

# Don't mix business with pleasure

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In working life it's now almost expected that employees answer work-related emails after hours, or take their laptops with them on holiday. But the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life can affect people's sense of well-being and lead to exhaustion. This is according to Ariane Wepfer of the University of Zurich in Switzerland who, together with her colleagues, published a study in Springer's *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

Wepfer and her colleagues recruited 1916 employees from a broad range of sectors in German-speaking countries to take part in an online study. Most were married (70,3 percent) and their average age was 42.3 years. Half of the participants (50.1 percent) worked 40 hours or more per week, while 55.8 percent were men. They were asked how well they were able to manage the boundaries between their work and non-work lives, for instance, how often they took work home, how often they worked on weekends and how often they thought about work during their time off.

Participants also indicated whether they made time to relax after work to socialize or to participate in sports and other hobbies, and how diligently they made sure that their work did not interfere with their private lives. To measure a person's well-being, the researchers considered participants' sense of physical and [emotional exhaustion](#) as well as their sense of balance between work and non-work.

The researchers found that employees who did not organise a clear separation between work and free time were less likely to participate in

activities that could help them relax and recover from career demands. They were therefore more exhausted and experienced a lower sense of balance and well-being in the different key aspects of their lives.

"Employees who integrated work into their non-work life reported being more exhausted because they recovered less," Wepfer explains. "This lack of recovery activities furthermore explains why people who integrate their work into the rest of their lives have a lower [sense](#) of well-being."

Wepfer says that within the contexts of occupational health it is important to understand the findings, the mechanisms behind them and the factors that determine to what degree people are able to draw a line between their careers and their personal lives. She believes that companies should have policies and interventions in place to help their employees to segment different aspects of their lives better, to their own benefit.

"Organizational policy and culture should be adjusted to help employees manage their work-non-[work](#) boundaries in a way that does not impair their well-being," says Wepfer. "After all, impaired well-being goes hand in hand with reduced productivity and reduced creativity."

**More information:** Wepfer, A.G. et al (2017). Work-Life Boundaries and Well-Being: Does Work-to-Life Integration Impair Well-Being through Lack of Recovery? *Journal of Business and Psychology* [DOI: 10.1007/s10869-017-9520-y](#)

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