomicus*, that doesn't mean that they have to surrender their own character at the reception desk. Although opponents of office work like to say that people have to completely change their personality to work with other people, there is in fact a lot of social freedom in daily interaction. Chat a bit here, take lunch together, get together after you've left the office, romances in the tea kitchen: In the office, we make friends, communities and connections - and we continue these relationships into our private lives.

Not least of all, the spatial separation between home and work is also a healthy form of what advocates of a work-life balance are actually talking about: At home we ideally only focus on ourselves. In the office we focus on the job. When the clock strikes five, we step out of our employee role, take a deep breath and become private individual again. It's a boundary that is not to be underestimated, but that becomes blurred by the home office.

CONFERENCE IN YOUR PYJAMAS: WHY THE HOME OFFICE DRIVES PRODUCTIVITY TO ITS LIMITS. AND WHY IT DOESN'T.

Am I still an employee or am I a private individual? This is hard to answer in the home office. The boundaries between the two worlds couldn't be more permeable. And there are advantages and disadvantages to this. Let the plumber in and carry on working on your presentation? No problem. Play with the kids in the evening and step away quickly to answer an e-mail? Also not a big deal.

On the other hand, there are no social constraints in the home office. Not even roles that the employee has to play. You can sit around in your most comfortable clothing in an extremely personal environment and focus on nothing other than the task at hand. Without supervision or pressure from outside. Seen this way, the home office is the pinnacle of productivity. However, reducing it down to basics in this way requires significant self-discipline. After all, there is no shortage of distractions at home. And, in turn, there is also no supervision or pressure from outside in this regard.

So, we could say that the office and home office are two poles of work organisation, which could hardly be further opposed: Supervision from the outside versus self-supervision, networking-oriented versus task-oriented, separate living environments versus integrated living environments - and, last but not least, cabin fever versus isolation. Can companies that want to offer their employees more flexible working models find a happy medium between these poles? Of course. The skill lies in initially ignoring people and structures. And focusing on the work.

BALANCE BETWEEN TOGETHERNESS AND SOLITUDE: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INSPIRATION AND ROUTINE

Some routine tasks are so boring that they are best done when somebody else is (seemingly) looking over your shoulder. Social pressure breaks down your inner reluctance and the environment provides enough distraction to activate your bored mind. And then there are some tasks that demand creativity and inspiration - and brilliant ideas don't come to you when you're looking for them at your desk. They come when you're cleaning, cooking or painting pictures.

That's why there are some roles in the company for which it is necessary to offer employees the possibility of working from a home office. It's hard for any job with "creative" in the name to be done under any other conditions. But companies should also consider allowing employees to work from home now and again even for tasks requiring high levels of concentration, for which no teamwork is required - quarterly accounts, annual reports, etc. can be edited or compiled more easily if the employee isn't constantly losing the thread.

But how much home working is necessary and advisable? More and more companies are offering a (fixed) home day per week. Others at least communicate the possibility of working from home when necessary. And that's actually the better path to follow: After all, not everyone is cut out for work from a home office. And not every job is more easily completed when the employee is working from home sitting in front of their computer screen. On the other hand, sometimes you need more than one day at home alone to finish off a task.

Any company that wants to strike a balance between togetherness and solitude needs to be able to trust their employees. And the employees, in turn, must understand that a home office day is not a free ticket to more leisure time. In the end, the question should always be: In which environment can I best complete job XY?